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MPLAD funds misuse: CM's SVC quizzes elder Ajit Bhuyan

CM defends inquiry, says road project MP recommended does not exist

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Rajya Sabha MP Ajit Kumar Bhuyan was questioned for over five hours on Monday by the Chief Minister's Special Vigilance Cell (SVC) in connection with alleged irregularities in the use of MPLADS (Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme) funds.

The veteran journalist-turned-politician expressed surprise over the summons and later accused the state government of using the vigilance unit as a tool for political harassment.

Speaking to reporters after the interrogation, Bhuyan said he had faced close to 30 questions related to developmental projects under the scheme. "I had just one answer for all of them," he remarked. "I have always cooperated with the authorities, and I will continue to do so."

However, Bhuyan did not hold



back in criticising the intent behind the probe, calling it part of a larger campaign to stifle opposition voices ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections.

"The CM Vigilance has been weaponised. It's functioning like

the Chief Minister's personal strike force to target political opponents," he alleged.

He also sought to clarify the role of MPs in the MPLADS process, pointing out that Members of Parliament are only responsible for

recommending projects, while implementation is carried out by the district administration.

"The MP's role ends at the recommendation stage. It is the District Commissioner who oversees execution. If there are any irregularities, they should be held accountable, not the MP," Bhuyan said, questioning the rationale behind the investigation.

He further challenged why district officials involved in implementation had not been summoned or scrutinised. "Only the DC knows who was assigned what task and how. Ask them—that's where the answers lie," he said.

Bhuyan, a vocal critic of the current state leadership, suggested that the probe was designed to discourage dissent and opposition unity. "Whenever opposition voices begin to align, investigations and harassment follow. This is nothing

but political vengeance," he asserted. Raising the issue of selective targeting, Bhuyan questioned the vigilance body's inaction in cases involving ruling party leaders.

"Why does CM Vigilance stay silent when BJP leaders face similar allegations? But when it's Ajit Bhuyan, they're suddenly wide awake," he said.

In a pointed conclusion, Bhuyan questioned the absence of scrutiny toward the state's top leadership.

"If corruption is truly being investigated, let's start at the top. What about the Chief Minister and his family? Why are they never probed? Why does the Vigilance Cell fall silent when real questions are raised?"

Reacting to the allegations, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma told reporters that he respects the MP, but defended the inquiry. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Land encroachment: 693 families evicted in 2 dists



GOALPARA, June 16: The Assam government on Monday launched eviction drives to evict 693 families, mostly belonging to the migrant Bengali-speaking Muslim community, who allegedly encroached on vast tracts of land in the two districts of Goalpara and Bongaigaon, officials said.

According to officials, 667 families were evicted from Hasilabeel village in Goalpara district, while another 29 families were removed from Bhandara in Bongaigaon district.

The drive in Goalpara began at 7 am under tight security. Deputy Commissioner Khanindra Chaudhary said, "There was no resistance from the encroachers, and no untoward incident was reported during the day."

The drive was stopped around 3 pm because of rain. It's likely to resume at 8 am on Tuesday, an official said.

"Almost 60 per cent of the encroached area has been cleared with concrete houses demolished," he added.

The drive was carried out in over 45 per cent of 1,555 bighas in Hasilabeel under Balijana revenue circle, he added. The remaining land comprises a water body.

There are five lower primary schools in the village, which will also be demolished.

Around 20 bulldozers and excavators were pressed into service for the purpose, he said.

Chaudhary said the residents were served eviction notices in 2023 and 2024.

"We served final notices on Friday, asking them to vacate their homes by Monday morning. Placards and posters were also put up at multiple locations as reminders," he said.

Chaudhary, along with Senior Superintendent of Police Navneet Mahanta, camped in the village since morning, while IGP (Law and Order) Akhilesh Kumar Singh arrived later to review the situation. Many residents left the village with their belongings, but those who remained requested that the district administration rehabilitate them.

"I was born here, and so was my father. My grandfather settled here when the Jogighopa bridge was being constructed. We are cooperating with the authorities but request them to provide us with an alternative place to stay," a local resident said.

In Bongaigaon, the drive was carried out in Bhandara area after a notice was served to the encroachers last week, an official said.

The families had encroached 349 bighas of temple-sattra and built their homes, he added. There was no report of any untoward incidents with the families moving away with their belongings, and demolition of the houses was completed during the day. (PTI)

Sonowal announces major infra push to boost inland waterways on Ganga

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: In a significant push to strengthen India's inland water transport (IWT) network, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping & Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal on Sunday announced a series of new infrastructure initiatives aimed at transforming the Ganga (National Waterway-1) into a key artery for cargo, tourism, and sustainable transport. The announcements were made during the inaugural session of a Consultation Workshop on the development of IWT on NW-1, held in Patna.

According to an official statement, the Inland Waterways Authority of India (Iwai) signed State Support Agreements (SSAs) with the governments of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to bolster cooperation in areas such as cruise tourism, operation and management of community jetties, and Quick Pontoon Opening Mechanisms (QPOMs). The workshop brought together senior leaders including Union Minister Giriraj Singh, Bihar Deputy Chief Ministers Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, Bihar Water Resources Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary, Transport Ministers of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal's Minister of Irrigation and Waterways Manas Ranjan Bhunia, and Members of Parliament Ravi Shankar Prasad and Sudama Prasad. Senior bureaucrats including Bihar Chief Secretary Amrit Lal Meena and Iwai Chairman Vijay Kumar were also present.

Addressing the gathering, Sonowal emphasised the government's commitment to revitalising India's rivers, particularly the Ganga, as engines of future economic growth. He described IWT as the cleanest, most cost-effective, and environmentally sustainable mode of transport. Reflecting on the spiritual and civilisational significance of the river Ganga, he reiterated the government's resolve to align the river's heritage with the country's modern development goals. As part of the infrastructure roadmap, Sonowal announced the establishment of a new ship repair facility in Patna, aimed at enhancing river-based infrastructure. The Iwai will also conduct a feasibility study to operationalise River Gandak as (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ONGC gas leak enters day 5; top team deployed

SIVASAGAR, June 16: Energy major ONGC on Monday said it has deployed the "most experienced" Crisis Management Team (CMT) to control the leakage of gas, which continued for the fifth day after a blowout at a crude oil well in Assam's Sivasagar district.

The district administration said that air pollution is still within the acceptable limit and the local office of Pollution Control Board, Assam (PCBA) is closely monitoring the situation.

The blowout began on June 12 at Well No RDS 147 of Rig No SKP 135 of Rudrasagar oil field of ONGC at Barichuk of Bhatiapara. A private firm, SK Petro Services, was operating the well on behalf of the state-run Maharatna company.

"ONGC has deployed its most experienced Crisis Management Team (CMT), a team with a proven track record in managing complex well control operations, to contain the gas leakage at Well RDS#147. The operation is being closely and continuously monitored by ONGC's top management," the company said in a statement.

Geological challenges are inherent to oil and gas operations and the premier energy company follows stringent safety protocols, it added.

"ONGC is making all out efforts to bring the



gas leak under complete control at the earliest," the company said.

The company, in coordination with the district administration, undertook the safe evacuation of affected families and has been providing them with shelter, food, drinking water and other essential daily supplies.

Because of the blowout, around 1,500 people have been affected and 70 families were shifted to a relief camp set up in nearby Bongaon, and all necessary arrangements are being made to ensure their welfare and well-being.

"To safeguard public health, ONGC has es-

tablished free round-the-clock medical camps staffed with doctors and equipped with essential medicines, as part of its comprehensive emergency response," the statement said.

The company said that it is maintaining continuous communication with all stakeholders, including the district and police administrations, media and local community leaders, to ensure transparency and swift action.

"ONGC is grateful to the government, the local residents and the media for their continuous support and seeks further cooperation from all stakeholders till this situation is normalised," it added.

Meanwhile, the office of the Sivasagar District Commissioner in a Facebook post said that the local PCBA unit has established machines at the blowout site to study the air quality and oversee other pollution levels.

"According to the test reports by experts on the level of pollution in the atmosphere, the air pollution is still within tolerable limits," it added.

Measures have been taken to reduce the spread of compounds in the exhaust gas into the atmosphere by continuously pumping water at high pressure from the Dikhou river which flows near the rig. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CEM inaugurates exhibition celebrating 11 years of Modi's tenure



HT Correspondent

DONGKAMUKAM, June 16: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, on Monday inaugurated an exhibition at Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan, Ghelani in West Karbi Anglong, to mark the completion of 11 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure.

The venue also serves as the office of the BJP's West Karbi Anglong District Committee.

The exhibition, organised by the BJP, showcased comparative data highlighting the Centre's achievements under Modi's leadership in contrast with the previous Con-

gress regimes.

Among the highlights were the increase in AIMS from 8 to 23, medical seats from 82,533 to 1,92,496, and IITs from 16 to 23.

The number of universities was shown to have risen from 723 to 1,213.

The exhibition also underlined the implementation of 33 percent women's reservation in Parliament and State Assemblies, India's emergence as a global economic powerhouse, and the transformation of the Northeast into a key growth engine. Following the exhibition, a "Professional Baithak" was held to commemorate the occasion. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Govt issues Census 2027 notification; exercise expected to cost ₹ 13,000 cr

NEW DELHI, June 16: Sixteen years after the last census in 2011, the government on Monday issued a notification for conducting India's 16th census which will include caste enumeration in 2027.

The census will be carried out with a reference date of October 1, 2026 in the snow-bound areas like Ladakh and March 1, 2027 in the rest of the country, the notification said.

"The reference date for the said census shall be 00.00 hours of the 1st day of March, 2027, except for the Union Territory of Ladakh and snow-bound non-synchronous areas of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir and the States of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand," it said.

In respect of Ladakh and snow-bound non-synchronous areas of the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir and the states of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the reference date shall be 00:00 hours of the first day of October, 2026, it said.

The massive exercise, which is expected to cost the government over ₹ 13,000 crore to give population-related data from across the country, will be conducted by

about 34 lakh enumerators and supervisors and around 1.3 lakh census functionaries armed with digital devices.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the preparation for the census with Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India Mritunjay Kumar Narayan, and other senior officials here on Sunday.

This is the 16th census since the exercise started and the eighth after Independence, a government statement said.

According to Article 246 of the Constitution, the census is a subject listed at 69 in the Union List in the Seventh Schedule. The census is the primary source of data collection from every section of the society and a decennial activity.

In the upcoming census, caste enumeration will also be done, the first such exercise since Independence. The last comprehensive caste-based count was done by the Britishers between 1881 and 1931. Caste was excluded from all census operations conducted since Independence.

The decision to include caste enumeration in the upcoming cen-

sus was taken by the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 30.

"Considering all these circumstances, and to ensure that our social fabric does not come under political pressure, it has been decided that caste enumeration should be included in the main census instead of being conducted as a separate survey," an official statement had said.

In 2010, then prime minister Manmohan Singh had assured the Lok Sabha that the matter of caste census would be considered in the cabinet. A group of ministers was formed to deliberate on this subject and majority of the political parties recommended conducting a caste census.

However, the previous Congress-led government opted for a survey instead of a caste census, known as the Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC).

The SECC conducted in 2011 under the UPA government did collect caste data but it was never fully published or utilised. Bihar and Telangana have conducted caste surveys in the last three years. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tension in Dhubri: CM attacks Cong

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday came down heavily on the Congress party, accusing it of resorting to "cheap thinking" and communal politicking in the wake of an alleged incident involving the desecration of a Hanuman temple in Dhubri district.

Speaking to the media, Sarma claimed that beef was intentionally thrown into the temple premises, sparking unrest in the area.

He stated that individuals arrested in connection with the case belong to the minority community.

"Look at the cheap thinking of Congress," Sarma said. "Beef was thrown into a Hanuman temple in Assam. The culprits are from the minority community, but Congress is blaming Hindus. This is the politics they play." Doubling down on his criticism, the Chief Minister accused the opposition party of long-standing "appeasement policies" and rejected suggestions that a Hindu could have been behind the alleged act. "Just imagine how narrow-minded one must be to think that a Hindu would desecrate a temple by placing beef there," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Investigation in Raja Raghuvanshi murder case not just confined to love triangle: Meghalaya DGP

SHILLONG, June 16: Meghalaya DGP Idashisha Nongrang on Monday said the investigators probing the murder of Indore businessman Raja Raghuvanshi in Sohra were not treating the love triangle as the only motive, and they are looking into various other angles.

Raja was hacked to death on May 23 while honeymooning in the Northeastern state. His wife Sonam, her boyfriend Raj and three hitmen were arrested in connection with the murder on June 9.

"We are investigating whether there is anything more to this case. It is unusual that within a few days of marriage, she (Sonam) would develop so much animosity against her husband," Nongrang told PTI.

"We are exploring all possible angles for this murder to have taken place. We have enough evidence, and loose ends are being tied up. We have a solid case," she added.

Sonam (25) and Raja (29) got married in Indore on May 11 and reached Meghalaya via Guwahati in Assam on May 21 for their honeymoon. Both of them

went "missing" on May 23 in Sohra in East Khasi Hills district, hours after checking out of a homestay at Nongriat village.

Raja's decomposed 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 his boyfriend and the three hitmen. Sonam told the investigators that the Raja's jewellery that went missing was kept in a "particular place", the DGP said.

"We will be looking into that," she said.

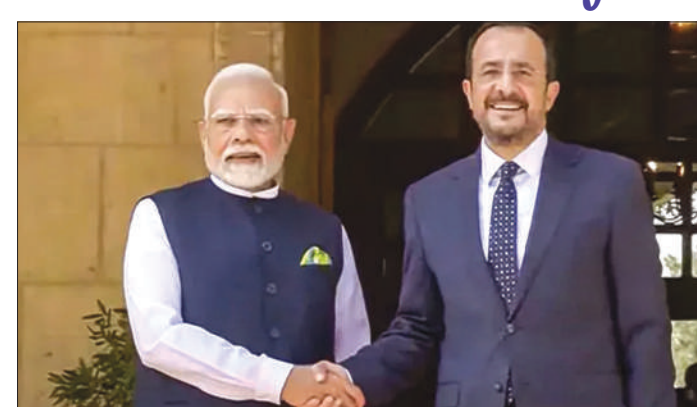
All those arrested will be taken to Sohra around 12 pm on Tuesday for the reconstruction of the crime scene, police said. The hitmen, who were Raj's friends, had attacked Raja on the head with a machete in front of Sonam at the parking lot of the Weisawdong Falls. They then pushed the body into the gorge, according to the police. Sonam fled the state following the murder, taking taxis, buses, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Modi pitches India as global growth engine at Cyprus business meet

NICOSIA, June 16: India will soon become the third-largest economy in the world, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has said, highlighting myriad economic opportunities the country offers to companies from Cyprus.

Modi, who is in Cyprus on the first leg of his three-nation tour, made the remarks as he, along with Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides, attended a business roundtable on Sunday in Limassol, a city on the southern coast of Cyprus.

The Prime Minister highlighted India's rapid economic transformation in the last 11 years and noted that the country, propelled by next-generation reforms, policy pre-



dictability, stable polity and Ease of Doing Business, has become the fastest-growing major economy in the world, the External Affairs

Ministry in New Delhi said in a statement.

Emphasising the primacy being given to innovation, digital revolu-

tion, start-ups and futuristic infrastructure development, he expressed confidence that India, the fifth largest economy in the world, was well positioned to become the third largest in a few years' time.

"India will soon become the third-largest economy in the world. India is one of the biggest emerging economies. We have implemented tax reforms, Goods and Services Tax, rationalised corporate tax, decriminalised laws, and are focusing on 'trust of doing business,' along with ease of doing business," he said that steady growth in India's civil aviation, port, shipbuilding, digital payments and green development sectors has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Iran-Israel war: Govt to meet stakeholders this week to assess impact on India's trade

NEW DELHI, June 16: The government is closely monitoring the situation arising from the Iran-Israel conflict, and a meeting with shipping lines, container firms, and other stakeholders will be held this week to assess the impact on the country's overseas trade and address any issue, a top official said on Monday.

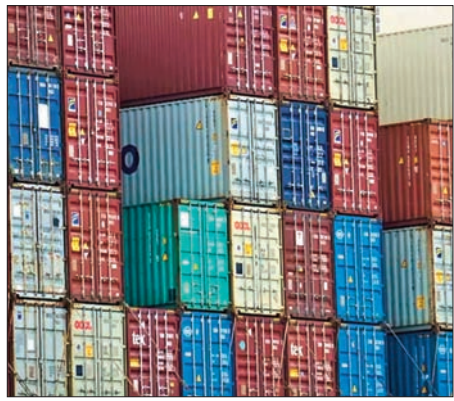
Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said that the impact of the war on India's trade will depend on how the situation unfolds over a period of time. "We are watching the situation. We are also calling a meeting (this week) of all the shipping lines, the container organisations and the concerned departments, and stakeholders to understand from them that what are the kind of issues they are facing and how we can sort it out," he told reporters here.

Exporters have stated that the war, if escalated further, would impact world trade and push both air and sea freight rates.

They have expressed apprehensions that the conflict is expected to impact movement of merchant ships from the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea. Nearly two-thirds of India's crude oil and half of its LNG imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran has now threatened to close.

This narrow waterway, only 21 miles wide at its narrowest point, handles nearly a fifth of global oil trade and is indispensable to India, which depends on imports for over 80 per cent of its energy needs.

According to think tank GTRI, any closure



or military disruption in the Strait of Hormuz would sharply increase oil prices, shipping costs, and insurance premiums, triggering inflation, pressuring the rupee, and complicating India's fiscal management.

Meanwhile, Israel's June 14-15 strike on Houthi military leadership in Yemen has also heightened tensions in the Red Sea region, where Houthi forces have already attacked commercial shipping. For India, this poses another serious risk.

Nearly 30 per cent of India's west-bound exports to Europe, North Africa, and the US East Coast travel through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, now vulnerable to further disruption, the GTRI has said. Indian export consignments gradually started moving through the Red Sea route but

now again it may get impacted. Cargo ships had gradually returned on Red Sea routes, saving them 15-20 days while moving to US and Europe from India and other parts of Asia. The present conflict that began with an attack on Israel on October 7, 2023 had brought cargo movement through Red Sea routes to a halt due to attacks by Houthi rebels on commercial shipping. After the US intervened with attacks on the rebels, the firing on commercial ships stopped.

Last year, the situation around the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, a crucial shipping route connecting the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea to the Indian Ocean, escalated due to attacks by Yemen-based Houthi militants.

Around 80 per cent of India's merchandise trade with Europe passes through the Red Sea and substantial trade with the US also takes this route. Both these geographies account for 34 per cent of the country's total exports.

The Red Sea strait is vital for 30 per cent of global container traffic and 12 per cent of world trade. India's exports to Israel have fallen sharply to USD 2.1 billion in 2024-25 from USD 4.5 billion in 2023-24. Imports from Israel came down to USD 1.6 billion in the last fiscal from USD 2.0 billion in 2023-24. Similarly, exports to Iran of USD 1.4 billion, which were at the same level in 2024-25 as well as in 2023-24, could also suffer. India's imports from Iran were at USD 441 million in FY25 as against USD 625 million in the previous year. (PTI)

Airtel rolls out AI-based system to combat online fraud in Assam and NE

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Bharti Airtel has announced a major technological intervention to curb the growing menace of online fraud in Assam and the Northeast, revealing that its AI-powered fraud detection system has already shielded over 1.35 million users across the region within just 33 days of its launch.

According to an official statement, the system, which has been automatically enabled for all Airtel mobile and broadband users, identifies and blocks malicious links shared via SMS, WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, email, and web browsers in real time. The platform scans more than one billion URLs daily and is capable of blocking harmful sites in under 100 milliseconds. Citing an example, the statement said that if a user in Guwahati receives a message with a fraudulent delivery link—such as "Your package is delayed. Track it here: http://www.trackyourparcel.com"—the system scans the link upon access. If deemed suspicious, it instantly blocks the site and redirects the user to a warning page that reads: "Blocked! Airtel found this site dangerous!" This real-time response mechanism has helped protect users from phishing, fake deliveries, and fraudulent banking alerts, particularly in high-risk zones such as Guwahati, Shillong, Kohima, Itanagar, and remote districts including Morigaon, Nagaon, and Dhubri.

Commenting on the rollout, Rabi Shankar Mishra, CEO — Assam and Northeast, Bharti Airtel, said, "We are thrilled to advance our efforts in combating all emerging digital threats. Today, we are pleased to introduce the world's first AI-driven fraud detection solution integrated into our network infrastructure. We are confident that this solution will serve as a significant differentiator and provide a completely new, safe, and secure digital experience for customers in the Assam and Northeast region."

The AI system is designed to operate silently in the background, requires no installation by users, and is provided free of cost.

Significantly, it offers fraud alerts in local languages including Assamese, ensuring greater effectiveness among populations with limited English proficiency or digital literacy. The initiative assumes importance as Assam and the Northeast continue to emerge as digitally progressive regions, with increasing reliance on online banking, education, and government e-services.

Sensex, Nifty rebound nearly 1 pc on value buying, global share rally

MUMBAI, June 16: Shrugging off geopolitical concerns amid escalating tensions between Israel and Iran, stock markets rebounded by nearly 1 per cent on Monday following value buying in oil & gas and IT shares and gains in other Asian markets as Brent crude oil prices dropped.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 677.55 points or 0.84 per cent to settle at 81,796.15 with 27 of its constituents ending in the green and three with losses. During the day, it surged 747.22 points or 0.92 per cent to 81,865.82. The 50-share NSE Nifty climbed 227.90 points or 0.92 per cent to 24,946.50. Among Sensex firms, UltraTech Cement rose the most by 2.39 per cent. Tech Mahindra, HCL Tech, Tata Consultancy Services, Eternal, Asian Paints, Tata Steel and Kotak Mahindra Bank were among the gainers. Tata Motors, Adani Ports and Sun Pharma were the laggards.

"Despite ongoing geopolitical tensions between Israel and Iran, the market moved higher, supported by gains in large-cap stocks, as investors maintained their focus on long-term fundamentals in the time of volatile situations. Geopolitical developments in the Middle East are likely to influence near-term market sentiment, with any signs of de-escalation being closely monitored," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

"Among sectors, oil and gas recorded strong gains, while the IT sector outperformed in anticipation of the

upcoming US Fed policy meeting, which is expected to provide further clarity on the interest rate outlook," Nair added. The BSE midcap gauge jumped 0.93 per cent and smallcap index climbed 0.38 per cent.

All BSE sectoral indices ended higher. IT jumped 1.50 per cent, followed by BSE Focused IT (1.50 per cent), tech (1.35 per cent), oil & gas (1.22 per cent), realty (1.21 per cent), services (1.10 per cent) and consumer durables (1.05 per cent).

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 markets were quoting in the green. US markets ended lower on Friday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.81 per cent to USD 73.63 a barrel. Wholesale price inflation (WPI) declined to a 14-month low of 0.39 per cent in May on easing prices of food articles and fuel.

"Despite mounting global uncertainty triggered by escalating tensions in the Middle East, Indian markets remained resilient," Sundar Kewat, Technical and Derivatives Analyst, Ashika Institutional Equity — Ashika Stock Broking part of Ashika Group, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,263.52 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. In the previous two sessions, the BSE Sensex lost 1,396.54 points or 1.69 per cent, and the Nifty dropped 422.8 points or 1.68 per cent. (PTI)

Mega conference for CA students concludes

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: The two-day Mega Conference for CA Students 2025, organised by the Board of Studies — Operations of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), concluded on a successful note in Guwahati on Sunday. The event, hosted by the Guwahati Branch of EIRCAS, commenced on June 14 and drew enthusiastic participation from students, subject experts, motivational speakers, and dignitaries from across the country.

In his welcome address, CA Vikash Kumar Choudhury, Chairman of EIRCASA Guwahati, introduced the conference theme—"Parivridhhi: Sankalp Se Siddhi Tak."

Assam Education and Tribal Affairs (Plain) Minister Dr Ranaj Pegu conveyed his best wishes through a message, lauding the initiative and its importance in shaping future professionals.

The conference was attended by key ICAI functionaries including CA Sanjib Sanghi, Vice Chairman of the Board of Studies — Operations and Conference Co-Chairman; CA Ravi Kumar Patwa, Central Council Member and Conference Director; CA Mayur Agrawal, Vice Chairman of EIRC and Chairman of EIRCASA; and CA Raginee Goyal, Chairperson of

the Guwahati Branch of EIRC.

The two-day event featured a series of knowledge and skill-enhancement sessions.

Day one began with a session on Direct Tax chaired by Advocate (CA) Giridhar Dhelia from Kolkata, followed by a "Skill-Up" session by CA Vijay Sarda from Pune. A session on Accounting and Auditing Standards, led by CA Yagnesh Desai from Mumbai, and an interactive discussion with the Board of Studies — Operations concluded the first day's proceedings.

Day two featured a knowledge session on Indirect Taxation by CA Yash Dhadha of Jaipur.

This was followed by sessions on startups by CA Shivam Palan and a motivational talk by CA Rajesh Sharma, Central Council Member, ICAI. The final session focused on Artificial Intelligence and was chaired by CA Aashish Sachdev from Jaipur.

A student paper presentation competition was also held during the event, evaluated by CA (Dr) Kamal Mour and CA Anil Agarwal from Guwahati.

