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Honeymoon murder: Sonam and aides presented before M'laya court

Sonam, aides get 8-day police custody • Brother sure she killed Raja

INDORE/SHILLONG, June 11: His sister had "100 per cent" killed her husband, Sonam Raghuvanshi's brother Govind said on Wednesday as the young woman and four men accused in the sensational "honeymoon murder" of 29-year-old Raja Raghuvanshi were sent to eight-day police custody in Shillong.

Convinced of his sister's guilt, Govind Raghuvanshi also said his family had snapped ties with her and vowed to fight a legal battle to get justice for Raja Raghuvanshi's family.

Wednesday marks one month to the day Sonam and Raja Raghuvanshi got married. The Indore couple went to Meghalaya for their honeymoon and went missing soon after.

Raja's blood stained body was found 10 days later in a deep gorge and Sonam was presumed missing till June 9, when she was nabbed from a dhaba hundreds of miles away in Uttar Pradesh.

A court in Shillong sent Sonam and her four aides to eight-day police custody. "Police sought a 10-day remand. The court granted 8 days of police custody," East



Khasi Hills district SP Vivek Syiem told PTI.

The 24-year-old woman was arrested from Ghazipur, while her aides were apprehended from Indore for their alleged role in conspiring and killing Raja.

The special investigation team sought police custody of the accused to reconstruct the

crime scene in Sohra, the officer said.

Investigators said Sonam told Raja Raghuvanshi that she would let him consummate the marriage only after making an offering at the Kamakhya Temple in Guwahati.

Accordingly, Raja planned their trip to Guwahati and adjacent Meghalaya, while his

wife and her boyfriend allegedly plotted to kill him in the jungles of the north-eastern state, they said.

"Sonam convinced Raja that they need to make offerings at the Kamakhya Devi Temple before consummating the marriage," a police officer who is a part of the investigation told PTI. Sonam and Raja got married in Indore on May 11 and arrived in Meghalaya via Guwahati on May 20. Both went missing on May 23 in Sohra in East Khasi Hills district, hours after checking out of a homestay at Nongriat village.

Raja's body was found in a gorge near Weisawdong Falls on June 2. A search continued for Sonam, who emerged in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur, around 1,200 km away, in the early hours of June 9 and surrendered as police arrested her boyfriend Raj Kushwaha and the three contract killers hired by them to murder Raja.

"Sonam coerced her husband to take her to the deep jungles of Nongriat with the belief that the hitmen she hired would have a better chance of killing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Arunachal, Assam Guvs discuss border, immigration, flood issues



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 11: In a meeting held at the Raj Bhavan in Guwahati on Wednesday, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General K T Parmaik (Retd), PVSM, UYSM, YSM, called on the Governor of Assam, Lakshman Prasad Acharya, to deliberate on key regional matters and foster enhanced cooperation between the two neighbouring states.

The interaction was held in a cordial and constructive atmosphere and focused on a wide array of issues concerning peace, progress, and the prosperity of the Northeast region.

According to an official statement, the Governor of Arunachal Pradesh commended the positive strides taken by the Chief Ministers of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in addressing and resolving long-standing inter-state border disputes.

He noted that the ongoing discussions between the two governments have created a renewed sense of goodwill and trust among the people living along the border, who have historically maintained strong cultural and social ties.

Drawing from his previous ex-

perience as a Corps Commander in Tezpur, Governor Parmaik expressed concern over the persistent challenges posed by illegal immigration in the region.

He underscored the need for continued vigilance and robust administrative measures to curb the issue, warning that unchecked immigration could pose demographic and security challenges in the future.

During the discussion, the Governor also highlighted the transformative potential of the Government of India's Act East Policy and the 'Rising Northeast' initiative. He described these as key policy interventions capable of reshaping the developmental trajectory of the region.

The Governor stated that the Northeast is poised to emerge as a significant hub for manufacturing, services, entrepreneurship, and international collaboration, particularly in trade and connectivity with Southeast Asia.

In a region perennially affected by natural calamities, the Arunachal Governor also raised concerns over the devastating impact of annual floods and landslides, especially the loss of human lives and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Espionage case: Court denies bail to YouTuber Jyoti Malhotra

HISAR, June 11: A local court on Wednesday rejected the bail plea of social media influencer Jyoti Malhotra, arrested on suspicion of espionage last month, her lawyer said.

Her bail plea was heard by Judicial Magistrate (First Class) Sunil Kumar through her lawyer Kumar Mukesh.

The police opposed the bail plea and argued the case's investigation was underway. Mukesh said the court after hearing the arguments of both the parties rejected her bail plea. On June 9, the court extended Malhotra's judicial custody and fixed her case's hearing on June 23. The 33-year-old YouTuber appeared before the court through video-conferencing.

Hisar Police arrested Malhotra on suspicion of espionage on May 16 and she was subsequently remanded to five days of police custody by the court.

Following the completion of the remand, the court extended the custody by four more days after

the police sought to question her further. On May 26, the court remanded her to judicial custody for 14 days. Malhotra, who hails from the city, ran a YouTube channel "Travel with JO". She was arrested at the New Aggarsain Extension and booked under provisions of the Official Secrets Act and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

Hisar Police previously said no evidence had emerged to indicate Malhotra had access to any military- or defence-related information but claimed she was in contact with some people, aware that they were Pakistani Intelligence Operatives (PIO).

Police sources had previously said she was in touch with Ehsanur-Rahim alias Danish, a staffer at the Pakistani High Commission, since November 2023. India expelled Danish on May 13 for allegedly indulging in espionage. The police have claimed Pakistani intelligence operatives were developing Malhotra as an asset. (PTI)

CM holds meeting with Khatara Satra management committee, pledges govt support

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 11: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma held a meeting with the Khatara Satra Management Committee on Wednesday to address key issues faced by the historic Satra.

The discussions took place during his visit to the 16th-century institution in Darrang district, founded in 1568 by Lechakonia Sri Sri Gobinda Ata, a prominent figure in Assam's Neo-Vaishnavite tradition. The According to an official statement, chief minister — who offered prayers at the Satra — underscored the importance of preserving spiritual heritage and fulfilling promises made during the panchayat elections.



He assured that the State Government would take appropriate steps to resolve challenges confronting the institution.

During the meeting, the Satra Committee raised several con-

cerns, including the reconstruction of the dilapidated Monikut and Sabha Ghar (Namghar). Sarma assured that necessary measures would be taken to support the restoration efforts. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India-Pak conflict was about combating terrorism: External Affairs Minister Jaishankar

BRUSSELS, June 11: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has said the recent confrontation between India and Pakistan was not just a mere conflict between two neighbours, but it was about combating terrorism, which will eventually come back to haunt the West.

Jaishankar, in an interview with the European news website 'Euractiv' Wednesday, also pitched for an EU-India free trade, underlining that India - a nation of 1.4 billion - offers skilled labour and a more trustworthy economic partnership than China.

"Let me remind you of something — there was a man named Osama bin Laden. Why did he, of all people, feel safe living for years in a Pakistani military town, right next to their equivalent of West Point?" Jaishankar, who is travelling to Europe a month after India launched Operation Sindoor in response to the Pahalgaon attack, told Euractiv.

He was replying to a question on the recent four-day conflict between India and Pakistan.

"I want the world to understand — this isn't merely an India-Pakistan issue. It's about terrorism. And that very same terrorism will eventually come back to haunt you," he said while criticising the international media for framing Operation Sindoor as a tit-for-tat between two nuclear-armed neighbours.

Tensions between India and Pakistan escalated after the Pahalgaon terror attack on April 22, which claimed 26 lives. India



carried out precision strikes on terror infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir on May 7.

The on-ground hostilities from the Indian and Pakistan sides that lasted for four days ended with an understanding of stopping the military actions following talks between the directors general of military operations of both sides on May 10.

When asked why India has not joined the West's sanctions against Russia, Jaishankar said that differences cannot be resolved through war.

"We don't believe that differences can be resolved through war — we don't believe a solution will come from the battlefield. It's not for us to prescribe what that solution should be. My point is, we're not being prescriptive or judgemental — but we are also not uninvolved," he said.

He said India has a strong relationship with Ukraine as well — it's not only about Russia. "But every country, naturally,

considers its own experience, history and interests," he added.

"India has the longest-standing grievance — our borders were violated just months after independence, when Pakistan sent in invaders to Kashmir. And the countries that were most supportive of that? Western countries," he said.

"If those same countries — who were evasive or reticent then — now say 'let's have a great conversation about international principles', I think I'm justified in asking them to reflect on their own past," he added. On a question about India's place in the new geopolitical order, he said, "Multipolarity is already here. Europe now faces the need to make more decisions in its own interest — using its own capabilities, and based on the relationships it fosters globally."

"I hear terms like 'strategic autonomy' being used in Europe — these were once part of our vocabulary," he said, adding that the EU is a major pole in the global order — and increasingly an autonomous one — and India wants to deepen the relationship in this multipolar world.

On a question on the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), he said India is not opposed to it but it has "deep reservations".

"Let's not pretend — we're opposed to parts of it. We have very deep reservations about CBAM and we've been quite open about it. The idea that one part of the world will set standards for everybody else is something (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

US reaffirms strong support to India in fight against terrorism: State Dept

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, June 11: The US reaffirmed its strong support for India's fight against terrorism and the bilateral strategic partnership during the visit of an Indian all-party parliamentary delegation last week, the State Department said.

The multi-party delegation led by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor met the US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau last week in Washington.

State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce said at a press briefing on Tuesday that Landau reaffirmed the US' strong support to India in the fight against terrorism and the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The delegation visited the US as part of the government's global outreach efforts after Operation Sindoor. India launched the operation in retaliation to the April 22 Pahalgaon terror attack that claimed 26 lives.

Responding to a question, Bruce said that a Pakistani parliamentary

delegation led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari met officials of the State Department, including Under Secretary for Political Affairs Allison Hooker, during its visit to Washington last week.

Hooker reiterated the US support for the ongoing cessation of on-ground hostilities — "as you might imagine, thank God — between India and Pakistan", Bruce said, adding that they also discussed important issues about the US-Pakistan bilateral relationship, including counterterrorism cooperation. "So that meeting occurred."

When asked if the US received any assurance from Pakistan that it will take action against terrorists, Bruce said she was not going to discuss the details of those conversations. In response to a question on President Donald Trump offering to "mediate" on the issue of Kashmir, Bruce said, "Well, I — obviously, I can't speak to what's on the mind or the plans of the President. What I do know is that I think we all (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

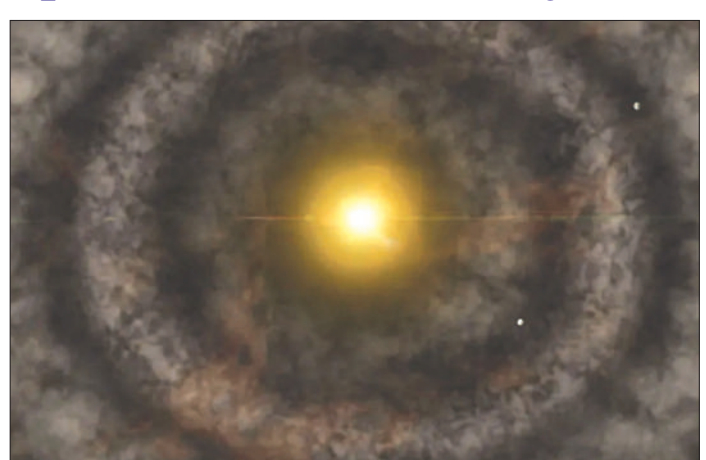
Researchers detect clouds containing sand-like particles -- or silicate clouds

NEW DELHI, June 11: Astrophysicists have gained new insights into how planets outside the solar system, or 'exoplanets', form by studying two "young" giant planets, "still hot from their formation", a new study says.

In one of the planets, known to orbit a sun-like star "YSES-1", researchers detected clouds containing sand-like particles -- or silicate clouds -- the strongest one seen on an exoplanet yet, they said.

"When we looked at the smaller, farther-out companion (planet), known as YSES 1-c, we found the tell-tale signature of silicate clouds in the mid-infrared (using the James Webb Space Telescope)," co-author Evert Nasedkin, a post-doctoral fellow in Trinity College Dublin's school of physics, Ireland, said.

The author added this is the



"strongest silicate absorption feature observed in an exoplanet yet" and related to its youth.

"We believe this is linked to the relative youth of the planets: younger planets are slightly larger

in radius, and this extended atmosphere may allow the cloud to absorb more of the light emitted by the planet," Nasedkin said.

In the study published in the journal Nature, the authors wrote,

"With two exoplanets around a solar-type star, the YSES-1 system is an ideal laboratory for studying this early phase of exoplanet evolution."

The findings help understand how the 'YSES-1' solar system formed, offering further insight into the origins of our solar system, the researchers said.

"Directly imaged exoplanets -- planets outside our own Solar System -- are the only exoplanets that we can truly take photos of," Nasedkin said. "These exoplanets are typically still young enough that they are still hot from their formation, and it is this warmth, seen in the thermal infrared, that we as astronomers observe," the author said. Studying the other planet 'YSES-1b', the team found that the entire planetary system is young, at 16.7 million (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India now world's 4th largest economy, soon to be 3rd, says Tripura Minister

AGARTALA, June 11: Tripura Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister Ratan Lal Nath on Wednesday launched a scathing attack on the Congress, accusing it of fostering a regime riddled with corruption, while hailing the BJP-led government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi for ushering in an era of holistic development.

Addressing a press conference in Unakoti district on Wednesday, Nath said, "In the past 11 years of PM Modi's leadership, we have seen Seva (service), Garib Kalyan (welfare of the poor), and good governance. The vision of a Viksit Bharat (developed India) by 2047 has been laid out clearly." He highlighted flagship initiatives such as Make in India, Start-up India, and Vocal for Local, attributing them as catalysts for the country's accelerated growth. "In my 50 years of political experience, I have never witnessed such developmental strides at both the state and national levels," Minister Nath said. Citing PM Modi's anti-corruption stance, he remarked, "While the Congress era was marred by scams, Modi's governance stands on the pillars of transparency—'Na khaunga, na khane dunga' (Neither will I take bribes, nor allow others to take them)." Minister Nath noted that India has risen from (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

AASAA submits memorandum to Prez

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, June 11: The Karbi Anglong District Committee of the All Adivasi Students' Association of Assam (AASAA) has submitted a five-point memorandum to the President of India, Droupadi Murmu, urging urgent intervention on longstanding demands of the Adivasi community in Assam.

The memorandum calls for the immediate implementation of Clause 1.1 of the Adivasi Peace Accord, granting of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to Adivasis in Assam, issuance of free land pattas to Adivasis residing in Karbi Anglong, construction of a model senior secondary school at Lahorijan Tea Estate without political interference, protection of Adivasi political rights in Sixth Schedule areas after the 125th Constitutional Amendment, and safeguarding Lahorijan and Nirmal Kumar Tea Estates from encroachment and land grabbing. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

OM SHANTI



RAISMODI NUNISA
Died on : 12-06-1971

We all remember you on your 54th Death Day, May your soul be in everlasting peace!

:: SONS ::

Dr. Motilal Nunisa, Shri Pradip Nunisa, Dr. Ruplal Nunisa and Dr. Bishnu Ram Nunisa

:: DAUGHTERS ::

Smti. Usha Hojai and Smti. Alo Thaosen

:: DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW ::

Smti. Jayanti Nunisa, Smti. Prabhati Nunisa, Dr. Ritu Nunisa {W/o- Lt. Nirmal Nunisa (son)} and Smti. Anima Nunisa

:: SONS-IN-LAW ::

Ramesh Thaosen and All grand children

'Challenging times for global trade; India will certainly cross USD 825 bn exports this fiscal'

BERN, June 11: The world trade is facing severe geo-political challenges, but India has consistently emerged as a winner in such times, and the country's exports of goods and services will certainly cross USD 825 billion in 2025-26, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

Despite global economic uncertainties due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Israel-Hamas war and the Red Sea crisis, the country's overall exports touched an all-time high of USD 825 billion against USD 778 billion in 2023-24. As per estimates of certain multi-lateral bodies, there would be a contraction in global trade, Goyal said.

"The world is going through severe geo-political challenges...So these are challenging times, but India has always emerged (as) a winner in challenging times and we did a record USD 825 billion exports in 2024-25. This year, we hope to do much better," he told PTI.

When asked if last fiscal's figures will be crossed, he said: "We will certainly be able to cross that".

Apex exporters' body FIEO has projected that the country's overall goods and services exports are ex-



pected to grow by over 21 per cent year-on-year to USD 1 trillion during 2025-26.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President S C Ralhan has said the healthy growth may come on account of international buyers seeking to diversify their sourcing in the wake of global economic uncertainties.

In 2025-26, merchandise exports are expected to grow 12 per cent to USD 525-535 billion from USD 437 billion in 2024-25, while services exports are likely to rise by about 20 per cent year-on-year to USD 465-475 billion from USD 387 billion in the last fiscal, ac-

cording to FIEO.

The major sectors that are expected to show a significant jump in the shipments this fiscal include electronics, engineering, chemicals, textile and clothing, pharma and even the agriculture sector. Free trade agreements with countries such as the UAE, Australia and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) will also help boost exports in the coming months.

The India-EFTA trade agreement is expected to come into force from October 1 this year.

Goyal also said that FTAs signed during the Congress era were not good and have impacted

domestic firms.

They signed FTAs with countries like ASEAN, which are India's competitors; besides, they were not balanced, he said, adding that India opened more markets for those countries and "we did not get" good deals in return.

On finished goods, he said, India removed the duties but import taxes on raw materials created inverted duty issues and that hurt "us a lot", he said.

He added that now the Modi government is doing FTAs with developed countries/regions like Australia, the UK, EFTA, the EU, the UAE, Oman, Peru, and Chile.

"Here we collaborate, there is no competition...so we are doing FTAs with well thought out strategies," Goyal said.

India-EFTA signed the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) on March 10, 2024. Under the pact, India has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products such as Swiss watches, chocolates, and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties. (PTI)

Stock markets close higher on firm global trends, foreign fund inflows

MUMBAI, June 11: Benchmark Sensex closed higher by 123 points while Nifty rose for a sixth consecutive day on Wednesday following a rally in global markets amid optimism over US-China trade talks and foreign fund inflows.

In a volatile session, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose by 123.42 points or 0.15 per cent to settle at 82,515.14. During the day, it climbed 391.79 points or 0.47 per cent to 82,783.50, driven by gains in IT and energy shares. In its sixth straight day of gains, the 50-share NSE Nifty ended 37.15 points or 0.15 per cent up at 25,141.40. The index moved between a low of 25,081.30 and a high of 25,222.40 during the day. In the six sessions to Wednesday, Nifty gained 598 points or 2.42 per cent.

After a flat start, the Nifty gradually moved higher in the first half and tested the resistance at 25,200, but failed to sustain the momentum at close, Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said.

From the Sensex pack, HCL Tech, Infosys, Tech Mahindra, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors and Eterna were the lead gainers.

Power Grid, Adani Ports, IndusInd Bank, Nestle, HDFC Bank and Hindustan Unilever were among the laggards. "Profit-booking continues in the broader markets, driven by elevated domestic valuations. However, large-cap resilience is supporting the indices, with institutional investors favouring compa-

nies with stable earnings outlooks.

"Auto and IT sectors remain in focus - auto stocks are gaining on improved monthly sales, while IT shares are benefiting from optimism around a potential US-China trade resolution," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

The BSE smallcap gauge went up by 0.06 per cent while midcap index dipped 0.12 per cent.

"Benchmarks ended with marginal gains on Wednesday extending their consolidation phase. Positive developments in US-China trade talks and a steady global equity environment helped buoy sentiment, though gains were tempered by profit-booking in certain sectors," Satish Chandra Aluri, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Among sectoral indices, oil & gas surged the most by 1.83 per cent, followed by energy (1.33 per cent), BSE Focused IT (1.30 per cent), IT (1.25 per cent), tech (1.01 per cent), healthcare (0.74 per cent) and auto (0.19 per cent). Financial Services, FMCG, industrials, power, utilities, services, capital goods and bankn were among the laggards.

As many as 2,227 stocks advanced while 1,821 declined and 132 remained unchanged on the BSE. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled in the positive territory. European equity markets were trading higher. (PTI)

JCI Guwahati Achievers hosts 5th edition of 'KAROBAR NXT' business expo

GUWAHATI, June 11: JCI

Guwahati Achievers, affiliated with the globally recognized Junior Chamber International (JCI), successfully organised the fifth edition of its flagship business expo, KAROBAR NXT 5.0, at Hotel Vishwaratna in Guwahati on Wednesday.

According to an official statement, the event drew enthusiastic participation from local women entrepreneurs, startups, and young business leaders.

It was inaugurated by JCI Zone 25 President Gunjan Harlalka in the presence of Zone Director (Business) Deepak Jain, Zone Vice President Komal Jain, and JCI Guwahati Achievers President HGF Dr Reshma Jitani Agarwal,

among other dignitaries.

Dr Agarwal stated that the expo, sponsored by Bhartiya Infra Projects Ltd (BIPL) and supported by The Dental Studio, reaffirmed its role as a vibrant platform for business networking, growth, and collaboration. The one-day event featured a wide range of business stalls, highlighting products and services from both emerging and established enterprises.

With an emphasis on innovation, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, the expo aimed to bridge the gap between ideas and execution.

Key partners for the event included Aayan Photobook (Photography Partner), Print & Signs (Signage Partner), Yaanaa Creations (Gifting Partner), OM Securities (Security Partner), and

Vector Vault Graphics (PR & Marketing Partner), among others.

Led by Dr Reshma Jitani Agarwal along with JFM Sumit Poddar (Immediate Past President), JFM Sneha Agarwal (Secretary), JFM Karan Agarwal (Treasurer), and Nitesh Agarwalla (VP Business), the organizing team underscored their focus on fostering entrepreneurial spirit in the region.

"KAROBAR NXT 5.0 is more than just a business expo - it's a platform to empower women and promote entrepreneurship," said Dr Agarwal.

With the successful completion of the fifth edition, JCI Guwahati Achievers reiterated its commitment to building impact-driven platforms that support local business and community development.

Renalyx Health Systems to invest ₹ 800 cr for setting up 3 dialysis machine production units

MUMBAI, June 11: Bengaluru-headquartered Renalyx Health Systems on Wednesday said it is planning to invest ₹ 800 crore in the next four years to set up three manufacturing units to produce RENALYX - RxT 21 machine that will help dialysis affordable and accessible to a larger population.

RENALYX - RxT 21 machine is world's first fully indigenous, AI and cloud-enabled smart hemodialysis machine with real-time remote monitoring and clinical connectivity facility, the company said. Currently, the company manufactures RxT 17 through contract manufacturing and with the launch of RxT 21, it will set up its own facilities at Bengaluru and Mysuru in Karnataka and at Mumbai in Maharashtra, Renalyx Health Systems Founder and Director Shyam Vasudeva Rao told PTI.

This is expected to raise the manpower of the company to over 500 people in 1-2 years from the current 100, he added.

"RxT 21 makes Renalyx the sixth company globally and first in India to produce an advanced dialysis machine with EU CE certification, a mandatory conformity marking for products sold within the European Economic Area (EEA). We are aiming for an annual capacity of 5,000 machines in the company-owned manufacturing units," he

added.

The Indian CDSO (Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation) approval of the machine is in its final stages and is expected by July this year, while the US FDA approval process is underway and anticipated by March 2026, he said. When asked how the company is planning to raise ₹ 800 crore for setting up the manufacturing units, Rao said, the company will get it through a mix of foreign direct investment (FDIs), equity and debt.

"The company plans to raise funds through the sale of equity, backed by strong interest from prominent Indian and international investors. In addition, it will raise debt, and the promoters will also invest capital. We are also planning to go public within the next three years," he added.

Renalyx Health Systems is a technology innovation company which is focused on delivering inclusive solutions for comprehensive renal care.

With initial deployments of the machine planned in Maharashtra and Karnataka, the company will go for rapid pan-India distribution of RxT 21 with its partners as well as exports to other countries.

Rao said the company has penetrated international markets, and has secured orders from South Africa, the USA, and Europe. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Honeymoon murder: Sonam and aides

him somewhere on the route, considering it is secluded. But, since there were too many tourists trekking to Nongriat on May 22 and May 23, they couldn't kill him there," the officer said. "They finally killed him near Weisawdong Falls, and dumped his body into the deep gorge," he said. Syiem, who is overseeing the investigation, told PTI that the contract killers arrived in Guwahati on May 21, a day after the couple reached the north-east. The killers procured a machete from outside their hotel in Guwahati, and then travelled by road to Shillong, he said. "We have gathered CCTV evidence, making this investigation a very tight-knit one," he said. Sonam was in touch with her boyfriend Raj throughout the day of the murder, while Raj coordinated with the three contract killers, he said.

"Sonam was present when Raja was killed," the officer said, adding that after the crime, she fled. Sonam, her boyfriend Raj and the three suspected contract killers were produced before a court in Shillong on Wednesday. Sonam's brother Govind said that based on the evidence so far, he knows "100 per cent" that it was his sister who executed the crime, and she should be hanged if found guilty.

Govind also said that his family has snapped ties with her after her alleged involvement in the killing of her husband came to light. An emotional Govind reached Raja Raghuvanshi's house in Indore to console the latter's family members. Sharing the family's grief, he hugged Raja's mother Uma and broke down. Coming out in support of the victim's family, he vowed to fight a legal battle to get justice for them. He later addressed media persons. When asked if Sonam should be given capital punishment if charges against her were proven, he said, "Absolutely. If Sonam is found guilty, she should be hanged straight away. I will appoint a lawyer myself to represent Raja Raghuvanshi's family in the court." "I am with the truth. Raja Raghuvanshi's family has lost a son. I have apologised to his family. Our family has broken ties with Sonam," he said.

