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## CM defends shoot-at-sight order in Dhubri

**'Huge conspiracy' against Assam on since independence, feels Himanta**

**DIBRUGARH, June 15:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday defended the shoot-at-sight order issued in Dhubri, claiming that a "huge conspiracy" has been going on against the state since independence and it will take time to eliminate such ploys.

Opposition parties, including the Congress, have criticised the government for issuing the order to control communal tension in Dhubri town.

Speaking to reporters after an official function, Sarma said police have arrested the person accused of writing objectionable content on walls in Dhubri town, and that interrogation is currently underway. "We have already taken action. Assam is a critical state. People won't stop indulging in anti-national activities just because I issued a warning. This is part of a larger conspiracy that has roots



going back to the days of independence," Sarma said.

"So, it won't end with just a warning. It's not that simple. It requires sustained effort, and we must continue working on it," he said when asked about the outcome of the stringent order.

On Saturday, Sarma had said 38 people were arrested in Dhubri, where shoot-at-sight was ordered following communal tensions.

The opposition criticised the CM's order and said throwing of suspected beef and the follow-up clash expose intelligence failure of

the BJP-led government.

"This entire episode shows the failure of the Home Department. Why was there no intelligence input? The government has failed to protect the sanctity of our religious places," Assam Congress chief Gaurav Gogoi said.

He also alleged that RSS has penetrated in every village of Assam ahead of the Assembly polls early next year and is trying to create enmity between communities.

"They are trying to create communal tension and divide people in the name of religion. I request Assam Police to check them and ask them to register in police stations to avoid any tension in coming days," Gogoi demanded.

AIUDF MLA Rafiqul Islam said there was no situation on the ground that warranted a shoot-at-sight order. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Ahmedabad plane crash

## Rupani's mortal remains identified, probe gathers pace



**AHMEDABAD, June 15:** The mortal remains of former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani have been identified through DNA test, officials said on Sunday, as investigations into the June 12 Air India plane crash in Ahmedabad intensified.

Various central and state government agencies, led by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), were at the crash site here for a probe into the causes of the country's worst air disaster in three decades.

So far, 32 victims have been identified and the mortal remains of 14 handed over to the relatives, additional civil superintendent Dr Rajnish Patel told reporters, as the process to identify the deceased through DNA tests gained pace three days after the tragedy.

Rupani was among the 241 passengers killed in the horrific crash. One out of the 242 persons on board miraculously survived.

"The DNA sample of former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani matched (with that of his family members) today morning at

11.10 am," Gujarat Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi told reporters in Gandhinagar.

Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel met the family members of Rupani and informed them about the DNA match, state Health Minister Rushikesh Patel said. "Thirty two DNA samples have matched till now, and 14 bodies have already been handed over to the respective families. These deceased were from Udaipur, Vadodra, Kheda, Mehsana, Ahmedabad and Botad districts," said Rajnish Patel, professor of surgery at the government-run B J Medical College. All but one of the 242 passengers and crew on board the Boeing 787-8(A1171) and another 29 persons, including five MBBS students, on the ground were killed in the plane crash on Thursday.

The London-bound aircraft came down moments after taking off from the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport before falling inside the nearby campus of the medical college in Meghainagar area of Ahmedabad and going

up in flames. An AAIB team is leading the investigations and they are here for the last three days, a senior state police official said.

Various central agencies and the state police are assisting in the probe into the horrific tragedy.

Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC) Commissioner Banchha Nidhi Pani said the black box recovery was a very important part of the investigation process.

"When the investigation started, the black box had to be recovered. The black box is either in the front or in the back. In this case, the tail end was not destroyed and it was stuck in the first building (of BJ Medical College hostel)," the official said. "The AAIB requested us that cranes, labourers and engineers be provided. The AMC immediately acted and the black box was also recovered," Pani said.

City Police Commissioner G S Malik also reached the accident site on Sunday morning.

"Around 270 bodies have been brought to the Ahmedabad Civil Hospital so far from the plane crash site," BJ Medical College's junior doctors association president, Dr Dhaval Gameti, told PTI.

The central government on Saturday set up a high-level multi-disciplinary panel to ascertain the "root cause" of the plane crash and assess any contributing factors, including mechanical failure, human error and regulatory compliances.

The panel, headed by Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan, was mandated to give its report in three months. As many as 230 teams were formed to coordinate with the victims' families, officials earlier said. (PTI)

## Five nabbed for throwing beef near temple: CM

**GUWAHATI, June 15:** Five people have been arrested in Assam's Goalpara district for allegedly throwing beef near a temple during the recent Eid festival, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday.

"Lakhimpur Police of Goalpara district has arrested the... individuals for allegedly throwing beef near a temple in a deliberate attempt to incite communal tension post Eid-ul-Zuha," Sarma said in a post on X. All apprehended people are the residents of Ward No 10 of Khaklamari in Lakhimpur police station area, he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CEM launches official Facebook page for public updates

**DIPHU, June 15:** In a move aimed at enhancing transparency and strengthening communication with the public, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, has officially approved the launch of the CEM Office's Facebook page.

According to an official statement, the page, approved on June 15, will be managed by the CEMO Media Cell and will function as a digital platform to disseminate updates on development activities carried out by various departments under KAAC. It will also spotlight the initiatives and efforts of Team Karbi Anglong, underscoring the administration's focus on progress and good governance. The statement added (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Guv launches Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0 in Baksa, distributes land allotment certificates

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 15:** Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Sunday launched Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0 and ceremonially distributed land allotment certificates to beneficiaries at a function held at the Integrated Textile Park in Kharujhar, Baksa district.

According to an official statement, the mission aims to provide land rights to small tea growers, rubber cultivators, and landless families of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

Addressing the gathering, Governor Acharya said that the peace prevailing in the BTR has been instrumental in driving development

in the region.

He credited the 2020 Bodo Peace Accord, signed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for ushering in a new era of peace, stability, and harmonious coexistence in Bodoland.

"Land in India is more than just an asset—it signifies identity, dignity, and livelihood. For decades, complex land laws have hindered access to land rights, especially for marginalised communities. It is encouraging to witness the BTR government's proactive steps to simplify land governance, digitise records, and make the process transparent and citizen-friendly," he said.

The Governor said the launch of Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0 marks a significant milestone in ensuring land security, social empowerment, and economic uplift of the people of BTR.

He also highlighted the achievements of the first phase of the mission, under which over 1.88 lakh applications were received through a digital portal and more than 1.61 lakh applications were successfully resolved.

The second phase, he said, would further streamline land services and improve delivery to eligible families. He lauded the BTR government's commitment to extending (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## CM lays foundation for centralised community kitchen in Dibrugarh

**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, June 15:** Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday performed the Bhumi Pujan and laid the foundation stone for a Centralised Community Kitchen of the Akshaya Patra Foundation at Dihing Khanti in Dibrugarh.

The project, worth ₹25.45 crore, aims to provide nutritious midday meals to over one lakh students under the PM POSHAN and Samagra Shiksha schemes.

According to an official statement, the facility will include a staff training centre, administrative office, and other infrastructure and is expected to be completed by September next year.

Speaking at the event, the Chief Minister assured that the remuneration of cooks and helpers involved in the midday meal scheme will be increased soon and clarified that none of the existing personnel would lose their jobs due to the centralisation.

Highlighting the state's efforts to expand the reach of such kitchens, Sarma mentioned previous initiatives in Jalukbari, Dispur, and Jorhat, and added that similar projects are underway in Nalbari, Majuli, and Tezpur.

He also announced that the foundation for another kitchen in Lakhimpur would be laid on June 16. The Dibrugarh kitchen is expected to cater to students in Tingkhong, Khowang, Naharkatia, Chabua, Lohowal, and Duliagan. Sarma praised the Akshaya Patra Foundation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Chopper crashes near Kedarnath, all seven on board killed



**RUDRAPRAYAG (UTTARAKHAND), June 15:** A helicopter carrying pilgrims from the Kedarnath shrine crashed early Sunday in the forests of Gaurikund amid poor visibility, killing all seven people on board, the fifth helicopter accident on the Chardham Yatra route since the pilgrimage started on April 30.

The Civil Aviation Ministry suspended the operations of the helicopter operator and issued a slew of safety directions after the tragedy, which came just days after one of the deadliest air disasters where an Air India flight to London crashed in Ahmedabad just after take-off, killing 241 people on board and several others on the ground.

The seven people on board the Bell 407 helicopter, operated by private firm Aryan Aviation Pvt

Ltd, included a two-year-old child and the pilot. They hailed from Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh.

The Civil Aviation Ministry said it has suspended the operations of Aryan Aviation for the Chardham Yatra and has directed the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) to immediately post officers from airworthiness, safety and operations to actively oversee all helicopter activity in the Kedarnath Valley.

Preliminary indications suggest that the probable cause may be Controlled Flight Into Terrain (CFIT), with the helicopter reportedly airborne despite poor visibility and extensive clouding at the valley entry area, the ministry said in a statement.

The exact cause will be determined through a detailed investigation by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB), it added.

CFIT occurs when an airworthy aircraft under the complete control of the pilot is inadvertently flown into terrain, water or an obstacle.

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami also ordered a high-level inquiry and suspension of helicopter operations on the Chardham Yatra route for two days. Rudraprayag District Disaster Management Officer Nandan Singh Rajwar told PTI that zero visibility caused by bad weather apparently led the helicopter to crash between Gaurikund and Triginarayan in Kedarghati and catch fire.

"There were five passengers, one infant and one crew member on board. The helicopter took off from Guptakashi at 05:10 hrs and landed at Shri Kedarnath ji Helipad at 05:18 hrs. The helicopter took off again at 05:19 hrs for Guptakashi and crashed near Gaurikund," an official statement said.

Among the victims was a member of the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee Vikram Singh Rawat. Rajveer Singh Chauhan, the pilot of the helicopter, had served in the Indian Army for over 15 years and had vast experience of flying missions over different terrains. A resident of Shastri Nagar in Jaipur, Chauhan had been working as a pilot with Aryan Aviation Private (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Gas leak continues at ONGC well after three days of blowout, 70 families shifted

**SIVASAGAR, June 15:** Leakage of gas continued for the fourth day at a well of energy major ONGC in Assam's Sivasagar district, where 70 families have been shifted to a relief camp, officials said on Sunday.

A team led by ONGC Director (Technology & Field Services) Vikram Saxena on Saturday took over the operational control of Well No RDS 147, where the blowout took place, they said. "The well killing process is going on, and we have mobilised all necessary equipment for the same. The Crisis Management Team (CMT) is working on war-footing to control the leakage," an official told PTI.

The well has not caught fire yet, and no one is injured in the incident, he said. The blowout took place on June 12 at Well No RDS 147A of Rig No SKP 135 of Rudrasagar oil field of ONGC at Barichuk in Bhatiapara. A private firm, SK Petro Services, was operating the well on behalf of the state-run 'Maharatna' company.

A senior official of the district administration said that around 1,500 people have been affected by the incident. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Free health Camp in Namsai for underserved communities

*Hundreds benefit as The Hills Times brings quality healthcare to Namsai's doorstep*



**HT Bureau**  
**NAMSAI, June 15:** In a step towards enhancing rural healthcare access - 'The Hills Times' - a leading media house, organised a free health camp at Poi Pee Mau Ground in Namsai on Sunday.

The initiative, aimed at uplifting rural healthcare in the region and serving the underprivileged and remote communities across Namsai, Changlang, and Lohit districts, was carried out with the support of multiple stakeholders and received an overwhelming public response.

According to an official statement, the health

camp was organised to ensure equitable access to basic medical services, especially for those living in geographically challenging and underserved areas.

Deputy Commissioner of Namsai, C R Khampa, who attended the event as the chief guest, lauded 'The Hills Times' for its initiative in uplifting community welfare through healthcare outreach.

Commandant of the 186th Battalion of the CRPF, Dharmendra Kumar Singh, was also present and extended full logistical and operational support to the organisers. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'Out-of-school model estimates assume stable patterns of school-age population progression through the education system' Over 272 million children out-of-school across the globe: GEM report

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** The global out-of-school population is now estimated to be 272 million, over 21 million more than the last estimate, according to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Team (GEM).

The team, in its latest report, has pointed out that by 2025, countries will be off-track by 75 million relative to their national targets.

"Two reasons explain this upward adjustment. First, new enrolment and attendance data account for eight million, or 38 pc, of the increase. The ban on girls attending secondary school age in Afghanistan in 2021 also contributes to this increase," the report said.

"Second, updated UN population estimates account for 13 million, or the remaining 62 pc, of the increase. Compared to the esti-



mates last used in the out-of-school model, the 2024 World Population Prospects estimate that the number of 6- to 17-year-olds in 2025 (a proxy of the school-age population) is higher by 49 million (or by

3.1 pc)," it added.

The report also noted that the impact of conflicts on out-of-school populations which can be underestimated as conflicts hamper data collection.

The change in the global population estimates impacts out-of-school rate and population estimates, but the magnitude of that impact depends on the source of data on enrolment and attendance. "If the source is administrative data, then the full increase of the population is passed on to the out-of-school population because there is no fresh information on enrolment."

"But if the source is survey data, then the increase of population is passed on to the in-school and out-of-school populations proportionately. As the model relies on survey data for many countries with large out-of-school populations, only part of the increased school-age population is estimated to be out of school," it said. In total, around 11 pc of primary school-age children (78 million), (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



# Adani's Haifa port unaffected by Iranian missile strikes, operations normal: Sources

**JERUSALEM, June 15:** Indian billionaire Gautam Adani-led group's Haifa port in Israel was unharmed by the Iranian ballistic missile attack, with cargo operations progressing unhampered, sources said.

Late on Saturday night, Iran targeted Israel's Haifa port and a nearby oil refinery in response to Tel Aviv's attack on Iranian nuclear and other targets earlier this week.

Sharpshooters fell in the chemical terminal at the port and some other projectiles fell at the oil refinery, two sources aware of the matter said. They claimed there were no injuries.

Adani's port, however, was not impacted by the strike.

A piece of interceptor shrapnel was also found at the Kishan West (Haifa port) but there were no injuries, they said.

Cargo operations at the Adani-operated port were unhampered. "There are eight ships in the port now, cargo operations are normal," a source said.

The Iranian ballistic missile attack did not inflict any damage to



the port or its operations, the sources claimed.

Adani group did not immediately offer any comments on the issue. Israel government authorities could not be immediately reached for comments. Haifa port is totally functioning normally, sources said, adding 8 ships were handling cargo as on Sunday.

The port has approximately 700 employees. It handles different

type of cargo, including containers, bulk, breakbulk, cement and general cargo.

Sources said the port is closely coordinating with the ministry of transport in Israel and continue to operate normally with full compliance of security and other requirements of the Israeli government.

The Chinese port (which is next to Haifa) is also functioning normally, sources said.

Haifa port serves as a crucial maritime hub, handling over 30 per cent of Israel's imports. It is owned by Adani Ports, which controls a 70 per cent share.

The missiles may have caused damage to a major oil refinery close to the port but there was no official comment on the impact on it. Haifa is less than 2 per cent of the volume handled by Adani Ports and SEZ and contributed about 5 per cent of the revenue. APSEZ handles a total cargo of 10.57 million tonnes.

Israel attacked Iran early Friday targeting its nuclear, missile and military infrastructure. Iran later launched retaliatory strikes on Israel. The two countries traded strikes for a third day on Sunday as the Middle East region braced for a protracted conflict.

Iran said Israel struck two oil refineries, raising the prospect of a broader assault on Iran's heavily sanctioned energy industry that could affect global markets. Some Iranian missiles evaded Israeli air defences to strike buildings in the heart of the country. (PTI)

## Grainspan invests ₹ 520cr on grain-based ethanol plants, benefits from Centre's interest subsidy

**AHMEDABAD, June 15:** Encouraged by the Union Food Ministry's interest subsidy scheme, Grainspan Nutrients has invested ₹ 520 crore to set up two grain-based ethanol plants in Ahmedabad and is supplying green fuel for blending with petrol.

The two plants, which use maize and rice as feedstock, have a total installed capacity of 350 kilolitres per day. Grainspan's first grain-based ethanol plant, located at Bhamsara Village in Ahmedabad district, became operational in May 2023 with a capacity of 110 kilolitres per day. This plant was Gujarat's first grain-based ethanol facility.

Enthusied by the success, the company last month commissioned its second facility, which has been built at a cost of ₹360 crore with an installed capacity of 240 kilolitres per day at the same location.

The company supplies ethanol to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) under the Ethanol Blending Programme (EBP).

"There are three grain-based ethanol plants in Gujarat, of which two facilities are being operated by us. We were the first to set up such a plant in the state, thanks to the central government subsidy," Grainspan Nutrients Pvt Ltd CEO Manoj Khandelwal said here.

He said there is an immense growth potential in ethanol production in India, not only to meet domestic demand but exports also.

Grainspan, which has been into manufacturing of food ingredients since 2014, forayed into ethanol a few years back to diversify its business taking advantage of interest subsidy.

The decision has helped the company increase its turnover which touched ₹ 760 crore last fiscal.

Grainspan Ingredients Pvt Ltd CFO Pankit Shah said the company has invested a total of ₹ 520 crore in these two plants, which are fully operational.

"The first plant has been set up with the help of Central Government interest subsidy. We have taken a loan of ₹ 120 crore for the first plant," he said, adding that there is no interest subsidy on the second plant.

In the 2024-25 Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) that runs from November to October, Grainspan Nutrients will supply around 8 crore litre to OMCs at a fixed rate of nearly ₹ 72 per litre.

In the next ESY, the figure will reach 12 crore litres generating a topline of more than ₹ 800 crore.

Apart from grain-based, Gujarat has 13 sugarcane-based distilleries.

Till June 8 of the current ESY, the ethanol blending has reached 18.9 per cent in the state with the supply

of nearly 33 crore litres of green fuel.

The Centre has notified various ethanol interest subvention schemes from 2018 to 2022 (in 2021 ethanol production from grain was also included under these schemes) to encourage sugar mills and distilleries to enhance their ethanol production capacities. Under all these subvention schemes, the government is facilitating project proponents to avail loans from banks/financial institutions. It provides interest subvention at 6 per cent or 50 per cent of the interest, whichever is lower, for a period of five years including one-year moratorium period.