The top three presenters were felicitated at the valedictory session.

Commenting on the success of the event, CA Jay Prakash Gupta, Secretary of the Guwahati Branch, said the conference provided an invaluable platform for knowledge sharing and networking.

GRA holds 8th annual general meeting in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: The Guwahati Realtors Association (GRA) held its 8th Annual General Meeting (AGM) on Saturday evening at Hotel Nandan, drawing participation from over fifty bona fide members and associates.

The meeting commenced with the National Anthem, following which GRA Secretary Abhimanyu Modi presented and confirmed the minutes of the previous AGM.

Treasurer Pabitra Kumar Deka tabled the financial report for the fiscal year 2024-25.

GRA President Gaurav Agarwal reviewed the association's achievements over the past year and presented a video showcasing key activities. Mementos were distributed to members in recognition of their contributions.

Agarwal also announced the new Governing Body for 2025-26 and formally inducted nine new members, reflecting the association's growing presence in Assam's real estate sector.

A key highlight of the evening was a panel discussion on "Real Estate — Strategies & Best Practices," featuring Sumanth Reddy, Chairman of NAR India, as the Chief Guest.

The panel also included Anup Dalmia, Vice President of NAR India and President of RECA Kolkata, and Rajesh Baid, Director (East Zone) of NAR India, as guests of honour.

Contd. from Page 1...

MPLAD funds misuse: CM's SVC

"I respect him, but the road project that he had recommended does not exist," Sarma told reporters. "These people carry a very good face value in front of the public. In this case, only his statement was pending. After this, the report will be submitted to the court. Many ACS officers have already been terminated from service after being found guilty in the case," the CM said.

The investigation was initiated following media reports in February 2023, which alleged widespread corruption and misappropriation of MPLAD funds during 2021-22 and 2022-23. A regular inquiry was launched by the SVC. As a result, several Assam Civil Services (ACS) officers were suspended, and some were later dismissed for their involvement in the scandal. The Vigilance Cell has yet to issue a public statement on the questioning or the status of the case. (With inputs from PTI)

ONGC gas leak enters day 5

The well has not caught fire yet and no one is injured in the incident, while all emergency services have been pressed in the area, a company official said. An ONGC official had earlier said that it was an old crude well without production and a perforation job was going on for zone transfer at the time of the blowout. "It is a kind of servicing of the well. The production was supposed to start from a new zone after the perforation job. At the time of the incident, the logging perforation operation was going on. Suddenly gas started coming out in an uncontrolled manner immediately after the perforation, leading to the blowout," he had added. (PTI)

CEM inaugurates exhibition

Addressing the gathering, CEM Tuliram Ronghang described the BJP-led NDA government as pro-poor. He cited initiatives such as free distribution of rice under the NFSA, which provides 5 kg per person each month, and the Ayushman Bharat scheme that offers free treatment up to ₹5 lakh for economically disadvantaged individuals. Reflecting on the condition of the hill districts prior to 2014, Ronghang said that Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao had been plagued by ethnic clashes, frequent bandhs, extremism, and developmental stagnation. Referring to the 1996 Charchim massacre where 41 innocent travellers were killed during a peak of insurgency, he said the situation has drastically changed under the Modi government.

Six extremist groups have since laid down arms and a tripartite peace accord was signed between the Centre, the Assam government and the militant organisations in recent years. He noted that the return of peace has paved the way for development in the region, with more progress expected in the next three years.

Ronghang further added that while the Congress government failed to allocate sufficient funds to KAAC, the BJP government has since doubled the financial outlay for the council. The Baithak was attended by Diphu MP Amarsing Tisso, MLA Rupsing Teron, KAAC Deputy Chairman Avijit Koro, President of BJP West Karbi Anglong District Committee Radip Ronghang, and other party functionaries.

Sonowal announces major infra push

National Waterway-37. In Uttar Pradesh, a freight village is being developed by National Highways Logistics Management Limited (NHLML), a subsidiary of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), to support multimodal cargo movement. Fairway maintenance works are already underway across NW-1, including the Varanasi-Ballia stretch, to ensure round-the-year navigability. A QPOM has been deployed at Nauranga in Ballia to address connectivity bottlenecks.

Fifteen community jetties are being developed in Uttar Pradesh, with onshore infrastructure already under construction at eight locations and two more under consideration. Two hybrid electric catamaran vessels have been deployed in Varanasi and Ayodhya, alongside a hydrogen-fuelled vessel and two Ro-Pax ferries for passenger cruise services. The operational Multi-Modal Terminal at Varanasi has positioned the state as a critical hub in the revitalised inland waterways ecosystem. A feasibility study is currently underway to replicate the Kochi Water Metro model in Varanasi, Ayodhya, and Prayagraj, subject to geographical suitability.

Speaking about the progress made in Uttar Pradesh, Sonowal said that the Jal Marg Vikas Project (JMVP) has made the state a major beneficiary of IWT revival on NW-1. The launch of MV Ganga Vilas—the world's longest river cruise—by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2023, which began its journey from Varanasi, has bolstered river cruise tourism in the state. The implementation of schemes like 'Jalvahak', offering incentives for cargo movement, and 'Harit Nauka', promoting low-emission vessels, has further advanced the state's leadership in sustainable river transport. In Bihar, the minister announced plans to explore a Water Metro project in Patna, inspired by the Kochi model, to provide clean and modern mobility across both banks of the Ganga. A new ship repair facility and the upgrading of the National Inland Navigation Institute (NINI) into a Centre of Excellence are also planned. Sixteen community jetties are being developed to enhance passenger connectivity, and Kalgahat Terminal is being positioned to handle cargo bound for Nepal. Infrastructure plans include four QPOMs, two Ro-Pax terminals, and two hybrid electric catamaran vessels. The IWA and the Bihar government signed an SSA to deepen collaboration on community jetties, cruise tourism, and QPOM operations.

In West Bengal, Sonowal noted that the Haldia terminal, already operational and integrated with Indo-Bangladesh Protocol routes, is establishing the state as a vital gateway for cross-border trade. The upcoming Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025, is expected to streamline cargo movement between inland and coastal waterways. West Bengal is also emerging as a key destination for river cruise tourism. Fifteen community jetties have already been commissioned, and work on seven more is in progress. Fairway maintenance is underway on important stretches including Farakka-Kahalgaon, and onshore facilities are being constructed at eight locations to support local logistics and passenger movement.

In Jharkhand, the Multi-Modal Terminal at Sahibganj is already operational and is significantly contributing to cargo movement along NW-1. Two community jetties are under development to improve local access. An integrated cluster-cum-logistics park is being planned at Sahibganj, with a memorandum of understanding signed between IWA, NHLML, and RVNL. A traffic study is being conducted to support the project.

The Union Minister highlighted that the JMVP, launched in January 2018 at a cost of ₹5,061 crore, aims to develop a 1,390 km stretch of NW-1 from Haldia to Varanasi with assured depth and width for navigation. As of May 2025, the project is nearly 69% complete, with cargo traffic increasing from 5.05 million metric tonnes in 2014-15 to 16.38 MMT in 2024-25. The project includes community jetties, navigational locks to reduce transit time, cargo terminals, and various facilities to support both commercial and passenger traffic.

Since 2014, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the inland waterways sector has seen a transformative shift. The number of operational national waterways has increased from three to 29, and cargo movement has grown more than seven-fold—from 18 million tonnes to over 145 million tonnes in 2025. Investments in the sector have crossed ₹6,300 crore. Today, 124 terminals are operational, including 27 permanent and 97 floating ones. A total of 111 waterways have been declared, spanning 23 states and four Union Territories, with a combined navigable length of over 20,000 km. In the financial year 2024-25, cargo movement on these waterways reached 145.84 MMT, with bulk commodities such as coal, iron ore, fly ash, cement, and vehicles forming 85% of the total.

India positioned to become world's

opened myriad opportunities for companies from Cyprus to partner with India, the statement said. "For the first time in 23 years, an Indian Prime Minister has visited Cyprus, and the first event that has been organised is the business roundtable meeting. This shows the importance of business leaders in the India-Cyprus relationship," the Prime Minister said. He also underlined the strengths of India's skilled talent and start-up ecosystem and highlighted manufacturing, AI, quantum, semiconductor and critical minerals as new and emerging areas contributing to India's growth story.

"You all (business leaders) are aware of India's talent and demographic dividend. In the last 10 years, a digital revolution has taken place in India. Around 50 per cent of the world's digital transactions take place in India, thanks to the Unified Payments Interface or UPI. Countries like France are associated with this, and talks are also underway with Cyprus for this, and I welcome this move," he said. Prime Minister noted that Cyprus was a significant economic partner for India, particularly in the Foreign Direct Investment sector and welcomed the keen interest in Cyprus for new investments into the Indian economy. (PTI)

Govt issues Census 2027 notification;

While some states have conducted surveys to enumerate castes, these surveys have varied in transparency and intent, with some conducted purely from a "political angle, creating doubts in society", the government had said. In the upcoming exercise, the provision of self-enumeration will also be made available to the people. The two-phased census will start with the first step of house-listing operation (HLO) in which the housing conditions, assets and amenities of each household will be collected. This will be followed by the second phase of population enumeration in which the demographic, socio-economic, cultural and other details of every person in each household will be gathered. Very stringent data security measures would be kept in place to ensure data security at the time of collection, transmission and storage. (PTI)

Tension in Dhubri: CM attacks

"If anyone files such a complaint, the first question should be: what evidence do you have?" Sarma further asserted that similar incidents in the past have also involved individuals from the minority community. However, he stressed that such acts were the work of isolated miscreants and not representative of the entire community. "Most members of the minority community are strongly opposed to such acts and condemn them," he noted. "But among them, there are a few who engage in these misdeeds." Calling for restraint and responsibility in public discourse, Sarma urged political leaders and critics not to level accusations without clear evidence. "Those who blame Hindus must present proof," he said. "Baseless allegations only serve to malign entire communities and deepen divisions."

The controversy has further inflamed political tensions in Assam, with the Congress party questioning the government's narrative and cautioning against communalising the issue. The state government, meanwhile, has maintained that the case is being pursued based on factual findings rather than political influence.

The unrest in Dhubri followed the discovery of suspected cattle remains near the Hanuman temple in Ward No. 3 of the town. Police have arrested at least 50 individuals so far in connection with the incident. As investigations continue, the episode highlights the fragile intersection of religion and politics in Assam, where communal flashpoints often take on broader socio-political dimensions.

Investigation in Raja Raghuvanshi

and a train to reach Indore via Assam, West Bengal, Bihar and UP. She, however, left behind her 'mangalsutra' and a ring in her trolley bag at a homestay in Sohra, leading the police to suspect her, Nongrang had earlier told PTI.

Meanwhile, a video posted by a tourist on Instagram went viral after Sonam and Raja were spotted in it. In the video, Sonam and Raja were seen ascending from Nongriat just hours before he was brutally murdered. Sonam, wearing black trousers with a white full-sleeved shirt similar to the one recovered from the crime scene, was seen walking a few steps ahead of Raja.

Police confirmed the authenticity of the video to PTI. East Khasi Hills district SP Vivek Syiem told the news agency that Sonam has confessed to being a part of the conspiracy to kill her husband. "At first it appeared that Sonam and her boyfriend hired hitmen, but later we found out the three were close friends of Raj and they killed Raja as a favour to their friend," he said. (PTI)

Recognition of work motivates employees to perform better, fosters loyalty, builds trust: Study

GUWAHATI, June 16: Due recognition of work by a company always motivates its employees to perform better, builds trust and gives them a sense of belonging to the organisation, a study by two HR technology firms said.

Guwahati-based Vantage Circle and Mumbai's 'Great Place To Work India' have jointly published a research report, "The Recognition Effect: A Leadership Blueprint for Emotionally Intelligent Workplaces", which uncovers how recognition of efforts, when done right, becomes a transformative force for workplace culture and performance.

"At the heart of the study lies a powerful finding: recognition isn't just about acknowledgement, it is a strategic lever for trust, agility, innovation and retention. Organisations that build high-recognition cultures outperform their peers across multiple dimensions of employee

and business outcomes," the study mentioned.

In such a scenario, 91 per cent of employees surveyed feel motivated, 94 per cent say their organisation is a great place to work, and an equally high percentage affirms that their companies deliver excellent customer services, it added. "Nearly all respondents in such environments also associate their organisation with innovation and express a strong intent to stay," the paper stated.

The research also brings to light how recognition of work is experienced across gender, generations, roles and tenure — signalling the need for more inclusive approaches.

Commenting on the findings, Vantage Circle CEO and Co-founder Partha Neog said, "The true power of recognition and rewards lies not in what is given, but in what is genuinely felt. When done with intention, recognition becomes

more than a moment -- it becomes a cultural signal that shows people they matter."

Due recognition of an employee's work builds trust, pride and belonging for the organisation, he said.

"We believe that a culture of recognition develops engaged and loyal employees. When organisations make employee appreciation an intentional and integral part of workplace culture, they unlock the true potential of their people," Great Place To Work India Chief Executive Officer Balbir Singh said.

Recognition in the workplace helps employees see that their company values them and their contributions, fostering loyalty and engagement, he added. "Recognition programmes are a crucial part of the employee experience and a key driver of perceptions of fairness in the workforce, Singh said. (PTI)

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Inspects Erosion Control Works of Jarasar River in Balipara Guardian Minister Pijush Hazarika chairs review meeting in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 16: Assam Water Resources Minister and Guardian Minister for Sonitpur district, Pijush Hazarika, chaired a comprehensive review meeting at the Deputy Commissioner's conference hall in Sonitpur on Monday. The meeting focused on the progress and implementation of three flagship welfare schemes — Orunodoi 3.0, Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Assam, and the Women Entrepreneurship Mission.

The session was attended by Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rabha, Rangapara MLA Krishna Kamal Tanti, Barchala MLA Ganesh Kumar Limbu, along with senior officials of the district administration and members of the District Monitoring Committee overseeing the schemes' implementation.

Addressing the gathering, Minister Hazarika emphasised the government's commitment to inclusive development and instructed the administration to en-



sure that no eligible beneficiary is left out. He reiterated the vision of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to uplift every section of society through targeted welfare programs. He also directed the Deputy Commissioner to maintain strict monitoring and ensure timely completion of all project-related tasks.

Inspects Flood Mitigation

Works in Balipara

Following the meeting, the Minister visited Balipara to inspect the ongoing erosion control and embankment strengthening works on the Jarasar River, which has long caused severe erosion and recurrent flooding, especially in the Dighali Balijan area under the Naduar constituency.

Minister Hazarika was accompanied by Naduar MLA Padma Hazarika and Rangapara MLA Krishna Kamal Tanti during the site inspection. He interacted with local residents and assured them of the government's firm resolve to permanently address the flooding and erosion issues in the region.

The Water Resources Department is currently executing critical mitigation measures, including the installation of approximately 1,200 meters of Geo Mega Tubes, designed to both heighten and strengthen the embankments. Minister Hazarika informed the public that the use of Geo Mega Tubes has significantly enhanced the durability of the protection works, reducing the risk of future damage.

The visit highlighted the state government's proactive approach in addressing long-standing environmental challenges and reaffirmed its dedication to the welfare of the people of Sonitpur.

CEM Pramod Boro chairs high-level meeting on Bashbari land issue

Concerns over proposed Adani Thermal Power Project addressed

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 16: In a bid to address growing public concerns over the proposed Adani Thermal Power Project at Bashbari in Parbatjhora subdivision of Kokrajhar district, a high-level joint meeting was held on Monday at the BTC Secretariat, Bodoa Nwgr, under the chairmanship of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Chief Executive Member (CEM) Pramod Boro.

The meeting brought together officials of the BTR government, the District Commissioner, senior police officials, circle officers, and representatives from the BJP and All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU). The ABSU delegation was led by president Dipen Boro and general secretary Khanindra Basumatary.

At the heart of the discussion was the BTR government's decision to allot 3,400 bighas of land to APDCL, which would then lease it to the Adani Group for setting up a thermal power plant. The proposed project site lies in an area inhabited by Boro, Garo, and Rabha tribal communities, triggering widespread opposition and fear among locals over potential displacement and loss of agricultural land.

Recent tensions in the area, including scuffles between villagers and police during a boundary demarcation drive, have raised alarms, with opposition parties intensifying their campaigns against the land allotment.

Speaking to the media following the meeting, CEM Pramod Boro assured that no agricultural, revenue, or private land would be taken from villagers and that no



forced eviction would occur. He said, "Once the ₹ 18,000 crore thermal power plant becomes operational, it is expected to directly or indirectly benefit 8,000 to 10,000 local youths through employment and allied opportunities."

He stressed that the project would be implemented peacefully and transparently, ensuring that the rights and properties of local residents are safeguarded.

ABSU President Dipen Boro confirmed that the meeting, which lasted over one and a half hours, involved detailed discussions on the emotions and concerns of the local people. He emphasized that four rounds of satellite surveys have already been conducted and clarified that:

"No paddy field or private property will be affected. The proposed project site will maintain a buffer distance of 200 to 1,500 metres from the nearest villages."

He added that the Adani Group and APDCL have assured the use of advanced technology to minimize environmental impact and pollution, and a Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) would be signed to ensure job reservations and engagement for locals.

While many villagers remain uncertain about the project's impact, the land issue has now become a flashpoint between the ruling UPPL and opposition parties like the BPF and Congress. Notably, BPF MLA Rabiram Narzary has supported the establishment of the plant, citing its potential to generate employment, even as other BPF factions oppose the project.

Responding to concerns about industrialization targeting tribal lands, CEM Boro said industries are essential for economic development, but added, "The government is fully committed to protecting tribal lands under the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation Act, 1886 (Amended 1948)."

Meanwhile, ABSU maintained that it would not compromise on job guarantees, citing past examples where companies like NTPC and BRPL provided minimal employment to locals.

The meeting concluded with a shared resolve to balance economic development with protection of indigenous land and livelihoods, while assuring the public that their concerns will be central to all future developments.

Silk Samagra-2 Project launched in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 16: Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Kache Rongpi, ceremonially launched the Silk Samagra-2 project at the Collective Mulberry Garden (CMG), Bithphang on Monday. Aimed at promoting the eri silk industry in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, the project covers the fiscal year 2024-2025 and has a total outlay of ₹ 4.24 crore, with 90% funding from the Central Government and 10% contribution from beneficiaries.

Sponsored by the Central Silk Board, Bengaluru, and implemented by the Sericulture Department, KAAC, the project will benefit 340 beneficiaries across development blocks including Lum-bajong, Bokajan, Nilip, Langsompi, Howraghat, Rongkhang, Chinthong, Rong-

mongve, and Samelangso.

As part of the launch, cheques of ₹ 9,382 (first installment) and nursery seedlings of Kesseru plants—the primary food plant for eri silkworms—were distributed to each beneficiary.

Addressing the gathering, EM Rongpi highlighted the cultural importance of eri silk among Karbi and other tribal communities. "Silk Samagra-2 is a valuable opportunity to revive and promote the traditional practice of silkworm rearing among our people. The finest quality eri silk from Karbi Anglong is already being exported to international markets," she said.

Rongpi also acknowledged the delay in availing the scheme, stating, "We missed out on Silk Samagra-1. Silk Samagra-2 is already nearing its end, but thanks to our efforts and coordination with Sericulture officials and the Central

Silk Board, we secured a portion of the project funds for Karbi Anglong." She encouraged beneficiaries to utilize the funds effectively to plant food crops, purchase spinning machines, and construct rearing houses. To mark the occasion, the EM and department officials planted Kesseru saplings on the premises.

Earlier, Deputy Secretary of KAAC, Deuri Ronghang, delivered the introductory address, followed by Extension Officer Longki Timung, who explained the benefits and goals of the project.

The event was attended by MAC Kadam Terangpi, Chairperson of the Sericulture Development Board Roshmi Teronpi, OSD Mohon Barman, Superintendent Jaghat Rabha, and other officials. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks from Additional Director Rongbong Rongphar.

Pragiyotishpur University & Vidya Bharati Drive rural empowerment through piggery initiative

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: In a significant step towards rural development and sustainable livelihood promotion, Pragiyotishpur University and Vidya Bharati Shiksha Sanskriti Trust, in collaboration with the National Research Centre on Pig (NRC), Rani, organised a Piggery Food Distribution Programme aimed at strengthening community ties and promoting hygienic piggery practices.

The event witnessed the distribution of fresh piggery products and educational materials on clean and scientific animal husbandry techniques. NRC experts engaged with attendees, underlining the nutritional value and income-generating potential of pig farming, particularly for underprivileged rural households.

Notable dignitaries at the event included Avnish Bhatnagar, Vice President of Vidya Bharati; Dr. Vivek Kumar Gupta, Director of NRC on Pig; and Dr. Pranab Jyoti Das, Principal Scientist, NRC. They collectively emphasised the vital role of research, education, and community engagement in fostering grassroots development.

Speaking at the event, Prof. Dr. Jogesh Kakati, Registrar of Pragiyotishpur University, underscored the importance of translating academic knowledge into actionable benefits for society. Representatives from Vidya Bharati also stressed the synergy between education, values, and service in shaping resilient rural communities.

The programme concluded with interactive sessions and a communal meal, fostering dialogue between experts and beneficiaries. Sanchi Ram Payeng from Shishu Shiksha Samiti, Assam, delivered the vote of thanks, expressing appreciation to all partners and participants.

Foundation stone laid for Akshaya Patra centralised community kitchen in Lakhimpur

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday laid the foundation stone and performed the bhoomi puja for a centralised community kitchen of the Akshaya Patra Foundation at Bebeja Kumartip in the Azad area of Lakhimpur district.

According to an official statement, the facility will be built over 16 bighas and 3 kathas of land at an estimated cost of ₹ 25.50 crore and is aimed at providing midday meals to schoolchildren across the district.

The kitchen, being set up under the PM Poshan scheme—a component of the Samagra Shiksha Mission—is expected to be completed by September 2025. The complex will include a staff training centre, a multi-purpose hall, administrative offices, senior management quarters, and other necessary infrastructure.

Speaking on the occasion, chief minister Sarma described the event as a milestone for Lakhimpur's education sector.

He stated that with support from the state government and the Akshaya Patra Foundation, the kitchen will deliver nutritious and hygienic meals to students on time, allowing teachers to focus solely on academics.

He added that this initiative would also improve student attendance and learning outcomes. Recalling his tenure as Assam's minister of education and health, Sarma said he was inspired by the Foundation's work during a visit to Bengaluru, after which he invited it to Assam.

The collaboration began in Jalukbari and was later extended to Kamrup and Kamrup Metropolitan districts. In 2022, a kitchen was launched in Jorhat, with similar facilities under construction in Majuli and Nalbari.

Preparatory work is also underway in Sonitpur, and a foundation stone was laid for another unit in Dibrugarh just a day earlier.

Calling food provision a humanitarian service, the chief minister praised the Akshaya Patra Foundation for effectively utilising both government and private resources to deliver nutritious meals.

He said the Foundation also extends support during natural disasters, such as by providing food to flood relief camps.

On employment concerns, Sarma assured that cooks and helpers engaged under the previous midday meal scheme would not be displaced. Instead, they would be employed by the Foundation to help with the distribution of meals delivered to schools.

The chief minister reiterated the government's commitment to public welfare, citing schemes such as the 108 ambulance service and the establishment of cancer treatment centres.

Pijush Hazarika visits erosion-hit Dehing Kal Ghar Gaon in Demow



HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 16: Assam Water Resources Department Minister Pijush Hazarika on Sunday visited Dehing Kal Ghar Gaon, under the Demow Revenue Circle of 95 No. Demow Constituency, to assess the impact of ongoing riverbank erosion in the area.

During his visit, locals of the erosion-affected village apprised the minister of their long-standing grievances and hardships due to the recurring erosion problem. In response, Minister Hazarika assured that erosion control work along a 1.5-kilometre stretch of the Dehing river will commence immediately after the current rainy season.

Speaking to the media, Hazarika highlighted the government's efforts over the last four years in the constituency. "Around ₹ 120 crore worth of work has already been completed in Demow, addressing 80 per cent of the flood-related issues," he said. The minister also promised that the remaining works will be completed in due course.

A resident of Dehing Kal Ghar Gaon informed that erosion has been a chronic issue for decades, displacing several families from the area. Although repeated representations have been made to the concerned authorities and the state government, a permanent solution is yet to be implemented. Currently, around 100 families reside in the village, many of whom live under constant threat of displacement.

The villagers have appealed directly to the Chief Minister of Assam to intervene and ensure a long-term, sustainable solution to the erosion crisis.

Later in the day, Minister Hazarika also visited the Liabil area under the same constituency. He was accompanied by Sushanta Borgohain, MLA of 95 No. Demow Constituency, along with senior BJP leaders, officials from the Water Resources Department, and representatives from the Demow Co-District Administration.

Debashish Sarma takes charge as New Nagaon Deputy Commissioner

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 16: Debashish Sarma, the newly appointed District Commissioner (DC) of Nagaon, officially took charge of his office on Monday, marking the beginning of his administrative tenure in the district. Earlier in the day, a farewell ceremony was held at the office of the District Commissioner to bid adieu to the outgoing DC, Narendra Kumar Shah. The event was presided over by Manoj Kumar Chikariya, Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad.