"I do not know whether my sister Sonam has confessed her crime in the Raja Raghuvanshi murder case or not, but from the evidence that is coming out, I know 100 per cent that she is the one who executed this crime," he said. He, however, dismissed reports of the alleged love affair between Sonam and Raj Kushwaha, another prime accused in the case. "Raj always called Sonam didi (sister). Sonam tied a rakhi to me and Raj while together in my house. Raj was just our employee. He was working in our office for two-three years. He used to manage the office and handle clients," he said. Govind claimed that the three other accused in the case - Vishal Chauhan, Akash Rajput and Anand Kurni - have an old relationship with Raj Kushwaha. Sonam made the first phone call to Govind before she surrendered before the police in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur. "During the phone call, he was crying miserably and was very nervous. I informed the police myself and got her to surrender," he said. (PTI)

Arunachal, Assam Guvs discuss

damage to property and livelihoods. He called for comprehensive and sustainable measures to mitigate the impact of such disasters and emphasised the importance of long-term planning and community resilience. As a symbolic gesture of goodwill and appreciation, Governor Parnaik presented Governor Acharya with a copy of the book Orchids of Arunachal Pradesh. The book highlights the rich biodiversity of Arunachal Pradesh and serves as a tribute to the state's pristine natural heritage and unique ecosystems. Both Governors reaffirmed their commitment to work collaboratively in addressing shared challenges and furthering the developmental aspirations of the people of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

CM holds meeting with Khatar

The Committee also sought the allocation of 1,000 bighas of land in the Char-Chapori area of Darrang district to promote agricultural activity as a sustainable revenue source. In response, the Chief Minister stated that the State Government would consider the proposal upon formal submission by the local MLA and Deputy Commissioner.

Earlier in the day, the Satra Management Committee hosted a series of traditional cultural performances for the visiting dignitaries, including Krishna Pravesha Nritya from the Ankiya Bhaona tradition, Khuliya Bhairiya Nritya, Thiya Naam, and Bhortal Nritya. The Chief Minister praised the artists and thanked the Committee for preserving the rich cultural legacy of the Satra. Sarma was accompanied by MLA Paramananda Rajbongshi, former MLA Gurujyoti Das, Satra Management Committee President Jadav Chandra Mahanta, Secretary Gangaram Baishya, and other officials. On his return to Guwahati, the chief minister stopped at the Shahid Stambha in Patharughat and paid homage to the martyrs of the Patharughat uprising.

US reaffirms strong support to India

recognise that President Trump in each step that he takes, it's made to solve generational differences between countries, generational war." Bruce added that it should not "surprise" anyone that he would want to "manage" something like that. "So, while I can't speak to his plans, the world knows his nature, and I can't speak to any details of what he might have in that regard...But it is an exciting time that if we can get to a point in that particular conflict..." Bruce said adding that it is a "very interesting time."

India has rejected any mediation related to the dispute on Jammu and Kashmir with Pakistan and maintains that Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are and will always remain an "integral" part of the country. (PTI)

India-Pak conflict was about

which we are against," he said. The CBAM is the EU's planned tax on the carbon emitted while making goods imported from countries like India and China. The move has sparked a debate at multilateral forums, including the United Nations climate conferences, as the poorer countries fear such tariffs will harm livelihoods and economic growth. On the US-India ties, Jaishankar said, "Our aim is to advance every relationship that serves our interests - and the US relationship is of immense importance to us. It's not about personality X or president Y." On ties with China, the minister said he has met with several European companies in India that have chosen to set up there specifically to de-risk their supply chains.

"Many companies are becoming increasingly careful about where they locate their data - they'd rather place it somewhere secure and trustworthy than simply go for efficiency. Would you really want that in the hands of actors you don't feel comfortable with?" he said. (PTI)

AASAA submits memorandum

Speaking during the submission, Anil Toppo, Chief Advisor of AASAA's central committee, warned against the continued neglect of Adivasi rights and alleged land encroachments. Toppo stressed the community's historical roots in the region, stating, "We have been living here since before the inception of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. We are bonafide indigenous people of this land, yet we continue to live like tenants on our own soil."

He also criticised successive governments for what he described as the systematic neglect of Adivasi interests. "Since India's independence, our people have been deprived of basic infrastructure—roads, schools, healthcare, safe drinking water, and access to government schemes. The promises made to us have remained unfulfilled for decades," he said. The memorandum was officially received by the Executive Magistrate, Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil), Bokajan. Reaffirming its commitment to peaceful democratic movements, AASAA warned that if the community's demands continue to be ignored, it will be forced to resort to mass agitation.

Study of young exoplanets reveals

years old, yet is too old to find signs of the planet-forming disk - a mixture of gas and dust rotating a star and from which planets can form. But around YSES-1b, the team observed a disk around the planet itself, thought to feed material onto the planet and serve as the birthplace of moons - similar to those seen around Jupiter, they said. Only three other such disks have been identified to date, but around objects significantly younger than YSES-1b, raising new questions as to how this disk could be so long-lived, the researchers said. (PTI)

India now world's 4th largest

the 11th to the 4th largest economy in the world under the current regime. "We are set to reach the third position soon," he added. Highlighting the government's achievements, he said, "We now have powerful air defence and armed forces. Around 84% of the population is connected with the Jal Jeevan Mission, compared to just 3% earlier. In 2025-26, the agriculture budget has been increased fivefold. Over 11 crore farmers have benefited from the PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi, with total disbursements worth over ₹ 3.90 lakh crore. In Tripura, 2.83 lakh farmers received ₹ 843 crore."

He also said that under the PM Fasal Bima Yojana, ₹ 1,750 crore was disbursed to farmers. "Today, 34 km of national highways are being constructed every day. We now have 136 Vande Bharat trains and 103 Amrit Bharat railway stations," he said. Nath asserted that due to the Digital India initiative, corruption has significantly reduced. "India is now leading in milk production, cotton, and spices, while ranking second in paddy, fish, eggs, and sugar production. Every village in the country is now electrified," he added.

Ethanol production capacity jumps over 4-fold to 1,810 cr litres in 11 yrs of Modi govt: Official

AHMEDABAD, June 11: India's ethanol production capacity has jumped more than four times in the last 11 years of the Modi government to 1,810 crore litres annually with the help of favourable policy initiatives, according to a senior official.

With an enhanced installed production capacity, the blending of ethanol with petrol has surged to nearly 19 per cent from 1.53 per cent in 2013, leading to huge saving in foreign exchange - more than ₹ 1.10 lakh crore -- as well as benefits to sugarcane and foodgrain farmers.

A senior official from the Department of Food and Public Distribution in the central government said till 2013, ethanol distillation capacity in the country was only 421 crore litres.

However, the official highlighted that the ethanol production capacity in the country has reached 1,810 crore litres, thanks to policy changes by the government, including interest subsidy to set up manufacturing facilities. Till 2013, the official said the supply of ethanol to OMCs (oil marketing companies) was only 38 crore litres with blending levels of 1.53 per cent in 2013-14 ethanol supply year (ESY) that runs from (November to October). "Production of fuel grade ethanol



and its supply to OMCs has increased by more than 18 times from ESY 2013-14 to ESY 2023-24," the official said at an event in Ahmedabad. Many ethanol plants have been set up in Gujarat with the help of Centre's interest subsidy policy.

In ESY 2023-24, about 707 crore litres of ethanol have been blended by OMCs, thereby achieving blending of 14.60 per cent.

Till May 25 in current 2024-25 ESY, about 548 crore litres of ethanol have been blended by achieving blending of 18.74 per cent, the official said.

During the last 11 years, the total revenue generated by sugar mills/distilleries, including grain-

based distilleries stood around ₹ 2 lakh crore, of which ₹ 1.22 lakh crore is revenue generated by only sugarcane-based distilleries.

The Centre has notified various ethanol interest subvention schemes from 2018-2022 (in 2021 ethanol production from grain was also included under these schemes) to encourage sugar mills and distilleries to enhance their ethanol production capacities.

Under these subvention schemes, the government is facilitating project proponents to avail loans from banks/financial institutions for which interest subvention at 6 per cent or 50 per cent of the interest charged by the banks/financial insti-

Encroachers disrupt weekly market development at Hawaipur

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, June 11: Tensions flared at Hawaipur in West Karbi Anglong on June 7 when a group of encroachers attempted to obstruct the construction of an office for the Jirim Village Weekly Market Management Committee. The incident occurred while the Committee was initiating construction work on land officially allotted for the weekly bazaar.

Eyewitnesses reported that a group of men and women, allegedly encroachers, surrounded the construction site and tried to stall the work, creating a tense atmosphere. However, timely intervention by local police helped defuse the situation, allowing the Committee to resume and continue with the construction peacefully.

According to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), the land allocated for the weekly bazaar spans more than 10 bighas. However, on-ground verification by the Management Committee revealed that a significant portion of the land is currently under unauthorized occupation.

Bronson Kramsa, President of the Weekly Bazaar Management Committee, stated, "This market is officially recognized and the current Committee has been approved by the concerned authority. Upon

checking with the Revenue Circle Office, we confirmed that the allotted land covers more than 10 bighas. But when we visited the site, we found much of it has been encroached upon."

Kramsa further explained that encroachers have built permanent houses and structures, including toilets, and have even planted mango, areca nut, and coconut trees on the market land. "The population in the area is growing, and we need a proper market for the convenience of the people. Instead, the space for the market has shrunk due to encroachments," he added.

He called on the KAAC to take necessary steps to evict the encroachers and reclaim the land, emphasizing that the Management Committee is not in a position to carry out demolitions but will continue to inform the authorities. "We welcome traders to do business here, but the land must be protected for its intended use," Kramsa said.

He also pointed out that the Jirim Weekly Market is over 50 years old and encroachments have been occurring for more than two decades. Kramsa made a direct appeal to the Council to address the issue without delay to safeguard the market's future and ensure space for legitimate traders.

BTR celebrates grassroots leadership

Community Cadres Conference held at Mushalpur

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 11: In a grand celebration of rural women's leadership and their role in socio-economic transformation, the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Government successfully conducted the BTR-Level Community Cadres Conference at the Integrated Textile Park, Kharuajan, Mushalpur, Baksa on Wednesday. The event, organised under the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM), honoured the dedication and contribution of community cadres working at the grassroots level across BTR.

The conference aimed to showcase the power of grassroots leadership in driving rural development and building community institutions. It witnessed the enthusiastic participation of over 2,500 community cadres, VDC and TCLCC Chairpersons, Cluster Level Federation (CLF) leaders, and grassroots stakeholders from across the region.

Minister for Panchayat & Rural Development, Government of Assam, Ranjit Kumar Dass, graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. In his address, he reaffirmed the government's commitment to empowering rural women and strengthening rural institutions to



drive inclusive growth.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) of BTR, Pramod Boro, also attended and addressed the gathering. Applauding the unwavering dedication of the community cadres, he stated, "Our cadres are the foundation of rural progress. Their commitment is shaping a self-reliant, peaceful, and inclusive Bodoland." He also acknowledged the role of the BTR Development Fellowship, co-administered by TheNudge Institute (TRIF), in supporting effective governance and programme delivery.

Several key dignitaries were present at the event, including Cabinet Minister Urkhao

Brahma, Executive Members Rakesh Brahma, Wilson Hansda, and Dr. Dharm Narayan Das, as well as MCLAs Madhab Chandra Chetry, Hemanta Rabha, and Reo Rea Narzihary. Akshdeep, Principal Secretary of BTC, along with the Director, P&RD, BTC, Chief Operating Officer (COO) of ASRLM, and other district and block-level officials were also in attendance.

The event also served as a platform to highlight flagship schemes of the BTC Government aimed at uplifting rural women. These include the Lakhpati Abo, Mahila Farmer Producer Companies, Women-Friendly Farm Machinery,

and the Bodoland Pig Mission, in alignment with ASRLM's long-term vision for rural development.

A key moment of the programme was the ceremonial distribution of field kits to selected cadres, symbolising the administration's support for their critical grassroots efforts. The government assured that all community cadres in BTR would receive the kits through their respective block offices in the coming days.

The event concluded with renewed energy and a collective commitment to building a prosperous, green, and inclusive Bodoland powered by strong women leaders and vibrant rural communities.

New school timings to combat rising temperatures

HT Correspondent
HAFLONG, June 11: In light of the rising temperatures and the on-going heat wave affecting the district, the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) has taken proactive measures to prioritize the safety and well-being of students. After careful consideration, it has been decided to reschedule the school timings for various categories of educational institutions—both Government and Private—across the Dima Hasao District.

The new timings for educational institutions are as follows:

Lower Primary (L.P.) Schools: 7:30 AM to 11:55 AM

Middle English (M.E.) Schools: 7:30 AM to 12:45 PM

High and Higher Secondary Schools: 7:30 AM to 1:15 PM

These revised timings will be effective immediately and will remain in force until further notice.

The decision, made with the approval of the competent authority, aims to ensure that the educational environment remains conducive and safe for students amid the extreme heat conditions.

Parents, teachers, and students are urged to adhere to the new schedule and to take necessary precautions during this period to safeguard health and minimize exposure to the scorching heat.

Biswanath Farm machinery moves towards litchi production

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 11: The North Eastern Farm Machinery Training and Testing Institute (NEMTTI), Biswanath, under the Government of India, has taken a proactive step toward enhancing litchi production in the region. In collaboration with Tezpur Litchi Bagan, the institute planted 100 high-quality litchi seedlings across 2.5 acres of land on Wednesday.

Of the total saplings, 20 are of the Bombay variety, while 80 are of the Bilati variety, informed P Kamalabai, Director of the institute. She also noted that the initiative, aligned with World Environment Day, will contribute to the greening of the area while simultaneously helping boost government revenue.

Prior to this initiative, the institute had been cultivating local litchi varieties across 4 acres of land. The new plantation represents a shift toward improved commercial varieties to enhance productivity and income generation.

The programme witnessed the participation of institute officials, staff members, and engineering students from various colleges and universities across India.

First meeting of CEM's Media Cell held in Diphu



HT Bureau
DIPHU, June 11: The inaugural meeting of the Chief Executive Member's (CEM) Media Cell under the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) was convened on Wednesday at the CEM's conference room.

The meeting was chaired by Miji Kro, Private Secretary to the Chief Executive Member, and focused on the significance, functioning, and responsibilities of the newly formed Media Cell. Discussions were also held on improving the infrastructure and operational framework of the media cells to enhance communication

and outreach.

Present at the meeting were Gagan Chandro Narzary, Deputy Director of the Information and Public Relations Department; Utpal Dimasa, District Information and Public Relations Officer; and Bijay Bey from the Information Technology Department of KAAC, along with other staff members associated with the cell.

The gathering emphasized collaborative efforts to ensure the Media Cell functions as an effective link between the Council and the public, aiming to improve transparency and public engagement across Karbi Anglong.

AJYCP submits memorandum to PM opposing mega dams in Assam

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 11: The Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Nagaon district committee, on Tuesday submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India through the Deputy Commissioner of Nagaon, registering strong opposition to the construction of mega dams in Assam.

The student body has long maintained a firm stance against river dams, expressing deep concern over the environmental, cultural, and human consequences of such projects. The memorandum reiterated that while AJYCP is not against power generation or industrial development, it firmly opposes projects that threaten the lives and livelihoods of the people of Assam.

Referring to the recent disasters linked to the Ranganadi dam, the AJYCP cited it as a clear example of the dangers posed by dam-induced floods and displacement. The memorandum particularly highlighted the proposed Lower Subansiri hydropower project, warning that its capacity—five times greater than Ranganadi—could pose a catastrophic threat to downstream communities and the ecological balance of the region.

"Such massive infrastructure, without proper environmental and social impact assessments, endangers Assam's age-old civilization and its rich biodiversity," the AJYCP stated.

The memorandum submission was attended by several central and district-level leaders of the AJYCP, including Debashirsh Das, Prabal Sarma, Hemanta Das, Dibyajyoti Hazarika, Dipankar Sarma, and Kamal Laskar. Also present was Anuradha Gohain, General Secretary of the Jatiya Mohila Parishad, Nagaon district.

AJYCP leaders called for alternative and sustainable approaches to energy development, and urged the government to prioritize the voices and welfare of indigenous communities affected by such large-scale hydro projects.

Kushbu Kumari Agarwal brings laurels to Margherita with 4th rank in BSc final exam

HT correspondent

MARGHERITA, June 11: In a moment of immense pride for Margherita, Kushbu Kumari Agarwal, a brilliant and dedicated student from Balukhad Ward No. 6 under the 83rd Margherita Constituency, has brought glory to her community by securing an impressive 4th rank in her sixth-semester B.Sc final examination under Dibrugarh University. The announcement of her remarkable achievement on Tuesday sparked waves of celebration and admiration across the region.

Kushbu's academic journey is nothing short of inspiring. She began her education at VKV Bargaon, later excelling in her Higher Secondary examination from Blue Bird Senior Secondary School. With unwavering determination, she went on to pursue a B.Sc degree in Mathematics with honors at Digboi College, affiliated to Dibrugarh University. Her hard work and focus culminated in this extraordinary academic milestone.

As the only daughter of Ramesh Agarwal, a respected businessman from Margherita Balukhad, Kushbu's success is a testament to her relentless efforts and the unwavering support of her parents. Her mother, Seema Devi

Agarwal, was moved to tears of joy, reflecting the deep pride and emotion of this momentous occasion.

The people of Margherita rallied in celebration, gathering in courtyards to honor their shining star, whose achievement has become a beacon of inspiration for the entire community.

Kushbu Kumari Agarwal's triumph embodies the timeless truth that hard work uncovers true gems. Her focus, perseverance, and academic brilliance have earned her widespread acclaim, with the entire Margherita community showering her with heartfelt praise and admiration.

This remarkable young woman has not only made her family proud but has also etched her name as a symbol of excellence and determination for generations to come. Speaking on her achievement, Om Prakash Sah, a noted social worker of Balukhad, remarked, "The 83rd Margherita Constituency under Tinsukia District has always been home to brilliant minds. Many students from Balukhad area have made a name for themselves by becoming doctors, advocates, chartered accountants, company secretaries, scientists, and professors. Kushbu is the latest addition to that inspiring legacy."



Women's SHGs receive financial grant-in-aid in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 11: A ceremonial grant-in-aid distribution programme under the State-Owned Priority Development (SOPD) scheme was held on Wednesday at the District Agriculture Office, Kokrajhar, benefiting women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) across the district.

The event, organised by the Agriculture Department, Kokrajhar, aimed to extend financial support to SHGs functioning in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) to boost agricultural productivity and promote rural entrepreneurship.

BTC MCLA and Chairman of the BTC Agriculture Department, Joy

Muchahary, attended the event as the chief guest and distributed the cheques to SHG representatives in the presence of senior officials and dignitaries.

A total of 135 SHGs in Kokrajhar district received Rs 20,000 cheques each. In total, 500 SHGs across the five BTR districts are being supported through this initiative, which seeks to empower women and enhance economic self-reliance at the grassroots level.

Speaking on the occasion, Joy Muchahary highlighted that this initiative is part of a larger mission of the Pramod Boro-led BTR government to promote sustainable agriculture and foster inclusive rural development. He emphasized the role of women in transforming the rural economy through active engagement in agricultural activities and entrepreneurship.

AAU signs MoU with VSI Pune to boost sugarcane research

34th AICRP Meet on Biological Pest Control

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, June 11: In a landmark development aimed at enhancing sugarcane cultivation and production in Assam, the Assam Agricultural University (AAU) on Wednesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Vasantdada Sugar Institute (VSI), Pune, a premier institution in the field of sugarcane research. The signing ceremony took place at the AAU campus in Borbhetta, Jorhat.

An AAU official stated that the collaboration with VSI—widely regarded as a national leader in sugarcane innovation and rural development—is expected to open up new research avenues and provide technical advancements that will benefit sugarcane farmers across Assam.

The signing ceremony was attended by key officials and scientists from both institutions. From AAU, present at the event were Sanjay Kumar Chetia, Director of Research (Agriculture), Mrinal Saikia, Associate Director of Research, Nilay Borah, Principal Scientist, and Milon Jyoti Konwar, Scientist. The team from the Sugarcane, Medicinal and Aromatic Plants Research Station (SMAPRS), Buralikson,



was led by TP Saikia, Chief Scientist, and included Tridib Kr Borbora and Jutimala Phookan.

Representing VSI, Pune, were Sambhaji Kadu Patil, Director General, along with AG Kadlag, Principal Scientist, and Kapil V Sushir, Senior Scientist.

The programme began with a welcome by TP Saikia, who outlined the objectives of the collaboration. Dr. Sanjay Kumar Chetia delivered the introductory address, highlighting the significance of institutional partnerships for regional agricultural advancement.

Speaking on the occasion, Sambhaji Kadu Patil emphasized the transforma-

tive potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in modern agriculture. He underscored how AI could optimize fertilizer and irrigation practices, minimize pesticide use, and determine the ideal harvesting period based on real-time sucrose content—ultimately leading to increased yield and quality of sugarcane crops.

In his address, Mrinal Saikia stressed the importance of value addition through effective utilization of sugarcane by-products, which could serve as an alternate revenue stream for farmers.

Meanwhile, AAU is also hosting the 34th Annual Group Meeting of the All India Coordinated Research Project

(AICRP) on Biological Control of Crop Pests, which began today and will continue till June 12. The event is jointly organized by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR)—National Bureau of Agricultural Insect Resources (NBAIR), Bengaluru, and AAU.

A total of 88 scientists from across India are participating in the national conference. The inaugural ceremony was graced by AAU Vice-Chancellor Bidyut Chandan Deka as Chief Guest, along with DK Yadava, Deputy Director General (Crop Science), ICAR, New Delhi, and Poonam Jasrotia, Assistant Director General (Plant Protection & Biosecurity), ICAR, New Delhi.

Sanjay Kumar Chetia delivered the welcome address, while SN Sushir, Director of ICAR-NBAIR and Project Coordinator of AICRP on Biological Control of Crop Pests, presented the 2024-25 annual report highlighting key achievements and future strategies under the national project.

Both events mark significant milestones for AAU as it intensifies efforts in research-driven solutions for crop improvement and sustainable farming practices in Assam and beyond.

No.DPRD/BTC(SOPD)UdI-02/2025/8
PRESS NOTICE
(e-Procurement)
The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of work "Const. of E/F and S/G road from Sarubengra-Barbengra connecting road to Hagramari village through paddy field" against tender value for an amount not exceeding of Rs.20,00,000.00 (Rupees twenty lakhs) only under SOPD fund for the financial year 2025-26 from the registered contractors of Class-I & Class-II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads)/(Building), BTC.
Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours.
Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/782

No.DPRD/BTC(15th FC)UT(VIII)UdI-02/2025/10
PRESS NOTICE
(e-Procurement)
The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of work "Impt. of road with E/F & S/G from Kashibari Bathou Mandir to Debeswar Boro house with RCC box culvert at Khasibari village" for an amount not exceeding of Rs. 23,00,000.00 (Rupees twenty three lakhs) only under 15th Finance Commission to BTC for the year 2023-24 during 2025-26 under Untied Grant from the registered contractors of Class-I & Class-II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), BTC.
Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours.
Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/785

No.DPRD/BTC(15th FC)UT(VIII)UdI-03/2025/10
PRESS NOTICE
(e-Procurement)
The Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar invites bids for implementation of work "Const. of slab culvert at Mora nadi near Porja Samaj Cementary" for an amount not exceeding of Rs. 22,00,000.00 (Rupees twenty two lakhs) only under 15th Finance Commission to BTC for the year 2023-24 during 2025-26 under Untied Grant from the registered contractors of Class-I & Class-II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), BTC.
Details may be seen at website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours.
Sd/- Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar
IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/788

AUCTION NOTICE

It is hereby informed to the concerned that spot auction sale of timber will be held on 16/06/2025 at the Range office, Western Range, Borlangphor during office hours. The interested bidders are requested to be present on the day of auction sale as mentioned above.

Sd/-
P Rongpi ACF
i/c Western Range,
Borlangphor

QUOTE OF THE DAY

You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist
—Indira Gandhi

Britain to revamp its defence

The United Kingdom's Strategic Defence Review (SDR), published on June 2 this year offers an ambitious vision for the British Armed Forces. It reiterates a focus on a 'NATO First' policy, amid what Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer calls in the document a 'new era for defence and security'. The latest war preparedness, to fight any future war in Europe or elsewhere has been proposed in the Strategic Defence Review (SDR), 2025. The SDR proposes to build as many as a dozen new nuclear-powered attack submarines, get the British Army ready to fight a war in Europe and become "a battle-ready, armour-clad nation," Prime Minister Keir Starmer vowed on Monday. Starmer said Britain "cannot ignore the threat that Russia poses" as he pledged to undertake the most sweeping changes to Britain's defences since the collapse of the Soviet Union more than three decades ago. The government announced its plans for the military in response to a strategic defence review commissioned by Starmer and led by George Robertson, a former UK defence secretary and NATO secretary general. It was the first such review since 2021, and it landed in a world shaken and transformed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine — and by the re-election of Donald Trump last year. Starmer's centre-left Labour Party government has said it will accept all 62 recommendations made in the review, aiming to help the UK confront growing threats on land, air, sea, and cyberspace.