A new interest subvention scheme for cooperative sugar mills has also been notified in March 2025 for conversion of their existing sugarcane-based plants into multi-feed-based ethanol plants.

Grainspan CFO said that the company's turnover rose 20 per cent to ₹ 758 crore last fiscal, of which ₹ 416 crore came from the food business and ₹ 342 crore from ethanol.

Pan-India, many companies and cooperatives have taken advantage of the interest subsidy incentive to set up new or expand ethanol-making capacities with sugarcane and grain (maize and rice) as feedstock.

As a result, India's total ethanol-making capacity has jumped over four times in the last 11 years of the current government.

Till year 2013, ethanol distillation capacity in the country was 421 crore litres.

At present, the ethanol production capacity in the country has reached 1,810 crore litres, which includes 816 crore litres of molasses-based capacity, 136 crore litres of dual feed capacity and 858 crore litres of grain-based capacity.

Additional capacity has led to an increase in percentage of ethanol blending with petrol.

Till year 2013, supply of ethanol to OMCs was only 38 crore litres with blending levels of only 1.53 per cent in 2013-14 ESY.

Production of fuel-grade ethanol and its supply to OMCs has increased by more than 18 times from ESY 2013-14 to ESY 2023-24.

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

In the current ESY 2024-25 till May 25, about 548 crore litres of ethanol has been blended by achieving a blending of 18.74 per cent.

The government has set a target of 20 per cent blending by 2025-26. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## CM defends shoot-at-sight

He alleged that the order was selectively targeted at one particular community. "The order is not at all justified. There are other means to control the situation. It seems the order was issued only to target one community," he claimed. Rajgor Dal working president Bhasco De Saikia said the state government failed to prevent communal tension in Dhubri and also to identify the real culprits. "The shoot-at-sight order is communal in nature aiming to polarise society. It was issued to divide people and trigger riots. We strongly oppose it," he added.

The law and order situation in Dhubri town deteriorated after pieces of objectionable meat were found near a temple on June 8. Tear gas shells were fired to disperse the agitators and restrictions on public movement were imposed. To prevent further flare-up of "communal tension, riot risk or violent protests", the district administration next day clamped restrictions under section 163 of BNSS and ordered all shops and markets establishments in the town to remain closed. It was withdrawn a day later. Sarma had said a number of cattle were allegedly slaughtered illegally at several places during Eid festival a day ago and parts of the meat were thrown at multiple locations across Assam. (PTI)

## Guv launches Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0

land rights to all landless families, irrespective of caste or community. Citing official figures, Governor Acharya informed that leveraging the amended Sixth Schedule provisions and the Land Regulation Act of 1886, land rights have been granted to over 26,775 families, and more than 3.23 lakh beneficiaries have availed land-related services. Under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, the region has issued 32,798 individual titles and 1,161 community land titles. He also said that land surveys in 36 previously unsurveyed, non-cadastral villages have been completed, providing long-overdue land security to thousands of residents.

The Governor noted that the initiative would significantly benefit nearly 8,000 small tea growers cultivating over 2,239 hectares of land, giving a boost to the region's tea economy. He further commended the government's steps toward modernising land administration through the adoption of digital tools such as GIS labs, a central modern record room, digital record tracking systems, and integration with online platforms.

"These measures have strengthened institutional efficiency, reduced land-related disputes, and built greater public trust. With initiatives like Mission Bwiswmuthi 2.0, BTR is becoming a model of land governance among Sixth Schedule regions," said Acharya, adding that the mission aligns with the national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047 -- to create a peaceful, smart, and green India. The event was also attended by handloom and textile minister U G Brahma, BTR chief executive member Pramod Boro, BTC legislative assembly speaker Katiram Boro, deputy CEM Gobinda Chandra Basumaty, executive members Ranjit Basumaty and Dharma Narayan Das, BTC principal secretary Akash Deep, and Baksa deputy commissioner Gautam Das, among others. Earlier in the day, the Governor also planted a sapling under the Green Bodoland Mission.

## Five nabbed for throwing beef

"A case has been registered and strict action is being taken to ensure all such elements face the full force of the law," the CM said. On June 8, Sarma had said that a number of cattle were allegedly slaughtered illegally at several places during Eid festival and parts of the meat were thrown at multiple locations across Assam.

On Saturday, he said that 38 people were arrested in Dhubri, where shoot-at-sight orders were issued for night-time following communal tensions. (PTI)

## CEM launches official Facebook

that all KAAC departments have been urged to actively contribute to the platform by providing regular updates, ensuring that the public remains well-informed about ongoing projects and policies. The initiative also seeks constructive engagement from social media users and the general public to foster a transparent, participative, and informed environment in the region.

## CM lays foundation for centralised

and the Hare Krishna Movement for their service to humanity and education, especially in tribal regions and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chief Minister also spoke about broader development plans for Dibrugarh, reiterating the government's vision of transforming the town into the state's second capital. He cited the ₹206 crore City Hospital project and the ₹290 crore Khanikar Sports Complex, set to surpass Guwahati's Sarusajai Sports Complex in scale. He also noted the Centre's commitment of ₹600 crore for the Trans-Arunachal Highway and said that the revamp of Namrup Fertilizer Plant would begin later this year.

On welfare schemes, Sarma said the digitisation for Orunodoi 3.0 had been completed to ensure genuine beneficiaries are included. He added that the list of beneficiaries under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan would be published soon and that disbursements under the scheme would begin from August. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Assam has entered a new era of peace, progress, and prosperity," Sarma said, adding that every welfare initiative is driven by a vision of inclusive development. Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, Transport Minister Jogen Mohan, Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika, Power Minister Prasanta Phukan, and several other dignitaries were present at the ceremony.

## Chopper crashes near Kedarnath

Ltd since October 2024. Besides the pilot, a couple and their two-year-old daughter hailing from Yavatmal in Maharashtra were also among those killed in the crash. They were identified as Rajkumar Jaiswal, a transport businessman, his wife Shradha, and their daughter Kashi, former Wani MLA Vishvas Nandekar told reporters in Yavatmal. Vinod Devi (66) and Tushti Singh (19) from Uttar Pradesh were among the victims. The Civil Aviation Ministry said that the DGCA has been directed to immediately post officers from airworthiness, safety, and operations to actively oversee all helicopter activity in the Kedarnath Valley and rigorously review the functioning of the Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority (UCADA) command-and-control room. "Two helicopters belonging to TransBharat Aviation - VT-TBC with Yogesh Grewal as pilot in command and VT-TBF with Jitender Harjai as PIC - were found to have been airborne under similar unsuitable weather conditions.

"Accordingly, the licenses of both pilots have been suspended for six months," the ministry said. Chief Minister Dhami chaired an emergency meeting with senior officials soon after the crash and ordered a high-level inquiry into it. "Heli services will remain suspended on Sunday and Monday as the weather is bad and the safety of passengers is the state government's top priority," he said. Those responsible for negligence should be identified and punitive action should be ensured against them, he said. He also told officials at the meeting to issue a strict SOP for heli operations in the state and set up a control and command centre in Dehradun to monitor heli operations in the state. Helicopter crashes or emergency landings are occurring at an alarming frequency on the Chardham yatra route in Uttarakhand. The Chardham yatra involves Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri shrines. On May 8, a helicopter going to Gangotri Dham crashed in Uttarkashi district in which six people were killed. On June 7, a helicopter going to Kedarnath had to make an emergency landing on the road due to a technical fault soon after take-off in which the pilot was injured but the five devotees on board were rescued safely. On May 12, a helicopter returning from Badrinath to Sersi with pilgrims on board had to make an emergency landing in a school playground in Ukhimath due to poor visibility. All pilgrims were safe.

The helicopter took off again after about an hour when the weather improved. On May 17, a heli ambulance from AIIMS Rishikesh crash-landed near the Kedarnath helipad in Uttarakhand due to damage to its rear part. Fortunately, all three occupants on board -- a doctor, a pilot, and a medical staff member -- escaped unharmed.

The chief minister said on Sunday that a strict SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) with priority to public safety should be prepared for the operation of heli services in the state, in which a complete check of the technical condition of the helicopter should be made mandatory. Weather status should also be checked before heli operations, he said at the meeting. It was decided at the emergency meeting to set up a common "Command and Coordination Center" in Dehradun for better coordination and safe operation of helicopters, Dhami said. "There should not be any laxity regarding compliance with DGCA norms in helicopter operations in the state. It should also be ensured that the pilots flying in the upper Himalayan region are experienced," he said. (PTI)

## Gas leak continues at ONGC

"They are getting the smell of gas and are not able to light their stoves or burn anything. We are providing them with cooked food and constantly monitoring the situation," she said. From the area of the blowout, 70 families have been shifted to a relief camp set up in nearby Bangoan, and all necessary arrangements are being made to ensure their welfare and well-being, the district administration said in a post on Facebook.

"There are currently doctors from the Health Department and the Animal Husbandry Department at the scene. They are examining the health conditions of both people and their domestic animals," it added. An official of ONGC 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 said. (PTI)

## Free health Camp in Namsai

The 186th Battalion of CRPF, Namsai, played a crucial role in facilitating the camp's success by providing transportation for patients from remote villages, ambulance services staffed with trained medical personnel, and a water tanker to ensure uninterrupted drinking water supply throughout the event. A medical team from Swastha Hospital, Dibrugarh, comprising reputed and experienced doctors, delivered comprehensive healthcare services during the camp. The team conducted free consultations, offered personalised medical advice, and attended to a wide range of health concerns, including maternal and child care, geriatric support, and general health check-ups. The camp recorded strong turnout from economically weaker sections, tribal communities, and other marginalised groups. In addition to addressing immediate medical needs, the initiative also helped spread awareness on preventive healthcare and hygiene practices. The Hills Times reaffirmed its commitment to social responsibility through such initiatives, with a vision to bridge the gap between healthcare facilities and rural populations. The collaboration with CRPF Namsai, Swastha Hospital, and local communities made the event a notable example of public service with lasting community impact.

## Over 272 million children out

15 pc of lower secondary school-age adolescents (64 million) and 31 pc of upper secondary school-age youths (130 million) are out of school. The model used multiple data sources (administrative, survey and census) to generate internally consistent trends of regional and global averages. "The model at the country level reconciles different sources, imputes values on years when there are no data, and involves short-term projections. "Therefore, they are not the same as countries' official out-of-school values, which are based on a single source on a given year. It is these latter values, which are the basis for countries' out-of-school rate targets to be achieved by 2025 and 2030," the report said. "Collectively, as the SDG 4 Scorecard shows, countries will reduce their out-of-school population by 165 million by 2030 if they meet their targets.

"However, it is projected that by 2025 countries will be off track by four percentage points among those of primary and lower secondary school age and by six percentage points among those of upper secondary school age. In total, this means that, already by 2025, countries will be off-track by 75 million relative to their national targets," it added. The report noted that the impact of conflict on out-of-school populations is being underestimated. (PTI)

## Segregating dreams from scrap: Seelampur's e-waste economy moves to shadows but doesn't stop

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** In the winding, congested alleyways of New Seelampur, a 500-foot stretch tucked deep inside east Delhi, life hums with the quiet rustle of wires, metal scraps, and fraying hopes.

Every household here seems tied to the business of e-waste -- a world where old computers, phones, fridges, and their innards are torn down, stripped, sorted, and sold.

But the story is no longer what it once was.

As India's e-waste policy evolves and the gaze of enforcement agencies intensifies, the epicentre of one of the world's largest informal e-waste markets has quietly dispersed, not collapsed, but fragmented and slipped into the shadows.

The business hasn't ended, it has just moved -- to Loni, Muradabad, Meerut and smaller towns where it thrives away from the eyes of the regulators, the media, and digital scrutiny.

"The volumes have not really reduced. The business is still alive, but just not visible in Delhi anymore," says Vinod, programme officer at Toxics Link, an environmental NGO.

"Two things are happening -- the market is moving out, and formal recyclers are taking some share, but the informal chain still dominates," he adds.

During a recent visit to the New Seelampur slum, PTI witnessed how this once-bustling hub has morphed into a quieter but deeply embedded network. As the reporter walked through the slum's narrow lanes, nearly every doorway opened into a home where families were engaged in e-waste segregation.

In a dimly-lit 6x6 feet room, 50-year-old Saleema sat hunched over a knee-high mound of cables. Her fingers, bent with arthritis, sort wires from morning to night, guided only by a low-watt bulb dangling from the tin roof.

For 10 kg of wires, she earns ₹ 50 -- slightly more if she finds slivers of copper.

A single mother -- her alcoholic husband vanished into irrelevance years ago -- Saleema supports her three children. Her eldest son has been



lodged in Tihar Jail for over a year on theft charges, still awaiting trial.

"I have been doing this for over 30 years. This is the only life I've known," she says.

Next door, 19-year-old Shaheda sits outside her one-room home, her hands still hennaed from her wedding barely a month ago.

Married into this community from Muradabad, she's no stranger to the trade. After making breakfast for her family, she joins her husband and in-laws, segregating wires.

"Copper dekh rahe hain... If we get a good amount, it helps us with daily expenses. It's little, but it adds up," she says.

Nearby, Sajid Khan's family of five is also neck-deep in dismantling old electronics.

"Pehle se kaam bahut kam ho gaya hai". The buyers are there, but GST and high costs have driven things outside. It's formalised now," he says.

His daughter attends school in the morning and returns to help in the evening -- a pattern repeated in many homes here.

Twelve-year-old Sharmila (name changed) wants to become a doctor -- and not just any doctor, but one who treats her neighbours, many of whom suffer from chronic ailments linked to toxic exposure.

"After school, I help my father," she says shyly, as she picks apart an old mobile charger.

Her father, who did not wish to be named, is saving every rupee in the hope of breaking the cycle. "We want to leave this behind," he says.

On any given day, one might see an array of tasks being carried out here -- circuit boards being pried open, mobile phones separated into

batteries, cases, and chips.

For ₹ 80, a technician will strip an old phone into saleable pieces. In the makeshift shanties, traders examine CRTs from old monitors, polishing the glass to resell in rural markets. Impure copper sells for ₹ 600 per kg; pure fetches up to ₹ 800.

Each house is a microcosm of labour -- families bent over wires, children washing dismantled parts, mothers selling components to traders who come knocking. Yet, the total daily income rarely crosses ₹ 500- ₹ 1,000 per household.

"e-waste is processed in phases -- from collection to dismantling to material recovery -- and each stage generates economic value," explains Vinod from Toxics Link.

"That's why it survives. Every actor in the chain makes something, even if it's meagre."

India's E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2022, was designed to tighten controls, making producers more responsible through extended producer responsibility (EPR). But the system still falls short. "How laws are made is not very important but how implementation takes place is the key, and that is where the gap is between implementation and the role of the informal sector -- these are two serious gaps," says Satish Sinha, associate director, Toxics Link, which works closely in the sector.

"The Delhi market might have shrunk in size and moved to somewhere else, the volumes, to my understanding, haven't really reduced."

"Many formal recyclers have entered the market, whose numbers have grown. So a lot of products could be going to the formal market directly, and that is why there could be a reduction of the informal market," Sinha says.

Only about 500,000 tonnes of e-waste were formally collected in 2021-22 -- out of more than 3 million tonnes generated.

And even though companies are mandated to send waste to the authorised recyclers, loopholes abound, says public policy analyst Dharmesh Shah. (PTI)



## Our campaign against this will not over Crackdown against anti-national elements to continue in Assam : CM Himanta

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 15:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said that the state government would continue the cracking down on anti-social elements as this has deep root since post-independence days.

He said, "We have already taken action. Assam is a very critical state. The anti-national elements will not stop their activities only after my warnings because these have been going on since the days of independence. Therefore our campaign against this will not over."

Meanwhile, Sarma also said that the Lakhimpur Police in the Goalpara District have arrested five individuals for allegedly throwing beef near a temple in a deliberate attempt to incite communal tension post Eid-ul-Zuhra.

The arrested persons have been identified as Bodir Ali, Hazarat Ali, Tara Mia, Shajamal Mia and Jahangir Alom. All the arrested persons are the residents of Khak-



ilamari locality under the Lakhimpur police station.

"A case has been registered and strict action is being taken to ensure all such elements face the full force of the law," the Chief Min-

ister said.

The incident follows another major law enforcement action in western Assam's Dhubri town, where 38 individuals were arrested during an overnight crack-

down on Saturday. The arrests came just a day after Sarma's visit to the area, which has witnessed communal disturbances since Eid al-Adha.

Tensions in Dhubri escalated on June 8 and 9 after suspected cattle remains were found in a temple, triggering unrest. Police have registered five FIRs relating to three separate incidents, including the alleged cow slaughter, rioting, and the spread of misinformation. Twenty-two people had initially been arrested in the aftermath.

The FIRs cite violations under the Assam Cattle Preservation Act and several sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, including those dealing with defiling places of worship, promoting enmity between groups, criminal conspiracy, and acts intended to outrage religious sentiments.

Authorities have intensified surveillance and law enforcement measures in the region to prevent further flare-ups.

### Assam logs 3 new COVID-19 cases, one recovery

**GUWAHATI, June 15:** Assam reported three fresh COVID-19 cases in the last 24 hours, according to official data released on Sunday.

According to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare website, there are 29 active cases in Assam, of which three were detected since Saturday. Since January this year, Assam has seen 14 people recovering from COVID-19, including one in the last 24 hours, it said. There are 7,383 active COVID-19 cases in India at present, and 10 more deaths have been reported in the last 24 hours, it added.

Official sources have maintained that most cases are mild and managed under home care. (PTI)

### Candlelight vigil held in Bokajan for Rosmita Hojai

**HT Correspondent**

**BOKAJAN, June 15:** A solemn candlelight vigil was held at the office of the Asom Jatiyatadabi Yuva Parishad (AJYCP) in Bokajan, Karbi Anglong, in memory of Rosmita Hojai, a 20-year-old woman from Assam who was recently found dead under mysterious circumstances in Uttarakhand.