During the ceremony, members of the district administration, heads of departments, and staff members of the DC's office warmly felicitated Narendra Kumar Shah and expressed their appreciation for his leadership and contributions to the district. Many recalled their positive experiences and shared memories of working with him. In his farewell speech, Shah extended his heartfelt thanks to the district officials and staff for their co-operation and support throughout his tenure. He also shared reflections on his time in Nagaon, highlighting the challenges and achievements during his service. CEO Manoj Kumar Chikariya conveyed his best wishes to the outgoing DC, wishing him continued success and good health for him and his family in his future endeavors. In the afternoon, Debashish Sarma formally assumed office as the new DC. According to an official press release, he was warmly welcomed by district officials and staff members.

DGP visits Dhubri amid communal tension

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI, June 16: In response to recent communal tensions in Dhubri, Assam Director General of Police (DGP) Harmeet Singh visited the district on Monday to assess the ground situation and ensure continued peace. The DGP held a series of meetings with delegations from various communities and stakeholders, and later assured the public that law and order remains firmly under control. "I have met with all kinds of delegations, and the situation is under control. The delegations have also expressed confidence that peace is prevailing," said DGP Singh during a media briefing.

Taking a stern stance, Singh warned against any attempt to disrupt harmony and stated unequivocally that lawlessness will not be tolerated under any circumstances. He also issued a strong warning against rumour-mongering and the spread of fake news, stressing that the police are actively monitoring such activities.

Punam Chauhan of Karbi Anglong secures 7th rank in B Pharma Exam

Her exceptional performance in the 8th semester (final) examination earned her statewide recognition



HT Correspondent

KHERONI, June 16: In a proud and inspiring moment for the Chauhan community, Punam Chauhan, daughter of Jaiprakash Chauhan and Rina Devi, has secured the seventh rank in the Bachelor of Pharmacy (B. Pharma) Examination – 2025, conducted by the Srimanta Sankaradeva University of Health Sciences (SSUHS).



Hailing from Kalamising Tisso Gaon, a remote village under Bakulaghat Police Station in Karbi Anglong district, Punam is the first girl from her community to achieve such a milestone in the pharmaceutical sector—marking a historic breakthrough.

A student of the Regional College of Pharmaceutical Sciences (RCPHS), Guwahati, Punam completed the four-year undergraduate

programme (FYUP) in Pharmacy, which focuses on the study of drugs, their development, and their effects on the human body. Her exceptional performance in the 8th semester (final) examination earned her statewide recognition.

Speaking about her achievement, Punam said, "This journey was challenging, but my parents' support and my determination kept me going. I hope my success inspires other girls from remote areas to pursue their dreams in the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors."

Punam's academic journey began at Saraswati Vidya Niketan, Lokejjan, Bakulia, where she passed her high school in 2017 with 70% marks. She then pursued higher secondary education at Maryam Ajmal Women's College of Science and Technology, under the Ajmal Foundation in Hojai, securing 68% in 2019.

Her consistent hard work, resilience, and academic excellence paved the way for admission into the competitive B. Pharma program and culminated in her top-10 rank in 2025.

Punam Chauhan's story is not just a personal success—it's a beacon of hope and motivation for students from rural and underrepresented communities across Assam. Her achievement underscores the transformative power of education and determination in overcoming social and geographical barriers.

Lakhijan Baptist Church celebrates Father's Day

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, June 16: The Lakhijan Baptist Church (BC) under the Nihang Karbi Baptist Association (NKBA), Saphapani Area, joyfully celebrated Father's Day on Sunday, honoring the contributions and love of fathers in the community.

The celebration was held under the biblical theme from Jeremiah 17:7 — "Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord." The service commenced at 11:00 AM, with Birtina Derapi, President of the Church's Women Department, chairing the programme. Church Secretary Ranjit Hanse made the official announcement.

In a heartfelt gesture, the Women's Department led prayers for the health, spiritual strength, and well-being of all fathers present. Tokens of love were also presented to them as a symbol of gratitude and appreciation.

The service concluded with an inspiring gospel message delivered by Rev. Dr. Aaron Teron, leaving a spiritual imprint on the congregation.

The church expressed hope that such observances would continue to strengthen family bonds and encourage deeper faith within the community.

AJYCP stages protest against big dams in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 16: The Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP), Nagaon district committee, staged a protest near the office of the Nagaon District Commissioner on Monday, demanding the closure of large river dams and the declaration of flood and erosion as national problems.

Raising slogans such as "Close the big river dams," "Declare flood and erosion as a national problem," and "Protect the indigenous people of Assam," the protesters voiced strong opposition to the construction and continued operation of large hydroelectric projects, which they claim exacerbate floods and erosion across Assam.

The protest was led by several key AJYCP leaders, including Pragiyotish Bonia, Deepmoni Bora, and Hemanta Das, and saw participation from numerous activists and supporters.

The AJYCP reiterated that floods and erosion have severely affected the lives and livelihoods of millions in Assam, displacing communities and damaging agricultural land every year. The organisation has long argued that big dams in the upstream regions contribute to the intensity of these disasters and must be reconsidered.

The protesters warned the government that if their demands are not met, they will be compelled to launch a more intensified agitation across the state.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

My father considered a walk among the mountains as the equivalent of churchgoing - Aldous Huxley

Volatile Middle East

Israel's attacks on Iran could lead to a catastrophic potential full-scale war, further destabilising an already volatile Middle East, with serious implications for global security. Such a conflict could disrupt global oil supplies, involve international powers, and deepen regional instability. Israel's June 13 airstrikes on Iranian soil have sharply escalated the long-running confrontation between the two arch-rivals. Codenamed Operation Rising Lion, the operation involved dozens of Israeli fighter jets targeting Iran's nuclear infrastructure, missile factories, and top military personnel. Explosions were reported in Tehran and at the Natanz uranium enrichment facility. According to Israel's Channel 12, Iran's Armed Forces Chief of Staff Mohammad Bagheri and several senior nuclear scientists may have been killed, though Iran has not officially confirmed the casualties. The strike followed months of rising tensions. Israeli officials cited intelligence that Iran had amassed enough enriched uranium to produce multiple nuclear weapons. A senior Israeli military official told Reuters that Iran could make up to 15 bombs within days. Israeli leadership framed the operation as a necessary step to counter an existential threat amid stalled diplomacy. Tehran denies seeking a nuclear weapon, but it stresses that it has a right to domestically enrich uranium—a process of altering the uranium atom to produce nuclear fuel. Earlier this week, Iran said it obtained a trove of secret documents on Israel's own undeclared nuclear arsenal. The immediate context includes not just military build-up but also failed diplomacy: US-Iran nuclear talks, scheduled for June 15 in Oman, were hanging by a thread before the airstrikes. It is now unclear whether they will go forward.

Just a day before the Israeli strikes, US President Donald Trump had issued two different sounding statements. As reported by Al Jazeera, within a day Trump had warned that there is a "chance of massive conflict" in the Middle East, confirming that an Israeli attack on Iran is "possible". Next, speaking to reporters on Thursday, Trump said he would "love to avoid the conflict" and suggested that the US would like Israel to hold off on plans to strike Iran's nuclear sites while Washington and Tehran continue their negotiations. Later on Thursday, the US president reiterated his commitments to diplomacy with Iran. "My entire Administration has been directed to negotiate with Iran," he wrote in a social media post. "They could be a Great Country, but they first must completely give up hopes of obtaining a Nuclear Weapon."

However, Washington's role goes beyond military posturing. While publicly disavowing military involvement, the US remains deeply invested in preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons and in managing the broader fallout from Israeli actions. Its long-standing diplomatic support for Israel, layered sanctions on Iran, and simultaneous pursuit of backchannel diplomacy highlight Washington's complex and often contradictory position in the conflict. The Israel-Iran conflict is a decades-long power struggle rooted in ideology, security threats, and competing visions for the Middle East. Israel sees Iran as its most dangerous enemy, primarily due to Tehran's pursuit of nuclear capabilities, its calls for Israel's destruction, and its sustained support for groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Israel believes that a nuclear-armed Iran would permanently alter the strategic balance in the region and pose an existential threat to the Jewish state.

All eyes on what Iran does to oil traffic through Strait of Hormuz

By: K Raveendran

Israel's strike against Iran has reignited a familiar tension in global energy markets, sending oil prices climbing into the mid-\$70 per barrel range. The impact is not just visible in the numbers, but in the broader nervousness sweeping across energy trading floors and geopolitical circles alike. At the heart of this movement lies the so-called "geopolitical risk premium"—the extra cost per barrel that markets price in when a key oil-producing region teeters on the brink of conflict. That premium has now risen to about \$8 a barrel, a level surpassing even the acute flashpoints of April and October 2024, when Israel and Iran directly exchanged strikes for the first time in decades.

This escalation has naturally drawn intense scrutiny, not only for the possibility of a broader military conflict but also for its potential to derail the delicate logistics of global oil supply. Among the many scenarios being modelled by analysts and strategists, one stands out as the most consequential: whether Iran will target the Strait of Hormuz. This narrow waterway, separating the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman, has long been considered the most critical chokepoint in the global oil trade. Some 12 million barrels of crude pass through it daily—more than 20 percent of global consumption—with refined products pushing that number closer to 20 million barrels per day. Over 80 percent of this volume is Asia-bound, underscoring the Strait's indispensable role in maintaining the energy lifelines of the region's largest economies, from India and China to Japan and South Korea.

As of now, market sentiment appears to be in a state of watchful hesitation. The price jump has been meaningful but not chaotic, largely because Iran's response remains undefined. If history is any guide, Iran may opt for a calibrated retaliation targeting Israeli military sites or regional proxies, thereby avoiding a broader confrontation. Such moves, while headline-grabbing, typically result in only short-lived spikes in oil prices. The key here is the market's growing familiarity with these kinds of actions—they generate noise and some volatility, but unless they escalate further or disrupt infrastructure, their economic impact tends to be fleeting.

But this time, the calculus feels different. The rhetoric on both sides has been sharper, and the regional alignments more complex. Should Iran choose to escalate further—by, for instance, targeting oil infrastructure in Saudi Arabia or the UAE, harassing tankers,

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or more provocatively, attempting to close or disrupt the Strait of Hormuz—then oil prices could enter a much more volatile phase. These are not theoretical risks. Iran has a long record of threatening to shut the Strait, and although it has never fully succeeded, its past actions—from missile launches to the seizure of oil tankers—have proven that it has the capacity to cause significant disruption and uncertainty. What makes the current scenario more precarious is that the available alternatives to the Strait are limited and insufficient for maintaining full flow continuity. Saudi Arabia operates the East-West pipeline, which moves oil from the Eastern Province to the Red Sea, bypassing the Strait altogether. The UAE, similarly, utilizes the Habshan-Fujairah pipeline, allowing some oil to reach global markets without passing through Hormuz. However, these routes together only handle around 6 million barrels per day—barely half of the volume typically moving through the Strait. Any prolonged disruption would thus create a substantial bottleneck, forcing refiners, traders, and governments to draw down on strategic reserves or scramble for alternative sources, both of which would drive prices sharply higher.

Moreover, the strategic geography of the Strait of Hormuz compounds the challenge. The narrowest point of the Strait is only 21 miles wide, with shipping lanes just two miles wide in either direction. It is shared with Oman, but Iran's proximity and control over its northern shores allow it to exert considerable influence over the waters. Iran

Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad: The creative flame of modern Assam

There are some people in the fabric of a region's cultural and historical existence whose impact is so broad that it's hard to comprehend their times without acknowledging their contribution. In the context of 20th-century Assam, Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala was a giant of an individual whose polymath genius configured the very essence of modern Assamese identity. His life and work were not only a mirror of the times in which he lived, but also a guiding light that shone the way for ideas, imagination, and boldness far beyond his times.

Born in 1903 in Tamulbari Tea Estate, Dibrugarh in a culturally refined and nationally sensitive family, Jyotiprasad had come into the inheritance of the legacy of progressive thinking and literary consciousness. His ancestors had been such legends as Haribillas Agarwala, who had brought the sacred Kirtan Puthi to the press, rescuing a valuable piece of Assamese heritage, and Chandrakumar Agarwala, the founder-editor of Jonaki, which had initiated an Assamese literary renaissance. Jyotiprasad grew up during an age of increased social ferment, when Assam, like the rest of India, was stirring to the vision of nationalism, reform, and modernity.

This was the time when Assam's increasing involvement in national political movements and cultural renaissance took place. The Assam Association, the forerunner of the Indian National Congress at the state level, started dreaming of Swaraj with the impact of all-India developments. The earliest indications of this cultural and political revival came with the creation in 1916 of the Assam Chhatra Sammilani and the Assam Sahitya Sabha in 1917. Jyotiprasad matured in the midst of this fresh ferment of intellectualism and rebellion, the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1921 being his first nationalist call to action when he was 18.

His involvement in the struggle for independence never deterred him from intellectual pursuits. After finishing his early studies in Tezpur, he moved to Calcutta and, in 1926, to England to pursue his studies further. Though he never held a formal degree, his time abroad was filled

with exposure to Western modernity. He learned filmmaking in Germany from the legendary Himangshu Rai with on-the-job training in direction, production, and editing. His wanderings around Europe, filled with all kinds of popular and high culture, gave him a cosmopolitan outlook that would later drive his art and activism back home.

In India, Jyotiprasad dove headfirst into the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930. He not only joined but also spearheaded the movement along with leaders such as Hem Barua and Bishnuram Medhi. He organized Rayat Sabhas, speaking to lower-rung masses in an effort to organize them in the national movement. His fifteen-month prison term in 1932 was not just a time of atonement but of intense reflection and mental consolidation. As Dr. Hiren Gohain aptly puts it, Jyotiprasad was among those visionaries who envisioned shattering the cultural lethargy of Assam and placing it at the front rank of progressive nations by the power of creativity and self-sustaining effort. He was inspired by Gandhi's thought and envisioned national rebirth through indigenous cultural renaissance.

But what distinguished Jyotiprasad was the purity of his ideals and practice. He lived what he taught, and his political activism was inseparable from cultural reconstruction. He had respect for tradition but was never its captive. Transformation was the leitmotif of his intellect. He had firm conviction that cherishing rotten forms of the past could never lead to a living future. His work was not a paean to nostalgia but a call to go ahead with roots unbroken.

As a poet, Jyotiprasad altered the course of Assamese poetry. When his peers were mostly in romantic loss and personal longings, Jyotiprasad's poetry broadened the scope of emotion with collective longing and aesthetics of beauty, harmony, and social progress. His poems such as Sundar Konwar and Manimugdha did not provide merely lyrical beauty but depth of philosophy. He pioneered new rhythms and patterns in Assamese poetry by departing from the formality of earlier Vaishnava metres and be-

stowing Assamese verse with a contemporary voice without losing its cultural depth.

His role in contemporary Assamese music was just as revolutionary. When middle class Assamese aesthetic sense was being swamped by Bengali cultural overlordship, Jyotiprasad had the temerity to redefine Assamese musical identity. He took inspiration from traditional folk of the region—biya naam, bon gash, bihu—and blended it with a dash of Indian classical music and Western harmony to produce a new genre of modern Assamese songs. His song "Gache gache paati dile" was not only musical but symbolic, embodying a blend of indigenous traditions and modern movements. These songs, typically imparting patriotic and social messages, became instruments of cultural awaken-

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

ing and resistance.

Atulchandra Hazarika aptly explained how Jyotiprasad reshaped the cultural landscape of Assamese theatre. Shonit Kuwari was a watershed in terms of Assamese music and drama, raising fresh standards and expectations. He revived traditional folk customs and merged them with modern-day performance arts, thereby restoring them to their former place of pride in popular awareness.

The passion for excellence that Jyotiprasad possessed was the stuff of legend. His enthusiasm was matched by his severity. The anecdote that Pushpalata Das has about him composing march tunes within a night and sternly training volunteers for a Rayat Sabha indicates his very deep commitment to the arts. For Jyotiprasad, every note, every step, and every word was necessarily in line with the ideals they represented. Art for him was no ornamentation—it was an austere act of nation-building.

This creative flame glowed even in children's literature. His poems such as Akamani Chowali and Bhut-Powali are still classics, cherished by generations for their lilting spirit, fantastical depth, and musicality of tone. His incomplete Jyoti Ramayana displays his capacity to embed

profound philosophical concepts in the simplicity of song and narrative, depicting nature as a symphony of music in which each component finds expression in movement and sound.

But the most daring page in Jyotiprasad's professional career was that of a film maker. In 1935, he produced Joymoti, the first ever Assamese film, under the most unfavorable conditions. Without any infrastructure, without trained hands, without professional actors—women, most of all, since Assamese society was very orthodox at that time—Jyotiprasad produced a milestone film. He wrote the screenplay, created the music, directed the actors, handled photography and editing, and constructed an ad-hoc studio, Chitran, on his family land. Making of Joymoti was a cultural revolution.

Though commercially unsuccessful, the artistic and historic significance of the film is unparalleled. His second film, Indramalati, produced under severe budget and time restrictions, was released in 1939 and brought him temporary financial relief.

His work did not stop in cinema. He constructed the Jonaki cinema hall at Tezpur in 1937—the first cinema hall in Assam—showing his sense of aesthetics and vision of modernity. His architectural experiments, as through his model of Gauhati University, showed his faith that even buildings could be a symbol of cultural identity.

A philosopher and an artist, Jyotiprasad articulated his vision in speeches and essays. In books like The Artist's World, Worship of the New, and To the Light, he dealt with the philosophical basis of art and culture. Culture, for him, was not static—it was fluid, rooted in the people's life, developing along with the times. He believed that politics, economics, and social justice were all threads in the large cultural fabric. Art, thus, needed to confront society, speak the truth to power, and awaken the people. While escapism was the vogue in the art scene during those days, Jyotiprasad openly embraced the philosophy of responsibility of art—one that the country, the oppressed, and the future could gain from.

He believed that artists had to

be awakened to social crises. Real art is, in his view, born of life itself—of struggle, suffering, hopes, and survival of common people. And yes, he may have developed a sympathy towards left-wing ideologies near the end of his life, but he could not confine his unrestrained spirit to any political party. He remained a voice of artistic uprising—a cultural revolutionary with his own moral sense.

Jyotiprasad was also a builder of institutions. He was a zealous supporter of the establishment in Gauhati University and played a part in generating public opinion in its favor. He penned short stories, initiated biographies of Gandhi and Chandrakumar Agarwala, and penned plays in English—all left unfinished, but indicating his volatile creative energy. What is striking about his life is the range and the depth of his contributions—poetry, song, film, essays, drama, education, children's literature, activism, architecture. Every one of his works carries an imprimatur of originality, intent, and deep cultural engagement. His work never was superficial. It always was a creation of immense commitment, genuine introspection, and a burning ambition to serve Assam and India. As Dr. Hiren Gohain has put it, Jyotiprasad felt that artists—rather than politicians—can guide the people, not by slogans or creeds but by a higher degree of consciousness. He also realized that all art, in a society divided into classes, is complicitous, and the artist must stand with the oppressed at the end of the day, not by slogans but by lighting up minds, molding ideas, and creating hopes. Art was an expression of self—a medium to allow individuals and communities to discover their worth, restore their pride, and march towards liberty with hope, for Jyotiprasad. Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala was not just a mastermind of creativity. He was the embodiment of modern Assam, whose vision, bravery, and dedication continue to inspire generations in succession. His fire—vibrant, bold, and beautiful—still lights up every Assamese heart that throbs for truth, freedom, and beauty. (The author can be reached at himangshur1989@gmail.com or 9954812261, 9864000260)

Desertification and Drought: A global challenge requiring local solutions

By: Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit

Desertification and Drought Day was officially declared by the UN General Assembly as "World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought" on 17th June. The World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought – is observed every year to promote public awareness of international efforts to combat desertification. The day is a unique moment to remind everyone that land degradation neutrality is achievable through problem-solving, strong community involvement and co-operation at all levels. The World Day to Combat Desertification has been observed since 1995 to promote public awareness relating to international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought.

The objectives of Desertification and Drought Day is to promote public awareness of the issue, to let people know that desertification and drought can be effectively tackled, that solutions are possible, and that key tools to this aim lay in strengthened community participation and cooperation at all levels and to strengthen implementation of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification.

As population become larger, wealthier and more urban, there is far greater demand for land to provide food, animal feed and fibre for clothing. Meanwhile, the health and productivity of existing arable land is declining, worsened by climate change. Globally, 23 per cent of the land is no longer productive. 75 per cent has been transformed from its natural state, mostly for agriculture. This transformation in land use is happening at a faster rate than at any other time in human history, and has accelerated over the last 50 years.

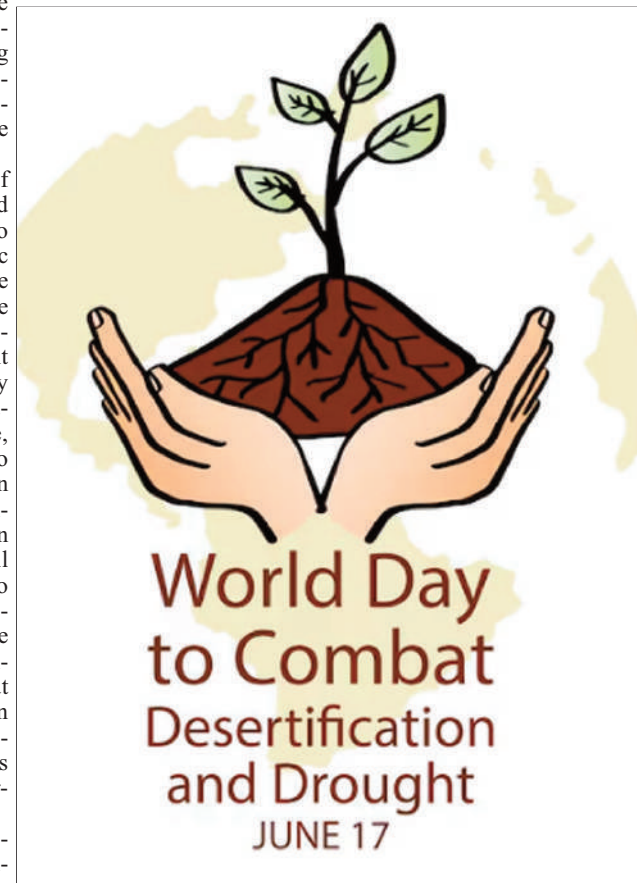
It is reported that over 70 per cent of natural ecosystems have been transformed. By 2050, this could hit 90 per cent. By 2030, food production will require an additional 300 million hectares of land and the fashion industry is predicted to use 35 per

cent more land – over 115 million hectares. Current pressures on land are huge and they are expected to keep on growing. More than 170 countries continue to be affected by desertification, land degradation and drought. Recurring and increasing threats of forest fires, heat waves, massive migration, sudden floods, rising sea levels, and food and water insecurity are more evident. By 2025, 1.8 billion people will experience absolute water scarcity. Also, two thirds of the world will be living under water-stressed conditions. By 2045, some 135 million people across the world may be displaced as a result of desertification. 2.6 billion people depend directly on

agriculture, but 52 per cent of the land used for agriculture is moderately or severely affected by soil degradation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development declares that "we are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations".

Due to drought and desertification, 12 million hectares are lost each year (23 hectares per minute). Within one year, 20 million tonnes of grain could have been grown. Currently, 13 million hectares of forests are being lost every year, while the persistent degradation of drylands has led to the desertification of 3.6 billion hectares.

The World Day to Combat Desertification is a unique occasion to remind everybody that desertification can be effectively tackled, that solutions are possible, and that key tools to this aim lay in strengthened community participation and co-operation at all levels. Let us focus on inclusive cooperation amongst all stakeholders, ministries, agencies and sectors, to restore and rehabilitate degraded land and contribute towards achieving the overall Sustainable Development Goals. (The author is a freelance journalist, writer & cartoonist, Limca Book of Record Holder (7 Times). He can be reached at dixitprakar@yahoo.in)



Maleriraptor kuttyi: India's Triassic predator unearthed

By: Satyabrata Borah

The discovery of a new dinosaur species in India, named *Maleriraptor kuttyi*, has opened a fascinating chapter in the study of prehistoric life. This remarkable find, dating back approximately 220 million years to the Norian age of the Triassic period, has not only enriched our understanding of India's paleontological heritage but also provided critical insights into the survival and adaptation of early dinosaurs. Belonging to the *Herrerasauria* group, a lineage of small- to medium-sized carnivorous dinosaurs, *Maleriraptor kuttyi* represents a significant milestone in paleontology. Its discovery in India's Maleri Formation marks the first definitive evidence that herrerasaurs survived a major environmental upheaval in Gondwana that led to the extinction of an entire group of herbivorous dinosaurs. This article explores the significance of *Maleriraptor kuttyi*, its physical characteristics, the geological context of its discovery, and its broader implications for understanding dinosaur evolution and the ancient ecosystems of Gondwana.