Starmer used the launch of the review to commit to building "up to" 12 new conventionally armed, nuclear-powered submarines to replace Britain's seven-strong Astute class from the end of the next decade onwards. However, the review says the Royal Navy "must continue to move towards a more powerful but cheaper and simpler fleet". It envisages the navy playing a new role in securing the UK's critical undersea infrastructure and maritime traffic. Its transformation should include use of unmanned technology across the board, including a "hybrid" aircraft carrier air-wing with both crewed aircraft and drones. The army must deliver "tenfold increase in lethality" at the same time as re-equipping and modernising after much of its kit, including Challenger 2 tanks and ammunition, have been given to Ukraine. A new "digital war fighter group" — using AI and drones — should be established by July 2026. While the UK is "already under daily attack" in cyberspace, the review warns that cyber-threats will become harder to mitigate as AI and other technology evolves.

The formation of a new "cyber and electromagnetic command" to oversee cyber-operations was announced last week by the British Ministry of Defence (MoD). That new command must be filled by civilians and reserves, given that greater expertise exists in the civilian sector, according to the review. While the review says the UK has access to world-class intelligence capabilities, they are "underpowered and fragmented" within defence intelligence, part of the MoD, and there should be a new unit to protect the military from hostile spy services. Essentially, the SDR is designed to send a message to both Moscow, and to President Trump in Washington that Europe is heeding his demand for NATO members to spend more on their own defence.

Madhavdeva's role in the Neo-Vaishnavism movement

The Neo-Vaishnavism movement, which emerged in Assam during the 15th and 16th centuries, played a transformative role in reshaping the socio-religious landscape of the region. At the heart of this cultural and spiritual resurgence were two towering figures—Srimanta Sankardev, the founder of the movement, and his most illustrious disciple, Madhavdeva. While Sankardev laid the foundation of the Neo-Vaishnavite faith, it was Madhavdeva who upheld and expanded this tradition with remarkable devotion, poetic brilliance, and organizational acumen. His unwavering commitment, theological contributions, and literary excellence helped solidify the movement's position as a major force in the spiritual and cultural life of Assam.

Madhavdeva was born in 1489 in the Lakhipur district of Assam, in a society rife with religious orthodoxy, caste divisions, and ritualistic practices. Initially, he was a follower of the Shakta tradition, a faith that focused on the worship of the goddess and involved elaborate rituals and sacrifices. However, his life underwent a profound transformation when he came into contact with Srimanta Sankardev. Their meeting at the Belguri Satra is often regarded as a spiritual turning point, not only in Madhavdeva's life but also in the broader journey of the Neo-Vaishnavism movement. Initially resistant to Sankardev's ideas, Madhavdeva was deeply moved by Sankardev's teachings, particularly his emphasis on Eka Sharanam Nama Dharma—the path of devotion to one God, Vishnu (specifically Krishna), through chanting and singing his name. This encounter led Madhavdeva to renounce his former beliefs and wholeheartedly embrace the Neo-Vaishnavite path.

Madhavdeva's loyalty to Sankardev and his teachings was unwavering. He became not only Sankardev's closest disciple but also his most trusted lieutenant, spiritual successor, and ideological companion. His role in the movement was multifaceted—he was a theologian, poet, composer, preacher, and organizer. After Sankardev's death in 1568, it was Madhavdeva who took on the mantle of leadership, guiding the community through a period of consolidation and expansion.

One of Madhavdeva's most significant contributions to the Neo-Vaishnavism movement was his literary output. Like his guru, he believed that religious instruction should be accessible to the masses, and to achieve this, he wrote extensively in the vernacular Assamese language. His magnum opus, the Naam Ghosa, remains a cornerstone of Neo-Vaishnavite literature. Composed in simple yet evocative language, the Naam Ghosa is a collection of verses that extol the virtues of chanting the name of God. It serves both as a devotional guide and a theological treatise, emphasizing the power of bhakti (devotion) over rituals, caste, and dogma. The work is widely recited in households and satras (monastic centers) and has significantly shaped the religious consciousness of Assamese society.

Madhavdeva also composed numerous borgeets—a unique form of devotional songs characterized by their lyrical beauty and spiritual depth. These songs, which follow specific ragas, are integral to the religious and cultural practices of Neo-Vaishnavism. They are sung in satras and namghars (community prayer halls) as a means of invoking divine presence and fostering a sense of spiritual community. His borgeets, along with those composed by Sankardev, form the musical backbone of the movement and are revered for their emotional intensity and theological clarity.

In addition to his literary and musical contributions, Madhavdeva played a critical role in institutionalizing the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. He was instrumental in establishing satras, which served not only as centers of religious instruction and practice but also as hubs of cultural education and social reform. These satras became instrumental in spreading the Neo-Vaishnavite faith across Assam and beyond. Under Madhavdeva's leadership, the satras flourished as egalitarian institutions that welcomed people from diverse social backgrounds, challenging the rigid caste hierarchies that had long dominated Indian society. Through these institutions, Madhavdeva emphasized the values of humility, community service, and devotion, thereby making religion a unifying force.

Madhavdeva was also known for his steadfast commitment to the spiritual discipline and moral principles of Neo-Vaishnavism. He lived a life of simplicity and celibacy, serving as a model for his followers. His personal integrity, humility, and devotion earned him immense respect and helped in consolidating the movement during a time when it faced opposition from orthodox religious authorities and political forces. He ensured that the teachings of Sankardev were preserved and disseminated with accuracy and reverence, safeguarding the core tenets of the movement against dilution or distortion.

An important aspect of Mad-

havdeva's leadership was his ability to maintain unity within the Neo-Vaishnavite community. After the passing of Sankardev, there was potential for fragmentation, as different followers could have claimed leadership or interpreted the teachings in divergent ways. However, Madhavdeva's moral authority, intellectual clarity, and organizational skills helped prevent schisms and maintained doctrinal unity. He appointed capable disciples to oversee the functioning of various satras and ensured a structured transmission of the faith's principles. This system of discipleship and community leadership later evolved into a robust institutional framework that ensured the longevity and continuity of the movement.

Madhavdeva's contribution was not limited to religious teachings; he was deeply involved in shaping the cultural identity of Assam. Through his writings, music, and the establishment of socio-religious institutions, he laid the foundation for a shared Assamese culture that transcended ethnic and linguistic differences.

His use of the Assamese language as the medium for religious expression helped standardize and enrich it, laying the groundwork for a distinct literary tradition. In this sense, Madhavdeva was both a spiritual guide and a cultural architect whose influence is felt to this day.

Despite his immense contributions, Madhavdeva never sought personal glory or recognition. He always considered himself a servant of God and a disciple of Sankardev. His humility and dedication earned him the reverence of his followers, who saw in him the embodiment of the very ideals he preached. His legacy is enshrined not just in texts and temples but in the daily lives of countless devotees who continue to follow the path he illuminated.

Madhavdeva passed away in 1596, but his influence has endured for over four centuries. The satras he helped establish continue to function as centers of religious and cultural activity, and the literary and musical traditions he nurtured remain vibrant. His teachings have shaped the moral and spiritual compass of generations and continue to inspire people to lead lives of devotion, compassion, and integrity.

In contemporary Assam, Madhavdeva is remembered not only as a religious reformer but also as a symbol of unity, tolerance, and cultural pride. His life and work serve as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of faith when combined with compassion, inclusivity, and a commitment to social justice. As the world grapples with increasing divisions and spiritual uncertainties, Madhavdeva's message of universal brotherhood, devotion to a single deity, and rejection of ritualistic orthodoxy remains as relevant as ever.

In conclusion, Madhavdeva's role in the Neo-Vaishnavism movement was foundational and far-reaching. As the foremost disciple of Srimanta Sankardev, he not only preserved his guru's vision but also expanded and institutionalized it, ensuring its transmission across generations. His literary brilliance, musical genius, organizational skill, and moral authority made him a central figure in Assam's religious and cultural history. Through his tireless efforts, Neo-Vaishnavism emerged as a powerful force for spiritual awakening, social reform, and cultural renaissance—a legacy that continues to illuminate the path of countless seekers to this day. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 986400260)

Madhavdev: The light of Assamese devotion

By: Satyabrata Borah

Madhavdev, a towering figure in Assamese history, left an indelible mark on the region's literature, culture and religious life. Born in 1489 in Letekupukhuri, near Narayanpur in Lakhipur district, Madhavdev is celebrated as the principal disciple and true successor of the great saint and reformer, Srimanta Sankardev. His multifaceted contributions to the spiritual, literary and social fabric of Assam continue to inspire generations. As a key proponent of the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, Madhavdev played a pivotal role in spreading the message of devotion, unity and cultural revival, shaping the identity of the Assamese people in profound ways. His life's work, encompassing devotional literature, music, drama and religious propagation, remains a cornerstone of Assam's heritage.

In the early years of his life, Madhavdev was a follower of the Shakta tradition, worshipping the goddess Shakti. However, his transformative journey began when he met Sankardev, whose teachings of Ekasarana Naam Dharma, a monotheistic form of Vaishnavism, deeply influenced him. This encounter marked a turning point, leading Madhavdev to dedicate his life to the path of devotion and the propagation of his guru's ideals. The bond between Sankardev and Madhavdev, often described as a perfect union of mentor and disciple, strengthened the Neo-Vaishnavite movement, bringing a spiritual awakening to Assam. Madhavdev's unwavering devotion to his guru was remarkable and through this loyalty, he carried forward Sankardev's vision, making it accessible to the masses and laying the foundation for a culturally and spiritually rich society.

Madhavdev's literary contributions are among his most enduring legacies, enriching Assamese literature with works of profound spiritual and artistic value. His masterpiece, the "Naam Ghosa", stands as a testament to his literary genius and devotional fervor. This monumental work, often called the Thousand Verses, contains 1,000 stanzas, of which approximately 400 are his original compositions, while the rest are translations and adaptations from various Puranas and scriptures. Written in a simple yet melodious style, the "Naam Ghosa" extols the glory of Lord Krishna, emphasizes devotion to the guru and advocates humility and surrender to God. Its language is accessible, allowing ordinary people to connect with its spiritual essence. The "Naam Ghosa" has become an invaluable treasure in Assamese culture, widely revered and recited in religious gatherings, serving as a bridge between complex theological concepts and the common devotee.

Another significant work by Madhavdev is the "Bhakti Ratnavali", a text that explores the essence and dimensions of devotion. Drawing from various scriptures, this work highlights the importance of Bhakti (devotion) as a means to attain spiritual liberation. Madhavdev's ability to distill profound philosophical ideas into accessible writings made him a beloved figure among the masses. His literary repertoire also includes 157 Borgeets, devotional songs that are a cornerstone of Assamese music and culture. These songs, steeped in the "Batsalya Ras" (the sentiment of parental love), vividly portray the childhood exploits of Lord Krishna and the tender affection of his mother, Yashoda. The Borgeets are characterized by their lyrical beauty, simplicity and deep emotional resonance, captivating listeners and evoking a sense of devotion and love. Through these songs, Madhavdev brought the divine qualities of Krishna closer to the people, enriching Assamese culture with a unique musical tradition that continues to thrive.

Madhavdev's contributions to the dramatic arts further highlight his versatility and creativity. He authored "Arjun Bhajan", a full-fledged play based on episodes from the tenth canto of the "Bhagavata Purana", showcasing his skill in weaving narrative and devotion into theatrical form. Additionally, he composed shorter dramatic works known as "Jhumaras", such as "Chordhara", "Pimpala Guchowra", "Bhojan Behar", and "Bhumi Letowa". These compositions laid the groundwork for Assamese drama, blending entertainment with moral and spiritual teachings. At the behest of Sankardev,

Madhavdev also translated the "Adi Kanda" of Valmiki's "Ramayana" into Assamese, further enriching the region's literary landscape. His final work, "Naam Malika", is a collection of verses that glorify divine names, drawing from various Puranas and scriptures. This text reflects his signature style which is simple, profound, and steeped in devotion making it a fitting capstone to his literary career.

Madhavdev's contributions to the religious sphere were equally transformative. Following Sankardev's passing in 1568, Madhavdev took up the mantle of leadership, tirelessly working to spread the tenets of Ekasarana Naam Dharma. He established key institutions like the Barpeta Satra and Sundaridiya Satra, which became centers of religious, cultural, and social activities. These satras (monastic institutions) played a crucial role in fostering devotion, education, and community welfare, serving as hubs for spiritual discourse and cultural expression. Madhavdev's vision extended beyond spirituality; he encouraged his disciples to pursue agriculture, trade, and other vocations, promoting self-reliance and economic stability. His efforts helped integrate spiritual values with practical living, laying the foundation for a balanced and progressive society. Madhavdev spent his final years in the kingdom of Koch king Lakshminarayana at Bhelduar, where he attained Mahaprayan (passed away) in 1596, leaving behind a legacy that continues to guide Assamese society.

Madhavdev's influence transcended the realms of literature and religion, sparking a cultural renaissance in Assam. His Borgeets, Bhatims (devotional verses), and dramatic works introduced new dimensions to Assamese culture, blending art, music, and spirituality. These creations reflected the ethos of contemporary society, capturing the tenderness of Yashoda's love, the playfulness of Krishna's childhood, and the depth of devotional sentiment. The cultural impact of his works endures, with Borgeets still sung in satras, homes, and festivals, and his dramas inspiring modern Assamese theatre. Madhavdev's ability to connect with the common people through his art and teachings fostered a sense of unity and identity, strengthening the cultural fabric of Assam.

The social reforms initiated by Madhavdev also deserve recognition. By promoting self-sufficiency and community welfare through the satras, he addressed the practical needs of society while nurturing spiritual growth. His emphasis on equality, devotion, and humility challenged rigid social hierarchies and superstitions prevalent at the time, aligning with Sankardev's vision of a harmonious and inclusive society. Madhavdev's teachings encouraged individuals to lead ethical lives, grounded in devotion to God and service to humanity. His approach bridged the gap between the spiritual and the mundane, making religion a lived experience rather than a distant ideal.

Madhavdev's life and works remain a boundless source of inspiration for the Assamese people. His unwavering devotion to his guru, Sankardev, exemplified the ideals of loyalty and dedication, while his literary and cultural creations enriched Assam's heritage. The Naam Ghosa, Borgeets, and other works continue to resonate, guiding devotees and artists alike. His establishment of satras and promotion of self-reliance laid the groundwork for a resilient and culturally vibrant society. Madhavdev's philosophy, blending devotion, humility, and creativity, offers timeless lessons for future generations.

Madhavdev's contributions to Assamese literature, culture, and religion are unparalleled. His writings, from the soul-stirring Naam Ghosa to the melodious Borgeets, elevated Assamese literature to new heights, while his efforts in religious propagation strengthened the Neo-Vaishnavite movement. His dramatic works and translations expanded the scope of Assamese art, and his social initiatives fostered unity and progress. Madhavdev's legacy is an integral part of Assam's identity, a shining beacon that illuminates the path of devotion, creativity, and cultural pride. His life's work continues to inspire, ensuring that his light shines brightly in the hearts of the Assamese people, guiding them toward a future rooted in their rich heritage.



Challenges to Democracy in India

(... continued from last edition)

By: Diganta Barooah

Measures to Have Access to Democracy : Democracy in India faces more serious challenges and needs to have more concern. Civil society needs to take serious steps with the government to better the prevailing condition. Poverty, lack of education and social exclusion in general reduce access to democracy.

Equal Quality Education for All : Democracy is obviously based on the idea of equality and the significance and the necessity of education for efficient functioning of democracy. This was appreciated by the framers of the Indian Constitution. There is no equal qualitative education for all in India. Whatever the efforts are there to improve the quality and quantity of education to realize the constitutional mandate that free and compulsory education to all the children up to the fourteen years of age. The National Policy on Education 1986, a National Literacy Mission 1988 under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and Right to Education Act, 2009 are not sufficient and efficient. In addition to that Saakshar Bharat 2009 aims at developing functional literacy and numeracy in the age group of fifteen and above to enable them to put their signature and to consider them under literacy group. In reality, it is not making them learn beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalence to formal educational system. Finally, though the literacy rate has risen to 74.04 per cent according to 2011 Census and the Right to Education is provided as a fundamental right, the situation is not much better than earlier. If the children have access to good and qualitative education throughout the country uniformly, the problem of education will be solved to a large extent. It is possible only with the nationalization of education in India. In India right from the voters to the people's representatives, most of them lack basic education and are less educated. Less educated and ignorant representatives of the people are governing the educated and the intellectual class. So naturally there's misgovernance in most part of our country.

Simultaneous Elections, popularly known as One Nation One Election, mean holding elections for all the State Legislative Assemblies, House of the People, and local bodies (Municipalities and Panchayats) simultaneously throughout the country. Elections to the Legislative Assemblies of States and House of the People were held simultaneously in India from 1951-52 to 1967. This cycle broke, and currently, elections are held every year and sometimes even within a year at different times, which results in massive government expenditures, diversion of security forces and electoral officers engaged in elections from their primary duties for prolonged periods, disruption in developmental work due to the application of the Model Code of Conduct, etc.

Thus, the Law Commission of India observed in its 170th Report on Reforms of the Electoral Laws that the government should consider the situation where the Lok Sabha and all the Legislative Assemblies elections are held at once, i.e. One Nation One Election.

Under the One Nation One Election, elections will be held only once every five years for both the Lok Sabha and all the Legislative Assemblies throughout the country.

The first step in making One Nation One Election work is to conduct simultaneous elections for the State Legislative Assemblies and the House of the People. For this, there is no requirement for the ratification by the states of constitutional amendments.

The second step will be to synchronise elections of the Panchayats and Municipalities with the State Legislative Assemblies and the House of the People in such a way that Panchayats and Municipalities elections are held within 100 days of holding elections to the House of the People and the State Legislative Assemblies. For this to happen, not less than one-half of the States have to do ratification.

Challenges to One Nation One Election : There are several challenges in implementing the One Nation One Election in India. Challenges may arise in syncing and shuffling electoral cycles, constraints in financial, logistical, conceptual, legal and constitutional aspects, considering the size of the country and the vast cultural and topographical differences between regions.

It is not possible to implement One Nation One Election in India without an amendment to the Constitution, and this amendment should be ratified by the governments of all states and union territories, possibly even major political parties.

The biggest challenge of One Nation One Election is syncing the terms of the different state legislative assemblies with those of Lok Sabha.

Another big challenge arises when a state or even the central government fails a no-confidence motion or is dissolved before its term ends. In such a situation, it is not possible to ask all other states to hold fresh elections.

Benefits of One Nation One Election : # Simultaneous Elections ensure convenience and ease for voters, avoid voter fatigue, and facilitate a higher voter turnout.

One Nation One Election would bring about greater certainty in policies. Frequent elections create an environment of uncertainty and these can affect policy decisions.

Synchronising elections would result in higher economic stability and growth, enabling businesses to make decisions without fear of adverse policy changes.

When elections are conducted at all three tiers of the government together, it will avoid disruption of production and supply chain cycles since it will prevent migrant workers from seeking leave of absence to cast their vote.

One Nation One Election prevents policy paralysis and enhances focus on governance.

Simultaneous Elections would reduce the government exchequer's financial burden as it avoids duplication of expenditure on intermittent elections.

Implementing One Nation One Election would result in optimised use of scarce resources, increased capital investment and asset creation.

The One Nation One Election synchronises electoral calendars, which would ensure the availability of more time for governance and unhindered public service delivery to citizens.

One Nation One Election would reduce election-related disputes and offences, thus reducing the burden on courts.

One Nation One Election would avoid duplication of efforts and save time and energy of political workers, government officials and

security forces.

One Nation One Election would mitigate social disharmony and conflict often observed during elections since elections are held once every five years.

Disadvantages of One Nation One Election :

In situations like midterm polls or the President's rule, if a party fails to get a majority, there is no clarity on how to deal with it when the One Nation One Election concept is implemented.

Conducting Simultaneous Elections may hamper the prospects of regional political parties since they may not be able to highlight local issues prominently. They may not be able to compete with national parties in terms of money and election strategies.

The One Nation One Election can only be implemented after making changes in the Constitution and following other legal frameworks. To implement One Nation One Election a constitutional amendment is needed and it must be ratified by the state assemblies.

In the One Nation One Election, regional issues may be overshadowed by national issues, affecting the state-level electoral outcome.

Regional political parties have limited resources, which means they may not be able to highlight local issues to voters in the face of better-funded parties campaigning for the Lok Sabha elections.

The One Nation One Election is a concept in which simultaneous elections are conducted for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies throughout the country. Here, elections of the Panchayats and Municipalities are synchronised with the State Legislative Assemblies, and voting occurs concurrently.

India has a thriving civil society and media that can rival those in so-called full democracies. Citizens are right to point a finger towards the imperfect functioning of the organs of State. These act as countervailing pressures. In particular, one should mention the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), and PRS Legislative Research. Such exercises improve transparency and accountability and their focus has been on the functioning of Parliament. There is relatively less scrutiny of executive and judiciary since they are not elected.

While the criticisms are in order, two points need to be mentioned. First, India, like many other countries, is an indirect and representative democracy. If one undermines faith in the institutions of governance, that undermines democracy, rather than strengthening it. Second, other than pointing a finger outwards, there is also the question of pointing inwards, at the extent to which individuals and enterprises help build democracy within their own ambits. After all, the Preamble to the Constitution begins with the words, "We the People".

Indeed, we the People have built democracy in India for thousands of years. Per se, that democracy is good and an end in itself. The pursuit of that democracy, and its perfection, is one pursuit of progress. The imperfections can be described as "bad". But for most Indians, democracy is non-negotiable. (The author is the Assistant Development Officer, Transformation and Development Department, Government of Assam. He can be reached at 7002699011 or digantabarooah@gmail.com and digantabarooah@yahoo.com)

Guwahati's battle with India's urban flood crisis

By: Dipak Kurmi

The recurring specter of urban flooding has become an all-too-familiar ordeal for India's major cities—Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Guwahati—where torrential rains transform bustling streets into impassable waterways. This escalating crisis, evident in recent years, stems from a confluence of factors: outdated and inefficient drainage systems, rampant urbanization, and the intensifying impacts of climate change. Historically, urban planners designed drainage networks to channel stormwater from rooftops, streets, and roads into natural water bodies, aiming to prevent inundation. However, these systems, often engineered for rainfall expected once every two years, are increasingly overwhelmed by modern storms of unprecedented magnitude. Compounding this, the concretization of urban landscapes, clogged drains, and the integration of sewage into stormwater systems have strained infrastructure beyond its limits. In cities like Guwahati, where topographic challenges exacerbate flooding, the consequences are particularly severe. As climate change amplifies the intensity of rainstorms, India's urban centers face a pressing need for innovative, scientific solutions to mitigate flooding and adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Urban drainage systems were originally designed with careful consideration of land use and rainfall patterns. The volume of stormwater runoff depends heavily on how land is utilized—open, permeable surfaces like parks absorb water, while paved areas generate significantly more runoff. Traditionally, Indian cities boasted substantial green spaces capable of absorbing considerable runoff, but rapid urbanization has transformed these landscapes. Over decades, cities have, either by design or through illegal encroachments, paved over vast areas, reducing natural absorption capacity. This concretization, coupled with population growth and changing land use, has increased stormwater volumes far beyond what aging drainage systems were built to handle. In Guwahati, for instance, the loss of wetlands and hillsides to urban sprawl has drastically reduced natural drainage, exacerbating flooding in low-lying areas like Anil Nagar and Zoo Road. The city's drainage network, designed decades ago, struggles to cope with the increased runoff from these impermeable surfaces, leading to frequent inundation during the monsoon season.

The capacity of a drainage system is determined not only by expected rainfall but also by the size of its catchment area—the land from which runoff flows into drains. Larger catchment areas produce greater volumes of stormwater, necessitating wider, deeper drains to prevent overflow. As water moves through a network of smaller drains into larger ones, the flow rate and volume increase, requiring progressively larger cross-sections. In cities with complex topography, such as Guwahati, where hills and low-lying areas coexist, gravity alone is often insufficient to evacuate stormwater, particularly in underpasses or flood-prone zones like Dispur. Here, pumps are essential to move water, but their deployment requires scientific precision. Guwahati's drainage challenges are compounded by its location on the Brahmaputra River's floodplains, where heavy monsoon rains and river overflow combine to overwhelm infrastructure. A 2023 report by the Assam State



Disaster Management Authority noted that 60% of Guwahati's drains are either undersized or clogged, reducing their capacity by up to 40%.

Clogging is a pervasive issue across Indian cities. Drains accumulate silt and solid waste, including plastics and debris, which diminish their carrying capacity. In Delhi, stormwater drains often double as conduits for sewage due to poorly managed sewerage systems and the exclusion of some areas from municipal networks. This dual burden clogs drains further, as organic waste and sediment settle, impeding water flow. In Guwahati, the Bharalu River, a primary drainage channel, is choked with sewage and garbage, rendering it a stagnant health hazard rather than an effective conduit. Desilting, a critical maintenance task, is often neglected or inadequately performed. Many drains, particularly in older urban areas, are permanently covered, making cleaning nearly impossible without significant retrofitting. The 2015 Manual on Stormwater Drainage Systems, developed for the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, recommended regular desilting and access points for maintenance, yet implementation remains inconsistent. In Guwahati, a 2024 civic audit revealed that only 30% of drains were desilted before the monsoon, leaving the city vulnerable to flooding.

Climate change has dramatically intensified these challenges. Over the past two decades, India has experienced rainstorms of greater magnitude and intensity, driven by shifting weather patterns. The 2015 manual advised cities to design drainage systems for a one-in-five-year return period to account for climate variability, but recent storms have exceeded even these projections. Mumbai's 2005 deluge, which dumped 944 mm of rain in 24 hours, and Chennai's 2015 floods, with 345 mm in a single day, highlight the inadequacy of existing infrastructure. In Guwahati, a single day in June 2024 saw 214 mm of rain, paralyzing the city and flooding key areas like GS Road. These extreme events overwhelm drains designed for lower rainfall thresholds, rendering them ineffective. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) projects that South Asia will face a 20% increase in extreme precipitation events by 2050, necessitating urgent upgrades to urban drainage systems.