Organised by the AJYCP Bokajan Regional Committee, the vigil saw participation from Sandeep Saikia, regional president; Jitu Phukan, AJYCP Central Executive Committee member; and Barim Engti, former president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, Karbi Anglong, among others. Lamps were lit and prayers offered in remembrance of the young woman, whose tragic and untimely death has stirred concern across the state. Rosmita Hojai, a resident of Dima Hasao district, had reportedly travelled to Delhi to appear for the Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) exam. She later went to Uttarakhand, accompanied by two men, and was subsequently found dead near a river bank.

The circumstances surrounding her death remain unclear, and calls for a thorough investigation have been growing across Assam. The AJYCP, among others, has demanded justice and urged authorities to ensure a transparent probe into the incident.

## Nirod Changkakoty submits memorandum to CM

*Proposes grassroots reforms for Jorhat*

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, June 15:** Noted publisher and philanthropist Nirod Changkakoty, proprietor of Changkakoty Books and Publishers, recently submitted a detailed memorandum to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in Guwahati on behalf of the Nirod Changkakoty Trust, highlighting a series of pressing grassroots issues in Jorhat district.

The Chief Minister met Changkakoty in person and received the memorandum, which outlines innovative and community-driven solutions aimed at social upliftment and economic empowerment.

**Skillings Mothers Near LP Schools**

One of the key suggestions addresses the plight of mothers who spend long hours—often up to three hours—waiting near Lower Primary schools to escort their children. Changkakoty proposed the government introduce a scheme, implemented by the Trust, to skill these mothers in crafts such as weaving, embroidery, tailoring, or snack-making. He stressed the need for basic infrastructure, including seating and washrooms, and said the model could be replicated across Assam, contributing to women's empowerment and the development of skilled human resources.

**Support for Newspaper Hawkers**

Concerned about the declining sales of newspapers and the financial distress of newspaper hawkers, Changkakoty urged the government to offer remuneration and post-retirement benefits to these workers. "They are the unsung carriers of information and deserve dignity and security," he said.

**Reviving Rural Bookstores**



The memorandum highlighted the impact of free textbook distribution on rural bookstores, many of which are shutting down. Changkakoty proposed that instead of distributing books directly, the government could transfer money to students, allowing them to purchase books from local stores. This, he said, would not only revive small businesses but also encourage browsing and cultivate reading habits.

He also pointed out a social change: with textbooks now freely available, students no longer seek hand-me-down books from seniors, reducing inter-generational academic bonding.

**Promoting Reading in Schools**

To counter declining newspaper sales and foster reading habits, Changkakoty suggested that each government school subscribe to at least one newspaper and magazine, ensuring students remain engaged with current affairs and print media.

**A Chess Hub for Jorhat**

The Trust also called for a permanent facility for chess players in Jorhat. With around 3,000 active players in the district, Changkakoty proposed building an infrastructure that could accommodate at least 500 players at once. "Chess enhances analytical skills and provides a healthier alternative to screen-based games," he said.

**Eco-Friendly Alternatives to Paper Cups**

Addressing environmental concerns, the Trust urged the government to involve IIT Guwahati and NTD Jorhat in developing eco-friendly, cost-effective alternatives to wax-coated paper cups widely used in tea stalls and public events. He suggested clay cups as a healthier, sustainable option that could also revive traditional pottery.

Changkakoty's comprehensive appeal, touching upon education, environment, entrepreneurship, and social welfare, was lauded by various quarters as a model of grassroots-focused governance advocacy.

## Efforts on as ONGC struggles to cap Bhatiapar Gas Well

**HT Correspondent**

**SIVASAGAR, June 15:** The deafening roar of an uncontrolled natural gas blowout from Well RDS 147 in Barichuk, Bhatiapar, just 8 km from Sivasagar town, continues to send waves of panic through the local population for the fourth consecutive day. Over 700 residents have been affected as efforts by a 20-member Crisis Management Team (CMT) to cap the well head remain unsuccessful.

The well, operated by SK Petrochemicals 135 VI, a private rig contractor for ONGC, suffered the blowout during a work-over operation earlier this week. ONGC officials on-site stated that efforts are underway to contain the gas flow and expressed hope of plugging the well soon, but admitted that no expert can give a definitive timeframe for full control.

An ONGC officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, revealed that the team's initial attempt to cap the well using the conventional Heavy Mud Injection method failed. The team is now employing the Junk Shot technique, a high-risk emergency measure that involves injecting shredded rubber, golf balls, and similar materials into the well to disrupt and stop the gas flow. Vikram Saxena, Director (Technical and Field Services), is personally monitoring the operation.

In a significant development, Sivasagar MLA and Rajior Dal leader Akhil Gogoi visited the site today. After speaking with ONGC's CMT leader Sri Hari, Gogoi disclosed that the blowout may have inadvertently revealed a rich natural gas reservoir in the region.

Meanwhile, the Sivasagar district administration has shifted affected residents to Bogan High School, where two medical camps are operational. Security forces have been deployed, and the Water Resources Department is assisting by lifting water from the Dikhow River to cool the well head and prevent ignition. Oil India Ltd has also sent logistical support to aid the operation.

Fears among villagers are growing, drawing comparisons to the Baghjan blowout of 2020. Dhan Chutia and his wife said they have been forced to leave their home after 4 p.m. daily due to the intense pressure and noise. "Our poultry and animals are suffering in the heat," they said.

Anjumoni Phukan, wife of Dayananda Chutia, tearfully expressed her dread, saying, "I'm praying every minute that this doesn't become another Baghjan." Several residents also accused ONGC of indifference to their suffering and lack of basic support, especially amid the scorching heat.

## Diphu Municipal Board declares weekly market days at Lorulangso Market

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, June 15:** In a significant move aimed at bolstering the local economy and improving access to essential goods, the Diphu Municipal Board has officially designated Sunday and Wednesday as weekly market days at Lorulangso Market, Diphu.

The initiative is expected to enhance trading opportunities for local farmers and vendors while also reducing market congestion, thereby benefiting both the producers and the general public.

According to a statement issued by the Department of Information and Public Relations (DIPR), the decision has received the official approval of Rah Kro, Chairman of the Diphu Municipal Board, and comes into immediate effect.

The move is seen as a proactive step toward ensuring regular access to fresh produce and essential commodities, while also providing a structured platform for economic activity in the region.

Local stakeholders have welcomed the decision, anticipating improved market efficiency, better consumer choice, and a boost to the grassroots economy in Diphu.

## Cryptic wall writings spark panic across Dhubri

**HT Correspondent**

**DHUBRI, June 15:** A series of mysterious wall writings discovered across various locations in Dhubri district have raised widespread public concern, prompting speculation about possible militant activity.

The writings, which lack any coherent or complete sentences, were initially thought to be in some form of code. The unusual nature of the markings led to fears of potential links to underground or extremist groups, although no such connection has been officially confirmed. The writings were first discovered on June 6th and again on Saturday night. In a significant development, Dhubri Police detained an elderly man on Sunday in connection with the incident.

## Jayanta Malla Baruah chairs Assam Athletics Association Meet in Tezpur

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, June 15:** The Assam Athletics Association (AAA) held its extended executive meeting today at the Tezpur Convention Centre, chaired by Assam Cabinet Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, who also serves as president of the association. The meeting aimed to accelerate the development of athletics in the state through strategic planning and grassroots engagement.

The event began with a ceremonial lamp lighting by Minister Baruah in the presence of Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rabha, AAA Treasurer Ritubaran Sharma, and several senior dignitaries. Welcoming the gathering, Sharma highlighted the purpose of the meeting and introduced key stakeholders, including prominent athletes and AAA office bearers.

A special felicitation was held for Minister Baruah on his recent election as Vice President of the All India Athletics Federation (AIAF). The association also honored five medal-winning athletes—Gitanjali Boro, Hamsira Rongpi, Neela Basumatari, Pakhila Engtipi, and Suni Barua Gogoi—for their outstanding performance at the World Veteran Athletics Championships in Taiwan.

does not." Narzary said the story of her new book "begins with an ancient feel about it, that would flow through realms, space and species, human, animals, birds and insects, all speaking the same language, and being bound by elements of love and compassion".

The 'Joukhoorei', the title derived from the Bodo words 'jou' meaning wine and 'khoorei' signifying bowl, is the dry shell of a world with its insides scooped out to hold liquid. The book tells the story of "having and losing, of uprooting and settling, of the joys of befriending and the pains of then letting go - It is a tale of a soul not lost forever but a soul which had only lost its way", she said.

It is redolent with the legends of "our land, but is imbued with universal concerns where the lines between myth and reality blur, and every choice carries the weight of destiny", Narzary said.

"A visit to the serene 'gompas' (monasteries) in the high altitudes of Sikkim and Bhutan refused to leave my thoughts, and I set this tale in the mountains, which are gener-

ally thought to be home to spirits, mysteries and mythical songs," she said. The author has woven the tale around 'Bathou' (as Lord Shiva is referred to among the Bodos) and the Buddha, but she points out that they are essentially separate and have distinct identities, though they are manifestations of the same belief.

"The connect with the Buddha and the Jataka era in the book was incorporated for a feel of ancientness and mythical allure, as well as to add a bridge between the very distant, enchanted past and the present," she said. Her books may be works of fiction, but Narzary maintains that a lot of research goes into her writings as she "observes people, situations, objects, and anything around me".

"I listen to people talk and at times, I get old people in our villages to speak of days of yore, of unchronicled incidents, of lost customs which were bound with lost clans. I also read a lot of academic papers, old news archives and even consultation with former army personnel like in 'An Unfinished Search' are involved," she said.(PTI)

## Myth, reality, universal concerns headline Rashmi Narzary's 'The Lost Soul of the Joukhoorei'

**GUWAHATI, June 15:** Bringing together a blend of myth and reality, award-winning author Rashmi Narzary's says her latest book - 'The Lost Soul of the Joukhoorei' - underscores universal concerns along with the "joys of befriending and the pains of letting go".

Narzary, who hails from the Bodo community, has narrated many a story of yore of the land with creative sensibility and her recent book, too, brings to the fore myths, folklore and legends drawn from lost and forgotten tales.

The only Assamese writer to be invited by the Sahitya Akademi as a house guest recently to the Rashtrapati Bhawan, Narzary, told PTI that 'The Lost Soul of the Joukhoorei' was born out of her "crazy imagination and I dole out magic and suspense, too, along with legends of the land".

Eminent lyricist and poet Gulzar has mentioned in the book's blurb, "If there is a Cosmos within Cosmos, a Universe within a Universe, it's in the storytelling by Rashmi Narzary. She takes you across infinite time. The book ends. The story

## Grand finale of Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas Cultural Extravaganza concludes in Margherita

*Open session will be presided over by Asom Xahitya Xabha President Basanta Kumar Goswami*

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, June 15:** The grand finale of the cultural extravaganza organised by the Asom Xahitya Xabha to centrally celebrate Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas concluded on Sunday at the Margherita Swarna Xakha Xahitya Xabha Bhawan.

Hosted by the Margherita Swarna Xakha Xahitya Xabha under the aegis of the Tinsukia Zilla Xahitya Xabha, the event, which began on May 25, served as a vibrant showcase of Assam's rich cultural heritage.

The final day of the competition was inaugurated by Lakhkyadhar Sonowal, former president of the Margherita Swarna Xakha Xahitya Xabha, whose inspiring address set the tone for a day filled with talent and tradition.

More than 100 students from various schools in the Margherita region participated in competitions that included Rabha music, Rabha dance, and recitation of



Rabha poetry, captivating the audience with their enthusiastic and heartfelt performances.

An esteemed panel of judges, comprising renowned reciter Pra-

bin Rajkhowa, Simanto Dutta, folk artist Shivani Phukan, dance expert Bandana Das Dutta, Kuwali Sonowal, and Mitali Gogoi, principal of Suror Deul,

ensured a fair and inspiring evaluation of the young talents. Also present were Margherita Xakha Xahitya Xabha president Pabitra Borgohain, General Secretary Ashwini Prasad Gogoi, Rabha Divas Reception Committee president Dr. Ramen Hazarika, and working president Sashidhar Shyam.

The organising committee announced that the winners will be felicitated on June 20, during the official Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas celebration at the same venue. The open session on that day will be presided over by Asom Xahitya Xabha President Dr. Basanta Kumar Goswami.

Speaking on the occasion, Ashwini Prasad Gogoi expressed pride in the event's success, saying it not only honoured the legacy of Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha but also celebrated the immense cultural potential of Assam's youth, leaving the audience both inspired and proud of their roots.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*It is a wise father that knows his own child.*  
—William Shakespeare

## Trump's California battle

Mexico or 'Mehico'? Mexicans have never stopped calling Mexico 'Mehico', just like Mumbaikars never stopped Bombay 'Mumbai' in their heads throughout the British Raj. And 'Mehicans' have always considered California Mexico's land, taken by force sometime in the past when the American wild west ran afoul of the Spaniards who had occupied the region called Mexico and lands south of Mexico. The sentiment continues to run deep among Mexicans and in huge numbers of non-Mexicans, too. That California is not a state of the United States of America. And is in line with a worldwide trend. Countries worldwide covet land beyond their stated borders. Think of China and Tibet. China's expansionist mind is always in overplay. Nowadays it is Arunachal Pradesh for all the good it's doing to Indo-China relations. ICE is the hottest thing that has happened to Mexicans who live off America's largesse like Bangladeshi and Rohingya "ghuspetiyas" live off India's largesse, albeit with legal documents procured illegally. The Trump administration is fighting a "war" with illegal immigrants in California and the mainstream media is not with the Trump administration. The United States' federal immigration laws are not worth a cent on the streets and in the alleys and bylanes of Los Angeles, America's second biggest city. The world's media have spread out in the United States and Trump's tough talk has only fuelled rather than doused the fires in the streets and in the hearts of people who fear Trump's policies and consider him a devil in disguise.

The same Trump who had, on taking charge of the United States on January 20, 2025, vowed to bring Mexico to heel along with the appropriation of Canada as the "51st state of the United States", and Greenland for dessert. Those dreams of an emerging expansionist, a la China's Xi Jinping, have now been laid to rest by whatever's happening to the Trump administration's anti-immigration actions let loose in California and elsewhere. "People" are fighting back even as "days worth of photos and footage from the riots" show rioters burning cars, assaulting police, and throwing bricks at vehicles. All this while waving the "defining symbol of the LA protests", the Mexican flag! The protestors are using the Mexican flag to "express solidarity with immigrants and denounce the Trump administration's raids..." said one prominent media outlet, one which has never stopped dogging Trump's heels, which started with his first term in office. The flags speak to the generations of people from Mexico and other Latin American countries who have called the US, and particularly California, home," a professor of the University of California 'Xed'.

The flags mean their families. The flags mean their communities. It is not about having an international invasion. Is that so? What else could be less international than the Mexican President posting to 'X' on behalf of the protestors, who United States Vice President JD Vance has called "insurrectionists", stating that Trump's "Big, Beautiful Bill", which includes a remittance tax on immigrant money transfers, should be implemented without more waste of time.

## Tribute on Death Anniversary

# Anandaram Dhekial Phukan: Guardian of Assam's tongue and soul

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, a towering personality in the history of Assam, played a crucial role in the revival and preservation of Assamese culture and language during a period of cultural and political turmoil. His vision, dedication, and efforts left a lasting impact on the linguistic, educational, and social landscape of Assam. Often referred to as the "Raja Ram Mohan Roy of Assam," Phukan's intellectual endeavors focused on the revitalization of Assamese identity, especially through the promotion of the Assamese language and vernacular education. He was the torchbearer of Assam's renaissance, continuing the work initiated by his father, Haliram Dhekial Phukan, who had planted the seeds of Assam's cultural revival through his historical work Assam Buranji and his advocacy for women's education.

This article delves into Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's profound contributions to Assamese society, particularly in the fields of education and language, his struggle to establish the Assamese language as distinct from Bengali, and his philosophical outlook on the importance of cultural and linguistic identity.

Early Life and Influence of Haliram Dhekial Phukan: Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was born into a family committed to social and cultural reform. His father, Haliram Dhekial Phukan, was a distinguished historian who authored Assam Buranji, one of the first comprehensive historical accounts of Assam. More than just a historian, Haliram was a visionary who saw education as the foundation for societal progress, and he was particularly supportive of women's education, a cause not commonly advocated during his time. These influences shaped Anandaram's worldview and set him on the path of enlightenment, making him a pivotal figure in Assam's renaissance.

Anandaram was deeply committed to the cause of education, and his central belief was that no society could progress without education in its mother tongue. He understood that the key to a people's advancement was through language—the language of their land, their heritage, and their heart.

Advocate of Vernacular Education and Assam's Cultural Revival: In the era of colonial India, education was largely imparted in foreign languages like English and Bengali. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan recognized that while learning foreign languages such as English and Bengali was necessary for global communication and competitive growth, neglecting one's mother tongue would ultimately erode the cultural foundation of society. He strongly

advocated for the introduction of vernacular education in Assamese, emphasizing that learning in one's native language would enhance the understanding of concepts and real-life situations among the masses. Phukan argued that true education could not take root unless it was in a language that the people could fully understand and engage with.

Phukan's resistance to the use of Bengali as the medium of instruction in Assam's primary schools was particularly significant. In his seminal work Observations, he argued that primary education should be imparted in the mother tongue. He pointed out that Bengali, being a foreign language in Assam, created significant obstacles in education, as neither the teachers nor the students were proficient in it. The result was a gross misunderstanding of concepts, with students unable to grasp the full meaning of the subjects being taught. Furthermore, Phukan criticized the educational system for using textbooks in Bengali, which were inaccessible to most of Assam's population.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan also recognized the importance of using Assamese in courts and administrative matters. He strongly objected to the imposition of Bengali as the court language, emphasizing that it violated the rights of the Assamese people. Phukan believed that the legal and judicial system should be accessible to the common people, and this could only be achieved by using the native language. His fight to restore Assamese as the language of the courts was ultimately successful, marking a significant victory for the Assamese people.