The unearthing of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* in the Maleri Formation, a well-known geological site in India, underscores the region's importance in paleontological research. The Maleri Formation, located in central India, is one of the country's richest repositories of Triassic fossils, preserving a snapshot of life from a time when the supercontinent Pangea dominated Earth's geography. The name *Maleriraptor* is derived from the Maleri Formation, while *kuttyi* likely honors a researcher or local contributor involved in the discovery. The fossils of this dinosaur provide a rare glimpse into the diversity of life during the Norian age, a pivotal period in Earth's history marked by significant environmental and biological changes. The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* adds to the growing body of evidence that India was a critical region for early dinosaur evolution, challenging earlier assumptions that herrerasaurs were primarily confined to regions like South America.

Physically, *Maleriraptor kuttyi* was a small- to medium-sized carnivore, likely measuring between two to three meters in length. Its skeletal structure suggests it was a swift and agile predator, equipped with sharp teeth and claws that made it a formidable hunter in its ecosystem. The *Herrerasauria* group, to which *Maleriraptor kuttyi* belongs, is characterized by bipedal dinosaurs with lightweight, streamlined bodies, ideal for chasing

prey. These features indicate that *Maleriraptor kuttyi* was well-adapted to its environment, capable of pursuing smaller animals or scavenging in a landscape where food resources may have been scarce. The study of its fossils reveals a body plan typical of early theropods, with strong hind limbs and a flexible neck, suggesting it was an efficient predator. Its discovery in India expands the known geographic range of herrerasaurs, previously documented primarily in South America, particularly in Argentina's *Ischigualasto* Formation.

The Triassic period, spanning roughly 252 to 201 million years ago, was a transformative era in Earth's history. It followed the catastrophic Permian-Triassic mass extinction, often referred to as the "Great Dying," which wiped out nearly 90% of life on Earth. The Triassic saw the rise of dinosaurs, which began as small, opportunistic creatures before evolving into the dominant terrestrial animals of the Mesozoic era. During the Norian age, around 227 to 208 million years ago, the supercontinent Pangea was beginning to show signs of rifting, with Gondwana forming its southern portion. Gondwana encompassed present-day India, South America, Africa, Australia, and Antarctica, and its ecosystems were shaped by dramatic climatic and geological changes. The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* is particularly significant because it provides evidence that herrerasaurs endured a major environmental upheaval in Gondwana during this period, which led to the extinction of a group of herbivorous dinosaurs.

This upheaval, likely triggered by intense volcanic activity, climate shifts, or tectonic movements, reshaped the ecosystems of Gondwana. Herbivorous dinosaurs, which relied heavily on specific types of vegetation, were particularly vulnerable to these changes. The loss of plant life due to climatic shifts or volcanic ash likely decimated their populations, leading to the extinction of entire groups. In contrast, carnivorous dinosaurs like *Maleriraptor kuttyi* may have had an advantage due to their dietary flexibility. As predators, they could exploit a variety of prey, including smaller reptiles, early mammals, or even carrion, allowing them to survive in a changing environment. The agility and predatory efficiency of *Maleriraptor kuttyi*, as inferred from its skeletal structure, likely played a crucial role in its ability to adapt to these challenging conditions. This resilience highlights the adaptability of early carnivorous dinosaurs and sheds light on the factors that allowed certain



groups to thrive while others perished.

The *Herrerasauria* group holds a special place in the study of dinosaur evolution. These dinosaurs are considered some of the earliest known members of the dinosaur lineage, predating the split between the two major dinosaur groups: *Saurischia* (which includes theropods and sauropods) and *Ornithischia*. *Herrerasaurs* exhibit a mix of primitive and advanced traits, making them a critical link in understanding the evolutionary origins of dinosaurs. For instance, their skeletal structure shows similarities to later theropods, such as sharp, curved teeth and a bipedal stance, but they also retain some archaic features, such as a less specialized hip structure. The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* in India suggests that herrerasaurs were more widespread across Gondwana than previously thought, challenging earlier models that placed their primary distribution in South America. This finding prompts scientists to reconsider the migration patterns and evolutionary history of early dinosaurs, particularly in the context of Gondwana's interconnected landmasses.

The survival of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* through the environmental upheaval in Gondwana offers valuable insights into the resilience of early dinosaurs. Unlike herbivorous dinosaurs, which were heavily dependent on stable vegetation, carnivorous dinosaurs like *Maleriraptor kuttyi* could exploit a broader range of food sources. This dietary versa-

tility likely allowed them to weather the ecological crises that decimated other species. The study of *Maleriraptor kuttyi*'s fossils provides clues about its hunting strategies and ecological role. Its sharp teeth and claws suggest it was an active predator, possibly preying on smaller reptiles or early synapsids. Additionally, its lightweight build and strong limbs indicate it was capable of rapid movement, enabling it to chase down prey or escape larger predators. These adaptations underscore the evolutionary advantages that enabled herrerasaurs to persist in a volatile environment.

The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* also highlights the importance of India as a key region for paleontological research. The Maleri Formation, part of the Pranhita-Godavari Basin, has long been recognized as a treasure trove of Triassic fossils. Previous discoveries in the region include remains of early sauropodomorphs, rhynchosaurs, and other reptiles, but the identification of a herrerasaur adds a new dimension to the site's significance. The Maleri Formation's sedimentary layers, formed in ancient river systems and floodplains, provide an ideal environment for fossil preservation. The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* encourages further exploration of this region, as additional fossils could reveal more about the diversity and distribution of early dinosaurs in Gondwana. Collaborative efforts between Indian and international paleontologists are likely to in-

tensify, with the goal of uncovering more evidence to piece together the puzzle of dinosaur evolution.

The broader implications of *Maleriraptor kuttyi*'s discovery extend beyond paleontology to our understanding of Earth's ancient ecosystems. The survival of herrerasaurs through a period of significant environmental change suggests that carnivorous dinosaurs played a critical role in maintaining ecological balance during the Triassic. By preying on smaller animals and scavenging, they likely helped regulate populations and prevent overexploitation of resources. Furthermore, the presence of herrerasaurs in India indicates that Gondwana's ecosystems were highly interconnected, with similar species inhabiting diverse regions. This interconnectedness is a testament to the mobility of early dinosaurs, which were able to disperse across vast distances before the breakup of Pangea.

The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* opens new avenues for research. Paleontologists are likely to conduct comparative studies between the fossils of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* and those of other herrerasaurs, such as *Herrerasaurus* from Argentina, to better understand their evolutionary relationships. Advanced techniques, such as CT scanning and isotopic analysis, could provide further details about the dinosaur's biology, diet, and environment. Additionally, ongoing excavations in the Maleri Formation may uncover more fossils, potentially revealing new species or additional specimens of *Maleriraptor kuttyi*. These findings could help refine our understanding of the timing and causes of the environmental upheaval that affected Gondwana's ecosystems.

The discovery of *Maleriraptor kuttyi* is a landmark achievement in paleontology, offering a window into the ancient world of the Triassic period. This small but formidable carnivore, with its sharp teeth and agile build, survived a tumultuous period in Earth's history, demonstrating the resilience of early dinosaurs. Its presence in India expands the known range of herrerasaurs and underscores the country's importance in the global study of prehistoric life. As scientists continue to explore the Maleri Formation and other fossil-rich sites, *Maleriraptor kuttyi* will remain a key piece of the puzzle in unraveling the story of dinosaur evolution and the dynamic ecosystems of Gondwana. This discovery not only enriches our knowledge of India's geological past but also deepens our appreciation for the adaptability and diversity of life on Earth millions of years ago.

What is the difference between Botox and dermal fillers?

By: Jennifer Berry

Botox and dermal filler treatments are popular, accounting for more than 9 million procedures in 2015, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

Botox contains purified bacteria that freeze muscles. In doing so, Botox can help minimize the appearance of lines and wrinkles caused by facial expressions.

Dermal fillers contain ingredients that add fullness to areas that have thinned due to aging. This thinning is common in the cheeks, lips, and around the mouth.

People should be aware of the costs and risks of treatments and have realistic expectations of what they can do.

What is Botox?

Botox may help to correct dynamic wrinkles, such as crow's feet around the eyes and horizontal lines on the forehead.

Botox is a purified form of the botulinum toxin that is obtained from bacteria. Though it is deadly in larger amounts, the tiny, regulated amount of Botox given to correct wrinkles has been used safely for decades.

Botox works by blocking nerve signals in the muscles where it is injected. When those nerve signals are interrupted, the affected muscle is temporarily paralyzed or frozen. Without movement of these selected muscles in the face, certain wrinkles may be softened, reduced, or even removed.

Botox and other treatments made with botulinum toxin are sometimes called neuromodulators or neurotoxins.

Treatments made with botulinum toxin are sold under the brand names Botox Cosmetic, Dysport, and Xeomin.

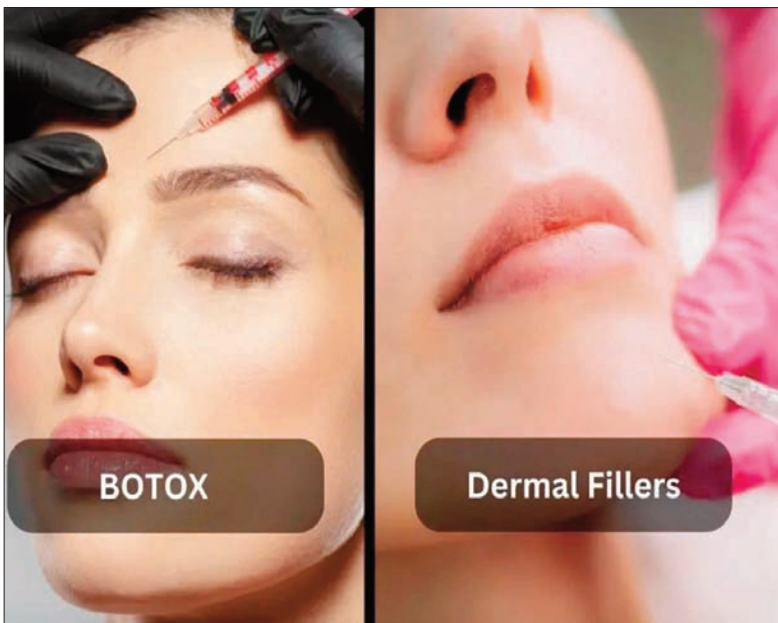
What can Botox correct?

Botox only works on wrinkles that are caused by muscle movement. These are known as dynamic wrinkles, and are often called "expression lines."

The most common dynamic wrinkles that Botox can treat are lines on the upper face, such as the "11" between the brows, horizontal lines on the forehead, and crow's feet around the eyes. These lines are caused by smiling, frowning, squinting, and other facial expressions.

Botox will not work on fine lines and wrinkles caused by sagging or loss of plumpness in the face. These are known as static wrinkles. Static wrinkles include lines in the cheeks, neck, and jaw areas.

Botox is not a permanent treatment. Repeated treatments are necessary for continued wrinkle-reducing effects. Most people find that the muscle-relaxing effect of Botox lasts for 3 to 4 months.



Possible side effects of Botox include:

- drooping of the eyelid or brow if injected near the eye
- weakness or paralysis of nearby muscles
- hives, rashes, or itching
- pain, bleeding, bruising, swelling, numbness, or redness
- headache
- dry mouth
- flu-like symptoms
- nausea
- trouble swallowing, speaking, or breathing
- gallbladder problems
- blurry vision or vision problems

The treatment may also fail to work due to antibodies that fight the toxin. This happens in less than 1 percent of people who have repeated Botox treatments, however.

The ASPS advise people not to rub or massage the area of the injection after having Botox treatment. This could spread the toxin to surrounding skin, causing muscle drooping and other problems.

The average cost of a Botox injection is \$385, according to 2016 statistics from the ASPS.

What are dermal fillers?

Dermal fillers, sometimes called soft tissue fillers, are substances designed to be injected beneath the surface of the skin to add volume and fullness.

Substances used in dermal fillers include:

- Calcium hydroxylapatite, which is a mineral-like compound found in bones.
- Hyaluronic acid, which is found in some fluids and tissues in the body that add plumpness to the skin.
- Polyalkylimide, a transparent gel that is compatible with the body.
- Polyacetic acid, which stimulates the skin to make more collagen.
- Polymethyl-methacrylate microspheres (PMMA), a semi-permanent filler

Each one of these is designed to treat different signs of aging or other cosmetic issues. The time they take to work, as well as how long they last, also vary. Some fillers last 6 months,

while others last up to 2 years or longer.

People should discuss their individual needs and expectations with their doctor to determine what filler would be the best choice for them.

What can dermal fillers correct?

Different types of dermal fillers are designed to treat varying signs of aging. Depending on the filler selected, they may:

- plump up thinning lips
- enhance or fill in shallow areas on the face
- decrease or remove the shadow or wrinkle under the eyes caused by the lower eyelid
- fill in or soften the look of recessed scars
- fill in or soften static wrinkles, especially on the lower face

Static wrinkles include those around the mouth and along the cheeks. These wrinkles are usually a result of a loss of collagen and elasticity in the skin.

Dermal filler risks and considerations

Dermal fillers are considered to be safe but side effects can occur. A licensed healthcare professional should perform all dermal filler procedures using only FDA-approved fillers injected with a syringe. The most common problems include:

- skin rash, itching, or pimple-like eruptions
- redness, bruising, bleeding, or swelling
- undesirable appearance, such as asymmetry, lumps, or overcorrection of wrinkles
- skin damage that causes a wound, infection, or scarring
- ability to feel the filler substance under the skin
- blindness or other vision problems
- death of skin cells due to loss of blood flow to the area

The cost of dermal filler treatments varies and depends on the provider performing it, the area being treated and the type of filler selected. The ASPS 2016 statistics list the following cost per syringe:

- calcium hydroxylapatite, such as Radiesse: \$687

- hyaluronic acid, such as Juvederm, Restylane, or Belotero: \$644
- polylactic acid, such as Sculptra: \$773
- polymethyl-methacrylate microspheres, such as Bellafill: \$859

These costs may be more or less, depending on how much filler is used. Using less than a full syringe of filler may be cheaper than using a full syringe or more than one.

The provider may also charge additional fees for their professional services, office visit, or other costs.

Key differences

In summary, the differences between Botox and fillers are:

Botox: This freezes muscles to stop creases and wrinkles caused by facial expressions. These are typically found in the upper face, such as the forehead and around the eyes.

Dermal fillers: These use hyaluronic acid and similar substances to "fill in" or plump areas that have lost volume and smoothness. This includes wrinkles around the mouth, thin lips, and cheeks that have lost fullness. They may also be used on forehead wrinkles, scars, and other areas that need extra volume for a smoother look.

Botox results last 3 to 4 months. Dermal filler results vary, depending on which filler is used.

Because Botox and fillers are different substances designed for different uses, they can sometimes be combined in one treatment. For instance, someone may use Botox to correct lines between the eyes and a filler to correct smile lines around the mouth.

Takeaway

Millions of Botox and filler procedures are performed each year, and they have a good track record of safety.

A study in *JAMA Dermatology* found that Botox and filler procedures are very safe when performed by experienced board-certified dermatologists. Side effects occurred in less than 1 percent of recipients, and most of these were minor.

Though Botox and fillers are minimally invasive, they still carry some risks. An individual should be aware of all possible risks and benefits before having these treatments.

Botox and fillers are not recommended for women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. People who have certain health conditions or who take any medications should discuss whether Botox or fillers are safe for them.

People should also discuss what Botox and fillers can realistically do for their appearance. Though they can enhance a more youthful look, the results are typically not as powerful as having a surgical procedure, such as a facelift.

Using a qualified medical provider, such as a board-certified dermatologist, plastic surgeon, or cosmetic surgeon helps ensure the procedure is done safely and properly. People should discuss the provider's experience and training in dermal fillers and Botox before making a decision. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

Understanding Gender, Gender Identity & Gender Expression

By: Vivek Mohan

What Is Gender?

Let's start at the beginning: gender. Simply put, gender is a social and cultural concept. While many people use "gender" and "sex" interchangeably, they're not the same. Sex is based on biological attributes like chromosomes and anatomy. Gender, on the other hand, is about roles, behaviours, and identities that society shapes and assigns.

Over time, societies have relied on binary categories—male and female. But people's real-life experiences of gender are far more diverse. They go beyond those two boxes. That's why we talk about a gender spectrum, where identities can range from cisgender (identifying with your birth-assigned sex) and transgender (identifying differently), to non-binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, and more.

Why This Matters

Social Understanding: When we recognize the broader spectrum of gender, we support people to express themselves authentically.

Mental Health: Supporting someone's gender journey can reduce stress, anxiety, and depression.

Inclusive Spaces: From schools to workplaces, celebrating gender diversity helps create environments where everyone feels valued.

What Is Gender Identity?

Moving deeper, gender identity is a person's internal sense of their own gender—how they feel inside. It may align with their sex assigned at birth (cisgender), or not (transgender).

Examples of Gender Identities:

Cisgender: You identify with the sex you were assigned at birth.

Transgender: Your identity doesn't match your birth-assigned sex.

Non-binary: You don't fit neatly into "man" or "woman."

Genderqueer, Agender, Bigender, Genderfluid: These are all valid identities on the spectrum.

Personalized Journey

Your gender identity is personal. You discover it over time, shaped by your feelings, experiences, and reflections. It may stay stable, or shift over months, years—even decades.

It's important to remember:

Self-affirmation is golden. People are the best experts of their own identity.

Pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.) matter—they affirm respect for that identity.

Respect allows growth. Encourage people to express their identity freely.

What Is Gender Expression?

Now, let's talk about how we show gender. Gender expression is the external manifestation of gender identity: how someone dresses, moves, speaks, and behaves.

Common Forms of Expression:

Clothing and Style: Suits, dresses, makeup, no makeup, accessories.

Voice and Speech: Tone, pitch, vocabulary, style of communication.

Mannerisms: Posture, gestures, body language.

Names & Pronouns: The words we use to refer to ourselves and others.

Why It Matters

Authentic self-expression can empower people and boost confidence.

Visible representation helps normalise diversity—because seeing someone else express their gender openly can validate your own identity.

But not everyone feels safe to express their gender openly, especially in unsupportive environments. Let's create those safe spaces.

The Interplay: How They Connect

Sex – Biological attributes: chromosomes, genitalia, hormones.

Gender – Social roles, expectations, and cultural norms.

Gender Identity – One's inner sense of being male, female, both, neither.

Gender Expression – How gender is communicated visually, verbally, behaviourally.

These four concepts—sex, gender (social roles), gender identity, and gender expression—are interconnected but distinct. Someone's identity may differ from their expression, or align with traditional expectations, and that's absolutely okay.

Why Clarity and Respect Matter

1. Visibility & Understanding
Using accurate language ("non-binary" instead of "confused," "assigned female at birth") sparks positive conversations and reduces stereotypes.

2. Mental Health Benefits

Studies show that acceptance of gender identity and expression is directly linked to better mental health, especially among transgender and non-binary communities.

3. Inclusive Environments

When schools, workplaces, and public spaces embrace self-expression through pronouns, dress codes, gender-neutral bathrooms, everyone thrives.

4. Stronger Relationships

Respecting each person's identity and expression builds trust and empathy. Simple acts like asking for pronouns or offering neutral spaces make a big impact.

Building Allyship Every Day

Becoming a gender ally is a journey—here are practical, everyday steps:

1. Listen and Learn: Seek educational materials from LGBTQ+ organizations and communities.

2. Ask, Don't Assume: Use open-ended questions: "How should I address you?"

3. Honor Pronouns: Normalize sharing your own pronouns in introductions; it encourages inclusivity.

4. Use Inclusive Language: Swap gendered phrases like "ladies and gentlemen" for "friends," "folks," or "everyone."

5. Create Safe Environments: Encourage or establish gender-neutral bathrooms and support anti-discrimination efforts.

6. Advocate for Change: Support policies that affirm gender diversity in educational and workplace settings.

Final Thoughts

Gender is a social and cultural spectrum. Gender identity is who we are internally. Gender expression is how we present our gender outwardly.

All three aspects deserve respect and freedom. As we broaden our understanding and language around gender, we foster a world where people can be their most authentic selves—without fear or shame.

Remember: curiosity + compassion = change. Every small step—using correct pronouns, sharing knowledge, and supporting equality—makes a difference. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Iran missile attacks on Israel kills 5, while Israel claims it now has air superiority over Tehran

TEL AVIV, June 16: Iran fired a new wave of missile attacks on Israel early Monday, killing at least five people, while Israel claimed in the fourth day of the conflict that it had now achieved "aerial superiority" over Tehran and could fly over the Iranian capital with impunity.

After days of attacks on Iranian air defences and missile systems, the Israeli military said its aircraft now control the skies from western Iran to Tehran and had destroyed more than 120 surface-to-surface missile launchers that had been firing at Israel in overnight missions.

"Now we can say that we have achieved full air supremacy in the Tehran airspace," said military spokesperson Brig Gen Effie Defrin. Iran, meantime, announced it had launched some 100 missiles and vowed further retaliation for Israel's sweeping attacks on its military and nuclear infrastructure, which have killed at least 224 people in the country since last Friday.

One missile fell near the American consulate in Tel Aviv, causing minor damage, US Ambassador Mike Huckabee said on X. There were no injuries to American personnel. Iran announced it had launched some 100 missiles and vowed further retaliation for Israel's sweeping attacks on its military and nuclear infrastructure, which have killed at least 224 people in the country since last Friday.

Israel said so far 24 people have been killed and more than 500 in-

jured as Iran launched more than 370 missiles and hundreds of drones. In response the Israeli military said fighter jets had struck 10 command centres in Tehran belonging to Iran's Quds Force, an elite arm of its Revolutionary Guard that conducts military and intelligence operations outside Iran.

Explosions rock Tel Aviv and Petah Tikva

Powerful explosions, likely from Israel's defence systems intercepting Iranian missiles, rocked Tel Aviv shortly before dawn on Monday, sending plumes of black smoke into the sky over the coastal city. Authorities in the central Israeli city of Petah Tikva said that Iranian missiles had hit a residential building there, charring concrete walls, shattering windows and ripping the walls off multiple apartments.

The Israeli Magen David Adom emergency service reported that two women and two men — all in their 70s — and one other person were killed in the wave of missile attacks that struck four sites in central Israel.

"We clearly see that our civilians are being targeted," said Israeli police spokesman Dean Elsdunne outside the bombed-out building in Petah Tikva. "And this is just one scene. We have other sites like this near the coast, in the south."

Petah Tikva resident Yoram Suki rushed with his family to a shelter after hearing an air raid alert, and



emerged after it was over to find his apartment destroyed. "Thank God we were OK," the 60-year-old said.

Despite losing his home, he urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to keep up the attacks on Iran. "It's totally worth it," he said. "This is for the sake of our children and grandchildren."

In addition to those killed, the MDA said paramedics had evacuated another 87 wounded people to hospitals, including a 30-year-old woman in serious condition, while rescuers were still searching for residents trapped beneath the rubble of their homes.

"When we arrived at the scene of the rocket strike, we saw massive destruction," said Dr Gal Rosen, a paramedic with MDA who said he had rescued a 4-day-

military officials and civilians.

Rights groups, like the Washington-based Iranian advocacy group called Human Rights Activists, have suggested that the Iranian government's death toll is a significant undercount. Human Rights Activists says it has documented more than 400 people killed, among them 197 civilians.

Israel argues that its assault on Iran's top military leaders, uranium enrichment sites and nuclear scientists was necessary to stop Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon.

Iran has always insisted its nuclear programme is peaceful, and the US and others have assessed that Tehran has not pursued a nuclear weapon since 2003.

But Iran has enriched ever-larger stockpiles of uranium to near weapons-grade levels in recent years and was believed to have the capacity to develop multiple weapons within months if it chose to do so. Ahead of Israel's initial attack, its Mossad spy agency positioned explosive drones and precision weapons inside Iran, and since then Iran has reportedly detained several people on suspicion of espionage.

On Monday, Iranian authorities hanged a medical doctor identified as Esmail Fekri, who had been in prison since 2023 after being convicted of supplying the Mossad with "sensitive and classified" information, Iranian state-run television reported. (AP)

China: Its fastest-growing nuclear stockpile remains at minimum level required



BEIJING, June 16: China has asserted that its rapidly expanding nuclear arsenal — generating over 100 warheads annually and now totaling around 600 — remains at the minimum level required, downplaying concerns that it is engaged in a nuclear arms race with the US and Russia to match their stockpiles by the end of the decade.

Beijing has added 100 more warheads to its nuclear stockpile each year since 2023. It currently holds at least 600 warheads, and that number is expected to "keep growing over the coming decade", according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Yearbook 2025, released by the Swedish think tank on Monday. "China ... has the fastest growing nuclear arsenal in the world," the report said. While most of these warheads are thought to be stored separately from their launchers, China could be deploying a small number of missiles, as is done on a much larger scale by the US. According to SIPRI's estimate, 132 of the warheads have been assigned to launchers that are still being loaded.

According to observers, China's growing stockpile has implications for India as Beijing's close ally, Pakistan, too, is accelerating its nuclear weapons programme.

When asked for his reaction to the SIPRI report, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing on Monday that China has no comment to make on the report. Guo reiterated that China has always adhered to a nuclear strategy of self-defence and maintains its nuclear capabilities at the minimum level required for national security, without engaging in any arms race. China strictly follows the policy of no-first use of nuclear weapons at any time under any circumstances and doesn't threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states, he said. Analysts say the reason why China is speeding up its nuclear and missile programme is to become a world-class military power.