Scientific tools offer a path forward. A simulation framework on a Geographic Information Sys-

tem (GIS) platform, piloted for the Government of Delhi, models runoff movement and adapts drainage systems to changes in population, land use, and rainfall patterns. This framework identifies flood-prone areas and optimizes drain design, offering a blueprint for cities like Guwahati, where haphazard urban planning has exacerbated flooding. For instance, Guwahati's rapid expansion into hilly areas has increased runoff into low-lying zones, yet the city lacks a comprehensive drainage master plan. A 2025 study by IIT Guwahati proposed a GIS-based model to integrate real-time rainfall data with topographic analysis, potentially reducing flood impacts by 25%. Such tools, however, require consistent investment and political will, both of which have been lacking.

Mitigating urban flooding demands a multifaceted approach. Enhancing groundwater recharge through permeable pavements and green spaces can reduce runoff volumes. Rejuvenating water bodies, such as Guwahati's Deepor Beel, a Ramsar wetland encroached by urban development, is critical. Cities like Singapore have implemented rooftop gardens to retain rainwater, a strategy Indian cities could adopt. Underground storage systems, such as tanks or detention basins, can temporarily hold excess water, easing pressure on drains. In Japan, massive stormwater tunnels divert runoff to rivers, though their high cost—often billions of dollars—poses challenges for India. Guwahati's 2024 budget allocated ₹200 crore for drainage upgrades, including new culverts and pumps, but experts argue this is insufficient for a city of 1.2 million facing annual floods. Community-led initiatives, stricter regulations on encroachments, and advanced planning are essential to transform India's urban centers into resilient, flood-resistant metropolises.

The impacts of urban flooding are profound, disrupting daily life, economies, and ecosystems. In cities like Mumbai and Delhi, inundated streets halt transportation, stranding commuters and delaying essential services. Guwahati's 2024 floods, for instance, paralyzed key commercial hubs like GS Road, with businesses reporting losses in the crores. Property damage, particularly in low-income areas, exacerbates economic inequality, as residents struggle to recover. Health risks are equally dire: stagnant floodwater breeds mosquitoes, increasing cases of dengue and malaria, while sewage contamination raises the threat of

cholera and typhoid. A 2023 study by the Indian Council of Medical Research noted a 15% spike in waterborne diseases in Guwahati post-monsoon. Ecologically, floods carry pollutants into rivers and wetlands, harming biodiversity. Deepor Beel, once a thriving habitat for migratory birds, now suffers from siltation and pollution, diminishing its ecological and flood-mitigating roles.

Guwahati's flooding crisis is a microcosm of India's urban challenges. The city's location in the Brahmaputra valley, coupled with an average annual rainfall of 1,688 mm, makes it inherently flood-prone. Urban sprawl has encroached on critical wetlands like Deepor Beel, now reduced to a fraction of its original size, and Silsako Beel, similarly degraded. Hillside deforestation in neighboring Meghalaya channels silt-laden runoff into Guwahati's drains, further clogging them. The Bharalu River, meant to serve as a primary drainage channel, has become a de facto sewer, with a 2024 report by the Central Pollution Control Board classifying it as one of India's most polluted water bodies. The Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority (GMDA) has acknowledged that the city's drainage system fails when the Brahmaputra cannot handle excess rainwater, a recurring issue during heavy rains. In May 2025, when 112.5 mm of rain fell in a short period, areas like Rukminigaon, Hatigaon, and Wireless were submerged, prompting the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) to deploy rescue teams with rubber boats. Posts on X, such as one from @GuwahatiCivic on May 20, 2025, voiced public frustration: "Another monsoon, another flood. Why are our drains always clogged?"

The root of Guwahati's drainage problem lies in its outdated infrastructure and poor urban planning. Many drains, built in the 1970s, were designed for a smaller population and lower rainfall intensity. The city's population, now over 1.2 million, has outgrown this infrastructure, while unplanned construction in hilly areas increases runoff into low-lying zones. A 2021 article in The Times of India warned that Guwahati's flooding could force residents to abandon the city if unaddressed Guwahati Floods Will Worsen. The GMDA's "Mission Flood Free Guwahati" initiative, launched in 2020, aims to upgrade drains and manage stormwater, but progress is slow. A 2024 civic audit revealed that only 30% of drains were desilted before the monsoon, despite annual flooding. Pumps installed in areas like Anil Nagar often fail due to power outages or insufficient capacity, leaving residents stranded.

Climate change has turned manageable rains into catastrophic deluges. The IPCC's 2021 report projected that South Asia's monsoon rains will become 20% more intense by 2050, a trend already evident in India. Bengaluru's 2024 floods, triggered by 130 mm of rain in 12 hours, and Hyderabad's 2020 deluge, with 192 mm in a day, reflect this new reality Urban Flooding in India. Guwahati's June 2024 flooding, caused by 214 mm of rain, overwhelmed its drainage network, highlighting the gap between infrastructure and current needs. The 2015 Manual on Stormwater Drainage Systems recommended a one-in-five-year return period for drain design, but even this is inadequate for today's storms. Cities must adopt higher thresholds, such as one-in-ten years, to accommodate extreme weather, though this requires significant investment.

Scientific solutions are critical to addressing urban flooding. The GIS-based simulation framework piloted in Delhi offers a model for Guwahati, mapping runoff patterns and identifying flood-prone areas. A 2025 study by IIT Guwahati proposed a similar framework, integrating real-time rainfall data with topographic analysis to optimize drain placement and size, potentially reducing flood impacts by 25% Urban Flood Mitigation Planning for Guwahati. Such tools can guide urban planning, ensuring new developments account for drainage needs. However, implementation faces hurdles: Guwahati's 2024 drainage budget of ₹200 crore is dwarfed by the estimated ₹1,500 crore needed for comprehensive upgrades. Political will, often undermined by short-term priorities, remains a barrier.

Sustainable, nature-based solutions can complement infrastructure upgrades. Enhancing groundwater recharge through permeable pavements and green spaces reduces runoff volumes. Restoring wetlands like Deepor Beel, a Ramsar site, could absorb significant floodwater, but encroachments must be cleared. A 2023 X post by @AssamWildlife urged action to save Deepor Beel, noting its role in flood mitigation. Rejuvenating water bodies like Silsako Beel and stopping hillside construction are equally critical. Cities like Chennai have piloted lake restoration to mitigate floods, a strategy Guwahati could emulate. Rooftop gardens, as seen in Singapore, retain rainwater at the source, while underground storage tanks can detain excess water. Large-scale solutions, such as Tokyo's stormwater tunnels, are effective but prohibitively expensive for India. Basic street-level drainage improvements, such as wider culverts and regular desilting, remain foundational.

Community engagement is vital to long-term success. Public awareness campaigns can discourage waste dumping in drains, a chronic issue in Guwahati, where the Bharalu River is littered with plastics. Mumbai's citizen-led drain-cleaning initiatives offer a model for community involvement. The National Disaster Management Authority's 2010 guidelines advocate integrated urban planning, emphasizing coordination between municipal bodies, but implementation lags Mission Flood Free Guwahati. Stricter regulations on wetland encroachments and illegal constructions are essential, requiring robust enforcement. A 2025 X post by @GuwahatiResident highlighted the need for accountability: "Why do builders get away with blocking drains? We pay the price every monsoon."

India's urban flooding crisis demands a paradigm shift. With 50% of the population projected to live in cities by 2050, the stakes are immense. Guwahati's struggles—clogged drains, lost wetlands, and extreme rains—mirror those of Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Hyderabad. While complete flood prevention is unattainable, a combination of scientific planning, sustainable infrastructure, and community action can mitigate impacts. GIS-based modeling, wetland restoration, and green solutions offer hope, but they require sustained investment and governance reform. As India's cities face a deluge of challenges, the path to resilience lies in reimagining urban planning for a climate-altered future, ensuring that metropolises like Guwahati thrive despite the storms. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Heatwave days to double in Delhi, Chennai & these 6 Indian cities by 2030

By: Preetha Banerjee

Mumbai, Chennai, Delhi, Surat, Thane, Hyderabad, Patna and Bhubaneswar are projected to witness a two-fold increase in heatwave days by 2030, according to a study released June 10, 2025 by development consulting firm IPE Global and GIS technology provider Esri India.

Unveiled at the International Global-South Climate Risk Symposium in New Delhi, the report titled *Weathering the Storm: Managing Monsoons in a Warming Climate* offers a district-level assessments of the correlation between extreme heat and erratic rainfall in India. The findings underscore the escalating threat of climate change and call for urgent, localised interventions to strengthen resilience across urban and rural landscapes.

Incessant and erratic rainfall will become more frequent in 8 out of 10 districts in India, the report noted.

"Our analysis suggests that around 72 per cent of the tier-I & tier-II cities are going to witness an increased occurrences of heat stress and extreme rainfall events, accompanied with storm surges, lightning and hailstorms," said Abinash Mohanty, head of Climate Change and Sustainability Practice at IPE Global and lead author of the study. "Meteorological phenomenon like El Nino & La Nina are going to gain stronger momentum, resulting in abrupt surge in climate extremes like flood, cyclones, storm surges and extreme heat."

Coastal districts, in particular, are expected to endure prolonged summer-like conditions even during the peak monsoon months of June through September. Around 69 per cent of coastal districts will be affected by heat stress by 2030, a figure that could rise to 79 per cent by 2040.

Drawing on dynamic climate modelling and spatial analytics,

the study documented a stark rise in extreme heat over the last three decades. Between 1993 and 2024, India recorded a 15 times increase in heatwave days during both the March-May and June-September periods. The last decade alone saw a 19-fold surge, with far-reaching implications for human health, agriculture, energy demand and water stress.

Microclimate shifts, land-use change

The study highlighted that in a business-as-usual scenario, 63 per cent of hotspot districts will undergo land-use and land-cover changes by 2030. These transformations—from forest to farmland, wetland to settlement—are exacerbating local heat and rainfall extremes by disrupting natural cooling systems and water cycles.

Some states that already face extreme heat will bear an additional burden of extreme rainfall. These include Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Uttarakhanda, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Meghalaya and Manipur, with more than 80 percent of the districts projected to be impacted by this by 2030, the authors of the report found.

Local factors such as deforestation, unplanned urbanisation, loss of wetlands and mangroves intensify the broader climate crisis. "Embracing hyper-granular risk assessments and establish climate-risk observatories should become a national imperative to safeguard Indian agriculture, industry, and large-scale infrastructural projects from the vagaries of climate change," said Mohanty.

"The growing intensity and frequency of extreme heat and rainfall events across India are no longer rare occurrences—they are signals of a shifting climate reality impacting lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure," said Agendra Kumar, Managing Director, Esri India. Addressing

them requires a scientific and spatially informed approach, the expert added. "GIS technology offers the ability to visualise and respond to these risks in real-time—whether in city planning, agriculture or disaster response."

The report recommended the establishment of a Climate Risk Observatory—a centralised platform using Earth Observation data and climate models to provide real-time and predictive information.

Such a system, the authors argued, would enable real-time forecasting, improve public communication and help policymakers prioritise investment in climate-resilient infrastructure.

The authors also called for the creation of heat-risk champions within District Disaster Management Committees to coordinate response efforts and enhance grassroots resilience.

Financing risks

In addition to scientific and governance reforms, the study advocates for risk financing mechanisms to cushion the economic blow of climate-induced disasters.

"Climate and development pathways are intricately linked. Nearly all countries of the Global South face the dual challenge of improving living conditions for large segments of their population while simultaneously adapting to the consequences of climate change," said Ashwajit Singh, Founder and Managing Director of IPE Global.

India has to bring innovations from margins to the mainstream, he suggested. "Only then, can India truly emerge as the climate solutions capital to the world."

The report, released as India prepares to participate in SB 62, the mid-year climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn, calls for a "climate solutions mindset"—shifting from reactive responses to proactive, data-driven planning. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

Plastic in the urban veins: Towards circular and climate-resilient cities

By: Aparna Roy

As the monsoon approaches, Indian cities once again face the familiar threat of clogged drains, flooded streets, and overflowing landfills—symptoms of a deeper, more chronic crisis. Plastic waste, largely uncollected and poorly managed, chokes stormwater systems and magnifies the impact of extreme weather. According to the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, waste generated in Tier 1 cities accounts for 72.5 percent of the total waste generated per day. India generates 4.1 million tonnes of plastic waste annually, out of which, more than 40 percent remains uncollected. What is collected is often mixed with organic and hazardous waste, making recycling difficult. In cities like Bengaluru and Mumbai, where daily waste exceeds 9,000 tonnes, plastic pollution is no longer just an environmental nuisance—it is a structural failure of planning, design, and governance. The 2023 Bengaluru floods, worsened by plastic-choked drains, exposed how unmanaged waste can undermine urban resilience. As World Environment Day 2025 calls attention to combating plastic pollution, it is time to confront it not as a sanitation issue, but as a barrier to building climate-resilient cities.

Despite increasing policy attention to plastic waste management, India's urban response remains fragmented and largely reactive. The Plastic Waste Management Rules (amended in 2021) have mandated Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), but implementation has faltered due to capacity constraints at the municipal level and a lack of traceability in the informal sector. State-level bans on single-use plastics have proven difficult to enforce, especially in markets and among small vendors. Municipalities remain underfunded and overburdened, with solid waste management constituting a minor portion of urban development budgets. Much like India's early approach to managing heatwaves—limited to issuing alerts without upgrading infrastructure—plastic waste management continues to be treated as an auxiliary function rather than a core pillar of climate-resilient planning. The result is a deeply linear economy in cities: one that takes, uses, and dumps, with few systems in place for reuse, recovery, or regeneration.

A systems transformation toward circular cities is essential. However, this transition must acknowledge the uneven terrain on which Indian cities operate. Nearly 80 percent of the recycling economy is informal. Lakhs of waste pickers, often women and Dalits, manually collect and sort plastic waste with little protection, income security, or institutional support. Municipalities rarely integrate these workers into formal service delivery, and in most cities, there

is no database of who they are or where they work. This exclusion undermines recovery rates and reinforces social inequities. For example, Delhi's attempts to automate collection have displaced thousands of informal workers without alternative livelihoods. In contrast, cities like Pune have shown that cooperatives such as SWaCH can bridge the gap, offering social protection while enhancing service efficiency. A just transition toward circularity must therefore be people-centred—recognising the informal sector as a climate ally, not a regulatory burden.

India's urban development schemes—Smart Cities Mission, AMRUT, and Swachh Bharat Abhiyan—have begun building infrastructure for waste collection, transportation, and processing. But these investments remain unevenly distributed, with wealthier Tier-I cities capturing the bulk of funding while smaller towns and peri-urban settlements lag. Moreover, these schemes lack a unified circular economy vision. Climate action plans under the C-CAP initiative rarely include material flow assessments or set recovery targets for high-leakage materials like multilayered plastics. Waste-to-Energy plants, often backed under public-private partnerships, remain controversial due to the low calorific value of Indian waste and the emission of toxins when burning plastic. Chennai, for instance, faces local resistance against its WTE plant over air quality and land-use concerns. Without upstream reforms—segregation at source, design for recyclability, and waste audits—technology-driven solutions will continue to underperform.

Reform must begin at the point of design and procurement. Indian cities continue to rely on linear supply chains for packaging and materials, with procurement guidelines rarely considering circularity. There are few incentives for bulk consumers—hotels, markets, e-commerce warehouses—to shift away from single-use plastics. Bengaluru's "Refill Hubs" pilot in government stores, where citizens refill cleaning products and staples, represents a promising shift, but such experiments need institutional scale and financing. The absence of mandates for public procurement of recycled content or subsidies for reusable packaging keeps the circular business models niche. Local governments, constrained by fiscal deficits, are unable to underwrite the transition costs for circular innovations.

Technology could be a powerful enabler, but is underutilised. Startups in Indian cities are piloting AI-based segregation, traceability platforms for EPR, and decentralised plastic-to-fuel units. However, many face regulatory bottlenecks, data inaccessibility, or weak municipal uptake. Unlike the relatively coordinated rollout of digital public goods in healthcare or finance, urban waste tech lacks systemic support. Cities do not maintain digitised, real-time dashboards

of plastic flows or segregation performance. In contrast to cities like Amsterdam or Seoul that track materials through every node of the urban metabolism, Indian cities rely on manual reporting and sporadic audits. The National Urban Digital Mission offers an opportunity to institutionalise data-driven waste governance—through smart bins, geo-tagged collection routes, and open dashboards for public accountability.

Communities—especially women-led households, resident welfare associations, and youth groups—can anchor behavioural transitions. Yet, public awareness campaigns remain sporadic and top-down. Behaviour change communications are often limited to poster drives or punitive fines, without fostering long-term collective ownership. Cities like Indore and Surat, which have climbed the cleanliness rankings, did so by coupling civic participation with decentralised infrastructure. Similarly, urban circularity efforts must be hyperlocal—linking community Material Recovery Facilities with micro-enterprises, and deploying reward-based models to incentivise low-waste behaviours. Plastic-free bazaars, zero-waste housing societies, and school-led audit programmes must move from pilot to policy.

The consequences of inaction are not distant—they are already unfolding. Plastics contribute directly to India's emissions burden. Uncollected plastics clog storm drains, fuel landfill fires, and leach toxins into urban water systems. The public health fallout—ranging from microplastic ingestion to respiratory diseases—is already visible in high-density informal settlements where waste collection is weakest. In a warming world, plastic pollution acts as a threat amplifier—intensifying the frequency and scale of urban climate disasters. Cities that continue to manage waste in isolation from climate and health goals will remain locked in a reactive cycle—cleaning up after disasters rather than building resilience before they strike.

India has positioned itself globally as a champion of sustainable lifestyles through its LIFE campaign and has led calls at the G20 and United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) for collective action on plastic pollution. Yet, if this global vision is to be credible, it must be backed by transformative change in India's cities. Combating plastic pollution is no longer an issue of local cleanliness; it is a strategic imperative for national climate resilience, economic efficiency, and social equity. World Environment Day 2025 offers a moment not just for reflection but for redesign. The plastic crisis is an urban crisis, and solving it demands a new generation of Indian cities that are circular by principle, inclusive by design, and resilient by default. (Courtesy: ORF)

Russian attacks kill 3, wound 64 as drones hit Kharkiv, other parts of Ukraine

We stand strong. We help one another. And we will endure, says Terekhov

KYIV, June 11: Russian forces launched a new drone assault across Ukraine overnight on Wednesday, killing three people and wounding 64 others, Ukrainian officials said.

One of the hardest-hit areas was the city of Kharkiv in northeastern Ukraine, where 17 attack drones struck two residential districts, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said. Emergency crews, municipal workers and volunteers worked through the night to extinguish fires, rescue residents from burning homes, and restore gas, electricity and water services.

"Those are ordinary sites of peaceful life — those that should never be targeted," Terekhov wrote on Telegram.

Three people were confirmed killed, according to Kharkiv regional head Oleh Syniehubov. In a statement, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that 64 people had been wounded and reiterated his calls for greater international pressure on Moscow.

"Every new day now brings new vile Russian attacks, and almost every strike is telling," he said. "We must not be afraid or postpone new decisions that could make



things more difficult for Russia. Without this, they will not engage in genuine diplomacy. And this depends primarily on the United States and other world leaders. Everyone who has called for an end to the killings and for diplomacy must act."

Kharkiv has been frequently targeted in recent months as Russia launched repeated large-scale drone and missile attacks on civilian infrastructure.

Moscow's forces have launched waves of drones and missiles in recent days, with a record bombardment of almost 500 drones on

Monday and a wave of 315 drones and seven missiles overnight on Tuesday. The attacks come despite discussions of a potential ceasefire in the war. The two sides traded memorandums at direct peace talks in Istanbul on June 2 that set out conditions. However, the inclusion of clauses that both sides see as nonstarters make any quick deal unlikely.

Wednesday's strikes also caused widespread destruction in Kharkiv's Slobidskyi and Osnovianskyi districts, hitting apartment buildings, private homes, playgrounds, industrial sites and public

transportation. Images from the scene published by Ukraine's Emergency Service on Telegram showed burning apartments, shattered windows and firefighters battling the blaze.

"We stand strong. We help one another. And we will endure," Terekhov said. "Kharkiv is Ukraine. And it cannot be broken."

Ukraine's air force said that 85 attack and decoy drones were fired over the country overnight. Air defence systems intercepted 40 of the drones, while nine more failed to reach their targets without causing damage.

In other developments, Russia has returned 1,212 bodies of Ukrainian soldiers in line with an agreement reached during the talks in Istanbul between Russian and Ukrainian delegations.

Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for Treatment of Prisoners of War said that the bodies came from Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions, as well as Russia's Kursk region where Ukrainian forces waged an incursion. It said that authorities would work to determine their identities as quickly as possible. (AP)

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk defends centrist government before vote of confidence

WARSAW, June 11: Prime Minister Donald Tusk defended his centrist, pro-European government before parliament on Wednesday, seeking to reassert control and rally his fractured coalition after suffering a bitter political defeat. Tusk requested a vote of confidence in the wake of the June 1 loss of Warsaw Mayor Rafal Trzaskowski — his close ally — to nationalist historian Karol Nawrocki. Backed by US President Donald Trump, Nawrocki is set to replace outgoing President Andrzej Duda, another conservative who repeatedly blocked Tusk's reform efforts.

"I am asking for a vote of confidence with full conviction that we have a mandate to govern, to take full responsibility for what is happening in Poland," Tusk said. Most of the power in Poland's parliamentary system rests with an elected parliament and a government chosen by the parliament. However, the president can veto legislation and represents the country abroad.

"Anyone who is ready to move forward with me, with the government, and above all with our voters, regardless of these momentary emotions, and build a better Poland, should vote today for a vote of confidence in our government," Tusk said.

The vote, scheduled for Wednesday afternoon, is widely expected to go in Tusk's favour. His four-party coalition holds a narrow but stable majority in the

460-seat Sejm, Poland's lower house.

A loss would trigger the formation of a caretaker government and may open the door for an early parliamentary election. That could potentially return power to the conservative Law and Justice party, in coalition with the far-right Confederation party, whose candidate placed third in the presidential race.

Tusk had long counted on a Trzaskowski victory to break the institutional deadlock created by Duda's vetoes. Instead, he now faces an incoming president aligned with the nationalist opposition and openly hostile to his government's legislative priorities.

"We cannot close our eyes to reality," he said. "A president who was reluctant to accept the changes we proposed for Poland and our voters is being replaced by a president who is at least equally reluctant to those changes and proposals." But he also argued that Trzaskowski's narrow defeat indicates that there is continued strong support for those who share his views.

The election result has rattled the already uneasy governing coalition, which spans from centre-left to centre-right and has struggled to deliver on key campaign pledges, including liberalizing Poland's abortion law and legalizing same-sex civil unions. Tusk acknowledged the growing strains in Wednesday's address. (AP)

Rights group says global brands at risk of links to forced labour in China's minerals industry

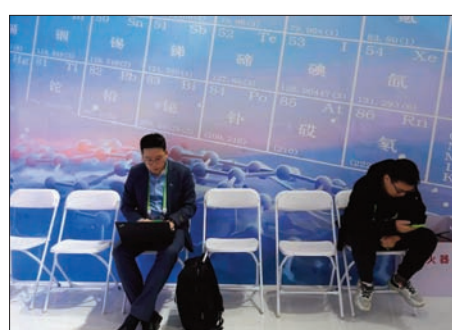
LONDON, June 11: Several global brands are among dozens of companies at risk of using forced labour through their Chinese supply chains because they use critical minerals or buy minerals-based products sourced from the far-western Xinjiang region of China, an international rights group said Wednesday.

The report by the Netherlands-based Global Rights Compliance says companies including Avon, Walmart, Nescafe, Coca-Cola and paint supplier Sherwin-Williams may be linked to titanium sourced from Xinjiang, where rights groups allege the Chinese government runs coercive labour practices targeting predominantly Muslim Uyghurs and other Turkic minorities.

The report found 77 Chinese suppliers in the titanium, lithium, beryllium and magnesium industries operating in Xinjiang. It said the suppliers are at risk of participating in the Chinese government's "labour transfer programmes," in which Uyghurs are forced to work in factories as part of a long-standing campaign of assimilation and mass detention.

Commercial paints, thermos cups and components for the aerospace, auto and defence industries are among products sold internationally that can trace their supply chains to minerals from Xinjiang, the report said. It said that companies must review their supply chains.

"Mineral mining and processing in (Xinjiang) rely in part on the state's forced labour



programmes for Uyghurs and other Turkic people in the region," the report said.

The report came as China and the United States, the world's two largest economies, said that they have agreed on a framework to get their trade negotiations back on track after a series of disputes that threatened to derail them.

The two sides on Tuesday wrapped up two days of talks in London that appeared to focus on finding a way to resolve disputes over mineral and technology exports that had shaken a fragile truce on trade reached in Geneva last month. Asked about the report, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that "no one has ever been forcibly transferred in China's Xinjiang under work programmes."

"The so-called allegation of forced labour in China's Xinjiang region is nothing but a lie con-

S Korea halts propaganda broadcasts along border with rival North in move to ease tensions

SEOUL, June 11: South Korea's military shut down loudspeakers broadcasting anti-North Korea propaganda along the inter-Korean border on Wednesday, marking the new liberal government's first concrete step toward easing tensions between the war-divided rivals.

The South resumed the daily loudspeaker broadcasts in June last year following a yearslong pause in retaliation for North Korea flying trash-laden balloons toward the South in a psychological warfare campaign.

South Korea's Defence Ministry said the move, ordered by President Lee Jae-myung, was part of efforts "to restore trust in inter-Korean relations and promote peace on the Korean Peninsula".