Struggle Against the Imposition of Bengali: The imposition of Bengali in Assam had its roots in colonial administrative policies. British officers, who lacked the initiative to learn Assamese, mistakenly regarded Assamese as a mere dialect of Bengali. This misconception, combined with the shared alphabet of Assamese and Bengali, led to the erroneous belief that the two languages were essentially the same. Bengali was adopted as the official language in Assam's courts and schools, leading to widespread discontent among the Assamese populace.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan was at the forefront of the movement to dispel this misconception. He believed that the imposition of Bengali threatened to erase Assamese cultural identity. Phukan meticulously documented the differences between the two languages, proving that

Assamese was a distinct language with its own grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. In his work A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language and on Vernacular Education in Assam, Phukan provided concrete examples to illustrate the linguistic differences between Assamese and Bengali. Through comparative analyses of everyday words, literary passages, and even Sanskrit texts, Phukan demonstrated that Assamese was not a mere variant of Bengali but a unique and independent language.

Phukan's comparison of Assamese and Bengali went beyond vocabulary. He argued that while Assamese and Bengali shared certain commonalities due to their Sanskrit origins, this did not make them the same language. His meticulous research and clear arguments helped establish Assamese as a language in its own right, distinct from Bengali. This intellectual defense of Assamese laid the foundation for the eventual restoration of Assamese as the official language of Assam.

The Restoration of Assamese as the Court Language: One of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's most significant achievements was the restoration of Assamese as the language of the courts. For many years, Bengali had been imposed as the court language in Assam, creating a barrier between the legal system and the Assamese people. Phukan's tireless efforts to replace Bengali with Assamese culminated in the successful reintroduction of Assamese in Assam's judicial system.

Phukan argued that the use of Bengali in the courts was not only impractical but also unjust. He pointed out that most Assamese judges and court officials were more comfortable with Assamese than Bengali, and the imposition of Bengali created unnecessary communication gaps. Furthermore, the general populace found it difficult to understand legal proceedings conducted in a foreign language, which undermined their access to justice.

Drawing on the provisions of the Act XXIX of 1837, which had abolished Persian as the court language in Bengal and Hindustan and replaced it with local languages, Phukan argued that the same logic should apply to Assam. If Persian could be replaced by Bengali and Hindustani in other regions, then Bengali could similarly be replaced by Assamese in Assam. Phukan's arguments were compelling, and after years of advocacy, Assamese was finally restored as the court language in Assam, a victory that was

warmly welcomed by the Assamese people.

Philosophical Vision - Language as the Soul of a Nation: Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's fight for the Assamese language was not just a linguistic battle—it was a philosophical and cultural one. Phukan understood that language was more than just a means of communication; it was the soul of a people, the vessel of their culture, history, and identity. He believed that the survival of Assamese culture depended on the preservation and promotion of the Assamese language. Without a strong linguistic foundation, Phukan argued, the Assamese people would lose their unique identity and be subsumed by larger, more dominant cultures.

Phukan's philosophical outlook aligned with the ideas of other great thinkers of his time, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi, who also recognized the importance of cultural and linguistic identity in the process of nation-building. Like these luminaries, Phukan believed that true progress could only be achieved through a synthesis of tradition and modernity. While he advocated for the learning of foreign languages like English and Bengali for practical purposes, he insisted that Assamese must remain at the heart of Assam's educational and administrative systems.

A Lasting Legacy: Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's life was tragically short, but his legacy endures. His tireless efforts to restore the dignity and prominence of the Assamese language laid the groundwork for future generations of Assamese scholars, writers, and activists. Phukan's contributions to education, language, and society earned him a place among the greatest figures in Assam's history.

Through his writings, his advocacy, and his unwavering commitment to the cause of Assamese cultural revival, Phukan gave the people of Assam a renewed sense of pride in their heritage. His work ensured that Assamese would not be relegated to the status of a "mere dialect" but would be recognized as a distinct and vibrant language with its own literature, history, and intellectual traditions.

Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's life and work remind us of the importance of language in shaping our identity and our future. His vision of an enlightened, educated, and culturally vibrant Assam continues to inspire us today, as we strive to preserve and promote our linguistic and cultural heritage in an increasingly globalized world. (The writer can be reached at [dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com](mailto:dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com))

## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

## Anandaram Dhekial Phukan: A visionary who awakened Assam's soul

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The journey of Assam through the corridors of the 19th century was one fraught with the burdens of political transition, cultural insecurity, and linguistic erosion. As the region came under British colonial administration, it was not only its sovereignty that was challenged but also its unique identity. Assamese language, literature, and cultural expressions faced a systemic marginalization, particularly due to the imposition of Bengali as the language of administration and education. In such a time of peril, when the native spirit risked being silenced under the weight of foreign dominance and internal confusion, there arose a luminous figure who not only understood the depth of the crisis but also possessed the intellectual courage to challenge it. Anandaram Dhekial Phukan emerged as the most compelling voice of that era—an enlightened mind, a dedicated reformer, and a visionary whose ideas heralded the dawn of the Assamese renaissance. Though his life spanned a mere twenty-nine years, its impact has endured for generations. He was more than a reformer—he was a symbol of resistance, a harbinger of progress, and a prophet who foresaw the emergence of a modern Assamese identity built on the solid foundation of language, education, and cultural pride.

Born on 22nd September 1829 in Guwahati, Anandaram came from a family rooted in aristocratic legacy and cultural erudition. His father, Holiram Dhekial Phukan, had held a prominent position during the Ahom rule and later served under the British regime, producing scholarly works in Sanskrit and Bengali. This familial heritage sowed the seeds of intellectual curiosity in young Anandaram, although his early years were shadowed by personal loss. The death of his father when he was just two years old placed him under the nurturing care of his mother, Kameshwari, who raised him with quiet strength. His initiation into traditional education began at the Sanskrit Tol of Umananda, which grounded him in classical learning. However, it was his transition to English education—despite opposition from traditionalist family members—that marked a profound turn in his intellectual journey. Enrolling in Guwahati's first English school in 1837 under the mentorship of James Matthew and Jenkins, he imbibed the modern liberal arts spirit. Recognizing his exceptional promise, the British administration sponsored his education in Calcutta, where he joined Hindu College in 1841. Though he returned prematurely in 1844 due to familial obligations, his thirst for learning never waned. He continued to educate himself in English, Urdu, and Persian, making him a rare polyglot of his time. This eclectic scholarship became the bedrock of his reformist zeal and his lifelong mission of cultural preservation and societal modernization.

The defining cause of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan's life was his unwavering commitment to the Assamese language at a time when it



teetered on the brink of extinction in formal domains. The British colonial administration, driven by expediency and influenced by Bengali officials, had supplanted Assamese with Bengali as the language of instruction and governance in Assam. For Anandaram, this was not a mere administrative change—it was an assault on the cultural and intellectual integrity of his people. He saw language as the carrier of a civilization's consciousness, a repository of its history, values, and aspirations. His fight to restore Assamese was not driven by narrow linguistic sentiment but by a profound understanding of identity politics. When British Governor A. J. Moffatt Mills visited Assam in 1853, Anandaram presented an erudite and persuasive memorandum advocating for the reinstatement of Assamese in schools. His arguments were so cogent and well-articulated that Mills supported the proposal, setting in motion a policy reversal that would have long-term implications. It was a turning point in Assam's modern history. Anandaram's intervention restored not just a language but revived a collective confidence among the Assamese people in their cultural legitimacy.

His landmark work A Few Remarks on the Assamese Language, and on Vernacular Education in Assam, published in 1855, stands as a monumental intellectual contribution to the cause of linguistic identity. Distributed among administrative circles across India, the book provided rigorous evidence that Assamese was not a derivative of Bengali but a distinct language with its own grammar, syntax, and literary lineage. This assertion, supported by his multilingual erudition, challenged the dominant colonial narrative and reshaped official policy. More importantly, it gave Assamese speakers a renewed sense of pride in their mother tongue. His scholarship became a cornerstone of the intellectual movement that reclaimed Assamese as a legitimate and independent language. Through this work, Anandaram not only countered colonial assumptions but also dismantled the regional hegemonies that sought to undermine Assamese linguistic sovereignty. In a deeply divided and colonially orchestrated cultural

milieu, this was an act of intellectual defiance and self-assertion.

Education, for Anandaram, was the most potent instrument for social transformation. He believed that a nation could progress only when its youth were equipped with knowledge. He viewed modern education not merely as a means of individual advancement but as a pathway to collective liberation. His textbook Assamese Larar Mitra played a vital role in the revival of Assamese as a medium of instruction. It served as an educational bridge, reconnecting young minds with their linguistic roots while simultaneously steering them towards rationality and enlightenment. He implored the youth to seek knowledge fearlessly, exhorting them to overcome social prohibitions and conservative resistance. His appeal to students to unite in the pursuit of education was revolutionary for its time and reflected his radical belief in intellectual empowerment. Anandaram was not just a reformer; he was a dreamer who saw a future Assamese society that was literate, thoughtful, and capable of steering its own destiny.

However, Anandaram's vision was not confined to education and language. He had a comprehensive understanding of modernity, encompassing economic, social, and moral dimensions. At a time when commerce was still viewed with suspicion in Assamese society, Anandaram championed trade as the cornerstone of national development. He explicitly linked prosperity to commerce, arguing that without economic engagement, Assam would remain impoverished and marginalized. His call to embrace trade was not just practical advice—it was a visionary forecast of a self-reliant Assam integrated into the global economy. His critique of Assamese indifference towards economic matters demonstrated a rare insight into the nexus between cultural pride and material progress. He recognized that cultural revival had to be backed by economic strength for it to be sustainable.

Anandaram's ideas on social reform were equally progressive. In his writings and personal conduct, he consistently demonstrated a vision of a civilized, egalitarian society. His famous prayer for a transformed Assam—one that would witness steamships instead of boats, brick houses instead of bamboo huts, schools in every village, and mutual love replacing hatred—was a dream rooted in rational optimism. It captured not just his aspirations but also offered a blueprint for Assam's future. He envisioned a society where modern infrastructure would blend with moral values, and where development would be inclusive and humane. His prayer reveals a desire for comprehensive progress—material, intellectual, and ethical—and underscores his spiritual humanism. He dreamt of an Assam where modernity did not mean abandoning tradition but rather evolving tradition into a higher, more inclusive form.

In his personal life too, Anandaram broke

conventions. His decision to educate his wife, Mahendri Devi, was a quiet yet profound act of rebellion against the patriarchal norms of his time. In a society where women's education was nearly unheard of, his insistence on making his wife literate spoke volumes about his commitment to social equality. He balanced his responsibilities as a husband and father with his public duties, never allowing personal grief or societal constraints to deter him from his mission. The death of his first child, Raseshwari, was a personal tragedy, but he continued to devote himself to public causes with unflinching zeal.

Professionally, Anandaram served in various administrative positions including as Jemadar, Munsif, Dewan of Bijni Raj Estate, and Deputy Commissioner of Nagaon. His tenure in the colonial bureaucracy was marked by efficiency, fairness, and a deep sense of duty. But even as he carried out his official responsibilities, he remained intellectually active and socially engaged. His books on legal and administrative matters such as Engalor Buranji, Estate Administration, Sadarer Mamalar Nispati, and Dewani Mamalar Nispati show the breadth of his knowledge and his desire to democratize access to institutional knowledge. He sought to bridge the gap between the ruling system and the common people, believing that awareness and information were key to empowerment. Through his professional and literary contributions, he exemplified the ideal of the civil servant-scholar—one who serves not only the administration but also society.

Tragically, Anandaram's promising life was cut short when he passed away on 16th June 1859, merely five days after falling ill. His death at the age of twenty-nine robbed Assam of a torchbearer in its time of awakening. Yet, his ideas continue to resonate. His belief in language as identity, education as liberation, commerce as progress, and unity as strength remains profoundly relevant. Today, as Assam faces new cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic challenges, the legacy of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan offers both inspiration and guidance. He remains a shining example of how vision, courage, and intellectual clarity can spark the renaissance of an entire civilization.

The story of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan is not simply the biography of an individual—it is the narrative of a people reclaiming their voice, their dignity, and their place in the world. His life reminds us that the future of a community lies not in passive adaptation but in proactive transformation. He taught Assam to look within for strength and to look ahead for progress. In honoring his memory, especially on his death anniversary on 16th June, we do not merely pay tribute to a historical figure—we reaffirm our commitment to the ideals he stood for. His life remains a testament to the fact that even in a short span, a resolute soul can leave behind a legacy that shapes the destiny of generations. (The author can be reached at [himangshur1989@gmail.com](mailto:himangshur1989@gmail.com) or [9954812261](tel:9954812261), [9864000260](tel:9864000260))

## POST BAG

## Pineapple production – What next?

Sir,

The Chief Minister's recent announcement that Assam ranks second in the country in pineapple production, with over 2.96 lakh metric tonnes produced in 2022–23, is welcome news. However, beyond expressing joy, concrete steps are urgently needed.

Despite high production, there has been little focus on establishing food processing industries or cold storage facilities to support farmers. Why hasn't the government initiated small or medium-scale units for producing pineapple juice, squash, canned slices, jams, or dried products?

Such value-added products have strong market potential and can significantly boost the rural economy. Instead of setting up polluting factories, Assam should focus on agro-based industries using its own fruits and crops.

The government must move beyond celebrating numbers and formulate a roadmap to harness this opportunity for employment generation, fair farmer prices, and sustainable economic growth.

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## Litchi, the wonder fruit of Tezpur

Sir/Ma'am

Tezpur recently celebrated 100 years of being the Litchi king of the country. It was in late 1923 when the first Assamese Chairman of Tezpur Municipality, renowned litterateur and the first Asom Sahitya Sabha President Padmanath Gohain Baruah planted different varieties of these pulpy delights all over the Tezpur Municipality area, the fruits of which we are enjoying till now. Right from 1923 Tezpur Litchi has brick by brick made its place in the hearts of the people and in 2015 it received the coveted GI tag which cements its place as not only Tezpur's but the nation's wonder fruit. But this fruit has not yet made it big in the world scenario even though it is exported to some foreign countries, the main reason behind this is very limited production which barely serves the nation let alone the world demand. I urge the State Department of Agriculture and Horticulture to press the centre for a Litchi Board in Tezpur like the Makhana Board the centre approved last year for Bihar. This will give fresh energy to the horticultural potential of Litchi and will also open other avenues related to Litchi which will bring in good revenue for Assam and the country as a whole.

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# What to know about prediabetes

By: Markus MacGill

**P**rediabetes, also known as borderline diabetes, is where a person's blood sugar levels are higher than usual but not yet high enough for a diagnosis of type 2 diabetes.

Prediabetes is a condition that can progress to type 2 diabetes. Doctors may also refer to prediabetes as impaired glucose tolerance or impaired fasting glucose.

Research suggests that this progression occurs in about 25% of people with prediabetes within 3 to 5 years. Overall, up to 70% of people with prediabetes will develop diabetes at some point in their life.

## Symptoms of prediabetes

Prediabetes does not always have symptoms. Many people may not know they have it until a doctor determines they have high blood sugar based on a blood test or a complication occurs.

If symptoms do occur, they may include:

- unexplained weight changes
- increased appetite
- weakness
- fatigue
- blurry vision
- sweating
- recurring gum bleeding or skin infections
- slow wound healing

However, most people will not know they have prediabetes until they undergo testing.

## Causes and risk factors for prediabetes

According to the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, various other conditions and factors can increase the risk of prediabetes, including:

- overweight or obesity
- metabolic syndrome
- low levels of physical activity
- high blood pressure
- a history of stroke or heart disease
- polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS)

Regularly consuming sugary drinks may also increase the risk. A 2021 review associates drinks with added sugar, including soda, juices, and sweetened tea or coffee, with a higher risk of diabetes.

Anyone with any of these risk factors may benefit from a prediabetes screening to check whether they have the condition.

## Diagnosing prediabetes

A doctor may use the following blood tests to diagnose or screen for prediabetes:

□ **Glucose tolerance test:** A glucose tolerance test measures how quickly the body can process the sugar in the blood in a 2-hour period.

□ **Fasting blood test:** A fasting blood test measures blood sugar levels after a person has not eaten for a specific period.

□ **Hemoglobin A1C test:** An A1C test measures the average blood sugar levels over 2 or 3 months. People do not need to fast or take any special liquids or medications for the A1C test, and it gives reliable results.

□ **Random plasma blood test:** This measures a person's blood sugar levels at any time.

The American Diabetes Association states that a doctor will diagnose prediabetes when test results show the following measurements:

- fasting blood sugar levels of 100 to 125 milligrams per deciliter (mg/dl)
- glucose tolerance levels of 140 to 200 mg/dl
- an A1C test result of 5.7% to 6.4%

A doctor may also re-test these levels to confirm that the readings are not due to one-off spikes in blood sugar.

Who should undergo screening for prediabetes?

Healthcare professionals may recommend that people start to undergo screening for prediabetes between the ages of 30 and 45, repeating the screening every 3 years.

People with risk factors may need to start screening earlier and get follow-ups more often than this.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers an online test to assess people's risk of prediabetes.

Anyone who is concerned they may have prediabetes should also visit a doctor for testing and a diagnosis.

## Prediabetes treatment

Prediabetes is reversible. Lifestyle changes and weight management are the first-line treatment option.

Healthcare professionals may suggest a person work toward a goal of exercising for 30 minutes per day and switch to a low fat diet, with the aim of reducing their weight by 7%.

If someone has a high risk of type 2 diabetes or cannot make the necessary lifestyle changes, doctors may suggest management with medication. Medications may include metformin (Glucophage) and acar-

bose (Prandase).

Managing prediabetes may also involve continual monitoring of the risk factors and regular testing of blood sugar levels.

National Diabetes Prevention Program

The CDC leads a program called the National Diabetes Prevention Program, which aims to help people with prediabetes lower their risk of type 2 diabetes by building new lifestyle habits.

## The program runs for a year and involves:

- a lifestyle coach keeping people motivated, helping them set and meet goals
- a CDC-approved curriculum with handouts, lessons, and more
- a support group of people with similar goals

## The program may teach a person about the following:

- balanced eating
- physical activity
- managing stress
- getting back on track if new habits are difficult to maintain
- overcoming challenges, such as choosing healthy foods when eating out or during holidays

A lifestyle coach can work with people to make sure the sessions suit their needs, interests, and background.

## Preventing prediabetes

The following actions may help a person prevent prediabetes:

- exercising regularly
- eating a balanced diet with plenty of fiber
- maintaining a moderate weight for their body type
- taking any medications that a doctor prescribes
- quitting smoking, if applicable

A healthcare professional may also recommend that people limit the amount of salt, added sugar, and carbohydrates in their diet.