There could be several factors behind the rapid warhead build-up, including President Xi Jinping's

call that China "must be a world-class military power by the middle of the century", Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post quoted Hans Kristensen, an associate senior fellow at SIPRI and director of the Federation of American Scientists' nuclear information project, as saying.

"[There could have been] an apparent decision that the previous minimum deterrent was insufficient to deter potential adversaries, and possibly a conclusion that increasingly capable US missile defence systems could reduce the effectiveness of the Chinese retaliatory capability," Kristensen said.

The report said as of January, China had completed or was close to completing around 350 new ICBM (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile) silos in three large desert fields in its north and three mountainous areas in the east. However, it remained unclear as of that date as to whether any of these ICBM units had begun combat duty. "Depending on how it decides to structure its forces, China could potentially have at least as many ICBMs as either Russia or the USA by the turn of the decade, although its stockpile of nuclear warheads is still expected to remain much smaller than the stockpiles of either of those two countries," SIPRI said. Kristensen said once loaded and armed, the additional ICBM silos "clearly provide significant additional destructive power that China could inflict on the United States".

If China eventually filled each of its new silos under construction with a single-warhead missile, it would have the capacity to deploy around 650 warheads on its ICBMs within another decade, but if each silo were filled with a missile equipped with three MIRVs, this number could rise to more than 1,200 warheads, the Post quoted the SIPRI report. The rise in the number of states with multiple-warhead programmes could potentially lead to a "rapid increase in deployed warheads" and allow nuclear-armed states, especially China, to "threaten the destruction of significantly more targets", it added. (PTI)

PM Modi conferred with Cyprus' highest civilian honour

NICOSIA, June 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi was on Monday conferred with the Grand Cross of the Order of Makarios III of Cyprus, the country's highest civilian honour.

"Humbled to receive the 'Grand Cross of the Order of Makarios III' of Cyprus. I dedicate it to the friendship between our nations," Modi said after receiving the award.

Cyprus President Nikos Christodoulides conferred the award on the prime minister.

The Order of Makarios III is the senior order of knighthood awarded by the country named after the first President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios III.

Dedicating the award to the 1.4 billion people of India, Modi said it was an award to the trusted India-Cyprus friendship.

"I am confident that in the time to come, our active partnership will touch new heights. Together, we will not only strengthen the progress of our two nations but also contribute towards building a peaceful and secure world," the prime minister said.

"President @Christodoulides conferred PM @narendramodi with the 'Grand Cross of the Order of Makarios III' of Cyprus. The honour reflects the enduring India-Cyprus bilateral partnership and shared commitment to work together for the common vision for peace, progress and prosperity," the Ministry of External Affairs posted on X.

Cyprus' award brings the total tally of international honours conferred upon the prime minister to 23. Modi noted the award was a recognition of India's age-old philosophy of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" or "The World is one Family" that guides its vision for global peace and progress, an MEA statement said.

The prime minister embraced the honour as a renewed commitment to strengthening and diversifying the partnership between India and Cyprus and emphasised the award was a symbol of the unwavering commitment of the two countries to peace, security, sovereignty, territorial integrity and prosperity, the statement added. (PTI)

UK PM Keir Starmer appoints MI6 spy agency's first-ever female chief

LONDON, June 16: Prime Minister Keir Starmer has announced the "historic" appointment of Blaise Metreweli as the first female chief of the UK's Secret Intelligence Service, commonly known as MI6, in the 116-year history of the organisation.

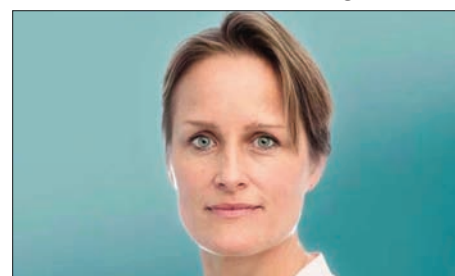
Commonly referred to as 'C', the international spy agency's chief has operational responsibility for MI6 and is the only publicly named member of the organisation, accountable to Foreign Secretary David Lammy.

Metreweli, 47, has been promoted from current role as Director General, or 'Q', responsible for technology and innovation in MI6 and has previously held a director-level role at M15 — the UK's domestic security service.

"The historic appointment of Blaise Metreweli comes at a time when the work of our intelligence services has never been more vital," Starmer said on Sunday.

"The United Kingdom is facing threats on an unprecedented scale — be it aggressors who send their spy ships to our waters or hackers whose sophisticated cyber plots seek to disrupt our public services," he said.

Metreweli will succeed Sir Richard Moore, who leaves the service in the autumn later this year. "I'd like to thank Sir Richard Moore for his dedicated service, and I know Blaise will continue to provide the excellent leadership needed to defend our country and keep our people safe — the foundation of my Plan for



Change," added Starmer. The new spy chief expressed her pride and honour in leading the security service which she has been a part of since 1999 as a career intelligence officer, having joined the Security Service as a case officer. "MI6 plays a vital role — with M15 and GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters] — in keeping the British people safe and promoting UK interests overseas. I look forward to continuing that work alongside the brave officers and agents of MI6 and our many international partners," said the new 'C'.

Metreweli, who studied Anthropology at Pembroke College, Cambridge University, has spent most of her career in operational roles in the Middle East and Europe.

"With a wealth of experience from across our national security community, Blaise is the ideal candidate to lead MI6 into the future," said her boss David Lammy.

"At a time of global instability and emerging

security threats, where technology is power and our adversaries are working ever closer together, Blaise will ensure the UK can tackle these challenges head on to keep Britain safe and secure at home and abroad," he said.

"Every day, our intelligence services work behind the scenes to protect our national security and compete with our adversaries. That's why I am proud that we are investing an extra GBP 600 million in our intelligence community so they can continue to defend our way of life," added Lammy. Metreweli will be the 18th chief of MI6 when she takes charge from Moore.

"I am absolutely delighted by this historic appointment of my colleague, Blaise Metreweli to succeed me as 'C'. Blaise is a highly accomplished intelligence officer and leader, and one of our foremost thinkers on technology. I am excited to welcome her as the first female head of MI6," said the outgoing 'C'.

Cabinet Secretary Christopher Wormald said the new 'C's experience and leadership in the intelligence community will help MI6 protect the "foundation of our national security and project our interests overseas". "Blaise will be an excellent chief, who will embody the values of the Service and act as a fine role model to its staff. I would also like to thank Sir Richard Moore for his excellent leadership of the Service over the past five years and his contribution to UK national security during that time and over his long career," said Wormald. (PTI)

34 Palestinians killed in new shootings near food distribution centres: Medics

DEIR AL-BALAH (Gaza Strip), June 16: At least 34 Palestinians were killed on Monday in new shootings in areas of Israeli- and US-supported food distribution centres in the south of the Gaza Strip, the local Health Ministry said. The toll was the deadliest yet in the near-daily shootings that have taken place as thousands of Palestinians move through Israeli military-controlled areas to reach the food centres run by the private contractor Gaza Humanitarian Foundation.

Two witnesses said Israeli troops opened fire early Monday in an attempt to control the crowds.

There was no immediate comment by the Israeli military. It has said in previous instances that troops fired warning shots at what it calls suspects approaching their positions. Gaza's Health Ministry said 33 Palestinians were killed trying to reach the GHF centre near the southern city of Rafah and another on route to a GHF hub in central Gaza. It said four other

people were killed elsewhere.

Two Palestinians trying to get food at the Rafah site, Heba Jouda and Mohammed Abed, told The Associated Press that Israeli forces fired on the crowds at around 4 a.m. at the Flag Roundabout. The traffic circle, hundreds of metres from the GHF centre, has repeatedly been the scene of shootings.

The military has designated specific routes to access the food centres, and GHF has warned aid-seekers that leaving the roads is dangerous, but many do in an attempt to get to the food first. Israel and the United States say the new GHF system is needed to prevent Hamas from siphoning off aid.

GHF says there has been no violence in or around the sites themselves. UN agencies and major aid groups, which have delivered humanitarian aid across Gaza since the start of the 20-month Israel-Hamas war, have rejected the new system, saying it can't meet the territory's needs and allows Israel to use aid as a weapon. (AP)

Israeli opposition leader rallies behind Netanyahu's Iran operation, suspending months of criticism

TEL AVIV (ISRAEL), June 16: Roughly 24 hours before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu launched a blistering assault on Iran, Israel's opposition was scheming to bring down his government.

Now, just days into the ongoing operation against Iran, the opposition has closed ranks behind the effort, suspending months of bitter criticism against Netanyahu and his handling of the war in Gaza.

It's a sharp about-face for a constellation of parties that have criticised Netanyahu throughout the war for what they have charged is his politically motivated decision-making. "It's not the right moment to do politics," opposition leader and former Prime Minister Yair Lapid told The Associated Press on Monday in his first international media interview since the start of the operation against Iran.

The latest conflict began when Israel launched an assault on Iran's top military leaders, uranium en-

richment sites and nuclear scientists that it said was necessary to prevent its longtime adversary from getting any closer to building an atomic weapon — which Israel says would pose an existential threat. Iran maintains that its nuclear program is peaceful.

Lapid spoke just days after he called from the dais of the Israeli parliament for an election to oust Netanyahu. "Yes, this government needs to be toppled, but not in the midst of an existential fight," Lapid said. And that fight has become personal. His son's home was damaged in an Iranian strike, although no one was there at the time except for house pets.

Israeli politicians across the spectrum typically fall in line behind government actions during times of war or crisis. But the deep polarization in the country, much of it fuelled by the public's view of Netanyahu, and the loud protests against his rule that preceded the war in Gaza and continued through

it make the opposition's change of tack all the more striking.

The past 20 months have also been an unprecedented time in Israeli history, with the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023 — the deadliest the country has ever faced — sparking the war in Gaza. And then a war against the militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon and now a major escalation with Iran.

Netanyahu, a divisive leader who has governed nearly uninterrupted for 16 years, has been at the helm throughout that period. On trial for alleged corruption and reliant on far-right parties to maintain his power, he has stoked accusations that he's prolonging the war in Gaza to appease his governing partners and delay an election that could put an end to his rule. While Netanyahu says he's acting in Israel's best interest, opposition parties, including Lapid's Yesh Atid, have hit hard at that idea. (AP)

UN rights chief decries 'horrifying' suffering in Gaza

GENEVA, June 16: The UN human rights chief said Israel's warfare in Gaza is inflicting "horrifying, unconscionable suffering" on Palestinians and urged government leaders on Monday to exert pressure on Israel's government and the militant group Hamas to end it.

Volker Turk made the comments at the opening of the latest Human Rights Council session on Monday, in a broad address that also raised concerns about escalating conflict between Iran and Israel, the fallout from US tariffs, and China's human rights record — alongside wars and conflict in places like Sudan and Ukraine.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, who has regularly spoken out about bloodshed in Gaza and called for the release of Israeli hostages held by armed Palestinian militants, used some of his most forceful words yet to highlight the Mideast violence.

"Israel's means and methods of warfare are inflicting horrifying, unconscionable suffering on Palestinians in Gaza," Turk told the 47-member-country body, which Israeli authorities have regularly accused of anti-Israel bias.

The Trump administration has kept the United States, Israel's top ally, out of the council proceedings.

Israel's military campaign has killed over 55,300 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. It says that women and children make up most of the dead but it does not distinguish between civilians and combatants.

"The facts speak for themselves. Everyone in government needs to wake up to what is happening in Gaza," Turk said. "All those with influence must exert maximum pressure on Israel and Hamas, to put an end to this unbearable suffering." (AP)

Cambodia threatens Thai fruits ban as tensions over border disputes continue to soar

PHNOM PENH, June 16: Cambodia on Monday said it would stop importing Thai fruits and vegetables if Thailand refused to lift border restrictions imposed following a deadly clash in one of the disputed areas between the two countries.

An armed confrontation at the border on May 28 left one Cambodian soldier dead. The incident, which each side blamed on the other, reportedly took place in a relatively small "no man's land" along their border that both countries claim as their own.

Cambodian and Thai authorities have engaged in sabre-rattling since last week, and continue to implement or threaten measures short of armed force, keeping tensions high. Thailand has added restrictions at border crossings, and

Cambodia has banned Thai movies and TV shows and implemented a boycott of the neighbouring country's international internet links.

Cambodian Senate President Hun Sen, the former prime minister, said in a televised speech Monday that the ban on Thai fruits and vegetables would take effect if Thailand doesn't lift the border restrictions by Tuesday.

Thai Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra later said Thailand decided to impose the border restrictions out of safety concerns for the citizens of both countries due to the heavier presence of armed forces along the areas. She also said any "unprofessional communication" that was conveyed outside a bilateral mechanism would only hurt the interests of both sides.

Officials of the two countries



met over the weekend in Cambodia's capital, Phnom Penh, on the conflicting territorial claims that

led to last month's deadly confrontation. While both sides said the meeting was held in a good at-

mosphere, it appears no major breakthrough was achieved to resolve the current spat.

Cambodia on Sunday said it has officially submitted a request to the UN's International Court of Justice, seeking a resolution to the ongoing border disputes with Thailand in four areas. The Cambodia's State Secretariat of Border Affairs said after the weekend meetings concluded that Cambodia would no longer discuss these areas under the bilateral mechanism of the two countries.

The Thai Ministry of Foreign Affairs said Monday that it was deeply disappointed that Cambodia refused to address the disputes through the existing mechanism and reiterated that Thailand does not accept the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

Both however agreed to participate in the next round of meetings on border issues to be hosted by Thailand in September.

Much of their war of words has appeared intended to mollify nationalist critics on both sides of the border. In Thailand, the elected government of Prime Minister Paetongtarn has been attacked by right-wing nationalists who are longtime foes of her father, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra. There is a long history to the territorial disputes between the two countries. Thailand is still rankled by a 1962 ICJ ruling that awarded Cambodia the disputed territory where the historic Preah Vihear temple stands. There were sporadic though serious clashes there in 2011. The ruling was reaffirmed in 2013. (AP)

Significant financial allocation has been distributed across multiple critical sectors

NEC highlights key development initiatives and smart agriculture project in Arunachal Pradesh

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 16: The North Eastern Council (NEC), functioning under the aegis of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (MDoNER), has underscored its continued commitment to the socio-economic advancement of the region by highlighting its recent milestones and outlining critical development initiatives currently underway in Arunachal Pradesh.

Among the notable achievements is the official release of the NEC Yearbook 2025, a detailed and data-rich publication that captures the essence of regional transformation and progress. This yearbook, now in its second edition, serves not only as a repository of vital socio-economic data but also as an analytical guide that helps stakeholders understand trends, assess impact, and plan future development trajectories more effectively. Designed for a diverse readership—including policy planners, academicians, research scholars, development practitioners, and analysts—the publication documents both sectoral and inter-sectoral developments across the North Eastern Region (NER). It can be accessed digitally via the official NEC website

<https://necouncil.gov.in/news-updates/nec-yearbook-2025>, ensuring easy availability for institutions and individuals seeking evidence-based insights.

In addition to its intellectual contribution, the NEC has also demonstrated its operational efficacy through substantial financial disbursements. In May 2025, the Council released a total amount of ₹ 11,37,60,526 (Rupees Eleven Crore Thirty-Seven Lakh Sixty Thousand Five Hundred and Twenty-Six only), aimed at fuelling a diverse array of developmental initiatives within Arunachal Pradesh. This significant financial allocation has been distributed across multiple critical sectors, each of which plays a pivotal role in ensuring inclusive and sustainable growth in the state.

The sectors benefiting from this disbursement include tourism, industry, agriculture, transport and communication, science and technology, human resource development, irrigation, flood control and water management, as well as the promotion of culture and heritage. By strategically channeling funds into these areas, the NEC not only reinforces the infrastructural backbone of the state but also enriches its cultural identity and



natural resource management capabilities. These timely and targeted financial interventions underscore the NEC's proactive approach and unwavering dedication toward ensuring the efficient implementation and completion of development projects that align with the region's long-term vision.

Among the standout initiatives supported by this disbursement is a path-breaking agricultural technology project titled "Technological Intervention using Artificial Intelligence and Internet of Things for Smart Agriculture in North East India." This forward-looking project

is being implemented by the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science & Technology (NERIST), located in Arunachal Pradesh, and represents a bold step toward agricultural digitization and modernization in the region.

Structured as a three-year programme, the project is expected to reach completion by April 2028. It involves the development and deployment of an AI- and IoT-enabled digital monitoring system that will allow farmers to manage their agricultural fields remotely, around the clock, using an integrated mobile applica-

tion. The system employs advanced real-time sensors to monitor key environmental and agronomic indicators such as soil moisture levels, ambient temperature, humidity, and overall crop health. These data points are instantly processed and relayed to the farmers via their smartphones, enabling timely decision-making and immediate response to emerging threats, whether related to pest attacks, irrigation needs, or climatic fluctuations.

The implications of this project are wide-ranging and transformative. By

significantly reducing the dependence on manual labor and enabling precision farming, the system enhances productivity, improves resource efficiency, and increases the resilience of farming operations. This is particularly beneficial for farmers residing in remote and hard-to-access rural areas, where agricultural challenges are often compounded by a lack of infrastructure and real-time support.

The integration of artificial intelligence and Internet of Things into the agricultural landscape of the Northeast through this initiative positions the region at the forefront of sustainable, technology-driven farming practices. It also reinforces the government's broader vision of making the agricultural sector more self-reliant, innovative, and environmentally adaptive.

In summary, the NEC's recent initiatives—including the launch of its comprehensive Yearbook and the financial backing of advanced agricultural projects—demonstrate a balanced focus on both intellectual resources and actionable, on-ground implementation. These efforts collectively signal a new era of developmental engagement in Arunachal Pradesh and the larger North Eastern Region.

PHE&WS department undertakes swift restoration of water supply in Keyi Panyor



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 16: In the wake of widespread damage inflicted on water supply infrastructure due to relentless rainfall and landslides from 28 to 31 May, the Public Health Engineering and Water Supply (PHE&WS) Department has mobilized extensive efforts to restore critical water services across the Keyi Panyor district. The natural calamity caused severe disruptions in multiple regions, leaving thousands of residents in over 30 villages without access to regular potable water.

Prior to the late-May catastrophe, the Dem water system had already sustained damage earlier on 24 April, creating early signs of strain on the area's water infrastructure. However, the situation deteriorated rapidly with the late-May weather events, which triggered massive landslides and flooding that crippled distribution pipelines and supply channels. The impact has been acutely felt in villages such as Neelam, Pania, Yazali, Deed, Talo, Yachuli town, and Upper Yachuli, including hamlets like Taba, Peet, and Taiji.

In response to this crisis, the PHE&WS Department, in close collaboration with Village Water & Sanitation Committees, panchayat leaders, and local communities, launched a comprehensive emergency operation to reinstate disrupted services. The collective resolve of local residents proved instrumental, as vol-

unteers stepped forward to offer manual labour and food support to departmental teams, substantially accelerating temporary repair work in many of the affected zones.

Thanks to this robust community-led support, temporary water restoration has already been achieved in multiple villages, including Yazali, Pitapool, Neelam, and Delipeji. These successful interventions reflect the coordinated ground-level action that continues to be the hallmark of the ongoing restoration initiative.

However, certain regions, particularly those more severely affected such as Upper Yachuli and sections of Yachuli town, continue to face major challenges. To address the immediate needs of these localities, the administration has made arrangements for private water tankers, ensuring that residents have at least a minimum supply of potable water while permanent repairs are underway.

Taking cognizance of the gravity of the situation, the local MLA of Yachuli visited the most affected Paraputuri circle, where he spearheaded the formation of a multi-agency task force involving the Highway Department, PHE&WS, District Disaster Management Officer (DDMO), and key local leaders. This coordinated body has been actively involved in mobilizing heavy machinery and engineering support to clear the debris and enable access to blocked water pipelines. Notably, two JCB machines, provided by the Highway Department's contractor, have been deployed for clearing landslide-affected sections, facilitating the faster progress of pipe-laying and connection work.

As of the latest update, most affected areas have now seen partial or full restoration of water supply services. The Upper Yachuli and Tago regions, which are among the hardest hit, are expected to see full restoration within the next 15 to 20 days, barring any further disruptions from weather or terrain instability.

The PHE&WS Department has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring complete restoration and strengthening the resilience of the water infrastructure system to better withstand future natural disruptions. The department also expressed gratitude to the local communities for their unwavering cooperation and solidarity during this testing time.

Rajiv Gandhi University secures 13th rank among central universities in IIRF 2025 rankings

ITANAGAR, June 16: In a significant academic milestone, Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU) has been ranked 13th among central universities across the country by the Indian Institutional Ranking Framework (IIRF) for the year 2025. This prestigious recognition places RGU among the top tier of central institutions in India, alongside some of the most reputed universities such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi University, and Banaras Hindu University (BHU), which continue to occupy the top positions in the rankings.

The IIRF rankings are widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive and analytical assessments of higher education institutions in India. The ranking framework evaluates universities on a broad range of performance indicators, including teaching-learning resources and pedagogy, research output, industry income and integration, placement performance, placement strategy and support, future orientation, as well as external perception and international outlook. These criteria collectively ensure a balanced evaluation of institutional performance, academic environment, and social impact.

According to an official statement released by Rajiv Gandhi University, the institution is "steadily emerging as a beacon of academic excellence," with a growing national reputation grounded in its consistent efforts in the domains of education, research, innovation, and institutional governance. The university has been making strategic and meaningful strides in shaping the academic landscape of Arunachal Pradesh and contributing positively to the broader development of higher education in the Northeast region.

In addition to the IIRF recognition, RGU was recently awarded a prestigious Grade A during the evaluation conducted by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC). This accolade reflects the university's strong academic foundation, high-quality infrastructure, efficient



administrative mechanisms, and robust governance systems. The NAAC Grade A has further cemented the university's reputation as a trusted centre for higher learning in the region.

The IIRF 2025 ranking has reaffirmed RGU's position as a high-performing institution. The university's 13th rank among all central universities in India is a significant achievement that underscores the effectiveness of its academic strategies, research initiatives, and commitment to student development. The university's performance in key areas—such as faculty expertise, research productivity, industry collaboration, and graduate employability—was instrumental in achieving this recognition.

Notably, this marks the second consecutive year that Rajiv Gandhi University has secured the top position among all central universities in the Northeastern region in the IIRF rankings. Other institutions from the region such as Tezpur University (Assam), Mizoram University (Mizoram), and Central Agricultural University (Manipur) were ranked 24th, 25th, and 26th respectively, placing RGU significantly ahead of its regional counterparts.

Speaking on this achievement, RGU Vice Chancellor, Professor S.K. Nayak, expressed heartfelt appreciation for the col-

lective efforts of the university community. "This is a moment of immense pride for all of us at Rajiv Gandhi University. With the dedicated people we have in our institution, we will continue to grow and reach new horizons," he said.

Registrar Dr. N.T. Rikam also lauded the shared commitment and enthusiasm of the university's academic and administrative bodies. "This achievement reflects the collective effort of Team RGU—our students, teachers, and non-teaching staff, whose dedication has enhanced our teaching and research environment. We also extend our gratitude to the state government for its unwavering support," he stated.

The university's continued climb in national rankings speaks volumes about its commitment to excellence, inclusive growth, and community-oriented progress. With a clear and visionary focus on nurturing knowledge, innovation, and leadership, RGU is steadily carving a niche for itself not just in the Northeast, but across the entire higher education landscape of India.

Looking forward, the university aims to build upon this momentum and further consolidate its position as a centre of excellence in higher education, thereby contributing meaningfully to the academic, cultural, and socio-economic fabric of the region. (Agencies)

APLA marks one year of leadership with staff interaction programme



HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 16: The Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly (APLA) today observed a significant occasion—the successful completion of one year in office by Speaker Tesam Pongte and Deputy Speaker Kardo Nyigyor. To mark this important milestone, a special Interaction Programme was organized at the D.K. Auditorium within the Assembly complex, bringing together the officers and officials who form the backbone of the state's legislative machinery.

The event served as an opportunity not only to commemorate the leadership's first year but also to foster a culture of reflection, appreciation, and renewed commitment among the Assembly staff. The interaction focused on recognizing collective achievements, strengthening institutional values, and reinforcing the shared vision of upholding the dignity of the legislative institution.

Delivering his address during the programme, Speaker Tesam Pongte extended

his heartfelt gratitude to the entire staff of the Legislative Assembly for their unwavering support and commitment over the past year. He acknowledged the crucial role played by every individual—regardless of designation—in ensuring the smooth conduct of legislative sessions, official programmes, and day-to-day administration within the Assembly.

"From bottom to top, everyone should uphold their responsibilities," the Speaker emphasized, underlining the spirit of teamwork, inclusivity, and accountability that forms the foundation of the institution's functioning.

He further urged the staff to continue discharging their duties with discipline, sincerity, and a deep sense of respect for the Assembly, which he described as the "temple of democracy." Reiterating his belief in collaborative growth, the Speaker welcomed suggestions from staff members on ways to improve the functioning and efficiency of the Assembly. He also announced that such interaction

programmes would be conducted regularly, as a means to strengthen internal communication and morale.

In his remarks, Deputy Speaker Kardo Nyigyor echoed the Speaker's sentiments, placing emphasis on discipline, commitment, and the importance of continuous learning. He reminded the gathering that regardless of rank or seniority, all positions within the Assembly carry dignity and responsibility. He encouraged the staff to remain open to learning not just from superiors but also from colleagues and juniors alike, fostering a work culture grounded in humility and respect.