Kang Yu-jung, Lee's spokesperson, described the decision as a "proactive step" to reduce military tensions and ease the burden for South Koreans residing in border areas, who have also been affected by North Korea's retaliatory loudspeaker broadcasts.

North Korea, which is extremely sensitive to any outside criticism of its authoritarian leadership and its third-generation ruler, Kim Jong Un, didn't immediately comment on the step by Seoul.

South Korea reactivated its front-line loudspeakers to blast propaganda messages and K-pop songs toward the North last year in response to thousands of trash balloons that Pyongyang flew toward South Korea to drop substances including wastepaper, cloth scraps, cigarette butts and even manure.

From May to November last year, North Korea flew about 7,000 balloons toward South Korea in 32 separate occasions, according to the South's military. The North said that its balloon campaign came after South Korean activists sent over balloons filled with anti-North Korean leaflets, as well as USB sticks filled with popular South Korean songs and dramas. Trash carried by at least one North Korean balloon fell on the South Korean presidential compound in July, raising concerns about the vulnerability of key South Korean facilities. Officials said that the balloon contained no dangerous material and no one was hurt.

The South's broadcast playlist was clearly designed to strike a nerve in Pyongyang, where Kim's government has been intensifying a campaign to eliminate the influence of South Korean pop culture



and language among the population in a bid to strengthen his family's dynastic rule.

The Cold War-style psychological warfare campaigns added to tensions fuelled by North Korea's growing nuclear ambitions and South Korean efforts to expand joint military exercises with the United States and strengthen three-way security cooperation with Japan.

Efforts to improve relations

Lee, an outspoken liberal who took office last week after winning an early election to replace ousted conservative Yoon Suk Yeol, has vowed to improve relations with Pyongyang, which reacted furiously to Yoon's hard-line policies and shunned dialogue.

During his election campaign, Lee promised to halt the loudspeaker broadcasts, arguing that they created unnecessary tensions and discomfort for South Korean residents in border towns. In recent months, those residents had complained about North Korea's retaliatory broadcasts, which included howling animals, pounding gongs and other irritating sounds.

In a briefing on Monday, South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles inter-Korean affairs, also called for South Korean civilian activists to stop flying anti-North Korean propaganda leaflets across the border. Such activities "could heighten tensions on the Korean Peninsula and threaten the lives and safety of residents in border areas," said Koo Byoungsam, the ministry's spokesperson.

In his inaugural address last week, Lee vowed to reopen communication channels with North Korea. But prospects for an early resumption of dialogue between the rival Koreas remain dim. North Korea has consistently rejected offers from South Korea and the United States since 2019, when

nuclear talks between Washington and Pyongyang collapsed over sanctions-related disagreements.

The North's nuclear threats remain

North Korea's priority in foreign policy is now firmly with Russia, which has received thousands of North Korean troops and large amounts of military equipment in recent months for its war with Ukraine. South Korean and US officials have expressed concern that Kim in return could seek Russian technology transfers that could enhance the threat posed by his nuclear weapons and missile programme.

Yoon, who was removed from office in April over his short-lived imposition of martial law in December, had focused on strengthening military partnerships with Washington and Tokyo and on securing stronger US assurances of a swift and decisive nuclear response to defend the South against a North Korean nuclear attack.

In a fierce reaction to Yoon's policies, Kim declared in January 2024 that he was abandoning the long-standing goals of a peaceful unification with the South and instructed the rewriting of the North's constitution to cement the South as a permanent "principal enemy".

Following years of heightened testing activity, Kim has acquired a broad range of missiles that could potentially target rivals in Asia and the US mainland. He has also called for increased production of nuclear materials to create more bombs.

Rafael Mariano Grossi, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency, said Monday that the UN nuclear watchdog is monitoring signs that North Korea may be building a new uranium-enrichment plant at its main nuclear complex in Yongbyon. (AP)

US, China say they have agreed on framework to resolve their trade disputes

LONDON, June 11: Senior US and Chinese negotiators have agreed on a framework to get their trade negotiations back on track after a series of disputes that threatened to derail them, both sides have said.

The announcement came at the end of two days of talks in the British capital that wrapped up late Tuesday.

The meetings appeared to focus on finding a way to resolve disputes over mineral and technology exports that had shaken a fragile truce on trade reached in Geneva last month. It's not clear whether any progress was made on the more fundamental differences over China's sizeable trade surplus with the United States.

"First we had to get sort of the negativity out and now we can go forward," US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick told reporters after the meetings. Asian stock markets rose Wednesday after the agreement was announced. The talks followed a phone call between President Donald Trump and Chinese leader Xi Jinping last week to try to calm the waters.

Li Chenggang, a vice minister of commerce and China's international trade representative, said the two sides had agreed in principle on a framework for implementing the consensus reached on the phone call and at the talks on Geneva, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

Further details, including any plans for a potential next round of talks, were not immediately available.

Li and Wang Wentao, China's commerce minister, were part of the delegation led by Vice Premier He Lifeng. They met with Lutnick, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Trade Representative Jamieson Greer at Lancaster House, a 200-year-old mansion near Buckingham Palace.

Wendy Cutler, a former US trade negotiator, said the disputes had frittered away 30 of the 90 days the two sides have to try to resolve their disputes. (AP)

Trump says will 'liberate' Los Angeles in speech to mark 250th anniversary of Army

FORT BRAGG (US), June 11: President Donald Trump called protesters in Los Angeles "animals" and "a foreign enemy" in a speech at Fort Bragg on Tuesday as he defended deploying the military on demonstrators opposed to his immigration enforcement raids and as he vowed to "liberate" the West Coast city.

Trump, in his most aggressive language yet regarding the protests, used a speech ostensibly supposed to be used to recognise the 250th anniversary of the US Army to denounce the protesters while repeating his false statements about the 2020 election being rigged and attacking the previous commander in chief, former President Joe Biden.

The Republican president, who sees the military as a critical tool for domestic goals, has used the recent protests in Los Angeles as an opportunity to deploy the National Guard and US Marines over the objections of California's Democratic governor.

Protesters blocked a major freeway and set cars on fire over the weekend in Los Angeles, but the demonstrations in the city of 4 million people have largely been centred in several blocks of downtown.

"We will not allow an American city to be invaded and conquered by a foreign enemy. That's what they are," Trump said Tuesday.

Trump's heated rhetoric came as he has left open the possibility of invoking the Insurrection Act, one of the most extreme emergency powers available to the president. It authorises him to deploy military forces inside the US to suppress rebellion or domestic violence or to enforce the law in certain situations. Trump received plenty of cheers from the crowd, which laughed at the president's jokes and delighted in his dancing to his campaign anthem of "YMCA." However, some members of the audience were uneasy with certain aspects of his remarks.

Robin Boothe, who voted for

Trump and works on the base as an audiologist assistant, said the speech was "classic Trump." However, she also found it to be too partisan, especially his comments on Los Angeles.

"I thought that was better left for a news conference than what we were celebrating today," the 50-year-old said.

The president called Los Angeles "a trash heap" with "entire neighbourhoods under control" of criminals and said the federal government would "use every asset at our disposal to quell the violence and restore law and order."

"We will liberate Los Angeles and make it free, clean and safe again," Trump said. Trump authorised the deployment of 4,000 National Guard soldiers to the city against the wishes of California Gov. Gavin Newsom. About 700 Marines were deployed to the Los Angeles area but had not yet been sent to respond to the protests.

Newsom asked a federal court Tuesday to block Trump from



using the military in his city. California leaders accused Trump of fanning protesters' anger and stoking the unrest.

In an address Tuesday evening, Newsom warned: "California may be first, but it clearly will not end here. Other states are next. Democracy is next. Democracy is under assault before our eyes."

Trump also announced his administration was restoring the names of seven military bases that

were given the monikers of Confederate leaders until being changed by the Biden administration.

Fort Pickett, Fort Robert E. Lee and Fort A.P. Hill in Virginia, Fort Hood in Texas, Fort Gordon in Georgia, Fort Rucker in Alabama and Fort Polk in Louisiana will have their names changed back, Trump said.

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth has already brought back the names of Fort Bragg and Fort Ben-

ning in Georgia.

"Can you believe they changed that name in the last administration for a little bit?" Trump said. "We'll forget all about that."

As they did when they changed back Fort Bragg and Fort Benning, Defence officials announced Tuesday that they had identified service members with the same last names in order to make the change and not have the bases officially carry Confederate-related names.

Before he spoke, Trump watched the US Army demonstrate a missile strike, a helicopter assault and a building raid, a preview of the kind of show of American military might he's expected to display in the nation's capital for a massive military parade this weekend.

Trump has promoted the Army's anniversary as a reason to hold the parade on Saturday, which is also his 79th birthday. Tanks and other vehicles will roll down city streets in a reminder of how the Republican president is reshaping the armed forces after returning to

the White House this year. "I think it's going to be great," Trump told reporters at the White House earlier Tuesday. "We're going to celebrate our country for a change." As a backdrop to the parade, "No Kings Day" protests are planned across the country on Saturday to push back against what critics see as the administration's draconian policies. Trump said earlier Tuesday that there would be more immigration raids and that any additional protests would be met with even greater force, including those who show up at the parade.

If they do, Trump said, "they will be met with very big force."

"I haven't even heard about a protest but you know, this is people that hate our country. But they will be met with very heavy force."

Newsom weighed in Tuesday on the parade, accusing Trump of forcing the military "to put on a vulgar display to celebrate his birthday, just as other failed dictators have done in the past." (AP)

Collective support of Team East Siang will surely take the district to greater heights

Sonalika Jiwani takes charge as East Siang Deputy Commissioner

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 11: Sonalika Jiwani, IAS (AGMUT: 2017), officially assumed charge as the new Deputy Commissioner (DC) of East Siang district recently, expressing her commitment to taking the district a "notch higher" in terms of public service delivery and development initiatives.

Taking over from outgoing DC Tayi Taggu at a formal ceremony held at the DC Office, Jiwani praised her predecessor's dedication to public service, noting that his zeal has greatly inspired her.

Outlining her priorities, she emphasized focused efforts on urban sector development and the effective implementation of various government welfare schemes currently in the pipeline. Her goal, she

said, is to ensure that the benefits of development reach every section of society, particularly at the grass-roots level.

Speaking to ADC HQ Tatling Pertin, administrative officers, HoDs, and staff members present during the interaction, the new DC underlined the importance of dedication, work ethics, and teamwork.

"Having taken charge of one of the most performing districts in the state, I believe that the collective support of Team East Siang will surely take the district to greater heights," she said.

She further expressed confidence that the combined administrative expertise of the officers and the co-operation of the people of East Siang will play a pivotal role in driving the district forward.



ArSRLM launches first-ever workshop on knowledge management and communication in Itanagar



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 11: In a landmark initiative aimed at enhancing organizational learning and communication efficiency, the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM) has launched its first-ever Workshop on Knowledge Management and Communication (KMC). The workshop commenced on June 10 and will continue till June 13, at the State Mission Management Unit (SMMU) Conference Hall in Itanagar. This four-day capacity-building programme marks a pivotal step towards the institutionalization of knowledge sharing practices within the mission and the establishment of a structured communication framework at every administrative level.

This pioneering effort reflects ArSRLM's growing emphasis on embedding knowledge management as a core institutional function, ensuring that information, insights, and community-driven practices are systematically captured, preserved, and shared for sustainable development outcomes. The launch of this KMC workshop demonstrates a proactive shift in strategy—from solely implementing development programmes to creating a more dynamic, data-informed, and people-centric governance model.

The workshop is being facilitated by Vinod Aghari, National Mission Manager (KMC), from the National Mission Management Unit (NMMU) under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM), Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India. Aghari, known for his extensive experience and thought leadership in the domain of development communication and knowledge systems, brings national-level best practices and proven strategies that are expected to provide critical guidance to Ar-

SRLM's efforts in this direction. His facilitation is being seen as instrumental in aligning ArSRLM's KMC goals with national priorities and frameworks.

A diverse group of ArSRLM functionaries are attending the workshop. This includes State Mission Managers (SMMs), Programme Managers (PMs), District Mission Managers (DMMs), and other officials who are actively engaged in implementation and supervision of rural livelihood initiatives across Arunachal Pradesh. The participation of key personnel from both state and district levels ensures a more integrated and inclusive approach to knowledge sharing, fostering a unified understanding of the mission's goals and methodologies.

The structure of the workshop has been carefully designed to balance theory with practice, providing participants with both conceptual clarity and applied skills. The first two days of the workshop are devoted to intensive classroom-style sessions focusing on foundational concepts such as the role of KMC in development programmes, techniques for knowledge capture, and the strategic use of communication tools. These sessions are followed by two days of hands-on practical exercises, allowing participants to directly engage in real-time documentation, storytelling methods, digital content development, and strategic communication planning.

Participants are expected to explore various storytelling formats—including video, photography, written narratives, and case studies—as part of this applied learning phase. Additionally, the training also emphasizes the use of modern digital tools and platforms for outreach, knowledge dissemination, and stakeholder engagement. These

practical sessions aim to build a confident, skilled cadre of field and administrative staff who can articulate grassroots innovations, success stories, and learning experiences in compelling and impactful ways.

This workshop is not an isolated event but a key element in ArSRLM's larger strategic vision of nurturing a knowledge-driven, transparent, and participatory ecosystem for rural transformation in Arunachal Pradesh. By mainstreaming knowledge management practices, the mission aims to ensure that community-level innovations are not only preserved but also propagated across regions for broader replication and impact. The initiative seeks to bring field-level experiences to the forefront of development dialogue, influencing both implementation strategies and policy formulation.

Furthermore, the workshop reiterates ArSRLM's enduring commitment to empowering its workforce through continuous learning and capacity enhancement. By equipping its teams with cutting-edge communication strategies and robust documentation skills, the mission is setting the stage for improved programme visibility, increased community engagement, and more effective inter-departmental coordination.

Ultimately, this workshop is expected to contribute significantly to ArSRLM's core objectives: to improve its institutional effectiveness, strengthen field-policy feedback loops, and amplify community voices in the process of rural development. As the workshop unfolds over the coming days, it is anticipated that the insights generated and the skills acquired will not only benefit ArSRLM internally but will also serve as a model for other state missions seeking to build similar capacities.

Arunachal sends fourth batch of trainees to Premier Drone Academy in Hyderabad

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 11: In a significant stride towards fostering high-end skill development in emerging technologies, the Department of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, has sent the fourth batch of 14 trainees to the Drone Training Academy in Hyderabad, Telangana. This initiative is being undertaken under the Chief Minister's Yuva Kaushal Yojana (CMYKY)—a flagship programme aimed at empowering youth through advanced technical training.

With this latest batch, a total of 56 trainees have so far benefitted from the drone training initiative, out of which 42 candidates have already successfully completed their course and received drone flying certificates/permits issued by the academy, duly recognized by the Ministry of Civil Aviation. Under the CMYKY scheme, the Department fully sponsors the training, covering course fees, boarding, lodging, food, and transportation, thereby ensuring that financial constraints do not become a barrier for aspiring candidates from the state.

The one-week training programme includes both theoretical and practical modules focused on drone technology, operations, and regulatory compliance. At the end of the course, participants will be awarded official drone flying certificates/permits by the Drone Training Academy, which is accredited by the Ministry of Civil Aviation.

The batch was formally flagged off from Naharlagun railway station by Mr. Sibbo Passing, Director of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship, along with Mr. Jumbom Riba, Assistant Director. Addressing the trainees, Mr. Passing encouraged them to make the most of the opportunity. "You are representing not just yourselves, but the entire state of Arunachal Pradesh. I urge you to be disciplined, stay committed, and bring back valuable knowledge that can contribute to your growth and that of the state," he said.

He also highlighted the transformative impact such training can have on youth, enabling them to become self-reliant and employment-ready, especially in sectors such as agriculture, disaster management, surveillance, and logistics where drone technology is gaining increasing relevance.

Mr. Jumbom Riba briefed the trainees on the "dos and don'ts" of the training programme and emphasized the importance of team spirit, discipline, and safety, particularly since many participants were stepping outside the state for the first time.

Arunachal BJYM highlights developmental focus on Northeast

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 11: As the Narendra Modi-led central government completes 11 years in office, the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), Arunachal Pradesh unit, has lauded the Prime Minister's leadership, citing India's emergence as a global power and the transformation witnessed across sectors—particularly in the North Eastern region.

Addressing media and supporters on the occasion, Ritesho Manyu, State President of BJYM Arunachal Pradesh, said the last 11 years under Prime Minister Modi's leadership have been a period of unprecedented growth and national pride. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has emerged as a major global power. In the past 11 years, the country has seen transformative development in every sector," Manyu stated.

Focusing specifically on the North East, he highlighted the Modi government's commitment to bridging historic gaps in infrastructure and services. "Arunachal Pradesh, which had long been neglected, has seen rapid development in the connectivity sector under the present government. Roads, bridges, and other infrastructure that were once only promises are now realities," he added.

Manyu further credited Chief Minister Pema Khandu for playing a crucial role in aligning Arunachal Pradesh with the central vision of development. "The Khandu government has worked tirelessly to ensure that the people of Arunachal Pradesh benefit from centrally sponsored schemes. What was once a distant dream is now being delivered to people's doorsteps," he remarked.



Commenting on recent national events, he said, "India is now under strong and decisive leadership, which has been clearly demonstrated in operations like 'Operation Sindoor', where the country responded boldly and effectively to external threats. It reflects the strength and resolve of the Modi government."

Highlighting the significance of the Modi administration's approach to the North East, Manyu stated, "The Modi government has completed 11 years of dedicated service, with a marked focus on the North Eastern states. This region, once seen as remote and disconnected, has now been identified as a national growth corridor. The commitment to the North East reflects a larger vision of inclusive development that leaves no region behind."

He elaborated that the government's efforts are not limited to physical infrastructure but extend to economic empowerment, youth opportunities, and enhanced air connectivity, which are vital to the long-term prosperity of the region.

Turning to the state's achievements, Manyu praised the leadership of CM Pema Khandu, describing his nine-year tenure as

"an era of unprecedented and transformative progress" in Arunachal Pradesh. "Chief Minister Pema Khandu has not only accelerated the pace of development but has also inspired the youth to take part in building a stronger, more self-reliant Arunachal," he said.

"Under nine years of Seva (service) and Sushasan (good governance), the Khandu-led government has remained steadfast in delivering on the aspirations of the people. From building roads and improving education and healthcare to ensuring social security and empowering indigenous communities—his government has made governance accessible to every citizen," Manyu asserted.

He concluded by expressing BJYM's deep appreciation for the visionary and results-oriented governance model adopted by both the central and state leadership. "We at BJYM strongly commend the dynamic leadership of both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Pema Khandu. Their collaborative efforts have made Arunachal Pradesh a shining example of progress and youth-led development in the North East," he said.

Joint civil-military mock drill on disaster preparedness conducted successfully in Tawang



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 11: A large-scale joint civil-military mock drill on disaster preparedness was successfully conducted on Wednesday at Mhentsang Rong (Bomdir Nallah) in Tawang, aimed at enhancing inter-agency coordination and strengthening response mechanisms in the event of natural disasters such as landslides, earthquakes, flash floods, and fires.

The mock drill commenced at 11:30 AM and was personally supervised by Brigadier Bhupal Singh, SM, Commander of the Tawang Brigade. The meticulously planned exercise saw active participation from multiple agencies including the Indian Army, 38th Battalion of Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), 55th Battalion of Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), 12th Battalion of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), Tawang Fire Brigade, Tawang Police, KDS District Hospital medical team, and Veterinary Officers from the De-

partment of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, Tawang.

Preparations for the drill began a day earlier, on June 10, with a thorough inspection of static equipment and a joint briefing session chaired by Brigadier Singh and District Disaster Management Officer (DDMO) Genden Tsomu at the Brigade Headquarters. Detailed response protocols were discussed to ensure seamless coordination during the exercise. The mock drill was carried out across five different locations, simulating multiple disaster scenarios to evaluate the efficiency, agility, and coordination of rescue operations under high-pressure conditions. These included realistic enactments of landslides, fire outbreaks, flash floods, and earthquakes.

During the debriefing session, Brigadier Singh lauded the performance and cooperation of all participating teams. He emphasized that while drills are valuable, actual disaster situations demand rapid and

well-coordinated responses, citing past experiences with flash floods in the region. "A moment's delay can cost lives," he said, urging personnel to maintain a constant state of readiness.

Brigadier Singh further proposed the identification of responsible individuals in every locality to disseminate early warnings during emergencies. Highlighting the critical nature of the first two hours following a disaster, he advised communities in vulnerable areas—particularly those located near steep slopes or densely populated zones—to develop localized disaster management plans with clearly marked evacuation routes.

He also stressed the need for regular mock drills, particularly during the monsoon season, to reinforce preparedness. He recommended that communities be equipped with basic first-aid knowledge and ensure pre-stocking of essential supplies such as food, water, and medicine in disaster-prone zones.

This joint exercise reflects the unwavering commitment of both civil and military agencies to protect lives and minimize disaster impact through proactive planning and coordination.

Meanwhile, Deputy Commissioner Namgyal Angmo, Superintendent of Police Dr. D.W. Thongon, and DDMO Genden Tsomu participated in a virtual meeting with the Chief Secretary of Arunachal Pradesh, where region-wide monsoon preparedness measures were reviewed.

Online training for APSHRC officials

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 11: A one-day online training programme on e-Compliance and e-File Management Skills was conducted recently for officers and officials of the Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (APSHRC) by officials of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). The training aimed to equip participants with essential tools and knowledge to efficiently manage human rights violation cases using digital platforms.

The objective was to enhance the competencies of officials in the digitalization process, complaint handling, and systematic documentation of human rights-related cases. Special focus was placed on utilizing digital systems for case registration, action taken reports, tracking file movements, document management, dashboard operations, reporting procedures, and the use of the Central Registry System to ensure a seamless and accountable workflow.

NHRC resource persons shared valuable insights, expertise, and practical experiences in digitalization of complaints and digital case management techniques.

Remote Arunachal villagers build wooden bridge from their own pockets

More than a hundred villagers participated in the construction of the bridge

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 11: In a heartening example of resilience and community spirit, villagers from the remote Chatong village in Arunachal Pradesh have constructed a wooden bridge entirely from their own resources, addressing a long-standing communication bottleneck that had plagued the region for years.

Located in the hilly terrain of Longding district, Chatong is home to the Wancho tribe—a community known for its strong traditions and collective strength. With no financial aid or infrastructural support from the government, the residents of Chatong decided to take matters into their own hands. Coming together as a unified force, the villagers contributed money from their own pockets and built a wooden bridge that now connects them more effectively with the rest of the district.

More than a hundred villagers participated in the construction of the bridge, working shoulder to shoulder. Women from the village also played a vital role by preparing and serving tea and meals to support the men working tirelessly on the project.



"We have contributed from our own pockets to build the bridge because the government has failed to do so. This bridge will finally ease the communication problem which has long been ignored," said a villager who was part of the initiative.

The construction, driven by necessity and frustration over years of official inaction, was completed in just three days. The

bridge is now a critical link for villagers in Chatong, Ozakho, Langmai, and Chajam—all part of eastern Arunachal's Longding district—who had been suffering from a lack of proper connectivity.

Despite the state's recent developmental strides, regions like Longding continue to highlight the uneven spread of infrastructure. In particular, the affected villages had long struggled due to the absence of a re-

liable bridge, making travel and access to basic services a daunting challenge. Although two roads technically connect these villages, one of the routes—a PMGSY road through Chibam block—has remained completely non-motorable, making it useless for daily travel or transport of goods.

As a result, villagers were forced to take a much longer alternative route, traveling nearly 40 kilometers through neighboring Tirap district just to reach their own district headquarters, Longding. This detour not only increased travel time but also exacerbated the daily hardships faced by the community.

Years of disappointment and unmet promises from successive governments and relevant departments had led to growing frustration. That frustration eventually turned into determination, as villagers turned to community labour and local materials to create a functional bridge that could serve their needs.

"It took around three days to complete the construction of the bridge, which is now expected to significantly ease the day-to-day struggles of the villagers," said

Jacob Wangsu, President of the Chatong Students' Union.

"When the government didn't step in, our people took it upon themselves to build what was necessary," he added, underscoring the people's sense of ownership and agency in solving their own problems.

The four villages collectively comprise around 500 households and fall under the Kanubari Legislative Assembly Constituency, currently represented by Minister Gabriel D. Wangsu. Despite being under a sitting minister's jurisdiction, the plight of these villagers had gone unnoticed and unaddressed for years, further fueling their decision to act independently.

This remarkable example of grassroots initiative stands as a testament to the strength and unity of rural communities. While it highlights the tenacity of the people, it also casts a spotlight on the continuing infrastructural and administrative gaps that still exist in many parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The bridge, though modest in appearance, carries with it the weight of collective effort, hope, and the unspoken question—when will the government finally catch up?

Mahayuti to contest local body elections together: Fadnavis

AKOLA (MAHARASHTRA), June 11: The BJP-led Mahayuti alliance will contest the upcoming local body elections in the state together except for friendly fights where tie-ups do not materialise, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis said on Wednesday.

Elections to several municipal corporations and other local bodies, including the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, have been pending for the last three years.

The state BJP president, working president, and the election committee of the party are authorised to take decisions related to the local bodies elections, Fadnavis told reporters in Akola after launching irrigation and power generation projects.

"We have decided to contest the polls as an alliance. There will be friendly fights wherever a tie-up does not work out," he added.

The Ajit Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party and Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena are the two other members of the alliance.

When asked about Prahar Janashakti Party leader Bachhu Kadu's hunger strike, Fadnavis said district guardian minister Chandrashekar Bawankule will speak to him. Kadu is on hunger strike for



four days over demands related to farmers' issues.