## Prediabetes progression

Around 70% of people with prediabetes progress to a diagnosis of diabetes. However, the rate of progression may vary from person to person, and not all people with prediabetes will progress to diabetes.

People may be able to prevent this progression if they make appropriate lifestyle changes. It is important for people with prediabetes to work with a healthcare professional to lower their risk of progression and complications.

## Frequently asked questions

What foods should someone with prediabetes eat?

Healthcare professionals may recommend that people with prediabetes eat a balanced diet with plenty of fiber. Fiber-rich foods include whole grains, beans, and leafy green vegetables.

People may also benefit from limiting simple carbs, salt, and added sugar.

What are the complications of prediabetes?

Even if it does not progress to type 2 diabetes, prediabetes can lead to complications such as stroke, kidney failure, and heart disease.

Can children have prediabetes?

In a 2019 study involving 5,786 people, 18% of the 2,606 adolescent participants — ages 12 to 18 years — had prediabetes. Among the 3,180 young adults, the prevalence was 24%.

Many children who develop type 2 diabetes do not receive a diagnosis until adolescence. This is, in part, because puberty hormones can make it harder for the body to regulate insulin.

Parents and caregivers can help prevent diabetes in children by encouraging them to eat a balanced diet and engage in plenty of physical activity.

Can prediabetes progress to type 1 diabetes?

Prediabetes refers to a metabolic state that is a precursor to type 2 diabetes. It cannot evolve into type 1 diabetes.

However, there is research on a parallel disease called pre-type 1 diabetes, in which a person's immune system displays certain characteristics that indicate progression to type 1 diabetes.

How long does it take to reverse prediabetes?

With a well-balanced diet, regular exercise, and prescribed medical interventions, a person may be able to reverse prediabetes in about 3 years.

## Summary

Prediabetes is the stage before type 2 diabetes develops. It does not usually cause active symptoms, and most people will not be aware that they have the condition until it progresses to diabetes and starts causing health problems.

Anyone who is at risk of developing diabetes should have regular screening. Risk factors include high blood pressure, low levels of physical activity, and overweight or obesity.

Prediabetes can be reversible with a sustained exercise program and a balanced diet. People may also be able to join a diabetes prevention program. (Courtesy: Medical News Today)

## Is your child at risk of a genetic liver disorder? Early treatment can change everything

By: Dr. Vikram Kumar

**W**hen we think of liver problems, we often associate them with adults. But the truth is, liver conditions can affect children too—especially when they are inherited through family genes. These are called genetic liver disorders. Though they may sound worrying, understanding them early and getting the right help can make a big difference in your child's health and future.

## What Are Genetic Liver Disorders?

Genetic liver disorders are inherited conditions that affect how a child's liver functions. They may disrupt the body's ability to break down substances, produce bile, or remove toxins. Some of the most recognised disorders include Wilson's disease, Alpha-1 Antitrypsin deficiency, and Glycogen storage diseases, Biliary Atresia.

Children affected by these disorders might not display symptoms right away. Some only experience signs as they grow—like persistent jaundice, swelling in the belly, fatigue, poor weight gain, or pale stools. In many cases, parents only discover the issue during routine check-ups or blood tests.

## Early Detection Makes All the Difference

The liver is a silent worker. It performs hundreds of essential functions every day—but when it's not working right, the effects can be serious. If not properly managed, several inherited liver conditions may progress to cirrhosis, liver failure, or require a liver transplant. That's why early intervention is critical.

With timely diagnosis and expert care, children can be treated successfully—even before symptoms appear. And that brings hope.

## Pediatric Liver Treatments That Give Children a Healthier Future

Thanks to advances in pediatric liver care, most genetic liver disorders can now be managed effectively through a combination of:

- Medications that remove toxic build-up or improve bile flow
- Custom diet plans tailored to the child's condition
- Supplements containing essential vitamins and minerals that help promote healthy growth and support liver function
- Regular monitoring through tests and imaging

In certain cases, a liver transplant may be recommended, providing a new chance at life for children with serious liver damage.

These treatments are not one-size-fits-all—they are personalised. A team of pediatric liver experts will create a personalised treatment plan tailored to your child's specific condition, age, and overall health.

## What Can Parents Do?

If your child shows signs of liver trouble or if you have a family history of liver disease, talk to a pediatric liver expert. Don't ignore symptoms like long-term jaundice, poor appetite, or unexplained tiredness. Early screening can be life-changing.

And remember: treatment doesn't just aim to control the condition—it's about helping your child live life to the fullest.

## Expert Help Is Closer Than You Think

Parents often feel helpless when facing a child's diagnosis. But with the right information and expert medical care, there's every reason to feel hopeful. A timely diagnosis, personalised treatment plan, and regular follow-up can make all the difference in your child's health journey. (The author is the Principal Consultant, Paediatric Liver Transplantation, Gastroenterology & Hepatology, Max Hospital, Saket)

## Acting FAST during a stroke makes all the difference

By: Dr. Vipul Gupta

**S**troke is a major health emergency, and among the different types of strokes, ischemic stroke is by far the most common accounting for nearly 87% of all stroke cases globally. An ischemic stroke occurs when a blood clot blocks or narrows an artery leading to the brain, cutting off the oxygen supply. Within minutes, brain cells begin to die. Because the brain is extremely sensitive to lack of blood flow, timely treatment is critical. The faster a patient receives medical attention, the better the chances of minimizing long-term disability or even preventing death.

Early detection of an ischemic stroke is the most important factor that influences outcomes. Unfortunately, many people fail to recognize the symptoms or underestimate their seriousness, delaying medical intervention. In stroke care, time is brain every second counts, and a fast response can dramatically change the course of recovery.

The hallmark symptoms of an ischemic stroke tend to appear suddenly. One of the earliest and most visible signs is facial drooping. This typically manifests as one side of the face appearing uneven or numb, and the person may be unable to smile symmetrically. Arm weakness is another red flag; if the person cannot raise both arms or if one arm drifts downward, it is a strong warning sign. Speech difficulties follow ranging from slurred speech to trouble understanding or forming sentences. Other potential signs include sudden blurred or double vision, unsteadiness, dizziness, lack of coordination, or a thunderclap headache with no apparent cause.

To simplify the identification of stroke symptoms, the American Heart Association recommends the acronym FAST:

- **F (?) Face Drooping:** Does one side of the face sag or feel numb?
- **A (?) Arm Weakness:** Is one arm weak or numb? Can the person raise both arms?
- **S (?) Slurred Speech:** Is the speech slurred or incoherent?
- **T (?) Time to Call Emergency Services:** If any of these signs are observed, seek immediate medical help.

Recognizing these symptoms

quickly and seeking urgent care can prevent brain damage and improve the likelihood of a full recovery.

Modern neurointerventional procedures, such as mechanical thrombectomy, a minimally invasive technique to remove the clot have revolutionized stroke treatment, but they are highly time-sensitive. Their effectiveness diminishes with each passing hour.

While rapid response is essential during a stroke, prevention is the ultimate key to reducing the burden of the disease. Controlling high blood pressure, the most significant risk factor can significantly cut down the chances of stroke. Similarly, people living with diabetes should manage their blood sugar levels diligently, as fluctuating glucose levels can damage blood vessels and raise stroke risk. High cholesterol also contributes to the narrowing of arteries, and reducing LDL levels through diet, exercise, or medication can offer protection.

Smoking is a well-established cause of blood vessel damage and clot formation, and quitting can greatly reduce the risk. Excessive alcohol intake should be avoided, as it can increase blood pressure and atrial fibrillation both risk factors for stroke. Maintaining a healthy body weight through regular physical activity and a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins also supports cardiovascular and brain health.

Ischemic stroke is a serious but largely preventable condition. Raising awareness about its warning signs and risk factors is crucial. If someone around you displays even one symptom from the FAST checklist, act quickly and call emergency services. Timely intervention can mean the difference between full recovery and lifelong disability or even death. Likewise, by adopting a healthier lifestyle and managing chronic conditions, we can significantly reduce the risk of ever having a stroke in the first place.

Let us not wait for symptoms to appear let us act now, stay informed, and take proactive steps to protect our brain health. (The author is the Director - Neurointerventional Surgery, Sir H.N. Reliance Foundation Hospital, Mumbai)

## Knee pain? Your weight could be the cause

By Dr Shakeeb Ahmed Khan

**K**nee problems are not uncommon to Indians. In fact, one of the main health issues among young adults and senior citizens is osteoarthritis of the knee joints.

A sedentary lifestyle coupled with limited mobility is the leading cause of weak knees, particularly in young adults and working professionals.

## What causes knee pain?

People complain of knee pain due to old age, wear and tear, poor muscle strength and conditioning.

Less protein intake, incorrect posture and ergonomics also contribute to knee pain. In India, sometimes sitting cross-legged on the floor for too long also affects the knee joints.

The rise in obesity combined by a general lack of physical exercise puts additional weight on the knee joints.

Rheumatoid arthritis, bursitis (painful swelling of the fluid-filled sac that cushions the joints), ligament and meniscal injury (damage to the C-shaped cartilage in the knee) and chondromalacia patella (softening and break down of the cartilage under the kneecap or patella) are other reasons why you could experience pain in the knee joints.

Over the last couple of years, we have also been noticing an increasing trend of ligament injury and meniscal tear due to road traffic accidents, particularly involving two-wheelers.

Similarly, individuals who play badminton and football may experience ACL tear and

meniscal tear that affects the knee.

What are the warning signs that your knees are weak?

The primary function of knee joint is movement. It helps carry out our day-to-day activities like sitting, sitting to standing, walking and climbing stairs.

Early warning signs include pain while performing these daily activities. It would typically start with one joint and progress to other joints. In extreme cases, apart from excruciating pain, people also complain of weakness, loss of balance and co-ordination.

One of the immediate things you can do is to visit an orthopaedic consultant or a physiotherapist to assess your knee.

Once you are diagnosed with knee pain, it is important to carry out all daily activities with less intensity and simultaneously build strength around the knee joints.

What changes can you make in your diet and lifestyle for healthy knees?

Diet is a very important aspect for stronger knees. You have strong knees when your muscles like quadriceps, hamstrings, abductors and adductors of hip and gluteal muscles are regularly strengthened.

For this, sufficient protein intake is necessary. To ensure muscles are not quickly fatigued, you may consult a nutritionist and dietician based on your food preferences to get your required protein intake through food.

For healthy knees, movement, particularly the full range of motion, is important.

Our knees typically perform only two

movements -- flexion (bending the knee) and extension (straightening the knee joint).

For a healthy and active lifestyle, you must walk, jog, cycle and climb stairs daily. You may also add weight through weight cuffs or use a resistance band.

If you have weak knees, avoid standing for long hours while working.

If your job involves standing for a long period, take short breaks. Shift your weight from one knee to the other and avoid sitting cross-legged on the floor. If you are doing high intensity exercise or playing a sport, please wear a knee cap or crepe bandage.

Weight management is crucial for the health of your knees as it bears the weight of your entire body.

If you reduce 1 kg of weight, the weight on your knees will be reduced by four times.

Simple exercises for people with knee pain You can always start with brisk walking and jogging. Knee strengthening involves exercises like squats, lunges and knee curls.

VMO (Vastus Medialis Oblique, which is a part of your quadriceps muscle) also requires strengthening. For this, an expert will place a cushion under the knee, guide you to press down, raise the leg straight, hold for 10 seconds and repeat.

Static quadriceps exercises, which involves tightening and relaxing the muscle, are also helpful, especially for the elderly.

These exercises have to be done consistently for better results. Young adults can opt for intense training using the TheraBand (re-

sistance band), weight cuffs, quadricep chair and other gym equipment.

People with disabilities can also perform these exercises under the supervision of an expert so that they are careful with the balance.

Individuals who use wheelchair can use weight cuffs, the TheraBand or practise seated marching where knees are carefully lifted in sitting position. Always remember: Motion is a lotion. For healthier knees, correct posture and movement is the key.

## Who should get a knee replacement?

For individuals experiencing severe pain and issues with basic mobility due to knee damage, experts may suggest knee replacement surgery.

Knee replacement is a good solution provided you receive rehabilitation in the form of physiotherapy post surgery.

However knee replacement must never be the first choice for knee pain or osteoarthritis. It must only be considered if physiotherapy has not been helpful after a long duration.

It is usually recommended only for people with severe osteoarthritis and mobility loss who are unable to walk for 10 to 15 minutes, and for people with gradual progressing deformities.

Total knee replacement surgeries are expensive and often far beyond reach for many Indian families.

It is important to consider all possible aspects of the patient before opting for any surgical procedure for knees or joints. (Courtesy: Rediff.com)

## Understanding heart failure and treatment

By: Dr T.S. Kler

**H**eat failure may sound frightening, but advances in medical science have made it a highly manageable condition. Awareness, early intervention, and adherence to medical guidance are your best tools for living well with heart failure. Here are some general questions about heart failure which every patient wants to know.

## What is heart failure?

Heart failure, also known as congestive heart failure, is a condition where the heart is unable to pump blood effectively to meet the body's needs. It doesn't mean the heart has stopped working, but rather that it's functioning less efficiently than normal.

## What causes heart failure?

There are several causes. The most common include coronary artery disease, high blood pressure, previous heart attacks, heart valve diseases, and certain

infections or genetic conditions that weaken the heart muscle.

## What are the early symptoms I should watch out for?

Common symptoms include shortness of breath, fatigue, swelling in the legs or ankles, rapid heartbeat, persistent coughing, and difficulty lying flat due to breathlessness. These symptoms often worsen over time if left untreated.

## How is heart failure diagnosed?

We start with a physical exam and medical history, followed by tests like ECG (electrocardiogram), echocardiogram, chest X-ray, blood tests (including BNP), and sometimes cardiac MRI or stress tests. These help us assess heart function and determine the type and severity of heart failure.

## Can heart failure be cured?

While heart failure often cannot be completely cured, it can be managed very effectively. With proper treatment and lifestyle changes, many people

live long and active lives.

## What are the main treatment options?

Treatment typically includes medications, lifestyle modifications, and in some cases, device implantations or surgery. The goal is to improve symptoms, slow disease progression, and reduce hospitalisations.

## What kind of medications are usually prescribed?

Common medications include ACE inhibitors, beta-blockers, diuretics, ARBs (angiotensin receptor blockers), ARNI (angiotensin receptor neprilysin inhibitors), aldosterone antagonists, and SGLT2 inhibitors. Each plays a role in improving heart function and controlling symptoms.

## Are there any lifestyle changes I should make?

Yes, and they're very important. Reduce salt intake, manage fluid intake, avoid alcohol and smoking, monitor weight daily, exercise regularly (as advised), and control blood pressure and

diabetes. Following a heart-healthy diet is also crucial.

## What about devices? When are they needed?

When medications aren't enough or if the heart rhythm is affected, we may recommend devices like pacemakers, implantable cardioverter-defibrillators (ICDs), or cardiac resynchronization therapy (CRT). These help regulate heartbeat and improve heart function.

## Is surgery ever required for heart failure?

Sometimes. If heart failure is due to valve disease, valve repair or replacement might be necessary. In severe cases, especially when other treatments have failed, a heart transplant or a left ventricular assist device (LVAD) may be considered.

## Are there any risks associated with device implantation?

Like any medical procedure, device implantation carries risks such as infection, bleeding, or device malfunction. However,

for many patients, the benefits significantly outweigh the risks, especially when managed by experienced medical teams.

## How often should I follow up with my doctor if I have heart failure?

Regular follow-ups are crucial. Initially, visits might be frequent—every few weeks—to stabilize your condition. Once stable, follow-ups every 3-6 months are typical. Always report any changes in symptoms immediately.

## Can heart failure patients live a normal life?

Absolutely. With proper treatment, regular monitoring, and commitment to lifestyle changes, many patients with heart failure can lead fulfilling and active lives. The key is early diagnosis and consistent care. (The author is the Chairman & HOD - BLK-Max Heart & Vascular Institute, Chairman Pan Max - Electrophysiology, BLK-Max Super Speciality Hospital, Delhi)



# Israel, Iran trade strikes for third day as nuclear talks called off

*'There were a number of hits to buildings on the campus'*

**DUBAI, June 15:** Israel unleashed airstrikes across Iran for a third day on Sunday and threatened even greater force as some Iranian missiles evaded Israeli air defences to strike buildings in the heart of the country.

Planned talks on Iran's nuclear programme, which could provide an off-ramp, were cancelled.

The region braced for a protracted conflict after Israel's surprise bombardment of Iran's nuclear and military sites on Friday killed several top generals and nuclear scientists, and neither side showed any sign of backing down.

Iran said Israel struck two oil refineries, raising the prospect of a broader assault on Iran's heavily sanctioned energy industry that could affect global markets.

The Israeli military, in a social media post, warned Iranians to evacuate arms factories, signalling what could be a further widening of the campaign. Around noon local time, explosions were heard again in the Iranian capital, Tehran.

US President Donald Trump has expressed full support for Israel's actions while warning Iran that it can only avoid further destruction by agreeing to a new nuclear deal.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said on Sunday that if the Israeli strikes on Iran stop, then "our responses will also stop". He said the United States "is a partner in these attacks and must take responsibility".

## Explosions in Tehran

New explosions echoed across Tehran and were reported elsewhere in the country early Sunday, but there was no update to a death toll released the day before by



Iran's UN ambassador, who said 78 people had been killed and more than 320 wounded.

In Israel, at least 10 people were killed in Iranian strikes overnight and into Sunday, according to Israel's Magen David Adom rescue service, bringing the country's total death toll to 13. The country's main international airport and airspace remained closed for a third day. Israeli strikes targeted Iran's Defence Ministry early Sunday after hitting air defences, military bases and sites associated with its nuclear programme.

The killing of several top generals and nuclear scientists in targeted strikes indicated that Israeli intelligence has penetrated Iran at the highest levels.

## Death toll mounts in Israel

In Israel, at least six people, including a 10-year-old and a 9-year-old, were killed when a missile hit an apartment building in Bat Yam, near Tel Aviv. Daniel Hadad, a local police commander, said 180 people were wounded and seven are still missing.