"Every member of the Assembly team plays a vital role in maintaining its dignity and ensuring its effective functioning," the Deputy Speaker noted.

The programme began with a welcome address by APLA Secretary Tadar Meena, who congratulated the Speaker and Deputy Speaker on their successful completion of one year in office. She lauded their leadership and expressed confidence that the Assembly, under their continued guidance, would further strengthen its commitment to excellence and democratic values. Smt. Meena also encouraged the staff to take genuine pride in serving in such a prestigious and historic institution, calling upon them to uphold its reputation through professional integrity and dedication.

The day-long event not only served as a platform for dialogue but also reinforced the sense of unity and shared purpose among the Assembly staff. It reflected the evolving ethos of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly—one of institutional growth, responsibility, and respect for democratic tradition.

As APLA continues its journey in legislative service, the programme stood as a reminder of the collective responsibility of every staff member to protect and promote the values that underpin the democratic framework of the state.

Plantation drive

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, June 16: In a significant step toward environmental conservation, Thrizino township hosted its first-ever Cherry Blossom (Tsan) and Bauhinia (Sheldon) plantation drive under the banner of the "Clean Thrizino, Green Thrizino" initiative. The event was jointly organized by the Clean Thrizino, Green Thrizino Committee in collaboration with the Thrizino Administration, aiming to enhance the township's green cover and raise awareness on ecological sustainability.

No. E-543943/217

NOTICE

It is for information to all concerned that the Appointment Letters of 443 Nos. of **Veterinary Field Assistants** pursuant to the Advertisement No. E-543943/72 Dated 3rd March, 2025 will be distributed at a Ceremonial function to be held at Srimanta Sankardev International Auditorium, Panjabari, Guwahati-37 from 11.00 A.M. onwards on **19-06-2025** in presence of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Assam, Hon'ble Minister, Animal Husbandry & Veterinary & Other Hon'ble Ministers with Dignitaries.

Therefore, all the new VFA appointees (443 Nos.) are requested to present at the venue by 9.00 A.M. on **19-06-2025 (Thursday)** positively on security point of view.

For any query, Candidates are requested to visit the Departmental website <https://animal-husbandry.assam.gov.in>

Sd/-

Director

Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Department, Assam
Chenikuthi, Guwahati-03

DIPR /D/HLT/36/17-Jun-25

No.GDB/6th-FC/206/2022-23/145

Dated:-01/06/2025

TENDER NO.210F 2024-25 INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)

Selected tenders affixing Non-refundable court fee stamp of RS.8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty Five Paise) only with at validity period of 180 (One Hundred Eighty) days which will subsequently to be covered and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the intending Registered Contractors of all categories of the Assam PWD (Bldg. & Roads) for submitting tender for the work below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2:30 PM 01-06-2025 to 21-06-2025 and will be opened on the date 21-06-2025 at 2:30 PM.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Approx Estimated value of work	Earnest money 1% for ST/SC/OBC/MOBC & 2% for GNL	Cost of tender document	Time of completion
1	Const. of slab culvert at Dighalipara kalbari road near Dandi chowk, under 6 th -FC fund for the year 2023-24 during 2025-26 (2 nd -Inst)	5,00,000.00	Rs 5,000/- & Rs. 10,000/-	Rs 200/-	3(Three month)
2	Const. of slab culvert at Galkata chowk to Shani Mandir near kaali mandir, under 6 th -FC fund for the year 2023-24 during 2025-26 (2 nd -Inst)	5,00,000.00	Rs 5,000/- & Rs. 10,000/-	Rs 200/-	3(Three month)
3	Const. of RCC slab culvert (2 Nos) connecting Suagpur Market to Barnadipar Boro Chupa, under TA fund for the year 2025-26	16,48,000.00	Rs 16,500/- & Rs. 33,000/-	Rs 200/-	3(Three month)

Detailed NIT may be seen in all working days in the Office of the undersigned. Tender 4paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent up to 11:30 AM in all working days from 01-06-2025 to 21-06-2025 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Banker Cheque/Bank Draft/ Demand draft duly pledged in favour of the BDO, Goreswar Development Block.

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/880

Sd/-Block Development Officer
Goreswar Development Block

ED files chargesheet against Pak man who made Indian govt IDs for Bangladeshis in Kolkata



NEW DELHI, June 16: The Enforcement Directorate has filed a chargesheet under the anti-money laundering law against a Pakistani man, living as an Indian in Kolkata, after illegally procuring as many as five vital government IDs including Aadhaar, voter card and passport.

He was laundering funds by making "fake" Indian IDs for Bangladeshis who came here and through other illegal activities like hawala, the federal probe agency said in a statement on Monday.

The ED said it has submitted the prosecution complaint against the man named Ajad Malik alias Ahammed Hossain Azad and Azad Hossain before a special Prevention of Money Laundering (PMLA) court in Kolkata on June 13. The court has taken cognisance against the "Pakistani national" and fixed a date for hearing, it said.

The ED, which carried out raids in this case in April, had then said in a press statement that Malik was a Bangladeshi national. It arrested Malik under the anti-money laundering law and the probe brought to light that he was indeed a Pakistani national.

The ED case stems from a West Bengal Police FIR against Malik and unidentified others for violation of the Foreigners Act of 1946.

"Probe found that the man was a Pakistani national illegally living in India," the ED statement said. "A Pakistani driving licence dated back to 1994 was recovered from his mobile phone bearing the name Azad Hossain and featuring the photograph of Ajad Malik alias Ahammed Hossain Azad. It listed his father's name as Mumtaz-Ul-Haque and a permanent address in Pakistan," the ED said.

It said the driving licence recorded his date of birth as 14.08.1971 and it was issued by the Licensing Authority in Hyderabad, Pakistan.

In order to "conceal" his true identity, the ED said, the man

adopted the alias "Ajad Malik" and procured multiple Indian identity documents like Aadhaar, PAN (permanent account number issued by the income-tax department) card, driving license, voter ID and passport by submitting "forged" and "fabricated" documents, as per the ED.

The agency found that the man operated a "hawala" network to facilitate illegal cross-border remittances between India and Bangladesh, collecting payments in cash and UPI, before transferring equivalent amounts to Bangladesh using platforms like 'Bkash', an online financial transaction platform of Bangladesh.

"He was also involved in illegal money transfers and document forgery and was actively involved in facilitating the preparation of visas and passports for Bangladeshi nationals seeking to travel to countries like Dubai, Cambodia and Malaysia," the ED said.

The Pakistani man collected payments in Bangladeshi Taka, US Dollar, and Indian Rupee and deposited these amounts into his own bank account or transferred them to the accounts of associates engaged in fraudulent visa or passport processing, the ED alleged.

He played a "significant" role in "fraudulent" activities carried out at certain forex changers (full-fledged money changers) based in Kolkata, in which "huge" cash deposits were declared as proceeds from legitimate foreign currency sales to customers but were actually "proceeds of crime" linked to "unlawful" activities including the creation of "fake" Indian identities for Bangladeshis to obtain passports, the ED said.

The ED had said in April that the man has two sons -- Osama Bin Azad and Omar Faruk -- and his wife Maymuna Akhter, residing in Bangladesh and are citizens of that country. It said the man "frequently" visited Bangladesh to meet his family. (PTI)

NDMA, NDRF strongly positioned India to become global leader in disaster management: Shah

NEW DELHI, June 16: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday said India has become a global leader in the field of disaster management due to the excellent works carried out by the NDMA, NDRF and others.

Addressing a conference of the relief commissioners and disaster response forces of all states and Union Territories (UTs) here, Shah also said 10 years ago, the approach of the disaster mitigation organisations was for minimum casualties and after 10 years, the approach is to achieve the target of zero casualties.

"Whenever the history of India's disaster response will be written, the last 10 years of the Modi government will be recorded as a transformative decade. In these 10 years, we have made significant achievements in all four areas -- capacity, efficiency, speed and accuracy," he said.

The home minister said the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) has effectively carried out policy, subject structure, research work, dissemination of various exercises to the public, development of several applications, and overall coordination and policy-related work.

In the last 10 years, NDMA, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI)

have strongly positioned India to become a global leader in the field of disaster management, he said.

Shah said in the last two years, work has been done to create a platform of ideas with a whole-of-government approach by bringing together workshops and meetings of all the agencies related to relief and disaster management.

"When the heads of all the disaster relief teams discuss on a single platform, many shortcomings are removed and the country also benefits in being prepared to deal with a disaster," he said.

The home minister also suggested that every year, some districts and tehsils sensitive to disasters should be included in this conference so that the disaster management being considered at the national level gradually reaches the tehsil and district levels as well.

All relief commissioners should prepare a district disaster management plan for every district in their state within 90 days, he said.

He also praised the role of NDMA, saying it has effectively carried out policy, subject structure, research work, dissemination of various exercises to the public, development of several applications and overall coordination and policy-related work.

Shah said the NDRF has earned nationwide recognition, built a strong reputation and gained re-



spect while the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) has also played a significant role in this structure. He said due to climate change and global warming, the entire world is grappling with disasters and there is a need to move forward with environmental conservation as a core component.

"In the coming days, while everyone is fully prepared to tackle disasters, there is also need to address their root causes," he said.

"Not only has our capacity to handle disasters been increased but it has also been enhanced and extended to the tehsil level. Attention has been given to speed, as saving lives during a disaster is of utmost importance," he said.

The home minister said efficiency has been improved through

the use of cutting-edge technology and the dedicated approach of disaster response forces.

Additionally, by providing accurate forecasting and early warnings, society has been made aware and successfully engaged in relief and rescue operations, he said.

Shah said during the Modi government's tenure, there has been a significant shift in the approach related to disaster management.

Earlier, the approach was relief-centric, but now, the goal of "zero casualty" has been successfully achieved and the focus has shifted from relief-centric to a comprehensive and integrated approach, he said. He emphasised the importance of anticipating future disasters, conducting advanced research, compiling global ideas in

this field and adapting them to suit India's geographical conditions.

The home minister said in the last decade, India has made significant efforts for financial empowerment and greatly increased the government's budget.

"We have also pursued institutional empowerment deliberately and by design, along with structural empowerment. Combining all these, we have also adopted a multidimensional approach as a policy," he said.

Shah said from 2004 to 2014, the budget of the SDRF was ₹38,000 crore, which increased to ₹1.44 lakh crore from 2014 to 2024. Similarly, the budget of the NDRF was ₹28,000 crore from 2004 to 2014, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi increased to ₹84,000 crore.

"Overall, we have nearly tripled the total budget from ₹66,000 crore to ₹2 lakh crore," he said.

The home minister said the relief commissioners should prepare district disaster management plans for their respective districts within 90 days because until a district has its disaster management plan in place, it cannot respond swiftly in the face of a disaster.

He also said a lightning action plan needs to be formulated soon and noted that several states have yet to implement the incident response system. (PTI)

Fresh caste survey in Karnataka: BJP says Cong always betrayed OBCs

NEW DELHI, June 16: The BJP on Monday accused the Congress of always deceiving and betraying the Other Backward Classes as it hit out at the party following the Karnataka government's decision to junk an earlier caste count and go for a fresh enumeration.

Union minister and BJP leader Bhupendra Yadav asked for fixing accountability, noting that over Rs 165 crore of public money was spent in carrying out the earlier survey and claimed that the plank of social justice is merely a show for the Congress to engage in social division for electoral purposes.

With the Congress asking the Centre to adopt the "Telangana model" for not just caste enumeration but also in bringing out detailed data on socio-economic parameters during the nationwide census, the key OBC face of the BJP questioned why the opposition party did not follow the same practice in Karnataka.

Congress' inner contradictions have been exposed as the party has no real commitment to social justice and resorts to such political gimmicks for electoral purposes, he said.

At a press conference, Yadav also demanded an apology from RJD supremo and former Bihar chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav after a political row erupted over the placement of a picture of Dalit icon Bhim Rao Ambedkar near his feet on his birthday.

"It shows his (Lalu's) arrogance. Most backward classes and Dalits faced most injustice during his government," he alleged.

Speaking to reporters, Yadav claimed that the Con-

gress has a history of betraying the OBC interests as he recalled that its governments at the Centre had ignored the Kaka Kalelkar Commission report on empowering the backward classes. The party also opposed the Mandal Commission recommendations, he said. He cited Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's statement that the decision for a fresh caste enumeration was not his government's but the Congress leadership's, questioning the party's interference in the state government's decision-making.

Yadav compared it with the alleged interference from Sonia Gandhi-headed National Advisory Council during the UPA government.

The Congress has said that the fresh exercise has been announced to address the concerns of certain communities. Also, the earlier caste survey data was 10 years old and needed to be updated, it said.

It is the Modi government, Yadav said, which has worked for the socio-economic empowerment of the backward classes with its numerous schemes. It also accorded constitutional status on the National Commission for Backward Classes, he added.

He said the Karnataka government's decision not only highlights the internal contradictions of the Congress but also stressed that social justice is mere optics for the party which has "no commitment" to the idea. The Congress, he alleged, resorts to electoral engineering, data manipulation and vote bank appeasement in the name of social justice, and invariably deceives the backward classes. (PTI)

Making cuts in implementation of MGNREGA 'crime against Constitution', says Kharage

NEW DELHI, June 16: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday alleged that the Modi government is trying to destroy MGNREGA and said making cuts in the implementation of this scheme is a "crime against the Constitution".

The Congress president shared on X a media report which claimed that for the first time, the government has capped spending under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) at 60 per cent of its annual allocation for the first half of the financial year 2025-26. In a post in Hindi on X, Kharge said, "The Modi government is trying to destroy MGNREGA, the lifeline of the poor. The Modi government has now fixed the limit of MGNREGA expenditure at 60% for the first 6 months of the year."

Making cuts in the implementation of MGNREGA, which ensures the Right to Work under the Constitution, is a "crime against

the Constitution", he said. Posing questions from the Congress' side, Kharge asked whether the Modi government is doing this only because it wants to snatch about ₹25,000 crore from the pockets of the poor, which it has to spend separately in the next financial year when the demand is high at the end of the year.

"Since MGNREGA is a demand-driven scheme, what happens if there is a surge in demand during the first half in case of disasters or adverse weather conditions? Will not imposing such a cap hurt the poor who depend on MGNREGA for their livelihood?" Kharge said. What happens if the limit is crossed and will states be forced to deny employment despite demand, or will workers have to work without payment, he asked. Is it not true that according to a recent report, only 7 per cent of families have received the promised 100 days of work, Kharge further asked. (PTI)

Govt's high-level committee should not supplant investigation by AAIB: CPI(M)

NEW DELHI, June 16: The CPI(M) on Monday questioned the setting up of a high-level committee by the Centre to look into the Ahmedabad crash, saying holding a "parallel" inquiry under India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) is investigating the incident will lead to doubts about government interference.

Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu on Saturday said while the AAIB investigation will handle the technical aspects, the high-level committee (HLC) will provide a holistic, policy-oriented roadmap for future safeguards.

In a statement issued here, the CPI(M) said the existing investigation should not be supplanted. The CPI(M) said as per international protocols and norms set by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), India's Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau has commenced its independent investigation into the causes and circumstances surrounding the crash.

The Left party said the AAIB will take possession

of the "black boxes" of the aircraft and all other evidence, and complete its investigations in cooperation with international bodies, aircraft and engine manufacturers and other stakeholders.

"Having a parallel high-powered governmental air crash investigation committee filled with bureaucrats will undermine the AAIB investigation and raise doubts about possible government interference," it said. The CPI(M) demanded that the terms of reference of the HLC be immediately revised to remove all overlaps with the AAIB investigation, especially as to the cause and circumstances of the crash of AI-171. "The accident investigation is better left to professionals and experts."

"The HLC should instead go into the Ahmedabad and other earlier crash investigation reports to formulate binding rules and mechanisms for strict implementation to prevent settlements and buildings coming up within prescribed distance and safety parameters in the proximity of airports," it said. (PTI)

70% vaccines sourced by WHO, 14% generics imported by US are from India: Minister

NEW DELHI, June 16: Union Minister of State for Health Anupriya Patel said on Monday 70 per cent of total vaccines sourced by the World Health Organization (WHO) and 14 per cent of generics imported by the US are from India.

She delivered the keynote address at the inaugural session of the Second Policymakers' Forum organised by the Indian Pharmacopoeia Commission (IPC) here. An international delegation of policymakers and drug regulators from 24 countries is participating in the forum.

Aimed at promoting the recognition of the Indian Pharmacopoeia and collaboration in India's initiative for flagship affordable medi-

cines -- the Pradhan Mantri Bhartiya Janaushadhi Pariyojana (PMBJP) -- the Forum is being organised by the IPC under the aegis of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in association with the Ministry of External Affairs.

In her keynote address, Patel emphasised India's commitment to ensuring equitable access to quality-assured medicines and stressed the importance of regulatory harmonisation in facilitating global health equity.

She also highlighted that "under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, India has emerged as a global hub for affordable healthcare solutions and continues to deepen its part-

nerships with nations through knowledge-sharing, capacity-building and health diplomacy".

Underlining the importance of the Jan Aushadhi Kendras, Patel said, "Our Jan Aushadhi Kendras are the shining examples of India's commitment to provide quality and affordable medicines to all our citizens. Jan Aushadhi has been one of the most powerful instruments of bringing down the out-of-pocket expenditure of our citizens."

Highlighting India's strides made in the direction of providing vaccines, Patel said India continues to be a leading supplier of vaccines. "As much as 70 per cent of WHO's total vaccines are sourced from India," she said. (PTI)

In year of 'negative news', UN climate chief says 1.5 deg C goal still achievable

NEW DELHI, June 16: UN climate chief Simon Stiell on Monday said that despite a year dominated by negative headlines, many of the world's largest economies are showing encouraging signs of action on climate change and that keeping global warming within 1.5 degrees Celsius is still possible.

At the opening of the mid-year UN climate conference in Bonn, Germany, Stiell said worsening climate impacts in every country highlight the need for continued cooperation. "This year, beneath the noisier negative news, there are plenty of good reasons for optimism. We are seeing green lights for climate actions from many of the world's biggest economies, sending powerful demand signals to investors and doers," he said.

Stiell said countries must use the Bonn talks to finalise indicators for the Global Goal on Adaptation.

Negotiators in Bonn must "deep-dive" to create a roadmap for mobilising USD 1.3 trillion annually by 2035 to help developing



countries fight climate change, he said. At COP29 in Azerbaijan's Baku last November, countries agreed to triple climate finance to USD 300 billion a year by 2035, part of a broader goal to mobilise USD 1.3 trillion.

In Bonn, countries are expected to begin consultations on the "Baku to Belem Roadmap", which will guide the delivery of this goal.

Stiell urged countries to ensure that the Mitigation Work Programme -- established at COP26 in

Glasgow to urgently scale up mitigation ambition -- builds momentum for "actionable solutions that respond to the urgency".

At COP28 in Dubai, countries completed the first Global Stocktake -- a two-year review of the collective global progress towards achieving the Paris Agreement goals -- and decided to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030, double the global rate of energy efficiency improvements by 2030 and transition away from fossil

fuels. Stiell said countries must also make progress on the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake at Bonn.

"None of these issues are easy. Disagreement is natural," Stiell said, adding that the progress made in the next 10 days will make a "very real" difference to billions of lives and livelihoods in every country. He said that recent COPs have all produced concrete, major global steps forward.

"Even if imperfect, even if no country gets everything it wants, this is human solidarity in action..."

Without UN-convened climate multilateralism, we would be headed for up to 5 degrees Celsius of global heating. Now it's around 3. A reminder that 1.5 and protecting all people continue to be both achievable over the course of time and utterly essential," the UN climate change chief said.

The mid-year UN climate meetings held annually in Bonn help countries work out technical details before the annual UN climate conferences known as COP. (PTI)

Plea seeks review of SC verdict mandating 3-yr practice for judicial services

NEW DELHI, June 16: A plea filed in the Supreme Court has sought the review of its May 20 judgement barring fresh law graduates from appearing in entry level judicial services examination and fixed a three-year minimum law practice criteria.

The verdict of Chief Justice B R Gavai and Justices Augustine George Masih and K Vinod Chandran on May 20 mandated a minimum of three years of legal practice as a prerequisite for candidates aspiring to become civil judges (junior division).

The review plea, filed by recently-enrolled advocate Chandra Sen Yadav, argues the violation of fundamental rights under Articles 14 (right to equality) and 16 (equality of opportunity in matters of public employment for all citizens) of the Constitution of the aspiring law graduates.

The plea said the imposition of an uniform three-year practice requirement for all judicial service aspirants amounts to arbitrary and unjustified discrimination, depriving

fresh law graduates of equal opportunity in public employment.

The plea, in particular, challenges the direction asking high courts and the state governments to amend their service rules to enforce the new eligibility criterion.

"That the review petitioner...is particularly aggrieved by issue 7 and direction 7 of the impugned judgment passed by this court, which pertain to the prescription of minimum years of practice at the Bar as a prerequisite for appearing in the examination for the post of Civil Judge (Junior Division)," it said.

Immediate enforcement, the plea went on, caused retrospective hardship, violating principles of fairness, legitimate expectation, and equal opportunity under Article 14 of Constitution.

"This court restored the requirement of a minimum three years' practice at the Bar as a mandatory condition for entry into judicial service, relying upon certain affidavits submitted by various High Courts." (PTI)

Ahmedabad plane crash: 99 victims identified by DNA tests

AHMEDABAD, June 16: Four days after the horrific crash of an Air India plane claimed 270 lives, 99 victims have so far been identified through DNA matching and 64 bodies, including that of former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani, were handed over to their families, officials said on Monday.

Rupani was among the 242 passengers and crew members on board the London-bound Air India flight AI-171 that crashed in Ahmedabad on June 12. His mortal remains were handed over to his wife Anjali Rupani and other family members at the city civil hospital. Authorities are carrying out DNA tests to establish the identity of the victims as many bodies were charred beyond recognition or damaged. "Till now, 99 DNA samples have been matched, and 64 bodies have already been handed over to the respective families. These deceased were from different parts of Gujarat and Rajasthan," civil superintendent Dr Rakesh Joshi told reporters.

Addressing concerns of grief-stricken kin, he appealed to them not to panic over the time-consuming process of matching DNA samples with mortal remains.

"We are trying our best to finish this process as soon as possible. Some are complaining that the results have not come even after 72 hours. I appeal to them not to panic, because this is a very important process with legal implications. We will call them as soon as results arrive," added Joshi.

Earlier on Sunday, Ahmedabad Civil Hospital authorities stated that samples of 250 victims, including persons on board the ill-fated flight as well as those killed on the ground, had been collected for identification. The Boeing 787-8 Dreamliner with 242 persons on board crashed into a medical college campus in Ahmedabad moments after taking off from the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at 1.39 pm on June 12. (PTI)

Council has 20 elected members and 4 nominated members

BJP voted out of power in Mizoram's Chakma Council in no-confidence motion

AIZAWL, June 16: The BJP was voted out of power in Mizoram's Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) on Monday after its head, party leader Molin Kumar Chakma, was removed in a no-confidence motion, an official said.

The Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), the ruling party of the state, now has the maximum number of members in the council and it is likely to stake claim to form the next executive committee of the CADC.

The Molin Kumar Chakma-led executive committee, formed on February 4, was the first BJP-ruled one in the CADC since 1972.

A special session of the House was convened by CADC Chairman Lakkhan Chakma during which the BJP-led executive committee headed by Molin Kumar Chakma was voted out, the official said.



The no-confidence motion was moved by Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) member Doymoy Daveng Chakma, claiming that Molin lost the confidence of the majority of members.

Of the 17 elected members present, 15 voted in favour of Chakma's removal, and one against it. The lone MNF member Rasik Mohan Chakma abstained from voting, the official said.

Twelve BJP members, including Lakkhan Chakma, recently quit the party and joined the ZPM. In the 20-member council, the ZPM now has 16 members, the BJP two and the MNF one.

One seat is vacant due to the death of a BJP member in April.

The ZPM is yet to stake claim to form the next executive committee in the CADC, the official said.

The CADC was formed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution in 1972 for the welfare of the Chakma tribals of Mizoram.

It exercises legislative, executive and judiciary powers over allotted departments within the territory of CADC.

Its headquarters is Chawngte or Kamalagar in Lawngtlai district.

The council has 20 elected members and 4 nominated members. (PTI)

HONEYMOON MURDER

Victim's kin demand narco test on Sonam's parents, brother

INDORE, June 16: The elder brother of Raja Raghuvanshi, an Indore-based transport businessman murdered while honeymooning in Meghalaya, on Monday demanded a narco-analysis test on prime accused Sonam's parents and said the family suspects the involvement of more people in the killing.

Police have arrested five people, including Raja Raghuvanshi's wife Sonam (25) and her alleged lover Raj Kushwaha (20), for their alleged involvement in the 29-year-old businessman's murder last month. They are in the Meghalaya police's custody, and an SIT is probing the case.

Talking to reporters during Raghuvanshi's 13th-day death ritual here, his elder brother, Vipin Raghuvanshi, said, "We want a narco-analysis test on Sonam, her parents, brother Govind and sister-in-law."