Responding to a question on Prime Minister Narendra Modi enquiring about Sharad Pawar's health when he met MP and Pawar's daughter Supriya Sule during a meeting with all-party delegations, Fadnavis said, "Humanity, sensitivity exist in politics. We are ideological adversaries, not enemies."

It is a marker of a strong democracy, the chief minister said. Sule was part of one of the delegations which visited foreign countries to put forth India's stand on Pakistan-backed terrorism after Operation

Sindoor. While politics keeps evolving, the state government is stable and the three Mahayuti allies will stay together, he added.

Addressing a rally organised by the BJP in the city later, Fadnavis urged the people to support the ruling alliance in the local body elections just as they did during last year's assembly elections.

Fadnavis said 10 lakh hectares of land will be irrigated by the Wainganga River Connect Project which will also cover Buldhana district. He said the state government has signed an agreement with Meta to enable people to file applications and obtain certificates

through WhatsApp.

Fadnavis laid the foundation stone and dedicated to people development works of ₹ 2,588 crore.

In Mumbai, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut said the party has begun preparations for the civic body polls under the leadership of Uddhav Thackeray. Discussions are going on within the party whether to contest the civic body polls as part of an alliance or independently.

"Shiv Sena party chief (Thackeray) has authorised local leaders and asked them to review where polls can be fought in an alliance. At places where it is not possible, we can contest independently or not. A decision will be taken by the party chief. A decision on (whether to contest the) Mumbai (polls as an alliance or independently) will also be taken," Raut said.

The stage is set for the much-awaited elections to civic bodies, with the state government issuing a notification to finalise ward boundaries. The move follows a Supreme Court directive last month asking the SEC to proceed with the elections while hearing petitions related to the OBC quota and ward delimitation. Civic body polls in the state have been pending for two years. (PTI)

Rahul writes to PM, flags delay in scholarships for students from marginalised communities

NEW DELHI, June 11: Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagging the "deplorable" conditions in residential hostels for Dalit, ST, EBC, OBC and minority students and the delay in post-matric scholarships for those from marginalised communities.

In his letter to Modi, Gandhi urged the PM to resolve these two critical issues which he said hinder education opportunities for the 90 per cent of students who are from marginalised communities.

"Firstly, the conditions in residential hostels for students from Dalit, ST, EBC, OBC and minority communities are deplorable. During a recent visit to Ambedkar Hostel in Darbhanga, Bihar, students complained about single rooms which 6-7 students were forced to share, unhygienic toilets, unsafe drinking water, lack of mess facilities, and no access to libraries or the internet," the Congress leader said.

"Secondly, post-matric scholarships for students from marginalised communities are plagued by delays and failures," Gandhi said and cited the example of Bihar where he claimed the scholarship portal was non-functional for three years and no student received a scholarship in 2021-22.

"Even thereafter, the number of Dalit students receiving scholarships fell by nearly half, from 1.36 lakh in FY23 to 0.69 lakh in FY24. Students further complain that the scholarship amounts are insultingly low," Gandhi said in his letter to Modi dated June 10.

"While I have cited examples from Bihar, these failures are widespread across the country. I urge the government to immediately take two actions to remedy these failures," he said.

Gandhi called for an audit of every hostel for students from Dalit, Scheduled Tribes (ST), Economically Backward Class (EBC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and minority communities to ensure good infrastructure, sanitation, food and academic facilities; and allocate adequate funds to address deficiencies.

He also appealed for disbursement of post-matric scholarships on time, increasing scholarship



amounts, and improving execution by working closely with state governments.

"I am sure you agree that India cannot progress unless youth from marginalised communities progress. I look forward to your positive response," Gandhi said in his letter to Modi.

The issues were also raised at a joint press conference by Congress' SC department chief Rajendra Pal Gautam, Adivasi Congress chief Vikrant Bhuria and AICC NSUI in-charge Kanhaiya Kumar at the Congress' Indira Bhawan headquarters.

Kumar said Gandhi is continuously meeting students, employees and teachers from Dalit, backward, tribal, extremely backward and minority classes.

"Whenever we meet students from these classes, the first thing they say is that we do not get our scholarship on time. Scholarship drop out is very high in the country, because the government has made the entire scholarship process a punishment," Kumar said.

"Rahul Gandhi has written a letter to Prime Minister Modi on the scholarship of students, other problems and hostel conditions. However, what action the government takes on this will be known only in the coming time," he said.

Kumar said student suicide is a big issue in the country with two students committing suicide every hour.

"The government is continuously reducing the education budget. Apart from this, the money of SC/ST sub-plan is also being diverted by the governments," he

said. The result is that children are struggling for basic rights like education and this is a big injustice against the deprived class, Kumar said.

In his remarks at the presser, Gautam said, "Recently, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi visited Dr. Ambedkar Hostel in Darbhanga. Students from various hostels came and met him there. What Rahul Gandhi saw was very sad and heartbreaking. There he saw that 6-7 students live together in one room, toilets are in a very dirty condition, there is no arrangement for drinking water, there is no facility of books in the library, there is no internet facility, and there is no facility of good food," Gautam said.

Children of SC/ST, EBC and minority class are forced to study in very bad conditions, he claimed.

"Even their scholarship is not given, because sometimes the server of the government portal is down, sometimes it does not work at all," he said.

Gautam also flagged the issue of suicides in hostels, saying biggest reason for this is the poor financial condition of many children, in which parents take loans at high interest rates for the child's education.

"Children think that they will study diligently, if they get scholarship, they will repay the loan taken for studies, but when the scholarship does not come, the loan keeps increasing, then the children come under pressure and take steps like committing suicide. It is sad that the government is not serious in this matter," he said. (PTI)

12 dead, over 2 dozen injured in separate road accidents across Rajasthan

JAIPUR, June 12: At least 12 people were killed and over two dozen were injured in three separate road accidents in Jaipur, Jaisalmer and Jalore districts of Rajasthan, police said on Wednesday.

In Jaipur, five people, including a newly-wed bride, were killed while eight others suffered injuries after a multi-utility vehicle (MUV) carrying a wedding party collided head-on with a truck early Wednesday morning, officials said.

The accident occurred near Bhatkabas village on the Dausa-Manoharpur highway under Raisar police limits. The victims were travelling from Shahdol in Madhya Pradesh to Udaipurwadi in Jhunjhunu district when the accident occurred.

"The impact was so severe that the vehicle was completely mangled. Several passengers were trapped and could only be extricated after intense rescue efforts," a police official said.

The deceased included Bharati (18), the bride; Jeetu (33) Subhash (28), Ravi Kumar (17) and another person whose identity is yet to be ascertained.

The groom, Vikram Meena (25), is among those seriously injured and is undergoing treatment at a private hospital, police said.

In Jaisalmer, three people including the groom and a nine-month-old child were killed and four others were injured when an unidentified vehicle collided with their car near Basanpir village on Tuesday night, police said.

According to Head Constable Jaswant Singh of Sadar police station, the victims were returning from a wedding in Pokaran when the accident occurred around midnight.

The deceased were identified as Lila Ram (45), the groom; Mooli Devi (35), his sister; and Hitesh (9 months). The injured were referred to Jodhpur for treatment. Police said it was the second marriage for both the bride and groom and seven family members were travelling together in the car. (PTI)

ED searches on Cong MP, MLAs 'conspiracy' to divide party in Karnataka: Kharge

KALABURAGI (KARNATAKA), June 11: Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday termed the Enforcement Directorate (ED) searches against a party MP and three MLAs in the state, as a "conspiracy" to divide the party in Karnataka.

Without taking the name of the ruling BJP at the Centre, he claimed that the grand old party was being targeted, aimed at creating difference within the party, to reap benefits out of it, but they wouldn't be successful in their attempts as all Congress legislators are united. "I don't know the details. I just saw it on TV. Naturally, if the ED has done it, they have been angry with the Congress party since the beginning. If they are targeting the Congress MLAs, there seems to be a conspiracy to divide our party," Kharge said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said if they harass them by bringing up something now that is said to have happened during the election, it is not right.

"The matter should have been looked into during the election, but after one year, one-and-a-half year, if they are taking it up now, it seems to be an attempt to divide the party legislators here. Let's see how the ED takes the case. I will get information from the CM over the phone and see what needs to be done," he added.

The ED on Wednesday conducted searches against

Congress Ballari MP E Tukaram and three MLAs of the party as part of a money laundering investigation into the alleged Valmiki scam-linked money laundering case, official sources said.

They said five premises in Ballari and three in Bengaluru city are being searched under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). These include houses belonging to Tukaram and MLAs Nara Bharath Reddy (Bellary city), J N Ganesh (Kampli) and N T Srinivas (Kudligi). To a question about an allegation by the ED that the corporation's money was misused, Kharge said, "They may say so. It is a matter left to ED. I will not interfere. Such inquiries happen. During elections, crores of rupees are seized. Where is it? To whom does it belong? So far, things haven't come out. Money was seized from all parties then. Where is that money?"

Noting that everyone knows who spends how much during elections, while indicating to the BJP, he said, "They especially target one party (Congress) because, if they trouble this party naturally, there will be differences within and they feel that it will benefit them. But it is impossible. Despite all their harassment, all our MLAs are united and this is nothing new in Karnataka...I don't want to comment more until the inquiry is completed," he added. (PTI)

Hope prayers for peace, progress will be answered: Farooq Abdullah

JAMMU/SRINAGAR, June 11: National Conference president Farooq Abdullah on Wednesday returned to Srinagar by the recently launched Vande Bharat Express after an overnight stay at the Vaishno Devi shrine in Katra.

"Had a great darshan and I am hopeful that all our prayers for peace, progress and brotherhood at the shrine will be answered so that we can move forward and our country also marches ahead and we become part of its development trajectory," the former chief minister told reporters on his return.

The 87-year-old Abdullah took his maiden ride in the Vande Bharat Express, which connects Kashmir to the rest of the country, to reach Katra on Tuesday. He stayed at the sanctum sanctorum overnight and took part in special prayers at the shrine.

He was accompanied by his grandsons Zamir and Zahid, Jammu and Kashmir minister Satish Sharma, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah's advisor Nasir Aslam Wani and several NC legislators, including chief spokesperson Tanvir Sadiq.

Asked about his overnight stay at the shrine, Abdullah said, "I felt very happy."

"I came here by train and this service is a new beginning for us. This will not only benefit the pilgrims coming to visit Mata but also prove beneficial for the pilgrims intending to visit the Amarnath cave shrine and they will also come in large numbers. This will benefit tourism in J&K," he added.

Abdullah said this train is a blessing for Jammu and Kashmir which will boost trade and tourism.

"The journey was very good. You can see that tourists are also coming. This train is a blessing. It will increase tourism and trade. Our fruits can go outside easily and our people can now travel to any part of India comfortably. (PTI)

Shukteerth embodies 5,000-year-old legacy, no other faith can claim that: Adityanath

MUZAFFARNAGAR (UP), June 11: Shukteerth is not just a spiritual site but a living testimony to India's 5,000-year-old cultural and religious heritage, which is singular in the world, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said.

Addressing a gathering of saints on the 65th death anniversary of Swami Gyan Bhikshuk Das Ji Maharaj, Adityanath said, "When the country was struggling under foreign invasions during the medieval period and its culture and religion were under attack, Satguru Ravidas Ji emerged as a divine light."

Ravidas led by example, offering the nation spiritual guidance that still resonates today, he said.

"He raised awareness against social evils and blind practices, inspired faith in action over ritual, and kindled spiritual consciousness," Adityanath said, and quoted the saint's famous saying, "Mann changa to Koti mein Ganga" — If the mind is pure, divinity resides even in the smallest vessel.

The gathering also remembered Satguru Samandas Ji Maharaj. Adityanath said saints have always had a role in building a cohesive society.

"It is this path that prevents (reported exodus) incidents like those in Kairana and Kandhla, provides us security, guidance, and the courage to face adversity," he said.

He paid his tributes to Shukteerth as the place that has "stood for over 5,000 years."

"If there is any tradition in the world with such a long documented history, let it come forward. Only

you (referring to the saints) can lay claim to such an eternal heritage," he said.

Shukteerth, or Shukratul, in Muzaffarnagar draws pilgrims from across India.

It is the site where Sukadeva Goswami is believed to have recited the Srimad-Bhagavatam to King Parikshit, Abhimanyu's son, nearly 5,000 years ago.

Nestled along the banks of the Ganga River, the destination lies approximately 28 kilometres from Muzaffarnagar.

Ravidas, Adityanath noted, said he would be happy only when every person gets equal rights and food without discrimination.

That ambition, he said, was fulfilled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi through the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, under which 81 crore people received free food grains, even during the pandemic. "This is the true spirit of the saints' teachings," he said.

The CM said that before 2014, roads to Sant Ravidas' birthplace Sear Govardhan were single-lane. It is now connected via a four-lane road. A grand ashram, a magnificent statue, and an 'Anna Kshetra' have been built in the area. Land has been acquired for a park and statue in tribute to the saint, he said.

The BJP leader also said that a ghat and a parking lot will be developed around the Samandas Ashram, roads there will be widened and the area beautified.

He also criticised past governments for "failing" to honour BR Ambedkar adequately. (PTI)

SP, Congress driving wedge among Hindus, says UP min

AMETHI (UP), June 11: Uttar Pradesh Minister Mayankeshwar Sharan Singh on Wednesday accused the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress of trying to divide "Sanatan Dharma and Hindutva" and historically promoting casteism and social disintegration.

"But now, they won't succeed. Sanatan and Hindutva have always been one and will remain united," Singh told reporters in Amethi. Leaders of the Samajwadi Party (SP) and Congress in Amethi retorted to the allegations, and accused the BJP of being the real force behind social division and hatred.

Earlier, the BJP MLA from Tiloi (Amethi) alleged that the SP and Congress had repeatedly disrespected and tried to fragment Sanatan Dharma.

"They are now trying to divide Hindus in the name of caste, but they will fail. Sanatani Hindus have awakened and will work together in unity for the nation," he said. Singh also claimed that India has made rapid progress under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership over the last 11 years. "From defence to economic sectors, India is becoming self-reliant. Our borders are secure, and Operation Sindoor showed how the BrahMos missile struck deep in Pakistan," he claimed. (PTI)

Celebrities, influencers come forward to promote International Day of Yoga

NEW DELHI, June 11: As the International Day of Yoga approaches, familiar faces from film, music and public service are joining the "movement", reinforcing yoga's place in everyday life, the Ayush ministry said on Wednesday.

"Yoga is another word for self-care and social care," former governor of Puducherry and retired IPS officer Kiran Bedi said in her message of support.

Eminent actor Anupam Kher shared a video message encouraging everyone to "celebrate yoga".

Veteran actor Anil Kapoor took to the social media platform 'X' to share his thoughts, saying, "Yoga inspires, heals, and unites. Let's embrace a healthier today and tomorrow through the spirit of Yoga Mahotsav."

Wrestler and motivational speaker Sangram Singh added, "Yoga means union -- the connection of the soul with the Supreme.

It aligns us with nature and bridges the gap between our physical and inner selves. By integrating body, mind, and spirit, yoga helps us stay free from stress, anxiety, and depression."

What began as a national observance has grown into a people's movement, and now, celebrated names from across the country are becoming a part of it, the ministry said.

These messages, rooted in authenticity and lived experience, are motivating youngsters to rediscover India's rich wellness traditions, the ministry said in a statement.

Singer Kailash Kher said that among the many transformations in India, the world has acknowledged and embraced the timeless gift of Yoga.

Globally renowned classical dancer Sonal Mansingh noted, "Yoga has been a path to deep insight and spiritual elevation throughout my life's journey." (PTI)

'Early reports suggest that the variant has high immune escape potential, but there is no current evidence to indicate (an) increased severity (of disease)' New XFG COVID-19 variant part of natural evolution of SARS-CoV-2: Former ICMR chief Dr Bhargava

NEW DELHI, June 11: Emergence of the new XFG variant of the virus that causes COVID-19 is part of SARS-CoV-2's natural evolution, said Dr Balram Bhargava, former Director General of the Indian Council for Medical Research, amidst India recording over 200 cases linked to the variant.

Dr Bhargava was part of the team at the forefront of managing the country's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The emergence of the XFG variant is part of the SARS-CoV-2 virus's natural evolution," he said.

His statement comes as India's active COVID-19 cases crossed 7,000 as of June 11, with over 300 added in the last 24 hours and six deaths recorded in the same period, data from the Union Health Ministry shows.

According to the latest data from the Indian SARS-CoV-2 Genomics Consortium (INSACOG), 206 cases have been linked to XFG

variant, with the highest count of 89 infections coming from Maharashtra, followed by West Bengal reporting 49.

Dr Bhargava said the XFG variant of SARS-CoV-2 (which causes COVID-19) carries mutations which may improve its ability of binding to human cells and bypassing immune defences.

"Early reports suggest that the variant has high immune escape potential, but there is no current evidence to indicate (an) increased severity (of disease)," he said.

Other states reporting infections due to the XFG variant are Kerala (15), Tamil Nadu (16), Gujarat (11), Madhya Pradesh (6), Andhra Pradesh (6), Odisha (4), Puducherry (3), Delhi (2), Rajasthan (2), and Punjab, Telangana and Haryana (one each).

However, similar to how the virus adapts, so has India's diagnostic infrastructure since the first wave of the pandemic, and the RT-



PCR test, or 'reverse transcription-polymerase chain reaction' -- which detects the genetic material of SARS-CoV-2 in samples -- remains its cornerstone, the cardiologist said. He added that the widespread deployment of platforms such as Truenat -- a rapid molecular diagnostic test that uses RT-PCR technology for diagnosis

-- puts India in a strong position to detect and contain emerging variants swiftly, even in remote and resource-limited settings. Point-of-care testing, which detects antibodies in blood, played a crucial role during the pandemic then, and it continues to be a frontline tool for detecting emerging variants, such as XFG, Dr Bhargava said.

"Vigilance is critical now, and not panic. As we have done in the past, we should continue testing when symptomatic, masking in crowded spaces, and staying up to date with vaccinations", he said.

India has seen 74 deaths in the current surge in COVID-19 cases, which started January this year. Kerala continues to be the most affected with over 2,200 cases, followed by Gujarat (1223) and Delhi (757). Official sources have said that most cases are mild and can be managed under home care, even as all states have been instructed to ensure availability of oxygen, isolation beds, ventilators, and essential medicines, amidst rising cases of COVID-19. INSACOG data also shows that 21 of the newly emerging cases are linked to the L.F.7 variant -- Maharashtra and Gujarat reporting the highest with six cases each -- and two to the NB.1.8.1 variant -- one each in Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. (PTI)

Singh and several Meitei organisations have held illegal immigrants from neighbouring Myanmar Centre wants popular govt installed in Manipur: Ex-CM Biren Singh after meetings with Shah

IMPHAL, June 11: Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh, who held meetings with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi, on Wednesday said that the Centre, like the people, wants installation of a popular government in the restive state.

Manipur is currently under President's Rule after the resignation of Singh as the chief minister in February.

Singh, along with Rajya Sabha MP Leishemba Sanajaoba, had gone to New Delhi on Monday to brief central leaders about the current situation in the state where ethnic violence left at least 260 people dead and rendered thousands homeless since May 2023.

"We met Shah on the night of June 9. We held a meeting for over an hour again the next day. I apprised the home minister on various issues including bandhs, internally displaced persons and restriction on free movement along highways," Singh said.

He was speaking to reporters at the Imphal airport on his return from the national capital.

"I also apprised him (Shah) of the people's desire for a popular



government in the state. Shah said the central government also wants the same and will soon consider it after examining the situation," the former CM said.

The process of convening a meeting of representatives of various communities is underway, he said.

The Centre had on April 5 held a meeting with representatives of the warring Meitei and Kuki communities in an effort to bring a lasting peace in the state.

To a query on illegal immigrants, Singh said, "I handed over a memorandum to Shah and urged

him to extend the 30-day period given by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) for identification of illegal immigrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh."

The MHA on May 19 issued a 30-day deadline for all states and Union Territories to verify the identity and documentation of individuals suspected to be illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar. Those who fail to produce valid documents will be liable for deportation.

Singh and several Meitei organisations have held illegal immigrants from neighbouring

Myanmar responsible for the unrest and narcotic drug problems in the northeastern state.

The BJP leader said the Centre does not want anything that could harm the interests of Manipur and Shah has given his assurance to him on that.

"He (Shah) also appealed to all to maintain peace in the state," Singh said and urged the people to launch all movements in a peaceful and democratic way.

At least 260 people have lost their lives ever since the ethnic violence broke out between the Imphal valley-based Meitei and neighbouring hills-based Kuki communities in May 2023.

Several thousand arms were looted from different police stations across Manipur during the initial phase of the conflict.

Ajay Kumar Bhalla, a former Union home secretary, took charge as governor of Manipur on January 3.

President's rule in Manipur was imposed on February 13 after Singh resigned on February 9. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

Manipur reports first COVID case in current wave

IMPHAL, June 11: A 23-year-old woman has tested positive for COVID-19 in Manipur, the first such case in the northeastern state in the current wave of the coronavirus infection, an official said.

Manipur Health Services Director Dr Chambo Gomnei told reporters that the woman hails from Bishnupur district and had developed COVID-like symptoms.

"Her samples were tested at a private clinic in Imphal, and the results were positive," he said.

The tests were conducted on June 5, and the results came on Monday, the health services director said.

"We are yet to get the history from the patient," Gomnei said.

He appealed to people to be on alert in view of the spread of the infection in other parts of the country. (PTI)

Tripura: Cong youth wing seeks SHRC's intervention after leader's house 'attacked'

AGARTALA, June 11: Tripura Youth Congress has sought the state human rights commission's intervention in the wake of alleged intimidation and threats to its senior leader Sahajan Islam and his family members after he criticised Chief Minister Manik Saha in a social media post.

In a letter addressed to Tripura Human Rights Commission Chairman Arindam Lodh, state Congress' youth wing president Neel Kamal Saha claimed that "BJP-backed goons" attacked Sahajan's house in Shantipara in West Agartala police station area on June 8 after his Facebook live session.

"Besides ransacking household articles, the goons misbehaved with the women of the family members. It is a deep concern that

instead of arresting the attackers, the police arrested the aged father and brother of Sahajan... they were remanded to judicial custody for 14 days," he wrote.

He alleged that a section of BJP workers has been trying to evict Sahajan from his house.

"Not only Sahajan, they issued diktat to his mother and wife to leave the area. They are threatening the family to bulldoze their house if they don't leave the locality," he said.

Saha said the Tripura Pradesh Youth Congress considers sending Sahajan's father and brother to jail instead of arresting the attackers and eviction threat, a violation of human rights.

"Therefore, the TPYC sought the rights body's intervention to

protect the rights of Sahajan and his family members," he said.

Reacting to the letter to the state human rights commission, BJP sadar (Urban) district president Ashim Bhattacharjee on Wednesday said there was no violation of human rights.

"We have lodged an FIR against Sahajan for tarnishing the image of Chief Minister Manik Saha and met the West Tripura superintendent of police, demanding his immediate arrest. We have not given any threat to his family members", he said.

On being asked about the arrest of Sahajan's father and brother, Bhattacharjee said, "We have not lodged any complaint against the duo. We don't know why the police arrested them." (PTI)

Meitei outfit member held for firing at security personnel, 19 others detained

IMPHAL, June 11: A member of the Meitei outfit Arambai Tengol was apprehended for allegedly firing at security personnel during the recent protests in Manipur over the arrests of a leader of the organisation and four others, police said on Wednesday.

Nineteen others were also detained for their alleged involvement in violence during demonstrations in Imphal, a senior officer said.

The Arambai Tengol member was arrested on Tuesday as he was accused of firing at security personnel when they were trying to clear a roadblock in Tera Sapam area in Imphal West district on June 9, the officer said.

"The assailant, an Arambai Tengol cadre, namely Raj @ Boinao Pangeijam (39), was arrested by Manipur Police along with the weapon of offence (pistol)," the police said, adding that

he was produced before a magistrate and has been remanded to police custody for eight days.

"Protesters, belonging to Arambai Tengol, attacked security forces while they were trying to clear the roadblock at Tera Sapam, in Imphal West district. One of the protesters opened fire on the troops there and fled the spot," the officer said.

The police also detained 19 people for their involvement in "street violence in Imphal East district", he said.

"They were found blocking roads, harassing commuters and creating public disturbances, mostly in inebriated conditions, and their actions caused inconvenience to the law-abiding citizens and disrupted public order," the officer said.

Manipur has been witnessing protests as demonstrators defied prohibitory orders and

clashed with security forces across several districts of Imphal valley, demanding the unconditional release of arrested Arambai Tengol leader Kanan Singh and four others.

The police also urged all, especially the youth, not to get involved in unlawful and anti-social activities, and said "engaging in such behaviour can lead to legal consequences that may adversely affect one's future and career prospects".

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned. The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

Police to reconstruct crime scene with deceased's arrested wife Sonam, aides

SHILLONG, June 11: A special investigation team of the Meghalaya Police brought here around midnight arrested Sonam Raghuvanshi, one of the five accused in the murder of her Indore-based businessman husband Raja Raghuvanshi, and would reconstruct the crime scene in Sohra, a senior officer said on Wednesday.

The four others, who were also arrested from Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in connection with the murder, were also taken to Shillong during the day and would be produced before a local court, he said.

Sonam was taken to a hospital here for a medical examination and will be produced before a court during the day as the SIT will seek her police custody to complete the investigation, he said.

"The SIT that brought Sonam arrived here shortly before midnight. She was taken to a hospital here around 2 am to ascertain whether she was pregnant or not. She had undergone three tests. Sonam will be produced before a court here," a senior police officer told PTI.