An Associated Press reporter saw streets lined with damaged and destroyed buildings, bombed out cars and shards of glass. Responders used a drone at points to look for survivors. Some people could be seen leaving the area with suitcases. Another four people, including a 13-year-old, were killed and 24 wounded when a missile struck a building in the Arab town of Tamra in northern Israel. A strike on the central city of Rehovot wounded 42.

The Weizmann Institute of Science, an important centre for research in Rehovot, said "there were a number of hits to buildings on the campus". It said no one was harmed. Israel has sophisticated multi-tiered air defences that are able to detect and intercept missiles fired at populated areas or key infrastructure, but officials acknowledge it is imperfect.

## Urgent calls to deescalate

World leaders made urgent calls to deescalate. The attack on nuclear sites set a "dangerous precedent", China's foreign minister

said. The region is already on edge as Israel seeks to annihilate Hamas, an Iranian ally, in the Gaza Strip, where the war is still raging after Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu brushed off such calls, saying Israel's strikes so far are "nothing compared to what they will feel under the sway of our forces in the coming days".

Israel, the sole though undeclared nuclear-armed state in the Middle East — said it launched the attack to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. The two countries have been regional adversaries for decades.

Iran has always said its nuclear program was peaceful, and the US and others have assessed it has not pursued a weapon since 2003. But it has enriched ever larger stockpiles of uranium to near weapons-grade levels in recent years and was believed to have been able to develop multiple weapons within months if it chose to do so.

The UN's atomic watchdog censured Iran last week for not complying with its obligations.

Araghchi, Iran's top diplomat, said Israel had targeted an oil refinery near Tehran and another in the country's Bushehr province on the Persian Gulf. He said Iran had also targeted "economic" sites in Israel, without elaborating.

Araghchi was speaking to diplomats in his first public appearance since the initial Israeli strikes.

Semiofficial Iranian news agencies reported that an Israeli drone strike had caused a "strong explosion" at an Iranian natural-gas processing plant. Israel's military did not immediately comment. The ex-

tent of damage at the South Pars natural gas field was not immediately clear. Such sites have air defence systems around them, which Israel has been targeting.

## Iran calls nuclear talks unjustifiable

The Arab Gulf country of Oman, which has been mediating indirect talks between the US and Iran over Tehran's nuclear programme, said a sixth round planned for Sunday would not take place.

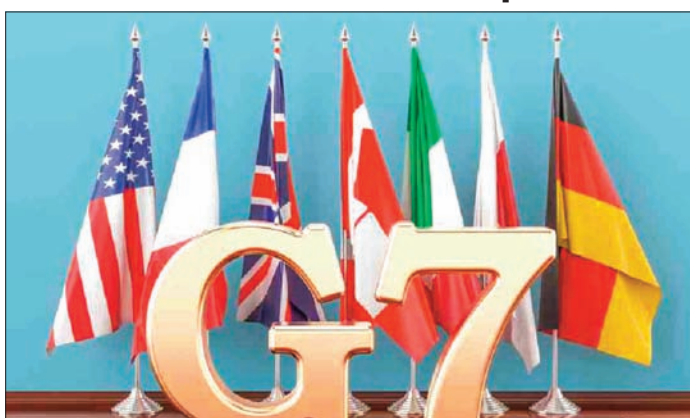
"We remain committed to talks and hope the Iranians will come to the table soon," a senior US official said on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive talks.

Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, said Saturday that the nuclear talks were "unjustifiable" after Israel's strikes, which he said were the "result of the direct support by Washington". In a post on his Truth Social account early Sunday, Trump reiterated that the US was not involved in the attacks on Iran and warned that any retaliation directed against it would bring an American response "at levels never seen before".

## More than a few weeks' to repair nuclear facilities

In Iran, satellite photos analyzed by AP show extensive damage at Iran's main nuclear enrichment facility in Natanz. The images shot Saturday by Planet Labs PBC show multiple buildings damaged or destroyed. The structures hit include buildings identified by experts as supplying power to the facility. UN nuclear chief Rafael Grossi told the Security Council that the above-ground section of the Natanz facility was destroyed. (AP)

# G7 leaders gather in Canada for summit overshadowed by Middle East crisis, Trump's tariffs



**BANFF (CANADA), June 15:** Leaders of some of the world's biggest economic powers will arrive in the Canadian Rockies on Sunday for a Group of Seven summit overshadowed by a widening war across the Middle East and US President Donald Trump's unresolved trade war with allies and rivals alike.

Israel's strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliation, which appeared to catch many world leaders unawares, is the latest sign of a more volatile world as Trump seeks to withdraw the US from its role as world policeman.

Speaking on a flight to Canada to attend the summit, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he had discussed efforts to de-escalate the situation with Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as other world leaders.

Britain is sending Royal Air Force jets and other military reinforcements to the Middle East.

"We do have longstanding concerns about the nuclear program Iran has. We do recognise Israel's right to self-defense, but I'm absolutely clear that this needs to de-escalate. There is a huge risk of escalation for the region and more widely," Starmer said, adding he expected "intense discussions" would continue at the summit.

## Trump is summit's wild card

As summit host, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has decided to abandon the annual practice of issuing a joint statement, or communiqué, at the end of the meeting.

With other leaders wanting to talk to Trump in an effort to talk him out of imposing tariffs, the summit risks being a series of bilateral conversations rather than a show of unity.

Trump is the summit wild card. Looming over the meeting are Trump's inflammatory threats to make Canada the 51st state and take over Greenland. French President Emmanuel Macron is making a highly symbolic stop in Greenland on his way to Canada, meeting the Arctic territory's leader and Denmark's prime minister aboard a Danish helicopter carrier.

Macron, who is one of the very few leaders to have known Trump during his first term, was the first European leader to visit the White House after Trump took office, emerging unscathed from the Oval Office encounter. But despite the two leaders' sporadic bromance, Macron's approach to Trump has failed to bear major results, with France caught up in the president's planned tariffs on the European Union.

Nor did it bring any US security guarantees for Ukraine despite Macron's efforts, together with Starmer, to build a coalition of nations that could deploy forces after any ceasefire with Russia, with the hope it would convince the Trump administration to provide backup.

Trump is scheduled to arrive late Sunday in Kananaskis, Alberta. Bilateral meetings between other leaders are possible Sunday, but the summit program does not get underway until Monday.

Peter Boehm, Canada's sherpa of the 2018 G7 summit in Quebec and veteran of six G7 summits, expects the heads of state to pivot discussion to devote more time to the war. "Leaders can accommodate a discussion, perhaps even a statement," Boehm said. "The foreign policy agenda has become much larger with this."

## He tends to be a bully

Leaders who are not part of the G7 but have been invited to the summit by Carney include the heads of state of India, Ukraine, Brazil, South Africa, South Korea, Australia, Mexico and the UAE. Avoiding tariffs will continue to be top of mind.

"Leaders, and there are some new ones coming, will want to meet Donald Trump," Boehm said. "Trump doesn't like the big round table as much he likes the one-on-one." Bilateral meetings with the American president can be fraught as Trump has used them to try to intimidate the leaders of Ukraine and South Africa.

Former Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien told a panel this week that if Trump does act out, leaders should ignore him and remain calm like Carney did in his recent Oval Office meeting.

"He tends to be a bully," Chrétien said. "If Trump has decided to make a show to be in the news, he will do something crazy. Let him do it and keep talking normally." Starmer had a warm Oval Office meeting with the president in February, wooing Trump with an invitation for a state visit from King Charles III. Trump has praised the British prime minister, despite their political differences.

## Zelenskyy expected to meet Trump

Last month Britain and the US announced they had struck a trade deal that will slash American tariffs on UK autos, steel and aluminum. It has yet to take effect, however, though British officials say they are not concerned the Trump administration might go back on its word.

Starmer's attempts to woo Trump have left him in an awkward position with Canada, the UK's former colony, close ally and fellow Commonwealth member. Starmer has also drawn criticism — especially from Canadians — for failing to address Trump's stated desire to make Canada the 51st state.

Asked if he has told Trump to stop the 51st state threats, Starmer told The Associated Press: "I'm not going to get into the precise conversations I've had, but let me be absolutely clear: Canada is an independent, sovereign country and a much-valued member of the Commonwealth."

The war in Ukraine will be on the agenda. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is due to attend the summit and is expected to meet with Trump, a reunion coming just months after their bruising Oval Office encounter which laid bare the risks of having a meeting with the U.S. president.

Starmer met with Carney in Ottawa before the summit for talks focused on security and trade, in the first visit to Canada by a British prime minister for eight years.

German officials were keen to counter the suggestion that the summit would be a "six against one" event, noting that the G7 countries have plenty of differences of emphasis among themselves on various issues.

"The only problem you cannot forecast is what the president of the United States will do depending on the mood, the need to be in the news," said Chrétien. (AP)

# 1 killed, 19 injured as hot air balloon crashes in central Türkiye

**ISTANBUL, June 15:** A hot air balloon crashed in central Türkiye on Sunday, leaving its pilot dead and 19 Indonesian tourists injured, a local official said. State-run Anadolu Agency said another hot air balloon taking off from the same location of Ilhara Valley also made a hard landing early Sunday morning, and that 12 Indian tourists were slightly injured and taken to hospital. In a statement, the governor's office said the balloons were affected by a sudden change of wind. In the first incident, the balloon was trying to make a hard landing near the village of Gozlukuyu in Aksaray province, when the pilot fell out of the balloon's basket and his feet got tangled in a rope, Aksaray Governor Mehmet Ali Kumbuzoglu said. "Unfortunately, our pilot got stuck under the basket and died," he said, adding that the injured tourists were taken to a hospital. (AP)

# Modi arrives in Cyprus on first leg of three-nation tour

**NICOSIA, June 15:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived in Cyprus on Sunday for a two-day visit during which he will hold talks with President Nikos Christodoulides to strengthen bilateral ties.

In a special gesture, President Christodoulides welcomed PM Modi on his arrival at the airport. Modi is the first Indian prime minister to visit Cyprus in over two decades.

"Landed in Cyprus. My gratitude to the President of Cyprus, Mr. Nikos Christodoulides for the special gesture of welcoming me at the airport. This visit will add significant momentum to India-Cyprus relations, especially in areas like trade, investment and more," Modi posted on X.

Modi arrived here on the first leg of his three-nation tour.

"A trusted partnership underpinned by shared values & aspirations. PM @narendramodi has landed in Cyprus. As a special ges-



ture, reflecting deep-rooted historic ties, President @Christodoulides and FM @ckombois delivered PM on arrival at the airport," Ministry of External Affairs spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X.

"Extensive discussions to further deepen bilateral ties lie ahead," he added.

In his departure statement in New Delhi earlier, Modi said Cyprus is a close friend and an important partner in the Mediter-

anean region and the EU.

"The visit provides an opportunity to build upon the historical bonds and expand our ties in the areas of trade, investment, security, technology and promote people-to-people exchanges," he said.

While in Nicosia, the prime minister will hold talks with President Christodoulides and address business leaders at Limassol, it said. From Cyprus, he will head to Kananaskis in Canada to participate in the G7 summit at the invitation of Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney. Following the G7 Summit, Modi will visit Croatia and hold meetings with President Zoran Milanovic and Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic.

Modi said his three-nation tour is also an opportunity to thank partner countries for their steadfast support to India in its fight against cross-border terrorism and to galvanise global understanding on tackling terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. (PTI)

# Jaipur Literature Festival London commemorates Ahmedabad plane crash victims

**LONDON, June 15:** The annual Jaipur Literature Festival (JLF) London opened on a sombre note in solidarity with all those impacted by the Air India Ahmedabad-London plane crash, with senior Congress MP Shashi Tharoor leading a moment's silence at the British Library.

A planned light-hearted inaugural session involving Indian High Commissioner to the UK Vikram Doraiswami was modified to a conversation around the 'Power of Words', with Tharoor and UK-based historian-author Shrabani Basu reflecting upon the inadequacy of words when coping with grief at such an enormous scale.

It came as the death toll in the tragic crash involving a plane that was due to land at London Gatwick Airport on Thursday evening hit 270, including 53 British nationals.

"The language of pain is not words but silence," said Tharoor, as he shared with the audience how

he had been airborne on another Air India flight to London at the time of the disaster.

"In many ways, the language of grief, of suffering, loss is a landscape of shadows. It's so often inadequate to the profound desolation that human beings feel and that language attempts, I think inadequately, to articulate," he said. Basu, the author of 'Spy Princess: The Life of Noor Inayat Khan' and 'Victoria & Abdul: The True Story of the Queen's Closest Confidant', added: "I hope today we can fill this room with the power of words, words to unite us, to console us, to remember those who lost their lives widely and also the love that they carried in their hearts, which we all share with them."

JLF London, one of the international off-shoots of the main literature festival held in Jaipur and running until Sunday, brought together speakers and writers from around the world to discuss every-

thing from art to literature, history to science, food to film, international politics to sustainability.

"Creativity is and continues to be at the center of everything that we do," said JLF producer Sanjoy Roy, managing director of Teamwork Arts. "This weekend we will be celebrating books and ideas and music and so much more. And this, in many ways, again, is a bridge between India and the UK. Do we need bridges? You bet we do... The easiest thing to do is to hate. Much more difficult is to love and respect each other, and books and ideas are one way to be able to push back on that idea of ignorance," he said.

This year's programme included sessions with International Booker Prize-winning Kannada author of 'Heart Lamp' Banu Mushtaq, lyricist and poet Javed Akhtar, novelist Shobhaa De, playwrights Hanif Kureishi and David Hare, JLF co-director William Dalrymple and Namita Gokhale, among others. (PTI)

# What US adults think about Pope Leo XIV, according to new AP-NORC poll

**WASHINGTON, June 15:** Just over a month after Pope Leo XIV became the first US-born pontiff in the history of the Catholic Church, a new poll shows that American Catholics are feeling excited about their new religious leader.

About two-thirds of American Catholics have a "very" or "somewhat" favourable view of Pope Leo, according to the new survey from The Associated Press-NORC Centre for Public Affairs Research, while about 3 in 10 don't know enough to have an opinion. Very few Catholics — less than 1 in 10 — view him unfavourably.

Among Americans overall, plenty of people are still making up their minds about Pope Leo. But among those who do have an opinion, feelings about the first US-born pope are overwhelmingly positive. The survey found that 44 per cent of US adults have a "somewhat" or "very" favourable view of Pope Leo XIV. A similar percentage say they don't know

enough to have an opinion, and only about 1 in 10 see him unfavourably. As he promises to work for unity in a polarised church, Americans with very different views about the future of the church are feeling optimistic about his pontificate. Terry Barber, a 50-year-old Catholic from Sacramento, California, hopes Leo will seek a "more progressive and modern church" that is more accepting of all.

## Bipartisan appeal

About half of Democrats have a favourable view of the new pope, as do about 4 in 10 Republicans and independents. Republicans are a little more likely than Democrats to be reserving judgment.

About half of Republicans say they don't know enough to have an opinion about the pope, compared to about 4 in 10 Democrats. Republicans, notably, are no more likely than Democrats to have an unfavourable opinion of the pope. About 1 in 10 in each group view Pope Leo unfavourably. (AP)

# Political violence threaded through recent US history; Motives, justifications vary

**WASHINGTON, June 15:** The assassination of one Democratic Minnesota state lawmaker and her husband, and the shooting of another lawmaker and his wife at their homes, is just the latest addition to a long and unsettling roll call of political violence in the United States.

The list, in the past two months alone: the killing of two Israeli embassy staffers in Washington, DC.

The firebombing of a Colorado march calling for the release of Israeli hostages, and the firebombing of the official residence of Pennsylvania's governor — on a Jewish holiday while he and his family were inside.

And here's just a sampling of some other disturbing attacks before that — the assassination of a health care executive on the streets

of New York City late last year, the attempted assassination of Donald Trump in small-town Pennsylvania during his presidential campaign last year, the 2022 attack on the husband of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi by a believer in right-wing conspiracy theories, and the 2017 shooting by a liberal gunman at a GOP practice for the congressional softball game.

"We've entered into this especially scary time in the country where it feels the sort of norms and rhetoric and rules that would tamp down on violence have been lifted," said Matt Dallek, a political scientist at Georgetown University who studies extremism. "A lot of people are receiving signals from the culture."

Politics behind both individual shootings and massacres

Politics have also driven large-scale massacres. Gunmen who killed 11 worshippers at a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018, 23 shoppers at a heavily Latino Walmart in El Paso in 2019 and 10 Black people at a Buffalo grocery store in 2022 each cited the conspiracy theory that a secret cabal of Jews were trying to replace white people with people of colour.

That has become a staple on parts of the right that support Trump's push to limit immigration.

The Anti-Defamation League found that from 2022 through 2024, all of the 61 political killings in the United States were committed by right-wing extremists. That changed on the first day of 2025, when a Texas man flying the flag of the Islamic State group killed 14 people by driving his truck through



a crowded New Orleans street before being fatally shot by police.

"You're seeing acts of violence from all different ideologies," said Jacob Ware, a fellow at the Coun-

cil on Foreign Relations who researches terrorism. "It feels more random and chaotic and more frequent."

The United States has a long and

grim history of political violence, from presidential assassinations dating back to the killing of President Abraham Lincoln to lynchings and violence aimed at Black people in the South to the 1954 shooting inside Congress by four Puerto Rican nationalists. Experts say the past few years, however, have likely reached a level not seen since the tumultuous days of the 1960s and 1970s, when icons like Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated.

Ware noted that the most recent surge comes after the new Trump administration has shuttered units that focus on investigating white supremacist extremism and pushed federal law enforcement to spend less time on anti-terrorism and

more on detaining people who are in the country illegally.

"We're at the point, after these six weeks, where we have to ask about how effectively the Trump administration is combating terrorism," Ware said.

Of course, one of Trump's first acts in office was to pardon those involved in the largest act of domestic political violence this century — the January 6, 2021 assault on the US Capitol, intended to prevent Congress from certifying Trump's 2020 election loss.