Sonam is accused of getting her husband killed during their honeymoon with the help of Kushwaha and three others, in a case which has sent shockwaves across the country.

The other three accused, Vishal Chauhan, Akash Rajput and Anand Kurmi, were initially suspected to be hired killers, but the police later found they were friends of Kushwaha.

Vipin Raghuvanshi said, "New videos related to the murder are surfacing one after the other. We believe more people might be involved in my younger brother's killing."



He also demanded that people who posted these videos on social media also be questioned and asked why they had not released the footage earlier.

He, however, expressed satisfaction with the Meghalaya police's probe.

"Our family is happy with the investigation," he added.

Meanwhile, Sonam's brother Govind attended the ritual feast, although the Raghuvanshi's family said he had not been invited.

"I am here to seek forgiveness. If anyone suspects us, we are asking to be investigated. We stand with Raja Raghuvanshi's family," he told reporters.

Govind had also taken part in Raja Raghuvanshi's post-death ritual in Ujjain on June 13.

However, tensions between Govind and the Raghuvanshi family appear to be growing.

The victim's other brother, Sachin Raghuvanshi, said, "I didn't speak to Govind during the ceremony. He may have come to show sympathy. We did not invite him."

As per the case details, a few days after their wedding, Raja and Sonam left for Sohra (also called Cherrapunjee) in Meghalaya's East Khasi Hills district and went missing on May 23.

His body was found in a gorge near Weisawdong Falls on June 2 while a search continued for Sonam.

She emerged in Uttar Pradesh's Ghazipur, around 1,200 km away from the crime spot, in the early hours of June 9 and surrendered before police. (PTI)

New Nagaland Lokayukta Iralu sworn in

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 16: Nino Iralu, a retired district and sessions judge, was sworn in as the new Lokayukta of Nagaland at a programme held at the conference hall of Nagaland civil secretariat in Kohima on Monday.

Chief secretary J Alam administered the oath of office to Iralu while home commissioner Anoop Khinchin initiated the official proceedings.

Senior officials, officers and staff of Lokayukta, well-wishers and family members were among those present on the occasion.

Iralu succeeded Banuo Z Jamir, former chief secretary of Nagaland, who completed her five-year term as Nagaland Lokayukta.

Iralu's appointment was made by the Nagaland governor based on the recommendation of the Selection Committee constituted under sub-section (2)(i) of Section 3 of the Nagaland Lokayukta Act, a notification issued earlier by the personnel and administrative reforms department said.

Air India discontinues full-service carrier at Imphal

IMPHAL, June 16: Air India has discontinued the operation of its full-service carrier at the Imphal International Airport from June 15, but the airline's low-cost subsidiary AI Express will continue services here, AAI officials said on Monday.

The decision was part of the airline's "long-standing and pre-planned" strategy, they said.

"It is part of a long-standing, pre-planned strategic decision by the airline, and is in no way related to any recent incident," one of the airport officials said.

Together, 241 people on board Air India's London-bound AI 171 flight were killed when the aircraft crashed shortly after takeoff from the Ahmedabad airport on June 12.

"The move is part of a broader strategic realignment by the Tata Group, which owns the airline. Air India Express, the group's low-cost subsidiary, will continue its operations at Imphal, signalling a shift in service model but ensuring continued air connectivity," said another official of the Airport Authority of India (AAI) here.

The Air India authorities could not be contacted for comment.

Air India has a cherished history in the region, connecting Imphal to major cities across the country, the officials added. (PTI)

Tripura introduces smart classes in 33 tribal hostels across state

AGARTALA, June 16: Tripura's Tribal Welfare Department has introduced smart classes in 33 tribal hostels across the state, enabling students from remote areas to access digital learning, an official said on Monday.

Tribal Welfare Minister Bikash Debbarma inaugurated a smart class at a tribal hostel on Sunday to mark the launch of the two-week-long Dharti Aaba Janbhagidari Abhiyan.

The launch saw active participation from students in all 33 government-run hostels, who joined the

programme using the newly developed digital infrastructure. The initiative is expected to benefit around 7,000 students in its first phase.

The project includes several key features like live online interactive classes, recorded lectures, printed study materials in multiple languages, online timed tests, downloadable study materials, learning management system (LMS), motivational and mental health counselling sessions in each hostel, officials added.

"We have set a target to introduce smart classes in 100 government-

run tribal hostels to provide best possible technological access to students who are studying and residing in remote areas. In the first phase, the facility has been implemented in 33 hostels by Debbarma", Tribal Welfare Director Subhasish Das told PTI.

He said the minister personally interacted with the students from hostels such as SD Memorial ST Girls Hostel, BKI ST Boys Hostel (Belonia), Melaghar ST Girls' Hostel, and KBI ST Boys' Hostel (Udaipur), encouraged them to use the technological advantage. (PTI)

Nagaland not frontrunner in GST collection, says official

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 16: Nagaland's commissioner of taxes Abhinav Shivam said the state is not a frontrunner in GST collection in average or per capital terms.

He noted that revenue leakages through evasion have severely affected the state share.

Addressing the inaugural programme of the five-day onsite training on GST for Nagaland state tax officers at the office of the commissioner of state taxes, Dimapur, Shivam said Nagaland has a unique and complex history.

"Our geography, remoteness, infrastructural challenges, and political complexities have led to a legacy of underdevelopment," he observed adding the state struggled to establish revenue-generating industries and enterprises.

Pointing out that Nagaland relies heavily on tax revenues to meet its financial and developmental needs, he said optimising tax revenue is not merely an administrative objective but also a developmental imperative.

"Progress of our people, the services we deliver, the salaries we dispense, the roads we build, the salaries we disburse all rest upon our tax collection," Shivam added.

Shivam also acknowledged that in recent

times, Nagaland has made modest headlines in terms of tax revenue recovery and compliance efforts. He said the state taxes department recovered over ₹ 10 crore in revenue arrears from February 2025 to May 2025.

Despite constraints, he said, the department is making steady, strategic progress.

He said the GST is dynamic and it demands that "we stay updated, trained, and alert to the nuances of reforms and policy changes that occur with remarkable frequency".

Also, noting that taxation unfortunately remains one of the most misunderstood concepts, often seen in a negative light, Shivam said, "We need to understand that the sprawling network of roads, developmental schemes, infrastructure, all are financed from the proceeds of tax which will change with a comprehensive public awareness campaign beginning from July."

For Nagaland to thrive, tax compliance must become a people's movement, he stressed.

Shivam extended his gratitude to the National Academy of Customs, Indirect Taxes & Narcotics (NACIN), Shillong, led by its additional commissioner Issac R Kharkongor, for conducting the training.

Five Meitei outfit members held for attacking 2 policemen, kidnapping man

IMPHAL, June 16: Five members of the Meitei outfit Arambai Tengol were arrested in connection with the alleged assault on two Manipur Police personnel in Bishnupur district and the kidnapping of a man in Imphal West, a senior officer said on Monday. Three members of the organisation were arrested on Sunday in connection with the kidnapping of Chesam Abdul Kadar of Paobitek Mayai Leikai area in Imphal West district, he said. The accused were produced before a court in the district and remanded to seven days of police custody, the officer said.

A search operation is underway to arrest others involved in the kidnapping of the person, he said. Another member of the Meitei outfit was

arrested on June 12 in connection with "the assault on a senior police officer and a police personnel". The two policemen were injured on June 9 while they were trying to disperse protesters who had come out to support the bandh called by Arambai Tengol at Nambol Bazar in Bishnupur district. One more member of the organisation was also arrested on June 13 in connection with the case.

Manipur had recently witnessed protests as demonstrators defied prohibitory orders and clashed with security forces across several districts of Imphal valley, demanding the unconditional release of the arrested Arambai Tengol leader Kanan Singh and four others. (PTI)

First group of 36 pilgrims for Kailash Manasarovar Yatra arrives in Sikkim

Moves to 17 Mile

GANGTOK, June 16: The first group of 36 pilgrims for the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra has arrived in Sikkim's capital Gangtok after six years, and moved to the 17 Mile area on Monday for acclimatisation, officials said.

The 17 Mile area is around 27 kilometres from the state capital.

The pilgrims will proceed via the Nathu La pass in Sikkim and Tibet's Shigatse city before reaching Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, they said.

On June 20, the pilgrims will cross the India-China border, an official said on Monday.

The group, also comprising two officials from the Ministry of External Affairs, reached Gangtok on Sunday evening, he said.

Tourism and Civil Aviation Department Additional Chief Secretary C S Rao said the pilgrims landed at Bagdogra airport in West Bengal's Siliguri and reached Gangtok by road.

They were welcomed by officials of the



Tourism Development Corporation at a bungalow in Rhenock, he said.

This year, 750 Indian pilgrims have been selected for the yatra, with 500 travelling in 10 groups via the Nathu La route and 250 through the Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand.

"The first group of pilgrims stayed in Gangtok on Sunday night and proceeded with the yatra on Monday. They will halt at 17 Mile on June 16 for acclimatisation and then move to Serathang before cross-

ing the India-China border on June 20," the official said.

"The Nathu La-Kailash Manasarovar Yatra is a government-to-government (G-to-G) based pilgrimage, and the Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation (STDC) will be responsible for the entire yatra," he said.

The STDC will take care of the pilgrims' journey from Gangtok to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar and back, he added. (PTI)

HPC EMPLOYEES HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY LTD

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জাননী

ইয়াৰ দ্বাৰা HPC Housing Co-operative Society Ltd. ৰ

সমূহ অংশীদাৰৰ জ্ঞাতাৰ্থে জনোৱা হয় যে আজি ১৬-৬-২০২৫ ইং তাৰিখৰ পৰা

সমিতিখনৰ অংশীদাৰ সকলৰ ভোটাৰ তালিকাখনৰ সংশোধন প্ৰক্ৰিয়া আৰম্ভ কৰা

হৈছে আৰু অহা ২০-৬-২০২৫ ইং তাৰিখে অংশীদাৰ সকলৰ খচৰা ভোটাৰ

তালিকাখন প্ৰকাশ কৰা হ'ব। যদি কোনো অংশীদাৰে নিজৰ নাম ও ঠিকনা,

বিৱৰণ আদি সংশোধন কৰিব বিচাৰে বা যদি কোনো পৰলোক গত অংশীদাৰৰ

উত্তৰাধিকাৰীয়ে অংশটো নিজ নামলৈ হস্তান্তৰ কৰিব বিচাৰে তেখেত সকলক

প্ৰমাণৰ বাৰতীয় নথি-পত্ৰৰ সৈতে অহা ১৯-৬-২০২৫ ইং তাৰিখৰ ভিতৰত

তলত উল্লেখ কৰা ফোন নম্বৰৰ সৈতে যোগাযোগ কৰিবলৈ আহান জনোৱা

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বিপুল মুদিয়াৰ

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HPC Employees Housing C.S. Ltd.

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SBFC FINANCE LTD

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DAKOTA JOHNSON ON WORKING WITH INTIMACY COORDINATOR FOR THE FIRST TIME: IT WAS COOL



LOS ANGELES, June 16: "Materialists" star Dakota Johnson says she found it great to work with an intimacy coordinator during a movie shoot as doing intimate scenes is "not sexy".

Intimacy coordinators have become a norm on Hollywood sets in the post #MeToo era as they ensure actors feel safe while shooting sex scenes.

Johnson, who worked on the racy trilogy "Fifty Shades", shared her experience of working with an intimacy coordinator on Amy Poehler's "Good Hang" podcast.

"She was really great. It was so cool because I'm so used to... you know, it's a sex scene. It's not sexy. It doesn't feel good," said the 35-year-old actor, who is getting some of her career's best reviews for her performance in Celine Song's new film about a New York City matchmaker.

Asked what's her approach to shooting intimate scenes, Johnson said, "First, I think it depends on, who is the character, and who is the character supposed to be to the audience. Is she a super idolized hot girl? Is she a housewife? Is she lonely? Is she scared? Is she conservative? So, that's obviously character work, but then certain prep would go into it." Johnson, who is the daughter of the actors Melanie Griffith and Don Johnson, said she was raised to be proud of her body and she wants to ensure she feels good while doing intimate scenes.

"I want to feel good in my body if I'm showing my body. My mom raised me to be really, really proud of my body and love my body. So, I've always felt so grateful for that, especially in my work because I can use it and it feels real," she said.

"Materialists", Song's follow up to her universally loved drama "Past Lives", also features Pedro Pascal and Chris Evans.

Johnson will next star alongside Anne Hathaway in "Verity". (PTI)

Warner Bros Pictures, Bhanushali Studios and JOAT Films team up for five-film strategic partnership

NEW DELHI, June 16:

Warner Bros Pictures, Bhanushali Studio Limited (BSL) and JOAT Films have announced an exclusive five-film strategic partnership to develop Indian adaptations of iconic films from the American studio.

The partnership is set to reimagine iconic Warner Bros. movies, infusing them with India's rich cultural tapestry while honouring the universal emotional core that made these stories loved worldwide. Warner Bros. Pictures will spearhead the global distribution, highlighting the ambitious international vision of this venture.

Denzil Dias, VP and managing director of India Warner Bros Pictures, said the country has "world's most vibrant and sophisticated film markets".

"India represents one of the world's most vibrant and sophisticated film markets, with audiences who deeply appreciate authentic, locally rooted narra-

tives. This partnership allows us to combine our storytelling heritage with exceptional local talent to create films that will resonate profoundly with Indian audiences while maintaining the universal appeal that defines great cinema," he said in a statement.

Vinod Bhanushali, founder and chairman of Bhanushali Studios Limited, said, "This collaboration represents a unique opportunity to reimagine the stories by Warner Bros. Pictures through an Indian creative lens, blending emotion, scale, and culture for audiences both at home and internationally."

Jack Nguyen of JOAT Films said he is excited for the venture.

"I'm excited to partner with BSL to adapt Warner Bros Pictures on titles that will resonate with Indian audiences. Warner Bros Pictures has an unparalleled library from which we will carefully curate select titles for the vibrant Indian market." (PTI)

With OTT, good actors not relegated to just villain roles, says Kay Kay Menon

MUMBAI, June 16: Actor Kay Kay Menon says OTT has opened up a lot of opportunities for artists unlike the past where only top stars got to portray heroes and many like him were pigeonholed in villain roles.

At the trailer launch of his upcoming series "Special Ops 2" in Mumbai on Monday, Menon, a versatile actor known for his roles across genres and mediums, spoke about the variety that has come with OTT. "We come from that time where there were only theatrical releases, there was no OTT. So those areas were booked for you know what (big stars)... We good actors used to play villain characters. But now it's opened up completely. We as actors now have a chance to enjoy ourselves with whatever talent we have. That's what OTT gives us," he told reporters here.

The actor, known for his roles in "Honeymoon Travels Pvt Ltd", "Haider" and Mumbai Meri Jaan" as well as OTT series "Farzi" and "The Railway Men", said he loves playing the role of RAW officer Himmat Singh in "Special Ops".

"I know Himmat Singh in and out. I also know that I don't know anything about cyber (crime)... So I don't know

anything about it (cyber world)... And for me to kind of get into it... it was an interesting actor's journey. I just acted like I'm an expert, that's all," he said about the new season.

The show became a runaway hit when it premiered on the streamer in 2020. It was followed by another installment called "Special Ops 1.5: The Himmat Story". The sequel is slated to premiere on JioHotstar on July 11.

Director Neeraj Pandey said there is no dearth of "unheard and untold" stories in the spy genre and it naturally becomes a magnet for any storyteller "whether it's the producers, the platform or whoever you would like to sit and the unsung hero". "Also, because these are operations which are covert, they are classified, they are under possible denial. That's the reason not too many people are aware of these operations, these adventures. I feel that it's a compelling enough reason for us to bring it to the audiences. The proof of it is that they enjoy it and they want more of it. Our endeavour is to bring newer stories and keep discovering, searching for newer stories in this domain and take it to the audience," he added. (PTI)



Amazon MGM Studios announces theatrical release of Anurag Kashyap's crime drama 'Nishaanchi'

MUMBAI, June 16: Amazon MGM Studios on Monday announced that director Anurag Kashyap's upcoming crime drama "Nishaanchi" will release in theatres on September 19.

Produced by Ajay Rai and Ranjan Singh under the banner of Jar Pictures in association with Flip Films, "Nishaanchi" marks the acting debut of Aaishvarya Thackeray who stars alongside Vedika Pinto, Monika Panwar, Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub and Kumud Mishra in pivotal roles.

"Nishaanchi" delves into the complex lives of two brothers who walk starkly different paths, uncovering how their choices shape their destinies.

Kashyap said "Nishaanchi" was written in 2016 and since then he has been looking for a studio that trusted the team "whole heartedly".

"Amazon MGM loved it, believed in it, and became the wall behind us. This is exactly what happened with all my films that people love - they were backed by great producers and great Studios."

"Nishaanchi" is a story full of raw human emotions, love, lust, power, crime and punishment, betrayal, redemption and the consequences of it all. I have been extremely fortunate to find a bunch of good people and superb actors and my most beautiful crew to tell this story in the best possible way that I would have wanted. Working with the team at Amazon MGM Studios has been an immensely rewarding and beautiful experience. It was like going back to my early days of filmmaking. We're excited, nervous, and can't wait to share the film with the audience to experience, when it releases in theatres this September," the filmmaker said.

Nikhil Madhok, Director & Head of India Originals, Amazon MGM Studios and Prime Video, said collaborating with Kashyap, "a maestro of raw, unfiltered, and emotionally charged storytelling", has been nothing short of incredible. (PTI)

Wanted to create a compelling story about disparate worlds colliding: 'Stolen' director Karan Tejpal

NEW DELHI, June 16: Karan Tejpal had almost given up on his dream to become a director when he stumbled upon the idea of his critically-acclaimed film "Stolen", about two brothers who are forced to confront their privilege after they witness a baby being stolen from an impoverished tribal woman at a small town railway station.

The director, who worked as an assistant on films like "3 Idiots" and "Delhi 6", said he wrote "Stolen" after he came across a video where two businessmen lost their lives in a lynching because they were mistaken as baby snatchers by the crowd.

"Disparate worlds are always clashing and coming together and it's not something unique in itself in India. But the way we have sort of addressed it in 'Stolen' is to create a compelling story out of it, and to have that intersection kind of take our privileged characters to a place where they have a transformation," Tejpal told PTI in a virtual interview.

"We never set out with this idea that we are telling some really unique story about this intersection. But the idea was to tell an honest

story about it, which compels you to think about these intersections."

After its premiere at the Venice Film Festival, "Stolen" travelled to many international festivals like BFI London, and the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM).

Produced and co-written by Gaurav Dhingra of Jungle Book Studio, the film features Abhishek Banerjee and Shubham as two brothers and Mia Maelzer as the tribal woman. Harish Khanna and Sahidur Rahman also star in key roles. The movie released on Prime Video earlier this month.

Tejpal said his personal motto while making a movie is to find the "heart of the story".

"If filmmakers do not find their heart within a story and they don't find that personal link to a story, then that story is never going to have any potency. For me, this project, or for any in the future, I think the hardest part is finding the heart of that story."

Banerjee, who plays sheltered rich brat Gautam Bansal in the movie, said his motivations to do the film were simple: he wanted to be part of an action drama.

"I really love the action genre and



just wanted to have fun on the set without thinking much... Both Karan and Gaurav had designed the film so well that you could see the film even when they were giving the narration," he said.

He, however, said being on the "Stolen" set felt like being in a proper acting college.

"This was the most planned film I've ever shot. Not a single minute was wasted. If we are on set, we are

doing something productive. And if we are not on set, then still, we are doing something productive, either rehearsing or writing," he added.

Shubham, who graduated from the Film and Television Institute of India and co-wrote the critically-acclaimed "Eeb Allay Ooo!" with Prateek Vats, said he also loved that the movie was rooted in the action genre. Shubham's Raman is the empathetic brother who ropes in a reluctant Gautam to help the woman, Jhumpa Mahato, in her perilous journey into the heartland to find her missing baby.

The actor said he was initially worried about coming off as a boring character.

"I decided that instead of concentrating on the morality part of it, I would focus on my relationship with my brother? How are my decisions being taken because of my brother? Sometimes these are very complicated, detailed things like if he's saying tea, I will say coffee. It is just that toxic brother relationship, which sometimes leads to problems," he added.

Maelzer said she wanted her portrayal of Jhumpa to be relevant to the real mothers.

"At no point should it come across as if I am trying to enact it. This kind of pain cannot be acted on, that's what I feel. I tried to use my craft to go as close as possible to this feeling and maybe our film did justice to the story. The material, the films Karan gave me to watch and study and the research brought me closer to the role," she added.

Tejpal admitted that "Stolen" was a difficult film to make though it has found a lot of support from within the industry with filmmakers like Anurag Kashyap, Vikramaditya Motwane, Kiran Rao and Nikhil Advani boarding it as executive producers.

Dhingra said when Tejpal showed him the video, he felt scared and they decided to work on the movie together. Initially, he said, the director wanted to shoot the movie in Maharashtra but they eventually decided Pushkar in Rajasthan would be more suited.

"The pandemic delayed our film and many on the team fell sick during the shooting but once it was over and the film premiered in Venice, it was like a bullet train and there was no looking back," Dhingra said. (PTI)

Paris Saint-Germain thumps Atlético Madrid 4-0 in an impressive Club World Cup opener



PASADENA (US), June 16: Fabián Ruiz and Vitorino scored in the first half, and Champions League winners Paris Saint-Germain opened Club World Cup play with a 4-0 victory over Atlético Madrid. PSG largely dominated Atlético at the Rose Bowl in its first match since trouncing Inter Milan 5-0 to win its first Champions League title on May 31.

Senny Mayulu and Lee Kang-in scored against 10-man Atlético in the second half of the European powers' meeting in front of 80,619

fans at the site of the 1994 World Cup final. The matchup was one of the highest-profile games in the group stage of the first 32-team edition of the Club World Cup — and treble-winning PSG excelled under another spotlight.

Atlético's Clément Lenglet was sent off in the 78th minute with his second yellow card on a frustrating day that left Diego Simeone visibly furious at both the referees and his players' mistakes.

Ousmane Dembélé wasn't in uniform for PSG after reportedly

injury to a quadriceps while playing for France on June 6. Gonçalo Ramos replaced Dembélé in Luis Enrique's only change to the starting lineup from the Champions League final.

Enrique wore shorts and a training shirt on the sideline while coaching PSG in 88-degree mid-day California heat (31 Celsius).

PSG controlled possession early, and Ruiz capitalized atop the penalty area in the 19th minute. The Spanish midfielder long coveted by Atlético beat Jan

Obiak with a clever strike into the far corner. Vitorino followed with a goal in injury time off Khvicha Kvaratskhelia's second assist of the first half.

Julián Alvarez appeared to answer for Atlético in the second half, but the goal was waved off after VAR determined Koke had fouled Désiré Doué in the buildup.

Alexander Sorloth horrifically missed an open net in the 82nd minute for Atlético. Mayulu iced PSG's victory five minutes later, and Lee converted a penalty on the

final kick of the match.

Atlético got a golden chance to tie it in first-half injury time, but Gianluigi Donnarumma swallowed up Thomas Griezmann's hard shot in the box. Moments later, Vitorino slipped through the Atlético defense and scored on the break. PSG looked remarkably sharp late in its taxing season, showing no sign of treating this tournament as an anticlimax. The champs are in good shape to advance from group play after winning their toughest group match on paper.

Atlético somehow looked more exhausted than its opponents, and it collected seven yellow cards that raise the danger of suspension down the road. Simeone's club will be favored in its next two matches, but will have less margin for error.

"I think that in this competition, we've set ourselves the goal to make history. We are entering a new chapter, and we need to show it's possible to reinvent ourselves. It's a good challenge. We need to keep fighting and working to win games. I was happy with the way we performed today." — Enrique

"The sending-off killed us. We knew it was going to be difficult, but for me, 4-0 is not fair. PSG are fair winners. Given their level, they were better. ... We have to push harder, like in the second half, when we were a different team." — Koke, Atlético midfielder. (AP)

George Russell holds off Max Verstappen for Canadian GP win as McLarens collide



MONTREAL, June 16: George Russell won his first race of the Formula 1 season as the Mercedes driver held off defending race winner Max Verstappen at the Canadian Grand Prix.

It was the fourth victory of Russell's career, and the race ended under yellow when McLaren teammates Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris staged a wheel-to-wheel late battle that ended with Norris hitting the wall.

"It's amazing to be back on the top step," Russell said.

"I felt last year was a victory lost, so to get the victory and see (teammate) Kimi (Anttonen) on the podium, too, is an amazing day for the team. I think it shows the strength of our cars in the cooler conditions, so let's see in the coming races."

Russell started on pole for the second consecutive year in Montreal and held the advantage for most of the race at Circuit Gilles Villeneuve. The British driver became the fourth race winner this year, joining points leader Piastri, Norris and Verstappen, the four-time reigning F1 champion.

Verstappen, who has one more race to go before points drop off his license and eliminate the possibility of a one-race suspension, was satisfied with his second-place finish. "Was quite a good race, even though in the first two stints we were struggling with the tires," the Dutchman said.

"We hung in there in the final stint. That was the maximum we could have achieved today."

Mercedes rookie Antonelli finished third behind Verstappen for his first F1 podium.