East Khasi Hills district SP Vivek Syiem confirmed that the results of the tests were negative.

"The four other accused per-



sons- Raj Kushwaha, Akash Rajput, Vishal Singh Chauhan and Anand Kuli - have also been brought here on transit remand on Wednesday," the officer said.

The SIT will seek "police custody of all the arrested persons, and will reconstruct the crime scene in Sohra", he said.

The Meghalaya Police, which codenamed the investigation as "Operation Honeymoon", collected evidence from the residences and other places frequented by the accused in Indore and Ghazipur, Syiem said.

Sonam and her aides were arrested from Indore in Madhya Pradesh and Ghazipur in Uttar Pradesh for their alleged role in conspiring and killing Raja Raghuvanshi last month.

The SIT has secured a six-day remand for the accused persons from Indore and that of three days for one arrested from Ghazipur, he added.

Raghuvanshi and his wife went missing while vacationing in Meghalaya's Sohra area on May 23. His body was found in a gorge on June 2. (PTI)

Common facility centre under PM-DevINE scheme opened in Nagaland

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 11: The North East Centre for Technology Application and Reach (NECTAR), an autonomous institute under the Union science and technology department, inaugurated a Common Facility Centre (CFC) for banana fibre extraction at New Chumoukedima village under Chumoukedima district on Wednesday.

The centre aims to promote sustainable livelihoods, skill development, and value addition through efficient utilisation of agricultural wastes.

The facility has been established under the ministry of DoNER's PM-DevINE scheme as part of the 'NECTAR Livelihood Improvement Project - A Value Chain on Utilisation of Banana Pseudostem for Value-Added Products'.

Chanchal Kumar, secretary, Ministry of DoNER, attended the opening ceremony as the chief guest.

A key highlight of the event was the formal launch of an organic biofertilizer derived from banana pseudostem sap - a product developed under the same project to provide eco-friendly fertiliser al-

ternatives for farming communities.

This initiative not only promotes circular economy but also directly supports soil health and sustainable agriculture practices in the region.

In his presentation, Arun Kumar Sarma, director general, NECTAR, showcased the broader objectives of the PM-DevINE project and NECTAR's portfolio of livelihood-oriented technological interventions across Northeast.

He highlighted how this specific project addresses a critical gap in agricultural waste management by converting banana pseudostem - typically discarded as waste into different useful and marketable products, including natural fibre, biodegradable sheets, and handmade paper.

He emphasised that this model offers both environmental and economic benefits and can be replicated across other regions and crops with similar challenges.

Another important milestone marked during the ceremony was the signing of an MoU between NECTAR and The Entrepreneurs' Associate (TEA) based in Naga-

land, formalising their collaboration for implementation and operation of the common facility centre.

The programme also included distribution of training materials and Vasundhara soil organic testing kits to beneficiary farmers from Nagaland.

REPAIRS TO RAILWAY HOSPITAL

E-Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/46 of 2025 Dated: 06-06-2025. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works:
Name of work: Repairs to Railway Hospital outdoor unit, Blood bank unit, X-Rayroom, Auditorium and Other miscellaneous work & repair to pipe lines including provision of alternative connection to the newly constructed Quarters in the jurisdiction of ADEN/II/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹1,80,87,936.44/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹2,40,400/-. **Date & Time of closing of E-Tender:** 15.00 hrs. of 03-07-2025 & opened at 15.00 hrs. of 04-07-2025. The complete information with the tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto 15.00 hrs. of 03-07-2025 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

Brooms, not bars: Manipur Police's unique approach for protest management

IMPHAL, June 11: In a novel twist to conventional policing, Manipur Police has traded handcuffs for brooms and shovels, initiating a "community service" programme for dozens of youths detained in various districts of the valley during violent protests since June 7. This unique approach follows the unrest which was witnessed on the streets after the arrest of prominent Arambai Tengol leader Asem Kanan Singh and four associates during a joint operation of Manipur Police and the CBI as he was wanted in several cases.

During the protests, people demanded unconditional release of Singh and others, leading to a 10-day bandh called by Arambai Tengol, which was eventually called off on Tuesday. Instead of facing formal charges that could mar their futures, over three dozen young people found themselves on the streets, not as rioters, but as cleaners.

Leveraging the innovative provisions of the recently introduced Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), Manipur Police handed them the tools of civic duty - brooms and shovels - to clear the very roadblocks, burnt tyres, and concrete debris they or others had created during the protests.

This unconventional move, police officials said, was a deliberate choice to safeguard the careers of these "misguided youths."

By invoking Section 4(f) of the BNSS, which advises community service for first-time offenders involved in minor misconduct, authorities are offering a path to rehabilitation rather than punitive measures.

Widely shared photos and videos show these young people in custody sweeping the roads and cleaning up the mess left over from the three-day protest, creating a powerful picture of justice balanced with a touch of civic duty. The unrest that preceded this unusual policing method was significant.

On June 7, widespread agitation erupted across various valley districts following the arrest of Singh, a dismissed head constable of Manipur Police.

The accused is wanted in several cases, including the February 27, 2024, attack by armed Arambai Tengol members on the residence of Imphal West Additional Superintendent of Police (Operations) Moirangthem Amit. (PTI)

Ceremonial homage, chants, and dialogue mark emotional opening to journey of healing and decolonisation Naga delegation begins historic repatriation process of ancestral remains from Oxford Museum

DIMAPUR, June 11: Naga elders and leaders from various "Naga tribe hohos", accompanied by members of the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) and Recover, Restore, and Decolonise (RRaD), met with the administration of the Pitt-Rivers Museum (PRM) at the University of Oxford to initiate the repatriation process of Naga ancestral human remains that had been displayed in the museum until 2020 on June 9, according to a press release by the FNR.

The Naga delegation was welcomed into the museum by Director, Professor Dr Laura van Broekhoven and members of her staff from PRM, the press note also said. "It has been a long journey to get to this moment", said Prof van Broekhoven, as she welcomed the delegation.

"I am very pleased we are now at this moment of the process, that we were able to welcome all of you to Oxford", she stated.

Prof van Broekhoven added that "...over a century ago, the first Naga ancestral human remains were donated by (John Henry) Hutton to the Pitt Rivers Museum. Many others followed later. These ancestral remains have been in our care since then. We know that this work will be one that we will both feel grief and sadness when looking back on that past, and also we will feel hope as we work towards reconciliation and healing in the future. I hope we



can support and hold each other throughout this process", the press release also said.

In response to the welcome, Reverend Dr Ellen Konyak Jamir, coordinator of RRaD and member of FNR, stated that the Naga delegation had arrived with hearts heavy with history, the press release stated. She explained that their presence represents a sacred journey that began five years ago to repatriate the physical remains of Naga ancestors who were taken away and have resided within the walls of PRM for generations.

Acknowledging the complex and painful colonial past that led to their presence here, Dr Konyak-Jamir remarked, "We recognise and express our sincere appreciation for the PRM's commitment to change, and ethical stewardship."

She praised their courage in confronting complicated histories and their dedication to the process of repatriation.

"We come with hope in the process, may this journey appease our

ancestors and our communities," Dr Konyak-Jamir said, as she requested Dr Visier Sanyii, an elder from FNR, to share the Indigenous chant before the process began, the FNR press release added.

Dr Sanyii's chant, titled "Our Ancestor", alluded to the parting of the Naga ancestor from the creator.

The verse concluded with the hope that the ancestor would be reunited with the creator and aid in healing the wounds of the past.

The keynote address was delivered by Thejao Vihienuo, president of the Angami Public Organisation, who reminded the audience of the history of the Nagas living between the Brahmaputra and Chindwin rivers. Vihienuo emphasised that the Nagas were never conquered until the British invaded their land in the nineteenth century and divided their ancestral domain.

"We have embarked on this historic journey, not only for the repatriation of our ancestors but also as a journey towards the process of decolonisation," he added.

He acknowledged that the ancestral remains displayed in the museum had conveyed the history of the Naga people in silence, the press release also said.

"We are proud of these ancestors and are here to pay our respectful homage to them," he said.

"Nagas are aware we cannot undo the past. But...we are confident that this process of repatriation will go a long way in healing the wounds of all the people involved," he concluded, the FNR press statement further said.

The Naga delegation then went to the room where the ancestral remains had been placed for them.

This was the first time such a delegation had been granted access to the remains since they were removed from the display room.

Chanting an incantation to the Blue Sky Father and Mother Earth, Nepuni Piku from FNR, invoked the name of the almighty and announced the presence of the delegation before the ancestral remains to pay homage and respect.

He asked for their goodwill and requested that the ancestors bless those who had come to take them back home, the press note also said.

The delegation then laid shawls in homage as a mark of respect to the ancestral remains. This brought the opening day's events to a close, the press note also stated. (NIN)

'PANCHAYAT' SEASON FOUR SET FOR JUNE 24 RELEASE ON PRIME VIDEO



NEW DELHI, June 11: Streaming service Prime Video on Wednesday announced that the fourth season of its beloved show "Panchayat" will debut on June 24.

The show's lead star Jitendra Kumar is returning for the new season along with Neena Gupta, Raghubir Yadav, Faisal Malik, Chandan Roy, and Sanvikaa.

Created by Deepak Kumar Mishra and Chandan Kumar, "Panchayat" revolves around Abhishek Tripathi (Jitendra Kumar), an engineering graduate who for lack of a better job option, joins as secretary of a panchayat office in a fictional village named Phulera in Uttar Pradesh.

In a press release, the streamer said the new season will bring "fresh challenges, familiar faces, and plenty of comic twists capturing the rhythms of small-town life with humour, warmth, and nuance."

The OTT platform also released the trailer of the fourth season, giving a sneak peek into the turf war brewing between two spirited frontrunners -- Manju Devi (Neena Gupta) and Kranti Devi (Sunita Rajwar).

"With rally songs, lofty pledges, and lots of fanfare, the village turns into a buzzing battleground. As both camps race to outshine and out-scheme the other, Phulera transforms into a carnival of chaos," read the official logline.

Chandan Kumar said writing "Panchayat" has been a journey of deep discovery and gratitude for him.

"What makes this series special is how each season unfolds organically—building naturally on the one before it while still leaving room for the journey to continue. Our effort remains to keep the narrative fresh, by introducing new characters and dynamics, while ensuring it stays true to the emotional rhythm of Phulera," he added.

Gupta said portraying Manju Devi has been deeply fulfilling as she's grown into one of the most loved and relatable characters. "Across seasons, it's been exciting to watch her journey from a hesitant pradhan to a confident voice in Phulera's affairs. With each chapter, Panchayat adds depth not only to village life but to every character's evolution. Season four brings unexpected twists—making the narrative all the more compelling," she said. (PTI)

ZEE5 UNVEILS TRAILER OF DILJIT DOSANJHS 'DETECTIVE SHERDIL', A WHODUNNIT SET IN BUDAPEST

NEW DELHI, June 11: ZEE5 has released the trailer of its upcoming original film "Detective Sherdil", a murder mystery headlined by actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh, who plays the role of an eccentric sleuth navigating a case riddled with secrets, betrayals and billion-dollar motives.

Set against the backdrop of Budapest, the whodunnit is helmed by debutant director Ravi Chhabriya, who earlier assisted Ali Abbas Zafar on projects like "Sultan", "Bharat" and "Tiger Zinda Hai". The film will premiere on ZEE5 on June 20.

The ensemble cast also includes Diana Pentz, Boman Irani, Ratna Pathak Shah, Chunky Panday, Sumet Vyas, Banita Sandhu, and Kashmiri Irani.

"Detective Sherdil" follows the murder of a flamboyant billionaire (played by Irani) under mysterious circumstances.

"What initially appears to be a hate crime quickly spirals into a far more complex case. Enter Detective Sherdil (Dosanjh), described as an unorthodox investigator with a razor-sharp mind and unconventional methods," the official logline read.

"The trailer of Detective Sherdil is just the beginning, there's a whole lot more madness waiting to unfold," said Chhabriya in a statement.

"From day one, I knew we needed a detective who could balance charm, wit, and swagger—and Diljit brought all of that and more," he added.

Dosanjh said he enjoyed experimenting with the role.

"Playing Detective Sherdil has been fun for me. The character's quirks and attitude is something I have tried differently. Hope audiences enjoy this character and the film," he said. "Detective Sherdil" is presented by Zafar's banner AAZ Films and Offside Entertainment. It is a Maurya Entertainment Production. Chhabriya and Zafar have also penned the script with Sagar Bajaj. (PTI)



British musician Passenger to embark on 3-city India debut tour in November



NEW DELHI, June 11: British singer-songwriter Passenger, best known for his globally hit track "Let Her Go", is set to make his India debut with a three-city tour in November, BookMyShow Live announced on Wednesday.

As part of his Asia Tour, Passenger, whose real name is Michael Rosenberg, will perform in Delhi-NCR on November 19, followed by stops in Mumbai on November 21 and Bengaluru on November 22, 2025.

The shows will be held at DLF CyberHub (Delhi-NCR), Phoenix Marketcity (Mumbai), and Phoenix Marketcity (Bengaluru), respectively.

Passenger, 41, shot to global recognition with "Let Her Go", the breakout single from his 2012 album "All The Little Lights", which topped charts in 19 countries and became the second-most searched song of all time on Shazam.

He has released 15 studio albums and some of his other popular tracks include "Simple Song", "Anywhere", "Sword from the Stone" and "Life's For The Living".

"Passenger's music holds a rare emotional weight, one that is quiet, introspective and deeply resonant. For many fans in India, his songs have been the soundtrack to personal moments, quietly weaving their way into everyday life. Bringing him to India for the very first time across three cities is incredibly special for us at BookMyShow Live," said Naman Pugalisa, Chief Business Officer – Live Events, BookMyShow.

"We've always believed in curating experiences that are as meaningful as they are memorable, and this tour is exactly that: intimate, honest and led entirely by the music," he added.

Tickets for the India leg of Passenger's tour will go live on June 17 exclusively on BookMyShow. (PTI)

'BOSCH' SPIN-OFF SERIES 'BALLARD' TO PREMIERE ON PRIME VIDEO IN JULY

NEW DELHI, June 11: "Ballard", an upcoming spin-off series to popular show "Bosch", will debut on streaming service Prime Video on July 9.

Actor Maggie Q, best known for starring in movies such as "Naked Weapon", "Mission: Impossible III", "Live Free or Die Hard" and "Priest", stars in the lead role in the new series.

"Ballard" introduces a new character from author Michael Connelly's bestselling novel series, a press release said.

In the show, Q essays the role of Detective Renée Ballard, who leads the LAPD's new and underfunded cold case division, tackling the city's most challenging long-forgotten crimes with empathy and relentless determination.

"As she peels back layers of crimes spanning decades, including a serial killer's string of mur-

ders and a murdered John Doe, she soon uncovers a dangerous conspiracy within the LAPD.

"With the help of her volunteer team and retired detective Harry Bosch (Titus Welliver), Detective Ballard navigates personal trauma, professional challenges, and life-threatening dangers to expose the truth," read the official logline.

The series will also feature Courtney Taylor, John Carroll Lynch, Michael Mosley, Rebecca Field, Victoria Morales, Amy Hill, Ricardo Chavira, Noah Bean, Alain Uy and Hector Hugo.

"Ballard" is executive produced by Michael Connelly, Henrik Bastin, Michael Alaimo, Kendall Sherwood, Trish Hofmann, Jet Wilkinson, and Melissa Aouate. Jasmine Russ serves as co-executive producer under Fabel Entertainment. (PTI)



Zoya Akhtar-Ayesha Sood on 'In Transit': We wanted trans people to tell their own stories

NEW DELHI, June 11: The idea for "In Transit", a four-part docu series about the lives of trans and non-binary individuals, was born out of the many stories filmmakers Zoya Akhtar and Reema Kagti came across while auditioning for their critically-acclaimed series "Made in Heaven".

Directed by Ayesha Sood and produced by Akhtar and Kagti through their Tiger Baby banner, "In Transit" is set to premiere on Prime Video on June 13.

"Made in Heaven" has been praised for giving centrestage to LGBTQ individuals, first with a gay lead in Arjun Mathur's wedding planner Karan and then by introducing a trans character with Meher, who was played by Trine-Haldr Gummara, in season two.

Zoya said they "got crazy feedback from the LGBT community" through the show as the community felt represented in an authentic way.

"When we wrote a trans character, we realised we knew very little... So, we started interviewing people and the people that spoke to us were very honest and they shared a lot, including their dreams. Mehar was a specific kind of character, so that story came out of these interviews.

"We realised that this is something that we need to expand on in a

different format. They need to tell the audience their own story and we pitched that to Amazon Prime who went for it in one call so we are lucky," Akhtar told PTI in a virtual interview.

The filmmaker said they decided to rope in Sood to direct the series as they wanted someone who could shepherd the project in an authentic way, without adding any shock value to it.

Sood, a filmmaker, photographer and editor who runs the media company Jamun Collective, said when Akhtar and Kagti approached her with the idea, she was a little flummoxed as trans experience is a huge canvas.

"I was like, 'How do you tell the story of trans people? Like women in India, the canvas is huge... There are so many diverse experiences of being a woman in India, likewise, being trans in India is our baseline setting and it is vast, unique and complex. How do we bring that out in the stories?'"

"So, we talk about things that are universally moving to all of us, like identity, our place in the world, our relationships with families and finding love. These are universal things that move everybody," Sood told PTI.

The team had a long period of research, and eventually found a way as well as a structure to tell these stories.

"The Indian idea of being trans is vast. So we wanted to get a

broad range of stories and people from different contexts and we wanted to be uniquely rooted in India. These are real people from different walks of life who are expressing their trans-ness," Sood said.

"It was also a matter of who could tell their stories to us. It's not easy for everyone to be on camera... These are tough lives, so it was also about who could actually tell us these stories," she added.

"In Transit" is the second project from the documentary slate that Akhtar and Kagti are planning to produce through their banner, following "Angry Young Men", a cinematic exploration of iconic screenwriter duo Javed Akhtar and Salim Khan's filmography.

A third, "Turtle Walker" by Taira Malaney, will chronicle the extraordinary journey of conservationist Satish Bhaskar. Akhtar, known for films such as "Luck By Chance", "Dil Dhadakne Do" and "Gully Boy", said she loves documentaries as the format allows a filmmaker to explore different stories. There is also a lot of interest for documentaries in India now, she added.

"There's a lot more exposure and I think people are interested in stories. Certain stories are good as short films, certain things lend themselves to eight hours of narrative. Certain things are good as features, and certain stories

need to be told in their most authentic, true self," Akhtar said.

Sood credited the OTT platforms for nurturing the format.

"We now have a growing audience for documentaries. The platforms are entirely to be praised for this. They have brought documentaries into your living room and everybody is watching them. Along with it, the craft has also elevated."

In "In Transit", Sood brings in a lot of pop culture references to describe the trans experience.

The documentary explores the lives of nine individuals, including a classical musician from Bangalore, a school educator from Tripura and a corporate professional in Mumbai.

The director said these pop culture references show why representation matters, whether it is a film or a television serial like "Hum Paanch".

"That's what people consume and spend their time being inspired, watching and discussing. It wasn't like I needed to get a Bollywood reference out here. It's the world that the characters live in.

"And those are the things that struck them when they were growing up, like the first time they saw themselves on screen, or the first time they felt something about a character or love or any such thing," she said. (PTI)

AUSTRALIA QUALIFY FOR 2026 WORLD CUP WITH 2-1 WIN OVER SAUDI ARABIA

MELBOURNE, June 11: Connor Metcalfe scored his first goal for Australia and Mitchell Duke iced the 2-1 victory in Saudi Arabia that ensured the Socceroos qualified for a sixth straight World Cup.

Needing just to avoid a five-goal defeat to secure direct entry to the 2026 tournament, the Socceroos rallied with Metcalfe equalizing just before halftime with a left-foot strike and Duke putting them ahead with a 48th-minute header. Abdulrahman Al Oboud had opened for the Saudis after 19 minutes.

Goalkeeper Mat Ryan made five saves, including a late penalty, in his 100th international for Australia. The Socceroos had to qualify through playoffs in 2018 and 2022 and so earning the direct entry took some pressure off. "We've done the first part — qualifying automatically," Socceroos coach Tony Popovic said. "Now the next part is to be bigger



and better for the World Cup." Popovic was part of the Socceroos squad that qualified for 2006, ending a long World Cup drought for Australia, and then reached the second round. Now he has guided another generation of players to the marquee global tournament.

"We've built a good foundation now (but) we want to get better, kick on and try and do something special in the World Cup," he said. Earlier, Japan and South Korea ended successful campaigns on a high with emphatic home victories over Indonesia and Kuwait, respectively.

In Osaka, Daichi Kamada scored after 15 minutes to set Japan, preparing for an eighth consecutive World Cup, on its way to a 6-0 victory.

Takefusa Kubo added a second five minutes later and Kamada extended the lead just before the break. Soon after the restart, Ryoya Morishita and Shuto

Machino piled on and Mao Hosoya made it six.

The Palestinian team was eliminated from contention after conceding a goal seven minutes into stoppage time in a 1-1 draw with Oman, giving the Oman team the last spot in the next round of continental qualifying.

Six qualifiers so far from Asia-Australia joins already-qualified Japan, Iran, South Korea, Uzbekistan and Jordan in reaching the expanded 48-team tournament in the United States, Canada and Mexico. Asia's two other automatic places will be settled between the six third- and fourth-place teams. That round takes place in October. The teams will be Oman, Qatar, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia.

Earlier, South Korea, which has qualified for an 11th straight World Cup, sealed the top spot in Group B after beating Kuwait 4-0. (AP)

Tuchel runs into early problems with England as critics circle

LONDON, June 11: Hired amid skepticism because of his nationality, German coach Thomas Tuchel was brought in as England manager to get the national team from soccer's birthplace "over the line" at a World Cup for the first time since 1966.

One year out from the 2026 tournament in North America and Tuchel has already run into problems — and is feeling the wrath of England's fans, too.

The 3-1 loss to Senegal at home in a friendly match on Tuesday brought a crashing end to Tuchel's honeymoon period that was already tottering after England could only eke out a feeble 1-0 win over 173rd-ranked Andorra four days earlier.

Boos rang out as Tuchel and England's players left the field at the City Ground in Nottingham after losing to an African nation for the first time.

Tuchel has coached some of the world's biggest clubs in Paris Saint-Germain, Bayern Munich and Chelsea and was regarded, tactically, as a big step-up from predecessor Gareth Southgate. For many, Southgate lacked that magic touch to turn England into title-winners despite its deep runs at the past four major tournaments.

These are early days — Tuchel only started the job in January — but England might even have regressed in its latest era under a foreign coach.

Here's a look at the teething problems being encountered in Tuchel's tenure:

Tactics While Southgate no doubt generated a great culture and atmosphere in the squad off the field, he was accused of being too pragmatic and lacking flexibility in his tactics on it.

Tuchel was expected to be a huge upgrade in that respect but England doesn't yet have an identity under the German. England captain Harry Kane listed the ingredients his team were missing against Senegal — and there were plenty.

"With and without the ball, we aren't quite clicking," said Kane, who opened the scoring. "We aren't finding the right passes, the right tempo. In the one-vs.-ones, we're losing duels and that aggressive nature we've had."

"There are some ideas that are new and we have some new players coming into the team who haven't got experience at international level. It's a mixture of things."

Tuchel only has four more camps to get his ideas across ahead of the World Cup, should England qualify of course. The team won its opening three World Cup qualifiers — against Albania, Latvia and Andorra — and tops Group K with five matches to play from September to November.

Selection Some of Tuchel's early-tenure selections have raised eyebrows.

He has brought former Liverpool captain Jordan Henderson, age 34 and most recently playing at Ajax, back into the squad because of his leadership qualities and to "take care of all the standards in the group," Tuchel said. (AP)

Man City signs Reijnders from AC Milan to complete \$150M spending spree



MANCHESTER, June 11: Manchester City concluded a \$150 million spending spree ahead of the Club World Cup by announcing the signing of Netherlands midfielder Tijjani Reijnders from AC Milan on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old Reijnders moved for an initial fee of 55 million euros (\$63 million) and is the second midfielder — after France playmaker Rayan Cherki — to join City in the special June 1-10 transfer window created to allow sides in the 32-team Club World Cup to reshape their squads.

City paid Lyon \$41 million for Cherki and also signed Algeria left back Rayan Ait-Nouri from Wolverhampton for \$42 million.

After deciding not to push to sign Florian Wirtz — the Germany playmaker is close to joining Liverpool, according to reports in the British media — City has spent around the same amount on three players.

Add this latest splurge to an outlay of more than \$200 million in the winter transfer window and City has already spent at least \$350 million on players in 2025 to provide manager Pep Guardiola with a squad capable of reclaiming the Premier League title from Liverpool.

Breakthrough season Reijnders has just been named as the best midfielder in Serie A after a breakthrough campaign in which

he scored 15 goals and added five assists across all competitions for Milan, which endured a dismal season and failed to qualify for Europe. He joined Milan from AZ Alkmaar in 2023 for a fee of around 20 million euros (then \$22.4 million) and recently signed a contract extension through to June 2030. That's the length of his contract at City, too.

City is releasing De Bruyne to end his 10-year stint at the club and now has Reijnders and Cherki to link up with Rodri in an enticing midfield set-up.

Reijnders said he was "ecstatic" to be joining City.

"It is also a dream come true to play in the Premier League," he said. "This league has seen many of the best Dutch players perform through the years and it's an inspiration to follow in their footsteps." City director of football Hugo Viana said Reijnders — who specializes in being a ball-carrying midfielder — will add "extra energy, composure and creativity to our midfield."

City announced the transfer of Reijnders a day after the special transfer window closed but appears to have signed him in time for him to play in the new-look, 32-team Club World Cup, which starts on Saturday.