Those pardons broadcast a signal to would-be extremists on either side of the political debate, Dallek said: "They sent a very strong message that violence, as long as you're a Trump supporter, will be permitted and may be rewarded." (AP)



## FREE HEALTH CAMP



Free health camp organised by The Hills Times in association with Swastha Hospital and CRPF Namsai aiming to uplift rural healthcare infrastructure in the region. -HT Photos

## Arunachal Guv appeals to ex-servicemen to motivate youth to prepare for defence forces

*'Your legacy strengthens the very foundation of our great nation and continues to inspire every generation'*



**ITANAGAR, June 15:** Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen KT Parnaik (Retd) has appealed to ex-servicemen to guide and motivate the youth to prepare for a life in the defence forces, thus contributing to the cause of nation-building.

Addressing an ex-servicemen rally at Rupa in Arunachal Pradesh's West Kameng district on Saturday, the governor encouraged the younger generation from veteran families to proudly follow in the footsteps of their forebears by joining the armed forces.

He praised the remarkable legacy of discipline, patriotism, and commitment that continues to be passed down through generations in these proud families, an official statement from Raj Bhavan said on Sunday.

Reaffirming the unwavering commitment to the well-being of veterans, he said the people stand with them, not just in words, but in spirit and in action.

Your legacy strengthens the very foundation of our great nation and continues to inspire every generation, he said.

Expressing deep respect and gratitude to the veterans, Veer Naris, officers of the Rajya Sainik Board and the proud families of ex-servicemen, Parnaik described them as the living embodiment of India's spirit of sacrifice and patriotism.

Acknowledging the immense contribution of

ex-servicemen in safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the nation, he praised their unwavering discipline, unmatched courage, and the noble way in which many continue to serve their communities even after retirement.

Praising the Veer Naris, the governor said that their strength and dignity, in the face of the supreme sacrifices made by their loved ones, are a source of inspiration for the entire nation.

Underscoring the importance of welfare and support systems, he urged all ex-servicemen to stay informed and actively avail themselves of the various schemes initiated by the Ministry of Defence, such as pension support, the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), resettlement and skill development programmes, and educational assistance for their children.

The governor directed the Director of Rajya Sainik Board to ensure that Veer Naris are extended every possible care and assistance and that the children of our brave martyrs are supported to complete their education with honour and dignity.

Gajraj Corps GOC Lt Gen Gambhir Singh, Ball of Fire Division GOC Maj Gen KS Grewal, Rajya Sainik Board director and also secretary Air Commodore RD Mosabi (Retd), senior military officers, veterans and Veer Naris from Tawang and West Kameng attended the rally. (PTI)

## Deputy Chief Minister attends World Blood Donor Day celebration in Itanagar



**HT Bureau**

**NAMSAL, June 15:** Deputy Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Chowna Mein, recently attended the World Blood Donor Day celebration jointly organised by Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh and the Arunachal Life Saving Foundation at the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

Addressing the gathering, the Deputy Chief Minister described blood donation as one of the highest forms of humanitarian service and praised the selfless contributions of voluntary donors. "It was a humbling experience to honour and appreciate those engaged in this noble mission of saving lives through blood donation," he stated.

Calling upon the citizens—especially the youth—to donate blood regularly, Mein emphasized the life-saving potential of this simple yet profound act of service.

Highlighting the Government's ongoing efforts under the leadership of Chief Minister Pema Khandu, he informed that Trauma Centres and Blood Banks have been established in District Hospitals across the State to address the issue of preventable deaths due to non-availability of blood.

To further strengthen the State's blood donation infrastructure, Mein announced three major initiatives:

Institutionalising blood donation drives by incorporating them into the Government's official calendar of events, establishing a dedicated Blood Bank facility in the State Capital and launching a Mobile Blood Bank to improve accessibility and outreach across the State.

He commended Seva Bharati Arunachal Pradesh and the Arunachal Life Saving Foundation for successfully organising a mass blood donation camp in the State Capital. He also extended his gratitude to healthcare workers, Armed Forces personnel, NGOs, CBOs, and all volunteers for their active participation in the campaign.

Special mention was made of Ramesh Jeke, Chairman of the Arunachal Life Saving Foundation, for his steadfast commitment to the cause of voluntary blood donation. The event witnessed the presence of Speaker Tesam Pongte, Minister Wangki Lowang, Deputy Speaker Kardo Nyigyor, and several MLAs, along with a wide cross-section of society including healthcare professionals, members of the armed forces, civil society organisations, and dignitaries.

## BJP Arunachal Pradesh launches Yoga Training Camp ahead of International Yoga Day



**HT Bureau**

**NAMSAL, June 15:** The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Arunachal Pradesh today launched a preparatory Yoga training camp at Thupten Gatselling Monastery, Itanagar, as part of the lead-up to International Yoga Day. The

initiative is also a tribute to 11 years of governance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and 9 years under Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

Organised under the leadership of BJP State President Kaling Moyong, the camp aims to promote wellness,

holistic health, and public engagement, while simultaneously showcasing the developmental strides made by the double-engine government in the State.

To mark these dual milestones, the BJP has announced a series of programs and outreach activities across all 60 assembly constituencies and 28 districts of Arunachal Pradesh. These events will be held under the party's slogan: "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas."

Today's event witnessed the enthusiastic participation of Hon'ble Ministers, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), newly appointed Chairmen and Vice Chairmen, State Office Bearers, and senior BJP Karyakartas, among others.

The party aims to leverage the occasion to reinforce its grassroots presence, celebrate the spirit of yoga, and connect with citizens across the State through a shared message of unity, development, and wellness.

## Two teenagers killed in scooter-truck collision

**ITANAGAR, June 15:** Two teenagers died after the two-wheeler they were riding collided with a dumper truck in Naharlagun in Arunachal Pradesh on Sunday, police said. The accident took place near Borum Bridge close to the Naharlagun Bypass stretch.

"The duo died on the spot. They were identified as Md Tanveer Khan (18), from Uttar Pradesh's Sant Kabir Nagar district and Md Sahil Alam (17), from Motihari district of Bihar," Naharlagun Superintendent of Police (SP) Mihin Gambo said.

Their bodies have been shifted to TRIHMS, Naharlagun, for post-mortem examination, the officer said.

The dumper truck involved in the accident has been seized by police. The driver of the truck, identified as Md Hasanur Islam (22), a native of Lakhimpur district of Assam, has been detained for questioning. Islam was currently residing at Helipad Colony, Naharlagun.

Police have registered a case and are probing the circumstances that led to the accident. Possibilities of over-speeding and negligence are being investigated, the SP added. (PTI)

## 2<sup>nd</sup> state-level junior cum inter-school chess championship 2025 concludes in Itanagar

**HT Bureau**

**NAMSAL, June 15:** The 2nd Arunachal Pradesh State-Level Junior cum Inter-School Chess Championship 2025 concluded successfully on Sunday at Sansy Smart School in Itanagar.

Held over three days from June 13 to 15, the event was organised by Mamar's Chess Foundation in association with the All Arunachal Pradesh Chess Association (AAPCA), following the regulations of the Fédération Internationale des Échecs (FIDE).

According to an official statement, the tournament saw enthusiastic participation from young chess talents representing schools across the state. The championship was aimed at fostering strategic thinking, encouraging competitive spirit among school students, and promoting the overall growth of chess in Arunachal Pradesh.

The closing ceremony was attended by former Chief Minister and Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) President Nabam Tuki, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest.

Also present were Biri Shanti Nido, ZPC of Kamle district, and prominent so-

cial activist Bimpak Siga as Guests of Honour.

The championship was led by Leyu Mamar Nilling, a FIDE-certified National Instructor, as the Organising Chairman, with Talin Gyama Maying serving as the Organising Secretary. Both played key roles in ensuring the smooth and professional execution of the event.

Five top-performing players from the tournament—Mui Tasi from VKV Chimpu, Busen Dupit from Government Secondary School Riso, Nyader Poyom, Oonshu Haging from JNV Megdong, and Charu Tuna from Government Secondary School ESS Sector Itanagar—have been selected to represent Arunachal Pradesh at the National-Level Junior Chess Championship 2025.

The organisers, in their statement, thanked all participants, guests, and supporting stakeholders for contributing to the success of the event. They reaffirmed their commitment to furthering the reach of chess in the state, noting that the championship served not only as a platform for competition but also as a valuable experience in mental discipline and focus for the participating students.



## Mann is just 'mukhota', Punjab govt being run by AAP's 'rejected leaders': Delhi CM



**CHANDIGARH, June 15:** Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta on Sunday alleged that her Punjab counterpart Bhagwant Mann is just a "mukhota" (mask) as his government is being run by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, who have been "rejected" by people of the national capital.

She was speaking to reporters in Ludhiana while campaigning for BJP candidate Jiwan Gupta for the June 19 byelection to Ludhiana West seat.

Launching a scathing attack on the AAP-led Punjab government, Gupta said drug menace is rampant in the state.

The Delhi chief minister added that "Punjab has been converted into a Chhitta Express" under the AAP's rule.

Gupta said the people of Ludhiana West will vote wisely and make the BJP candidate victorious.

She claimed that former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who is the AAP's national convener, had made "tall promises" to the people of Delhi as well as Punjab but now stood exposed.

"Those who ran away from Delhi after making tall promises are now sitting in Punjab... I want to ask them 'kya hua tera vaada' (what about your promises)," asked Gupta. "Kejriwal should answer what happened to those promises. I will not ask Bhagwant Mann because he is only a 'mukhota' (mask), the government here is being run by their leaders from Delhi who have been rejected by the people there," she said. Gupta asked the AAP what is the fate of their promises to improve health infrastructure and schools.

"What about your promise to end drug problem in Punjab? What have you done for these years?... People have died due to consumption of spurious liquor in Punjab, what are you doing? With builder mafia, you are snatching land of poor farmers. In every street, outside every school 'chhitta' is sold. Punjab has been converted into a 'Chhitta Express'," she alleged.

Gupta accused Kejriwal of displaying "false Punjabiyat today". "When you are in power in Delhi for a decade, not even one minister in Kejriwal's Cabinet was from the Sikh community. Did you not find them able? While in power in Delhi, you never did anything for the Sikhs," she said.

Gupta said the process of delivering justice to the 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims truly began after Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power. She also said that her government recently handed over job appointment letters to the families of 1984 anti-Sikh riot victims.

In present BJP government in Delhi, you will see a minister from the Sikh community, from the Punjabi community, she added.

Escalating her attack, Gupta said Mann has been made powerless.

## Naxalism will be wiped out from country by March 31, 2026: Shah

**LUCKNOW, June 15:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday reiterated that Naxalism will be eradicated from the country by March 31, 2026.

Speaking at an event to distribute job letters to newly-recruited civil police constables here, Shah said, "In 11 years of rule under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the country has become secure. Naxalism was prevalent in 11 states of the country, but now it is limited to just three districts. Remember my statement, by March 31, 2026, the country will become free from Naxalism."

Hitting out at the previous governments in Uttar Pradesh, Shah said till now, recruitments were made based on caste, while technology had no role to play.

Addressing the newly-recruited police personnel, Shah said, "You all have been appointed thanks to technology and transparency. Now, there are control rooms, command centres, PCR One, and more than 150 on-wheel forensic units, which

are engaged in providing justice to people.

"All of you have to take this forward. I am confident that you will move forward with the mantra of security, service, and sensitivity."

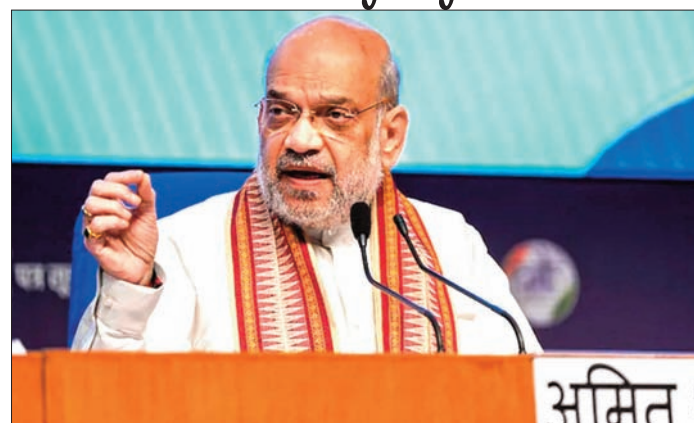
The home minister claimed that during Congress rule, terrorist attacks used to take place almost daily, be it in Ahmedabad, Delhi, Mumbai, Jaipur or Coimbatore, and "let's not talk about Kashmir".

"During Prime Minister Modi's tenure, Pakistan tried (to attack) three times -- at Uri, Pulwama, and Pahalgam."

"Surgical strikes followed the Uri attack. Air strikes were carried out after the Pulwama attack, while Operation Sindoor followed the Pahalgam attack in which terrorist headquarters were shattered (across the border)," Shah said.

Narendra Modi has sent out a message to the entire world that anyone attacking Indians will be punished, he said.

"Operation Sindoor has sent a stern message to the world," Shah



said. The bravehearts of the Indian armed forces razed the terror bases in Pakistan, ushering in a new era of "Shashakt Bharat", the home minister said.

"We now have three laws in place -- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA)... Let me tell you, citizens will soon get justice for every FIR they lodge,"

Shah said. Elaborating on the mechanism for expedited justice, Shah said, "We must ensure justice based on all the facilities and technology of CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems), ICJS (Inter-operable Criminal Justice System), and forensic science."

Addressing the gathering, Shah also said that while modernisation of India's police forces began na-

tionwide under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, Uttar Pradesh's efforts in this regard commenced only in 2017 after the formation of a BJP government under Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

"The Centre's reforms were not visible in Uttar Pradesh from 2014 to 2017," Shah said.

Shah also said that India will be a global leader by 2047, with Uttar Pradesh playing a crucial role.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Deputy Chief Ministers Brajesh Pathak and Keshav Prasad Maurya, among other senior officials, were present at the event.

The event marked the biggest-ever direct recruitment drive for civil police constables in the history of the state police, the Uttar Pradesh government said in a statement.

Under the 'Civil Police Direct Recruitment' drive, as many as 48,196 male and 12,048 female candidates have been selected by the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board. (PTI)

## U'khand chopper crash Cong calls for accountability; asks Centre, state to probe such incidents



**NEW DELHI, June 15:** In the wake of a chopper crash in Uttarakhand, the Congress on Sunday called for fixing accountability in such incidents and urged the Central and state governments to investigate them. Seven people were killed as a helicopter carrying them from the Kedarnath shrine in Uttarakhand crashed early Sunday in the forests of Gaurikund amid poor visibility.

"The news of the helicopter crash in Rudrapur, Uttarakhand is extremely painful. Seven passengers including the pilot have died. Our deepest condolences to the families of the victims. May God give strength to the bereaved families in this hour of grief," Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post in Hindi on X.

This is the fifth such helicopter accident in the last six weeks, he said.

"Accountability for these accidents must be fixed. It is an appeal to the state and central government to

investigate these accidents and ensure proper security arrangements," Kharge said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra urged the state government to thoroughly review the safety standards and ensure the safety of the pilgrims.

"The news of the death of seven people in the helicopter crash in Gaurikund, Uttarakhand is extremely saddening. May Lord Kedarnath grant peace to the departed souls. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families," she said in an X post in Hindi.

"This is the 5th helicopter accident since the Chardham Yatra began. An appeal to the state government is to thoroughly review the safety standards and ensure the safety of the pilgrims," she said.

Rudrapur District Disaster Management Officer Nandan Singh Rajwar told PTI that zero visibility caused by bad weather apparently led to the crash.

The Civil Aviation Ministry said the accident will be investigated by the Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB).

"There were 5 passengers, one infant and one crew member on board. The helicopter took off from Gup-takashi at 05:10 hrs and landed at Shri Kedarnath ji helipad at 05:18 hrs. Helicopter took off again at 05:19 hrs for Gup-takashi and crashed near Gaurikund," an official statement said.

As a precautionary measure, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has reduced the frequency of helicopter operations to chardham shrines of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Yamunotri and Gangotri.

The watchdog is carrying out enhanced surveillance and reviewing the operation for any further action, the statement said. (PTI)

## Two dead, six rescued; search on for missing persons, says Fadnavis

**MUMBAI, June 15:** Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Sunday said two individuals died while 32 were injured, six of them critically, after the bridge over the Indrayani river collapsed in Pune district.

He said six people have been rescued so far, and a search operation is being conducted on a war footing as some people are swept away.

The incident occurred in the Kundamala area frequented by picnickers, officials said. They said the area has been witnessing heavy rains over the last few days, sending the river in a spate.

"I was deeply saddened to hear the news of the tragedy that occurred when a bridge over the Indrayani River collapsed in Indori, near Talegaon in Pune district. According to preliminary information, 2 people have died in this



incident. I pay my heartfelt tribute to them. We share the grief of their families," Fadnavis said on X.

The chief minister further said he had spoken with the Divisional Commissioner, District Collector, Superintendent of Police and the

concerned Tehsildar.

He said a search was launched on a war footing as some people were swept away and NDRF has been deployed at the spot. The relief work has been immediately accelerated, he added. (PTI)

## Priyanka targets Left in Nilambur, says lives at risk amid human-animal conflict

**MALAPPURAM (Kerala), June 15:** Congress General Secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Sunday used incidents of human-animal conflict and the alleged politicisation of the welfare pension scheme to criticise the CPI(M)-led LDF government during a corner meeting held to seek votes for the party's candidate in the Nilambur Assembly by-election.

Vadra, who represents the Wayanad constituency in the Lok Sabha, referred to the loss of lives and livelihoods caused by human-animal conflict in her constituency -- of which Nilambur is also an Assembly segment -- and said it is the responsibility of the state government to ensure the protection of people's lives and livelihoods.

In an apparent response to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's earlier statement that a major hurdle in addressing the growing incidents of human-animal conflict was the wildlife laws enacted by the Congress government led by Indira Gandhi, Vadra said there was no point in blaming old laws. "There is no point in blaming old laws or saying that it is somebody else's fault. When we are in government, when it is a government, then it is the government's responsibility to place basic protection for lives and livelihoods," said Vadra at the meeting organised at Moothedam village after a roadshow.

In a recent press conference, CM Vijayan said that the state government was taking all possible steps to address the increasing instances of human-animal conflict, but central laws remained a major hurdle in effectively dealing with the issue.

"Everyone knows that these wildlife laws were introduced during the tenure of the Congress government at the Centre under Indira Gandhi in 1972," the chief minister said, referring to the Wild Life (Protection) Act of 1972, which was enacted for the protection of plant and animal species across India.