"A really good day. It was ab-

solutely victory on merit," Mercedes team principal Toto Wolff said. "We controlled the race all the way. George drove brilliantly and Kimi didn't crack under pressure, even with the McLaren right behind him."

"It's been a while since we've had two cars on the podium with a win and that's why everyone is delighted." The two McLarens came together when Norris, then in fifth, attempted to pass Piastri multiple times on the 67th lap out of 70. Norris ultimately ran into Piastri and bounced into the wall, drawing a safety car for the final laps.

"I was defending the inside, then I felt a small touch," Piastri said. "That's all I've got to go on at the moment. It's a shame for the team."

Norris received a 5-second penalty for contact with Piastri after the race and took responsibility. "I just went for it. I thought Oscar would move a bit more to the right, not leave a gap," Norris said. "I wasn't expecting anything easy from him. But in the end, it was all my mistake. I take full blame and I want to apologize to my whole team and to Oscar for attempting something like that."

Piastri finished fourth, ending an eight-race podium streak dating back to the second race of the season. McLaren as a team failed to reach the top three for the first time this year.

"We never want to see a McLaren car involved in an accident and definitely not contact between our two cars," team principal Andrea Stella said. "This is a situation we know is not acceptable. At the same time, we appreciate that Lando immediately owned it." (AP)

Norway captain Hegerberg's leadership highlighted as key to Euro 2025 challenge

OSLO (NORWAY), June 16: The leadership of Norway captain Ada Hegerberg was highlighted Monday as key for the two-time former title holder heading into the Women's European Championship next month.

Hegerberg, the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner, headed a 23-player squad picked by coach Gemma Grainger for the July 2-27 tournament in Switzerland.

"One of Ada's biggest strengths is how authentic she is," Grainger said Monday with Hegerberg sitting next to her at a squad announcement event.

"Ada will always tell me what she thinks," the coach said, adding "then you get to places a lot quicker" even if it involved "many uncomfortable conversations." Hegerberg quipped with a smile: "That is what you get."

Norway was European champion in 1987 and 1993 and is a four-time beaten finalist, most recently in 2013 when the team had a teenage forward line of Hegerberg and Caroline Graham Hansen.

The two storied veterans and former Champions League winners — Hegerberg at Lyon and

Hansen at Barcelona — with a combined 100 national-team goals are the biggest stars in the Euro 2025 squad.

The 30-year-old Hegerberg has 49 goals despite persistent injuries, and a five-year exile from the team ahead of Euro 2022 that helped push the national federation to treat women's soccer more equally. Norway has not advanced from the group stage in the past two Euros editions though looks favored in the 16-nation draw for Euro 2025.

Norway plays in the opening-day game against host Switzer-

land on July 2 in Basel, faces Finland at Sion four days later and Iceland on June 10 in Thun.

"People can say there are none of the bigger names in our group," Grainger said. "You don't underestimate anybody."

Defender Maren Mjelde was picked for her fifth Euros at age 35 and with 179 national-team games. Four players left on standby include Liverpool forward Sophie Roman Haug.

Norway squad

Goalkeepers: Cecilie Eskerstrand (Fiorentina), Aurora Mikalsen (Cologne), Selma Pa-

ningstuen (Brann).

Defenders: Tuva Hansen (Bayern Munich), Guro Bergsund (Wolfsburg), Maren Mjelde (No club), Thea Bjelde (Valerenga), Marit Bratberg Lund (Benfica), Emilie Woldvik (Rosengard), Mathilde Harviken (Juventus).

Midfielders: Ingrid Syrstad Engen (Barcelona), Vilde Boe Risa (Atletico Madrid), Elisabeth Terland (Manchester United), Justine Kiehlund (Wolfsburg), Lisa Naalsund (Manchester United), Frida Maanum (Arsenal), Guro Reiten (Chelsea), Signe Gaupset (Brann). (AP)

US Open champion JJ Spaun turned a freerfall into a title at rain-soaked Oakmont

OAKMONT (US), June 16: Nobody backs their way into a U.S. Open title.

J.J. Spaun wasn't about to be the first to say he did.

On a day built for umbrellas, panchos and industrial-sized squeegees, Spaun reversed his own freefall, took advantage of several others' and hit two shots that turned him into a major champion while finally, mercifully, creating a moment to remember at the rain-soaked brute called Oakmont.

"I just tried to dig deep," said the 34-year-old Californian who can now call himself a major champion. "I've been doing it my whole life."

The shots that will go down in history are the drive he hit on the reachable par-4 17th and the 65-foot putt he sank with the sun going down and the rain falling on 18.

The first set up a birdie that put him in the lead by himself for good. The second was for emphasis — he only needed a two-putt, after all — that ensured this U.S. Open would finish with one — and only one — player under par.

The 65 footer, the longest of any putt made all tournament, closed out a back nine 32 and left Spaun at 1-under 279 for the tournament. His 72 was the highest closing-round score for a U.S. Open winner in 15 years.

But that wasn't Sunday's take-away. Rather, it was the 401.5 feet worth of putts the champion made over four days. And the fact that Spaun joined none other than Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, Tom Watson and Jon Rahm as the fifth U.S. Open winner to finish birdie-birdie.

"I just felt like you keep putting yourself in these positions, like eventually you're going to tick one off," said Spaun, whose loss in a playoff to Rory McIlroy three

months ago at The Players Championship was his third top-three finish of 2025.

But at the U.S. Open? In that kind of weather?

None of it seemed possible when the rain started coming down during the tail end of a front-nine 40 that took Spaun from one shot back at the start of the day to four behind and fading fast.

Coaches told him, "Dude, just chill," and Spaun did.

A 1-hour, 37-minute rain delay ensued. It was a break that changed everything.

"They were just like, Dude, just chill," Spaun said of the pep talk he got from his coaches.

They suggested that, if earlier in the week, he'd been told he could be four shots back with nine holes to play, he would have jumped at the chance.

"They just said, Just let it come to you, be calm. Stop trying so hard," Spaun said.

Staying calm resulted in making a downhill 40 footer on the par-5 12th for birdie, then a 22-foot birdie on 14 to take the lead by himself for the first time, at even par.

Everywhere else, meltdowns in the rain.

Third-round leader Sam Burns thinned a shot out of a divot and over the 11th green en route to the first of two back-nine double bogeys. He shot 40 on the back and finished tied for seventh.

Adam Scott, the only major champion in the top 10 after Saturday's play, shot 41 in the rain on the back nine and dropped to 12th.

"I didn't adapt to those conditions well enough," Scott said.

Tyrell Hutton, who shot 72, briefly threatened and was part of a brief five-way deadlock for the lead before making bogey on the last two holes to finish tied for fourth. (AP)

Strong finish help India double Munich World Cup haul from last year

NEW DELHI, June 16: A string of consistent final appearances and two gold medals powered India to a commendable third-place finish at the recently-concluded World Cup in Munich, one of the most prestigious and challenging tournaments on the ISSF's annual calendar.

The tournament saw India register their third top-three finish this year in four World Cups, with two gold and as many bronze medals. The team not only improved its standing from joint third last year, but also doubled its medal count, including the number of gold.

"The Munich World Cup which is an annual feature of the International Shooting calendar and is held at the revered Olympic Shooting range, which hosted the

sport at the 1972 Munich Olympics, has once again brought out the best in our rifle and pistol shooters," said K. Sultan Singh, Secretary General, National Rifle Association of India (NRAI).

He added, "When many were saying and quite rightly so, that India will find it very tough given the large field, quality of competition and the fact that some of our best were not part of the squad, our athletes have proven that the depth in Indian shooting is more formidable than ever before. "On behalf of the NRAI, I congratulate the entire squad including the coaches and support staff, for the amazing results, not only in Munich, but throughout the year."

The high point for India at Munich this year, as also of this

whole international season, has been the stunning consistency of rising women's pistol star Suruchi Singh.

The Haryana teenager won an unprecedented third consecutive individual ISSF World Cup stage gold in the women's 10m air pistol, two months after a memorable debut in Buenos Aires. She went where no Indian has ever gone before.

The other highlight was Arya Borse and Olympian Arjun Babuta's tremendous win over the Chinese world record holders Sheng Lihao and Wang Zifei, the former also the Olympic champion in the event, in the 10m air rifle mixed team final, where they completely outgunned their opponents 17-7.

With some incredible and con-

sistent series of high scores, they showcased the depth and new found confidence in Indian shooting. Elavenil Valarivan (women's 10m air rifle), a two-time Olympian, and Sift Kaur Samra (50m rifle 3 positions women), Olympian and world record holder, also reinforced their status as world-class shooters with their bronze-winning performances in Munich.

Elavenil also set a new qualifications national record of 635.9 en route to her bronze while Suruchi equalled Manu Bhaker's qualifications national mark of 588 in the women's air pistol.

In keeping with the trend this year, Indian World Cup debutants also delivered encouraging performances in strong fields.

Ananya Naidu shot a solid

632.4 to finish 13th in women's 10m air rifle, while Nishant Rawat (10m air pistol men) and Aditya Malra (air pistol men) shot scores of 582 and 578 to finish 10th and 27th respectively.

India made a total of seven finals in the 10 events in Munich with Bhaker (women's 25m pistol), Varun Tomar (men's 10m air pistol) and Chain Singh (men's 3P) making the cut.

China finished on top of the standings with seven medals including four gold while Norway edged India to second on the basis of having won a silver with the same number of golds and medals as India.

A total of 11 nations including the individual neutral athletes group won medals in Munich. (PTI)

German regulator pushes for more fan control of soccer clubs like Bayer Leverkusen

DUESSELDORF (GERMANY), June 16: Top German soccer clubs including Bayer Leverkusen and Leipzig face the prospect of handing over more control to fans in future after a regulator intervened.

A statement Monday from Germany's antitrust regulator, the Federal Cartel Office, said it wants to see tighter enforcement of the rule known as 50-plus-1 which requires a soccer club's membership to have majority voting rights over how the team is run.

The regulator said recent European court rulings suggest permanent exemptions from 50-plus-1 for last year's champion Leverkusen and fellow top-tier club Wolfsburg seem "no longer possible."

It said efforts should be made in the future to ensure the club's professional soccer operations come under the control of membership organizations, but didn't



name any deadline.

Leverkusen and Wolfsburg were founded as workers' teams at major companies which own the clubs, with pharmaceutical giant Bayer at Leverkusen, and car manufacturer Volkswagen at Wolfsburg. Their long-term involvement led to the clubs getting exemptions from 50-plus-1.

The regulator also said the German men's soccer league needs to

ensure the clubs it oversees "offer their fans the opportunity to become a new full member with voting rights."

That appears to affect Leipzig and its relationship with drinks giant Red Bull, though they weren't directly named by the regulator in Tuesday's statement.

The club was founded by Red Bull in 2009 and is part of its international network of soccer

clubs. It grants voting rights to far fewer people than most German clubs. Local media reported that only 23 members had the right to vote at Leipzig as of last year.

Leverkusen said in a statement that the Federal Cartel Office's new approach was a "remarkable change of course". The club added that it does not consider the regulator's reasoning to be "convincing" and that it will examine the ruling and reserve all legal options.

Hans-Joachim Watzke, speaker of the league's executive board, said it stands behind 50-plus-1, which he called "an elementary component of German soccer."

Fan control means outside investors can't buy up German clubs outright, like they can in the English Premier League and other competitions.

It's also one reason why Germany hasn't seen the sort of spending sprees and dramatic shifts in competitive balance

which followed takeovers at clubs like Manchester City, Chelsea or Paris Saint-Germain in the past.

Fans often argue the rule keeps clubs rooted in their communities but still allows a limited role for investment.

Sportswear giant Adidas is among the minority shareholders who've helped member-run Bayern Munich win a string of titles, while Borussia Dortmund shares are traded on the stock market.

Fan power is a force in German soccer outside of the boardroom, too. Following protests, the league abandoned plans to sell a stake in its media rights income last year.

While the regulator's statement may eventually change how some top clubs are run, it could take a while. The regulator has been examining German men's soccer for around seven years now and has brought about limited changes before. (AP)

England will hold the edge but India will push hard, feel former cricketers

NEW DELHI, June 16: Former Australia opener Matthew Hayden believes India will have a strong chance of winning the upcoming Test series against England if they can clinch the games in Leeds and Manchester, but South African pace great Dale Steyn has backed the hosts to triumph 3-2 in the five-match contest.

India and England kick off their new World Test Championship cycle with the five-match series, starting with the first game in Leeds on Friday. Manchester will host the fourth Test from July 23.

"I don't think England bowlers are that good, they have got a number of injuries and a number of retirees as well, that will be the challenge," Hayden said on 'JioHotstar'.

"The northern Test matches when it's zipping around that will be key, win that one and it could well be a series that goes India's way," he added.

Since India's last red ball tour of England, the hosts' two most experienced bowlers -- James Anderson and Stuart Broad -- have bid adieu to international cricket.

Additionally, England's bowling arsenal is also considerably depleted, with speedster Mark Wood ruled out of at least the first three Tests due to injury.

Fellow quick Jofra Archer will also miss the opening game, and Gus Atkinson is continuing to recover from a hamstring strain.

India, meanwhile, will take the field under new captain Shubman Gill, ushering in a fresh era following the retirements of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and R Ashwin.

With a youthful batting line-up and limited red-ball exposure in recent months, the visitors will face a stern challenge.

Steyn didn't write India off but backed England to claim the trophy.

"It is a pretty young team. Probably going to say that England are going to win the series but it's not going to come without a fight. I feel like there are going to be one or two Tests that India will take themselves."



"All games will be close. But every game will have a result. I think it will be 3-2 in favour of England. But even that will be incredibly difficult."

Former India cricketers Deep Dasgupta and Sanjay Manjrekar also backed England to clinch the rechristened Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy, but agreed the series would be a closely fought affair.

"It is a young team, it has a young captain.

The team is going through a transition so that will give England a slight advantage and they have the home advantage as well but it (the series) will be very close. I'd say 3-2 in favour of England," Dasgupta said.

Manjrekar echoed the sentiment: "I think England have an edge. They are playing at home and the Indian team is going through a transitional phase so I think England might just pull this off." (PTI)

Women's ODI WC: India to face Pakistan on October 5 at Colombo

DUBAI, June 16: India's marquee women's ODI World Cup match against Pakistan will be held at the neutral venue of R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo on October 5, the ICC announced on Monday.

Colombo had to be added as a neutral venue according to the 'Hybrid Model' that was accepted for the men's Champions Trophy and beyond earlier this year after India refrained from travelling to Pakistan for the ICC event.

There were speculations whether ICC will slot an Indo-Pak round robin match, which is pretty much a feature in all global tournaments post terror attacks in Kashmir's Pahalgam where 26 Indian tourists were killed.

The military escalation from both sides had raised doubts about India facing arch-rivals even at world events but ICC has cleared all doubts after the release of schedule on Monday.

India will kick off their campaign against Sri Lanka at Bengaluru on September 30, and will also face Bangladesh on October 26 at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium, dispelling the rumours of the venue losing hosting rights of the matches after the recent stampede during the Royal Challengers Bengaluru victory celebrations. India's contest against the Lankans is also the opening match of the ICC showpiece.

India, who are seeking their maiden title triumph, will lock horns with South Africa on October 9 and will meet defending champions Australia on October 12, and both the matches are at Visakhapatnam.

From there, India will move to Indore to face England on October 19 and then will proceed to Guwahati for the match with New Zealand on October 23.

"With the eight best teams in the women's game descending on India,



alongside incredible venues and what promises to be record-breaking crowds, we are all looking forward to an unforgettable tournament," said Jay Shah, the ICC Chairman, in a release.

However, the BCCI is yet to form the Local Organising Committee (LOC) which will be in charge of the running of the tournament.

Australia will start their campaign against New Zealand on October 1 at Indore, while the high-profile match against England in a rematch of the previous edition's final is scheduled to be played on October 22 in Indore.

Meanwhile, Pakistan will play all their matches in Colombo as per the hybrid model.

Apart from the match against India, they will also play against Bangladesh (October 2), Australia (October 8), England (October 15), New Zealand (October 18), South Africa (October 21) and Sri Lanka (October 24) at the Premadasa Stadium.

The first semifinal is scheduled for October 29 either at Guwahati or Colombo depending on Pakistan's progress in the tournament.

The second semifinal will be held at Bengaluru on October 30, while the

final will be held at Bengaluru or Colombo on November 2 as per Pakistan's standing in the event.

India are hosting this global event for the first time since 2013, and all the eight teams will play each other in a round-robin format, with the top four entering the semifinals.

Apart from hosts India, the Aussies, England, New Zealand, South Africa and Sri Lanka achieved direct qualification to the World Cup while Pakistan and Bangladesh entered the tournament through the Qualifiers at Lahore earlier this year. Bangladesh qualified for the tournament at the expense of the West Indies.

India's WC schedule
September 30: India vs Sri Lanka, Bengaluru.

October 5: India vs Pakistan, Colombo.

October 9: India vs South Africa, Visakhapatnam.

October 12: India vs Australia, Visakhapatnam.

October 19: India vs England, Indore.

October 23: India vs New Zealand, Guwahati.

October 26: India vs Bangladesh, Bengaluru. (PTI)

BCCI to conduct an additional bone test for age determination in junior cricket

It is being done to have an exact age and make sure that no player loses due to arithmetical calculation rather than scientific calculation

NEW DELHI, June 16: In a significant move, the BCCI has decided to conduct an additional bone test at the age group level to ensure that no cricketer misses out on playing an extra season in the junior circuit due to arithmetical age.

As per the existing norms, a player undergoes a bone test for age determination via the TW3 method (test used for assessing bone age) and a +1 factor is added to determine his or her eligibility for the next season in the same age group.

However, with the rule change, for example a cricketer in the Under-16 boys category, will go a second bone test the following season to determine his eligibility to appear in the same age bracket.

"It is being done to have an exact age and make sure that no player loses due to arithmetical calculation rather than scientific calculation," a BCCI source told PTI.

The cut-off for U-16 boys is 16.5 years and 15 years for U-15 girls competition. "This means that the bone age of a player has to be 16.4 or below in the following season in male cricketers and 14.9 or below in case of females for participation," the source said.

To explain the rule change further, if a male U-16

player undergoes a bone test in the 2025-26 season and the result shows a bone age of 15.4 years, he would not need to undergo another bone test the following season. Instead, a +1 factor is automatically added to their bone age.

In this instance, the player's bone age for the 2026-27 season would be arithmetically calculated to be 16.4 years, regardless of their actual bone growth, allowing them to participate in the U-16 tournament with a bone age of 16.4.

Similarly, if a player's bone age is determined to be 15.5 years or higher, the bone age automatically increases to 16.5 years or higher, making him ineligible for the U-16 tournament, since 16.4 is the final cutoff.

"It's possible that this arithmetical calculation does not accurately reflect a player's actual age, which could cause them to lose out on a year of eligibility," the source added.

In the case of U-15 girls, if a player tests 13.9 years this season, she will be eligible for the same category the next season with a bone age of 14.9.

However, if she tests at 14 or above this season, she can play this season but not the next one with cut off being 14.9. (PTI)



India U23 men's head coach Naushad Moosa names 23-member squad for Tajikistan tour

NEW DELHI, June 16: Preparing for the 2026 Asian Cup Qualifiers, India U23 men's team head coach Naushad Moosa on Monday announced a 23-member squad, including three players from the senior side, for the upcoming friendly matches against Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic.

The Blue Colts have been training at the AIFF National Centre of Excellence in Kolkata since June 1 and will leave for Tajikistan on Monday evening.

As part of their preparations for the AFC U-23 Asian Cup 2026 Qualifiers in September, India will face Tajikistan on June 18 before squaring off against Kyrgyz Republic on June 21. Both matches will take place at the Hisor Central Stadium in Hisor, about 25 kilometres from Tajikistan's capital, Dushanbe.

"These two matches against Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic will help us understand the level of our players, and what more we need to add to it. For now, I'm happy with the way we have prepared. We won a couple of practice matches by big margins, but it wasn't much of a competition," said Moosa.

The camp began with 29 players, of whom 20 made the final list. Moosa's squad was boosted by



the addition of forward Suhail Ahmad Bhat, midfielder Ayush Chhetri and defender Tekcham Abhishek Singh, who joined the U23 camp after finishing their duties with the senior national team during the June FIFA window games against Thailand and Hong Kong.

"After these friendlies, we will get more understanding of our players and what else we need to work on. The opponents are of a pretty good level, I believe.

"It's important to play against such teams when you're preparing for the U23 Asian Cup Qualifiers, where we will face Qatar and Bahrain," Moosa added.

India U23's 23-member squad for June friendlies in Tajikistan:

Goalkeepers: Mohd Arbaz, Priyansh Dubey, Sahil.

Defenders: Bikash Yumnam, Dippendu Biswas, Muhammed Saheef AP, Nikhil Barla, Pramveer, Subham Bhattacharya, Tekcham Abhishek Singh.

Midfielders: Ayush Chhetri, Chingangbam Shivaldo Singh, Lalrentluanga Fanai, Lalrinliana Hnamte, Macarton Louis Nickson, Mohammed Aimen, Vibin Mohanan, Vinith Venkatesh.

Forwards: Joseph Sunny, Mohammed Sanan K, Parthib Sundar Gogoi, Suhail Ahmad Bhat, Thingjam Korou Singh. (PTI)

I have looked up to Washington for inspiration: Sai Sudharsan

BECKENHAM (UK), June 16: Washington Sundar's meteoric rise from age-group to international cricket in a quick span of time was an inspiration for his younger state-mate B Sai Sudharsan, who is all set to make his Test debut against England at Leeds on June 20.

In 2016, Washington was playing more as a specialist batter for India U-19 in the junior World Cup and within a year and half, he was playing his first ODI as an 18-year-old. In 2021, he made his Test debut as a 20-year-old and was one of the heroes of the Border-Gavaskar triumph.

Sai Sudharsan, who is two years junior to Washington, spoke about how his "senior's" journey guided him to work harder in order to achieve his goal of donning India colours.

"I had played a few games against him (junior level). So, it's always special. We have looked up to him a lot and the way he went up and played for the country, it was real quick, I had that in my mind," Sai Sudharsan told BCCI.TV on sidelines of the intra-squad warm-up game with a beaming Washington by his side.

"He (Washington) did well in the IPL. Then he played for the country, so it was great motivation for me, that someone from Chennai (is playing for India). Knowing him and playing with him since we were young, it made me feel I also want to do it the same way. He was an inspiration," the stylish southpaw's admiration for Washington was there to be seen.

Washington, who has played 9 Tests, 23 ODIs and 54 T20Is for India, also spoke about the time when Sai Sudharsan was coming through the ranks as this talented cricketer from Chennai.

"Lot of my coaches and friends as well, constantly spoke about his (Sai Sudharsan's) growth in his crickering career, always grown, only managed to get better," Washington said.

"Every time I watched him (Sudharsan) on TV, there was a lot to take from his skill-set, kind of work ethic, which definitely inspired a lot of kids," he said. (PTI)

India should play both Kuldeep and Jadeja at Leeds: Harbhajan

NEW DELHI, June 16: Spin great Harbhajan Singh has thrown his weight behind wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav to start in India's playing XI for the first Test against England alongside Ravindra Jadeja.

The series opener begins at Leeds on June 20. Traditionally, the surface at Leeds aids the pacers more than the spinners.

"India should look to play Kuldeep Yadav. Of course, Jadeja will bowl with him. So, two spinners with three seamers would be the kind of perfect match for this game," Harbhajan told PTI Videos on Monday.

The turbanator termed the left-arm wrist spinner as a potential match-winner irrespective of the conditions.

"Let's see if conditions will change or favour the spinners. But even if it doesn't, I think these are two capable bowlers who can take wickets on any wicket," he said.

Drawing on his own experience, Harbhajan recalled India's bold decision to field two spinners at Headingley in 2002, when he and Anil Kumble bagged 11 wickets between them on a green top.

"That was a very unique decision at that point of time. The pitch was as green as we are standing on this grass... But the management decided we'll go with two spinners and two fast bowlers and Sanjay Bangar will bowl as well.



"We went with five best bowlers who can pick wickets. That's what matters in the end. You have to back those bowlers who can

pick wickets in any conditions or any kind of wicket," he said.

With Shardul Thakur scoring a century in

the intra-squad warm-up and taking wickets, Harbhajan believes he holds the edge over Nitish Reddy for the fast bowling all-rounder's slot.

"India needs a bowler who can bat a bit. India have got a batting till No. 7, and at No. 8, you need to see who can bowl and get those wickets for you and bat a bit. Not someone who bats and bowls a little bit."

"That's where Shardul will have an edge on Nitish Reddy in my view. Nitish is a proper batsman who can definitely bowl. But we have not seen him bowling in the IPL much..."

"Gautam (Gambhir) is there. He is a very capable coach. And I am sure he will take the right decision," he added.

Harbhajan also weighed in on the much-talked-about exclusion of Sarfaraz Khan from the Test squad.

"It's very unfortunate... I was a bit shocked not seeing his name in the squad. I'm sure he will come back strong. He has got that will to make a comeback... All I can say is, don't be disheartened, you will get your due, if not today, then tomorrow... Look at Karun Nair.

"He scored 300 runs against England and then never got too many opportunities. Now he is back in England with the team," Harbhajan added. (PTI)