City is in the same group as Juventus, Al Ain and Wydad Casablanca and its first match is on June 18. (AP)

England booed after losing to Senegal for first defeat under coach Thomas Tuchel

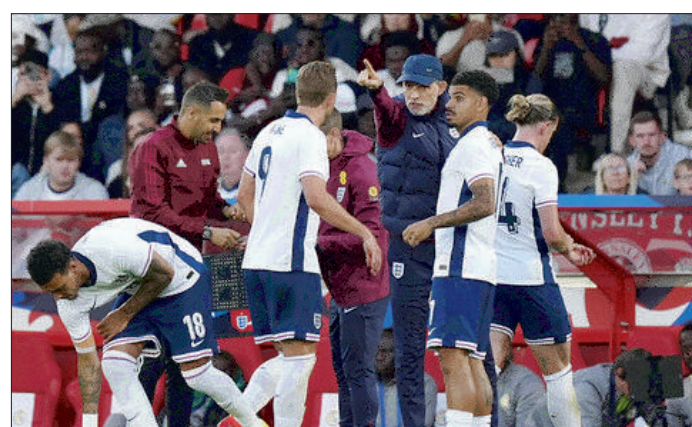
NOTTINGHAM (ENGLAND), June 11: Boos rang out as England left the field after a 3-1 loss to Senegal in a friendly Tuesday which marked the first defeat of Thomas Tuchel's tenure as coach.

Senegal recovered from conceding Harry Kane's early goal to become the first team from Africa to record a victory over England.

"We're not going to panic. But for sure we know we need to do better," England captain Kane told broadcaster ITV and suggested England had lost "that aggressive nature that we've had."

In World Cup qualifying Tuesday, the Netherlands beat Malta 8-0 and Austria beat San Marino 4-0.

England's landmark loss Kane was the only player retained in Tuchel's starting lineup from last week's 1-0 win over Andorra, which had caused Tuchel to criticize his team's attitude. The changes brought little improvement.



Kane's record-extending 73rd England goal gave his team the lead in the seventh minute, when he bundled in after a goalkeeping error by Edouard Mendy.

Senegal was a step above over Tuchel's previous England opponents Albania, Latvia and Andorra, and England conceded for the first time in his tenure in the 40th

minute.

Nicolas Jackson chased down a long pass and hooked it back for the onrushing Ismaila Sarr to score after having outpaced Kyle Walker.

Senegal's second goal followed a long ball to Habib Diarra, who seemed to be attempting a pass of his own when the ball deflected in off goalkeeper Dean Henderson's

Vinicius Júnior's goal sends Brazil to 2026 World Cup, delighting fans in Ancelotti's home debut

SAO PAULO, June 11: A goal by Vinicius Júnior secured Brazil a place in the 2026 World Cup, quite a momentous home debut for Carlo Ancelotti as head coach.

The once prolific duo at Real Madrid helped Brazil to a 1-0 win over Paraguay at Sao Paulo. Ecuador secured its place at next year's global tournament later Tuesday with a 0-0 draw at Peru.

Defending champion Argentina, held to a 1-1 draw by Colombia, had already qualified and is assured of finishing atop South American qualifying. Ecuador and Brazil each have 25 points in the standings, but the Ecuadorians are in second spot based on victories. The two nations are 10 points behind Argentina but, crucially, more than six points clear of the seventh-place team with two games remaining in the qualifying campaign. The top six teams in South America earn direct entries to the 48-team World Cup.

Chile will miss a third consecutive World Cup after losing 2-0 at Bolivia to remain last in 10-nation round-robin competition, a result that cost head coach Ricardo Gareca his job.

Uruguay beat Venezuela at home 2-0, with goals from Rodrigo Aguirre and Giorgian de Arrascaeta, and edged closer to one of the direct spots with 24 points.

Venezuela, with 18, is one ahead of Bolivia in the contest for seventh place that grants an intercontinental playoff berth.

Lionel Messi had a quiet night in Argentina's draw with Colombia in Buenos Aires. Luis Díaz opened the scoring for the visitors in the 24th minute. Enzo Fernandez was sent off in the 70th minute to the disappointment of more than 80,000 fans at the Monumental de Nunez Stadium. But Julián Alvarez scored the equalizer in the 81st with a low crossed shot.

Ancelotti received some frustration from fans after Thursday's 0-0 draw with Ecuador, as his team focused on defending the entire match. The Italian coach, who turned 66 Tuesday, promised changes to make his team more aggressive at the NeoQuimica Arena.

He was welcomed by 46,000 fans, including NBA star Gianni Antetokounmpo, who displayed a tifo in yellow and green that read "Parabéns, Carletto" (Happy birthday, Carletto in Portuguese).

Gabriel Martinelli replaced midfielder Gerson and was one of the best players of the encounter. Raphinha returned after suspension and created many problems for Paraguay's defense. And Vinicius Júnior was often seen as a target-man, sharing the duties with Matheus Cunha.

A mistake by Paraguay's defense, a low cross by Cunha and a gentle touch by Brazil's new No. 10 produced the only goal of the match. "It is for you," the striker told the coach as he celebrated.

Despite the low score, the hosts were much more aggressive than in most of its games in this World Cup qualifying campaign.

"We needed to win here for our people. Now we have more time to work, see what we can improve," Vinicius said after the match. He won't play Brazil's next game in qualifying against Chile due to suspension. "We need to celebrate this. After September it is all about the World Cup."

After the final whistle, a clip of Ancelotti's first days on the job was shown in big screens around the stadium. A raucous celebration erupted again, as if the Italian coach had brought new life to a team that only three months ago appeared lost and doomed.

He said the team was balanced despite having four strikers. He also said that Cunha's role, as a playmaker, is the one he figures will be Neymar's if the veteran fully recovers his fitness. (AP)

Dressing room seems like a funeral, but we can still qualify: Marquez after Hong Kong defeat

HONG KONG, June 11: "The dressing room is like a funeral (site)," said Indian football head coach Manolo Marquez as he struggled to explain the 0-1 loss to Hong Kong here even though he remained optimistic about the team's chances of qualifying for the 2027 AFC Asian Cup.

India conceded in the fifth minute of stoppage time on Tuesday, slumping to a second straight goalless outing in Asian Cup qualifiers, jeopardising their chances of qualifying for the Asian Cup.

"...we are not very happy. We are sad. The dressing room is like a funeral, practically," Marquez said when a question on the future of the team came up, insisting that it was not the time to dwell on that aspect.

"...But I still think that India has possibilities to qualify," he declared nonetheless in the post-match press conference.

Ranked 26 places above their opponents in the FIFA charts, the

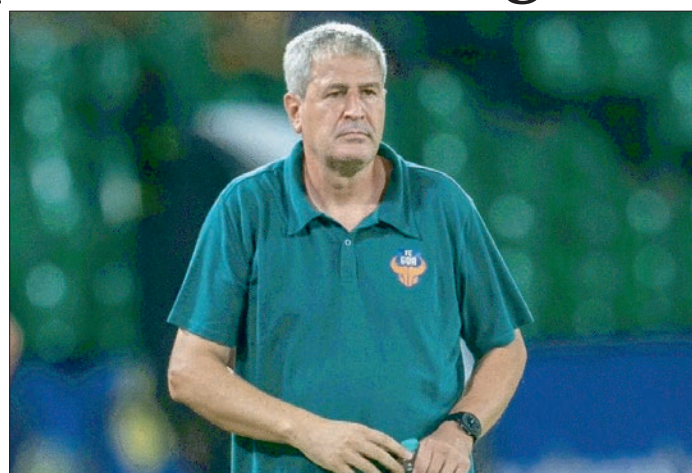
Indians were undone by poor finishing and lack of composure in key moments. India should have taken the lead in the 35th minute when Ashique Kuruniyan misjudged the delivery and fluffed a golden chance from close range.

"The game is easy to speak. Two teams fighting and that's all. Without too many chances. I think both teams defended both with order and one action. This is football," he said, trying hard to find the right words to explain the performance.

India now have just one point from two matches in Group C. With only the group winners advancing to the 2027 AFC Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia, the task ahead would be arduous.

"...we are not in a good moment. In terms of scores, it's difficult for us to score. But it's true that the team played with more order than in other games. This is true. But, unfortunately, we couldn't get any points here."

Marquez also lamented his side's



inability to settle for a point.

"I repeat again, it's for me a very equal game and unfortunately for us, practically in the last action, we lost at least one point and Hong Kong have three points. I told in the dressing room, obviously we want to win."

"But sometimes the team doesn't

know how to draw. And today, if you couldn't win the game before the minute 90-91, at least try to be in a position to avoid the defeat. But I feel that India is still in the fight."

Asked how India can fix their scoring woes, the coach responded with an honest reflection.

"Sometimes you never know. One day, this is not a problem of the national team, it's in clubs also. Sometimes there are four, five, six games that you don't score and suddenly you score three-four goals and you score."

However, he steered clear of criticising individual players but conceded that at times, nerves are getting the better of them.

"I cannot say anything negative about the players. I think that the effort was there, the attitude was there, the plan of the game was there. In some moments, I feel that we can play better with the ball and be more brave," he said.

"But this is about the situation that the team is not winning and the players are a little nervous. In some actions that the pass is clear, we are a little nervous," he admitted. Since taking over from Igor Stimac last year, Marquez has overseen eight matches with only one win — a 3-0 friendly victory over Maldives. (PTI)

Jon Rahm: Smaller fields make top 10s easier at LIV Golf

OAKMONT (USA), June 11: Two-time major champion Jon Rahm comes into the U.S. Open off another top 10 at LIV Golf, which is nothing new. The Spaniard has never come in lower in the 20 events he has finished since joining the Saudi-backed league at the start of last year.

Is that a big deal?

"I would happily trade a bunch of them for more wins, that's for sure," said Rahm, who has two LIV victories but has yet to win this year. "But I keep putting myself in good position." One of the criticisms of LIV is the 54-man fields over 54 holes, especially with a half-dozen or more considered past their prime and several unproven young players. Rahm delivered some context on his streak. "Listen, I'm a realist in this case," he said. "I've been playing really good golf, yes, but I'd be lying if I said that it wasn't easier to have top 10s with a smaller field. That's just the truth, right? Had I been playing full-field events, would I have top 10 every single week? No. But I've been playing good enough to

say that I would most likely have been inside the top 30 every single time and maybe even top 25."

He considered that impressive, and he figures most of those would be top 10s. Rahm tied for eighth last week in Virginia without ever having a serious chance of winning over the final few holes. He said against a full field, he doubts that would have been a top 10.

"I think winning is equally as hard, but you can take advantage of a smaller field to finish higher," he said. "As much as I want to give it credit personally for having that many top 10s, I wouldn't always give it as the full amount just knowing that it's a smaller field."

DeChambeau and LIV Bryson DeChambeau says the contract he signed to join Saudi-funded LIV Golf is up next year and he's already looking ahead to a new one. "We're looking to negotiate end of this year, and I'm very excited. They see the value in me. I see the value in what they can provide, and I believe we'll come to some sort of resolution on that," DeChambeau said. (AP)

The Great Indian Football Mess: Bhutia, others demand overhaul of 'rotten' system

KOLKATA, June 11: Outraged by India's plummeting fortunes on the football field, talismanic former captain Bhautung Bhutia has accused the national federation of destroying the sport while some other stakeholders have lambasted the current system as "rotten" and riddled with "fragile egos".

Bhutia's scathing attack on the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and its President Kalyan Chaubey came a day after the team collapsed to a stunning 0-1 loss to a lower-ranked Hong Kong in the third round of the AFC Asian Cup qualifiers.

"It's very painful to see... we are definitely struggling now to even qualify for the Asia Cup, which we've been qualifying for regularly," Bhutia told PTI.

"Countries like Uzbekistan, Indonesia (likely qualifiers based in current form) and Jordan have qualified for the World Cup, and we are still struggling for the Asia Cup. Very unfortunate," he lamented.

The loss on Tuesday left India's hopes of qualifying for the 2027 Asian Cup hanging by a thread -- a stark contrast to their recent back-to-back appearances at the continental showpiece.

Visibly anguished, the former India captain called for Chaubey's resignation and demanded a structural overhaul of Indian football, describing the on-field disasters and off-field chaos as symptoms of

a deeper rot.

Current India head coach Manolo Marquez, who is also the coach of Indian Super League side FC Goa, took over from Croatian legend Igor Stimac in July last year. Stimac was sacked after a string of disappointing results, including a loss to Afghanistan in a World Cup qualifier in Guwahati.

Marquez hasn't been able to arrest the slide either and the team has logged just one win in its last eight matches. It is being widely speculated that he does not wish to continue in the position.

India had trained for nearly three weeks in Kolkata ahead of the crucial match on Tuesday, only to be outclassed by a team ranked 26 notches below them (India: 127, Hong Kong: 153).

The latest defeat is expected to push the country down to 133 in the FIFA rankings.

Bhutia, who was defeated by Chaubey in the AIFF presidential election in September 2022, did not mince words while calling out the current leadership, alleging mismanagement, corruption, and bypassing of key footballing committees in major decisions, including the appointment of Marquez.

"Kalyan Chaubey has destroyed Indian football. Chaubey has to resign and leave. He has completely destroyed it. Three General Secretaries in two-and-a-half years -- the entire structure, the system



will have to be changed," he said.

"Controversy after controversy, corruption charge... even after months now we don't know who the I-League winner is," he added, referring to the ongoing legal tussle between Inter Kashi and Churchill Brothers for the championship.

He accused Chaubey of bypassing the Technical Committee to appoint Marquez and criticised the decision to let the Spaniard simultaneously coach both FC Goa and the national team.

Bhutia also criticised the decision to bring talismanic striker Sunil Chhetri out of international retirement, saying it was a poor call driven more by desperation than planning.

"It was nice of him to come out of retirement, but it was a completely bad decision. Manolo should not have requested, and now we hear the Federation pushed for it. But what's changed?" he asked.

"There is nothing happening at the grassroots. It's all negative news off the field, and that reflects on the national team's performance."

Bhutia also ridiculed AIFF's decision to offer a USD 50,000 match bonus instead of a qualification-linked reward for the Hong Kong game.

"You're paying ₹42 lakh for one game. Why not link it to qualification? It just shows how clueless the management is." Former India international Goutam

Sarkar echoed Bhutia's sentiments, expressing frustration at the team's stagnation and the federation's failings.

"We have not progressed even an inch. If Sunil Chhetri continues to be your indispensable player, can it be more unfortunate?" he wondered.

"Of course, the Federation is completely responsible. They have been a complete failure."

Legendary defender and coach Subrata Bhattacharya slammed the obsession with foreign coaches and called for more faith in Indian talent.

"It's no guarantee that a foreign coach will give you success. Domestic coaches like PK Banerjee and Amal Dutta brought glory."

"Foreigners in ISL won't help Indian players develop. Only Indian coaches know our boys and can develop them."

On Chhetri's return, Bhattacharya, who also happens to be his father-in-law, said, "It's his personal decision, but if it was done to serve someone's personal interest, it's wrong."

Two of Indian football's key club stakeholders -- Bengaluru FC owner Parth Jindal and FC Goa CEO Ravi Puskur -- also launched a scathing attack on the AIFF and the broader footballing ecosystem, calling for deep introspection and structural reform in the wake of the humiliating defeat.

FC Goa's Puskur called the system

"rotten in ways we refuse to admit."

"Everything moves on influence, favours, and fragile egos. We don't have the maturity to manage the ecosystem we claim to be building. We turn on each other faster than we face uncomfortable truths," Puskur wrote on X.

Puskur, however, felt that blame for the national team's persistent failures cannot be placed solely on the federation, the coach, or the players.

"We lost the match versus Hong Kong yesterday and there's outrage -- players, coach, federation, clubs are all facing the ire. But the truth is: blame isn't isolated. It belongs to all of us. And yes, that includes me," he added.

"Clubs -- mine included -- have inflated player salaries irresponsibly. We are outbidding each other for perception, knowing fully well it's unsustainable. Then we act shocked when these players fall flat on the international stage. WE built that illusion."

Bengaluru FC owner Parth Jindal also lashed out at the AIFF on social media, calling for urgent course correction.

"This is completely unacceptable @IndianFootball - just not good enough under any circumstances - deep introspection needed by the AIFF - this is not what all of us lovers and backers of Indian football have spent our hard-earned money and effort to witness - get a manager and a system that works -- it's high time," he said. (PTI)

Indian football continues to slide as team suffers defeat to lower-ranked Hong Kong

KOWLOON (HONG KONG), June 11: There was no stopping Indian football's decline as the senior men's team, lacking in spunk, finishing skill and the will to fight, suffered a calamitous 0-1 defeat to lower-ranked Hong Kong in a crucial 2027 AFC Asian Cup Qualifier match here on Tuesday.

Hosts Hong Kong emerged victorious after an injury-time goal by Stefan Pereira.

The referee awarded Hong Kong the penalty after India custodian Vishal Kaith came out of the goal line and tried to punch the ball to safety, only to end up hitting Michael Udebuluzor and injuring the player.

Pereira (90+4) stepped up to take the spot kick and shot the ball to the right of Kaith, who was also shown a yellow card for his injury-time foul.

The latest reverse jeopardised India's prospects of reaching the next Asian Cup in Saudi Arabia, and the team is also set to drop to 133 on the FIFA rankings with Hong Kong gaining points and climbing up in the pecking order.

It is a continuation of a series of disappointing results that the team has endured in recent years during which activities off the field grabbed more headlines than on-field performances, including the unceremonious exit of previous head coach Igor Stimac after an ugly dispute with his employers All India Football Federation (AIFF).

Such has been the team's woes that

head coach Manolo Marquez was forced to convince Sunil Chhetri to come out of retirement a year after he called it quits in international football.

However, even his comeback has not been able to lift the team out of the abyss it has found itself in recent times. The future of Manolo, who succeeded Stimac while also holding on to his job as ISL side FC Goa's coach, is also uncertain with the national team.

As his wards went about fluffing the two-three clear chances that came their way, Manolo was seen expressing his frustration on the touchline.

Earlier in the day, Manolo kept out veteran striker Chhetri from the starting XI.

A sea of red packed the stands at the newly built Kai Tak Stadium but despite the strong home support, India did pretty well to create a few chances in the first half, even though Hong Kong enjoyed more possession. But, as has been the trend with them in recent times, the lack of finishing has again let the Blue Tigers down in the first 45 minutes.

Among the opportunities that came their way before the half-time break, the Indians came closest in the 35th minute but Ashique Kuruniyan shot the ball wide from a close range after Liston Colaco ran down the left to provide him a nice cross.

Meanwhile, after having received medical attention after getting injured, Colaco unleashed a powerful long-range shot but it went straight into the keeper's gloves.

Hong Kong also grew in confidence as the game approached the half time. The home team could have taken the lead from a free-kick had it not been for a timely clearance by Asish Rai from goal-mouth after custodian Vishal Kaith was beaten.

Both India and Hong Kong have had their moments but neither side could convert in a tightly contested first half of this crucial 2027 AFC Asian Cup Qualifier.

Kuruniyan, who has otherwise performed his job admirably on the flanks, looked to have got another chance to break the deadlock some minutes into the second half, but could not.

Soon after, coach Marquez brought on India's all-time highest goal-scorer Chhetri alongside Naorem Singh in place of Kuruniyan and Brandon Fernandes.

India created chances in the second half too, including in the 81st minute when Lallianzuala Chhangte found Chhetri with a brilliant cutback inside the Hong Kong box, but the veteran striker was not able to connect it well.

The result is a setback for India who came into the game after a goal-less draw against Bangladesh in their first Asian Cup qualifying match, at home in March. India have one point from two games and are last in the group, and only one team from the pool of four will qualify for the final. India will now need to win their remaining four matches, but given their inability to score, it looks improbable. (PTI)

England sweeps T20 series against the West Indies after Duckett's 84 sets up 37-run win

SOUTHAMPTON (ENGLAND), June 11: England completed a 3-0 sweep of the Twenty20 international series against the West Indies after smashing 248-3 en route to a 37-run win in Southampton on Tuesday.

Put into bat for what proved a high-scoring third and final match of the series, England racked up its second-highest total in the format as Ben Duckett made a 46-ball 84 and put on 120 for the opening wicket with Jamie Smith, whose 26-ball 60 included five sixes.

England delivered its highest-ever score after 10 overs of a T20 -- 135-1 -- and never let up, with captain Harry Brook (35) and Jacob Bethell (36) shar-

ing an unbroken stand of 70 in 5.1 over to help set an imposing target of 249.

The Windies never really got close on a good batting track though still made a commendable 211-8 after slipping to 70-4 after 7.1 overs.

Rovman Powell was the top scorer for the tourists with an unbeaten 79 off 45 balls, and captain Shai Hope had a 27-ball 45.

England also won the ODI series between the teams by a 3-0 margin, marking an ideal start to the white-ball campaign for Brook.

England's focus switches to test cricket now, with a highly anticipated five-match series against India starting June 20. (AP)



England call up teenager Jack to train with Test squad after impressing against India A

LONDON, June 11: Teenage fast bowler Eddie Jack has been "invited to practise" with England's senior team ahead of the first Test against India after producing impressive efforts for the Lions against India A in the two four-day games, according to a report.

India begin their new World Test Championship cycle taking on England in a five-match series beginning with the first match at Headingley from June 20.

The 19-year-old Hampshire seamer caught the selectors' attention by dismissing India batter KL Rahul, who had scored a century in the first innings, during their drawn second unofficial Test in Northampton.

Standing at 6-foot-4, Jack has "impressed" England Lion's coaching group, including Andrew Flintoff, Mark Wood and Graeme Swann, The Times, London, reported.

Jack, who is yet to make his County Championship debut for Hampshire, has played two first-class matches -- both against India A -- and represented England U-19s earlier this year in South Africa.

He also took five wickets last month in a warm-up game against Zimbabwe, while playing for a combined counties XI.

In Northampton, Jack regularly beat the bat of India Test stars, including Nitish Reddy and Dhruv Jurel. (PTI)

On first 4-game losing streak since 2007, US looks unprepared with World Cup a year away



NASHVILLE (USA), June 11: The only bright side for the U.S. soccer team is the World Cup starts in a year, not this week.

The Americans conceded four goals in the first half, failed to get a shot on target and were embarrassed in a 4-0 blowout loss to Switzerland in a friendly on Tuesday night.

"It's really easy to look at one game, one half, and be like, oh, this is all going to pieces, they can't come back from this," defender Walker Zimmerman said. "But you look even the build-up to the 2022 (World Cup), we take down Morocco 3-0 and they make it into the semi-final. Things change -- that was six months apart. It's not the end of the world."

Heading into their CONCACAF Gold Cup opener against Trinidad and Tobago on Sunday, the Americans are on a four-game losing streak for the first time since 2007 and have dropped four consecutive home games for just the third time overall

and first time since 1988.

U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino blamed himself for picking a starting lineup that included four players with two or fewer international appearances. He wanted them to gain international experience but the Americans gave up four goals by the 40th minute for the first time since Nov. 9, 1980, at Mexico and the first time ever at home, according to Opta.

"It was my decision and the decision didn't work," he said. "It's painful because you don't want to improve losing games."

A dismayed fan base, angered by first-round elimination at last year's Copa America and two losses in the CONCACAF Nations League final four in March, is questioning the commitment of the team's player pool.

The U.S. was missing star Christian Pulisic (wanted time off); Yunus Musah (personal reason not disclosed); Weston McKennie, Tim Weah, Gio Reyna

(headed to the Club World Cup); Antonee Robinson, Tyler Adams and Folarin Balogun (injured); and Sergio Dest (re-gaining fitness).

Dan Noye scored in the 13th minute, Michel Aebischer in the 23rd, Breel Embolo in the 33rd and Johan Manzambi in the 36th. Goalkeeper Matt Turner, playing his first match for club or country since March 23, spilled a shot that led to Embolo's goal. Defenders left the Swiss lots of space.

"You have to take your licks and understand where things went wrong and try to put them right in the next five days," said defender Tim Ream, among five players who entered at the start of the second half. "There's some individual errors that we make and we get punished for them at this level."

Instead of a steady improvement, the U.S. has regressed since reaching the second round of the 2022 World Cup. The Americans are 5-5 under Pochettino, who took over after the Copa America flop led the U.S. Soccer Federation to fire coach Gregg Berhalter.

The U.S. also plays Saudi Arabia and Haiti in the Gold Cup's first round -- the Americans have won their group in 16 of 17 Gold Cups, along with a second-place finish to Panama in 2011. They're group stage record is 40 wins, one loss and five draws.

Only winning the tournament likely will calm supporters.

"I know in this sport you're not judged on one game, one half, but you've got to be able to bounce back mentally, physically, emotionally," Zimmerman said.

"We've played hundreds of games in our career. Some are going to be amazing. Some aren't going to be so good."

Pochettino isn't concerned fans will give up on the U.S. team and stay away from matches.

"The fans are going to be there for sure in the Gold Cup and the World Cup," he said. "I have no worries about that. The fans are going to be with the team." (AP)

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15TH JUNE, 2025

CONSULTANT CARDIOLOGIST

- Chest pain or discomfort
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue or weakness
- Swelling in legs, ankles or feet
- Coughing or wheezing

DR. REJA BORA
DM (CARDIOLOGY)

CONSULTANT NEPHROLOGIST

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- Fatigue or feeling unusually tired.
- Changes in urination (color or frequency)
- Loss of appetite or nausea.
- Persistent itching or dry skin.

DR. ANKIT RAY
DM (NEPHROLOGY)

CONSULTANT UROLOGIST

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- Blood in urine
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DR. DIVAKAR CHOUBEY
MCH (UROLOGY)

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