Vadra, who visited the home of a victim of human-animal conflict before attending the corner meeting, said it is very important to find concrete measures to protect lives.

She also referred to the recent incident in which a teenage boy was electrocuted by an illegal wire trap intended for wild boar in the Nilambur Assembly constituency.



Raising the issue of the ₹ 1,600 welfare pension given to over 62 lakh people, the Congress General Secretary accused the Left government of politicising it.

It must be given on time. It cannot be distributed at the convenience of the government -- when it suits them, whether during elections or otherwise, she said.

"People depend on this pension," Vadra added.

Her statement on the welfare pension came as the ruling CPI(M) launched a strong campaign in by-poll-bound Nilambur against Congress leader K C Venugopal's remark likening welfare pensions to a "bribe".

The CPI(M), which accused him of attacking a vital welfare scheme, seized on the comment made during a speech as part of the ongoing Nilambur bypoll campaign, framing it as an insult to pension beneficiaries.

Venugopal later clarified that his remarks regarding the Left government's welfare pension disbursement were intended to highlight delays and the partial clearing of arrears close to elections.

During the corner meeting, Vadra also referred to the ongoing protest by ASHA workers in Kerala, who are raising various demands, including an improved honorarium.

The Lok Sabha MP said the role of ASHA workers had become a 24/7, seven-day-a-week job, and was no longer just voluntary work. "So, if they are asking for a reasonable raise in their honorarium and ₹ 5 lakh as a retirement amount, what is wrong with that? Is it not their right?" she asked.

Congress leader Aryadnan Shoukath is the UDF candidate, while the CPI(M) has fielded its state secretariat member M Svaraj as the LDF candidate for the 19 June by-poll, which is considered crucial for both fronts ahead of the Assembly elections next year. (PTI)

## Harit Yoga seeks to integrate environmental sustainability with yoga: Union minister Jadhav

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** Harit Yoga, one of the 10 signature events being designed to commemorate the International Day of Yoga, seeks to integrate environmental sustainability with yoga and is gaining a lot of traction across the country, Union Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav said.

As we enter the 11th year, International Day of Yoga 2025 is not just a commemoration, it is a collective call to scale up efforts and deepen yoga's reach across all segments of society, Jadhav said.

The International Day of Yoga is celebrated every year on June 21.

In an exclusive interview to PTI, Jadhav said that Harit Yoga has already inspired over 160 dedicated events across India, including clean-up drives, tree plantation campaigns, and yoga sessions in natural spaces.

From coastal zones to Himalayan valleys, the synergy between ecology and asanas is being actively promoted, he emphasised.

"We are all witnessing the harmful effects of environmental imbal-



ance... erratic rains, droughts and extreme temperatures. Prime Minister Modi had earlier given the slogan 'One Tree in Mother's Name' and we took that message further by launching Harit Yoga, combining yoga with tree plantation," Jadhav said.

Everyone is encouraged to plant at least one tree in the name of their mother, father, or themselves,

he said. A better environment enhances the benefits of Yoga, especially when practiced in fresh air, the minister said.

"Harit Yoga is a movement to reconnect our breath with the planet's rhythm one tree, one asana at a time. It is a symbolic yet deeply personal step toward sustainability. A better environment

enhances the benefits of yoga, especially when practiced in fresh air, under open skies, close to nature," he stated.

To support this green vision, the Ministry of Ayush is also developing and revitalizing Yoga Parks in collaboration with local bodies and Resident Welfare Associations, Jadhav informed.

These open-air community wellness spaces offer a tranquil, eco-friendly environment for regular yoga practice encouraging citizens to embrace wellness and sustainability together, he said.

"The core idea is simple yet powerful: Yoga is not separate from nature; it thrives with it," he stated.

"I appeal to all fellow citizens, under the leadership of PM Modi, Yoga has received global recognition. But we must not treat 21st June as a one-day event. Yoga should become a way of life. Adopt it in your daily routine for better health, both physical and mental, and contribute to building a healthier nation," he stated. (PTI)

## MEA must move beyond passive advisories, establish coordinated evacuation for Indian students in Iran: Cong

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** The Congress on Sunday claimed that more than 1,500 Indian students are left in a state of uncertainty in Iran and asked the Ministry of External Affairs to move beyond passive advisories to immediately establish a coordinated evacuation mechanism. The Congress' assertion came after Indians in Iran were on Sunday asked not to panic, exercise due caution and maintain contact with the Embassy of India in Tehran through its social media accounts in view of the current situation in the country following the launch of strikes by Israel.

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khara alleged that while Indian students in Iran are calling for help, the government remains largely unresponsive, even as missiles rain from the sky.

"With flights suspended, airspace over Tehran closed, and internet access disrupted, more than 1500 Indian students are left in a state of precarity and uncertainty - with no information about evacuation or safe zones," Khara said in a post on X.

The Indian Embassy has issued a generic advisory urging the students to "remain vigilant, avoid all unnecessary movements, follow the Embassy's Social Media accounts and observe safety protocols as advised by local authorities", he said. "Meanwhile, students remain trapped in distress as the Indian Embassy in Iran remains unresponsive: 'We are traumatized after last night's attack. There has been no response from the Indian Embassy. Our families are panicking'," Khara said. He claimed this is not the first time Indian citizens have been left pleading for help during

foreign crises. "Whether it was Sudan, Ukraine, or now Iran, Modi's government has turned evacuations into propaganda opportunities -- stepping in late, speaking too much and doing too little, too slowly, Khara alleged. "The MEA must move beyond passive advisories and immediately establish a coordinated evacuation mechanism -- complete with emergency response teams, real-time communication channels and logistic support -- before the window for safe exit narrows any further," he said.

In an advisory, the Indian embassy in Iran asked all Indian nationals and Persons of Indian Origin to remain vigilant, avoid all unnecessary movements, follow the embassy's social media accounts and observe safety protocols as advised by local authorities.

The embassy provided a Google form on its X account and asked the Indian citizens to fill it out to provide their details. "Please remember, it is important not to panic, exercise due caution and maintain contact with the Embassy of India in Tehran," it said.

It also provided a Telegram Link and asked the Indian citizen to join it to receive updates on the situation from the mission. "Kindly note that this Telegram Link is ONLY for those Indian Nationals who are currently in Iran," the embassy posted on X. It also provided emergency contact details. The Congress on Sunday unequivocally condemned Israel's recent "bombings and targeted assassinations" on Iranian soil and said this attack on Iran's sovereignty and encroachment of its rights only deepens instability as well as sows the seeds of further conflict. (PTI)



## Yaba tablets worth ₹ 4 crore seized near Assam border, one arrested



**HT Correspondent**  
**AGARTALA, June 15:** In a major operation against drug trafficking, Tripura Police on Sunday seized 80,000 Yaba tablets valued at around ₹ 4 crore from a truck at the Churaibari check post in North Tripura district, near the Assam border.

North District Superintendent of Police Avinash Rai informed that acting on a tip-off, police intercepted a small truck entering Tripura and discovered the contraband hidden in eight separate packets.

"This significant seizure is part of our ongoing drive under the vision of 'Nasha Mukti Tripura' as laid out by Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr. Manik Saha, and in line with instructions from the Director General of Police (DGP) to curb the drug menace," SP Rai said.

The driver of the vehicle, identified as Sanjay Sahani (24), a resident of Tripura, was arrested in connection with the smuggling attempt.

Authorities said further investigation is underway to trace the wider network involved in the illicit drug trade.

## One arrested with drugs worth ₹ 4 crore in North Tripura

**AGARTALA, June 15:** One person was arrested with drugs worth Rs 4 crore in North Tripura on Sunday, police said.

Acting on a tip-off, a mini-truck heading to Agartala from Assam was intercepted at a checkpoint in the Churaibari police station area, they said.

"During the search, 80,000 Yaba tablets worth ₹ 4 crore were found in a secret chamber of the vehicle. The driver was arrested," Superintendent of Police Avinash Rai said.

The driver was identified as Sanjay Sahani (24), a resident of Phoolbari in Churaibari, he said.

A case was registered and an investigation started to identify those involved in the smuggling racket, he added.

Yaba, meaning 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a tablet form of methamphetamine, and a very powerful stimulant. It was introduced in East Asia during World War II to enhance soldiers' performance, and has become increasingly popular among young people in Thailand, Laos and Cambodia, as well as Vietnam and Myanmar, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. (PTI)

## Tipra Motha seeks PM's intervention for 'pushing back' all illegal immigrants in Tripura

**AGARTALA, June 15:** BJP ally Tipra Motha Party (TMP) sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi's intervention for sending back all illegal Bangladeshi immigrants living in Tripura.

Senior TMP leader Animesh Debbarma, the forest minister, told PTI that following the directives of the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), states like Gujarat, Assam and Meghalaya took swift action.

"Illegal migrants were detained, flown to various border areas and pushed back to their country of origin. This has not been done in Tripura as was expected," he said.

With this demand, a 15-member delegation of the TMP, led by Debbarma, met Governor N Indrasena Reddy on Saturday night and handed over a memorandum, seeking the PM's intervention.



Debbarma said the TMP urged the PM to send a task force to the state.

"We also urged for the setting up of a mechanism, involving the Assam Rifles, CRPF and the state police to detect, detain and push back the illegal migrants," he said.

Expressing concern over "demographic change" in the state, Debbarma said, "As per government records, the state accepted 6,09,000 people who had migrated from Bangladesh for various reasons during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. An accord was signed with a cut-off date of March 24, 1971, for the identification of illegal migrants."

A Mobile Task Force (MTF) was also raised under the Tripura Police with a separate budget for detection and deportation of all the illegal migrants, but the problem persists, he said. (PTI)

## Culmination of Naga leaders visit to England

**DIMAPUR, June 15:** The Naga delegation, comprising senior leaders of "Naga tribe hohos from Naga territories", the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR), and the Recover, Restore, and Decolonise (RRaD) team, concluded a week-long series of events and activities aimed at repatriating ancestral human remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford University on June 13, 2025, a press statement from the Forum for Naga Reconciliation (FNR) said.

The Naga delegation met with representatives from various British museums that held Naga belongings and human remains. Dr Alexandra Green, curator of the British Museum, stated that a significant amount of material from Myanmar/Burma may be of importance to the Nagas, but much of the existing collection was obtained from the erstwhile

province of Assam, the press note also said. She said that the digitisation process will be over soon, and almost all the materials will be accessible on their website. She went on to say that one Naga human remains had been taken off display.

Dr Mark Elliot, senior curator of the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge University, informed the Naga delegate that only a small percentage of the material was on display; hence, his university was also trying to digitise the material for greater public accessibility. He said that there were 725 objects, mainly belonging to the Angami, Ao, Konyak, and Khiamnungan communities, the press release also said.

The Head of Exhibitions and Collections at Manchester University, Georgina Young, and the

Lead Curator of the South Asia gallery, Nusrat Ahmed, informed the Naga delegation that they have been working tirelessly with local South Asian communities to co-create what should be included in the galleries and how they should be represented. They informed the Nagas that they possessed twelve Naga human remains, eleven of which were from the Konyak areas. The materials were donated by James P Mills, and in 1994, the Board of Manchester University decided that all the human remains were to be removed from the exhibition, it added.

Navjot Mangat and Heba Abd El Gawad, representatives of the Horniman Museum in London, informed the Naga audience that they had stopped using the word "objects" and had begun to use "belongings" to refer to the material that was forcibly taken from

communities during colonial rule. They said that they have more than 400 belongings, mainly pipes and shawls, most of which were obtained as gifts from army officers stationed in the Naga homelands during colonial times. They still have two human remains that had been taken off display. They said they would like to work with the Naga community to ensure that there could be an ethical process to repatriate human remains and belongings.

Lisa Graves, the curator of the Bristol Museum, said that they had more than 200 potential Naga collections and one trophy head that had been removed from display. A lot of their material from Myanmar had been labelled as belonging to the Chin, but it is possible that they were mislabelled, the press release of the FNR further said. (NNN)

## Farmland dispute triggers trouble in Manipur's Leitanpokpi area



**IMPHAL, June 15:** Tensions flared up in the border areas of Manipur's Imphal East and Kangpokpi districts on Sunday morning after Kuki and Meitei villagers targeted each other with stones and slingshots over cultivating a piece of land, officials said.

According to officials, at least three persons sustained minor injuries in the incident which took place at Leitanpokpi in Imphal East district.

Police said trouble started around 10 am, when Meitei farmers from Leitanpokpi went with a tractor to plough a paddy field at Sadu Lampak village near a Kuki settlement.

Seeing the farmers, Kuki villagers came down from the nearby hills in Kangpokpi district and allegedly objected to any move to cultivate land.

Nandeibam Mobi, a Meitei farmer who went to plough the field, told reporters, "The field at Sadu Lampak was not attended during the last two years due to the

conflict, but with the situation improving, Meitei farmers went to plough the land. We had taken permission from security forces. Today, when we started working, a large number of Kuki villagers came down from a nearby hill village and objected to our presence on our own land, claiming it as theirs."

The low-lying Leitanpokpi area has witnessed numerous incidents of armed clashes between Kuki and Meitei groups since violence erupted in the state in May 2023.

Police said security forces are continuously attending to the situation and right now things are under control.

They added that extra forces, along with the Superintendent of Police (SP), are monitoring the area closely.

Police said, "Some Kuki villagers came and said the paddy field does not belong to Meiteis. Meanwhile, some Meiteis also came to the spot, following which arguments started." (PTI)

## PM has energy for foreign trips, can he not summon empathy for visiting Manipur: Cong



**NEW DELHI, June 15:** Taking a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his three-nation tour, the Congress on Sunday said he has all the energy, excitement, and enthusiasm -- '3 Es' -- for such visits and asked can he not summon up a 4th E -- empathy -- for going to Manipur "where the people's suffering continues unabated".

The opposition party also said this is Modi's 35th trip abroad since May 2023 and it was "pathetic of the PM to treat Manipur in this awful manner".

"The Prime Minister leaves for Cyprus, Canada, and Croatia this morning. There was a time when he boasted about his knowledge of algebra by spouting the (a+b)<sup>2</sup> equation as applicable to India and Canada. But things went horribly wrong thereafter," Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X.

"When it appeared that Canada was dragging its feet on the invite

to India, Mr. Modi's drum beaters proclaimed that he would not go even if invited. But like always, he stands exposed," Ramesh claimed.

The Canadian prime minister has said that India has been invited to the G7 Summit along with a number of other non-G7 countries because India is the fifth largest economy in the world, Ramesh pointed out.

"Perhaps Mr. Modi can remind him that according to the Niti Aayog CEO, India became the world's third largest economy on May 24, 2025," the Congress leader said.

The Congress leader also shared a video clip of the PM from 2015 in which he is heard giving a mathematical analogy to demonstrate the relationship between the two countries.

Ramesh said, "This is Mr. Modi's 35th trip abroad since May 2023. He has all the energy, excitement, and enthusiasm--the 3 Es-- for such visits. But can he not summon up a 4th E--empathy-- for going to Manipur where the people's distress, agony and suffering continues unabated?"

"He has met with NOBODY from the state, let alone political leaders, since May 3, 2023. Pathetic of the PM to treat Manipur in this awful manner," he added.

The Congress has been attacking the prime minister for not visiting Manipur besides slamming

the Centre for its handling of the situation in the ethnic strife-torn northeastern state.

More than 220 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic violence between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The Congress last week had accused Prime Minister Modi of "insensitivity" to the suffering of people in the state.

Ramesh had said the suffering of the people of Manipur is not only of the state and the northeastern region but of the entire country.

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

Prime Minister Modi on Sunday morning embarked on a three-nation tour during which he will take part in the G7 Summit in Canada, and visit Cyprus and Croatia to shore up India's bilateral cooperation with these two countries.

Modi will first be in Cyprus at the invitation of the country's president, Nikos Christodoulides.

In the second leg of his visit, Prime Minister Modi will travel to Kananaskis in Canada on June 16-17 to participate in the G7 Summit at the invitation of Canada Prime Minister Mark Carney. (PTI)

## Tripura eyeing tea boom with govt support, unused land



**AGARTALA, June 15:** Tripura is witnessing a big transformation in its tea sector, with large tracts of unused government-allotted land and rising production figures setting the stage for what officials are calling a "tea uprising" in the northeastern state.

Tripura Tea Development Corporation (TTDC) Chairman Samir Ghosh said the state's tea industry holds immense potential due to underutilised land and favourable policies.

"Altogether 12,832 hectares were allotted by the government for tea cultivation, but only 6,000 hectares are currently being utilised. The remaining 6,832 hectares are lying vacant," Ghosh told PTI, emphasising the untapped potential for expanding cultivation.

Unlike several other states that cap tea garden land at 4.2 hectares, Tripura imposes no ceiling, allowing both large-scale and small-scale growers to flourish.

"That gives Tripura a clear com-

petitive edge. Plus, Tripura tea has a very strong liquor -- it's one of our biggest strengths," Ghosh said.

Currently, Tripura has 54 tea gardens, including five run directly by the government, 11 managed by cooperative societies, and the remaining under private ownership.

Additionally, around 2,800 small tea growers, each cultivating on 1-2 hectares, contribute nearly 30 per cent to the state's total tea production.

To support these growers, TTDC is ramping up local infrastructure.

"We are setting up a modern tea processing centre in Machhmara in Dhalai district, and a tea auction centre is coming up at Brahmkunda in West Tripura district," Ghosh said.

The auction centre, being developed with financial support from the North Eastern Council (NEC) at a cost of ₹ 2.2 crore, is expected to help local growers secure better prices and reduce dependence on auction houses in Assam.

"Our teas are currently sold under the Assam label. With this auction centre, we aim to build a distinct identity for Tripura tea," asserted Ghosh.

Production has seen a dramatic upswing in recent years.

According to State Cabinet Minister Ratan Lal Nath, Tripura's tea production has grown from 2 lakh kg in 2017-18 to 7.55 lakh kg in 2024-25.

"This jump in production is the result of the state government's strong political will to revive and promote the sector," Nath told PTI.

Since 2018, the state government has launched multiple initiatives to give Tripura tea a national and international presence.

A unique 'Tripura Tea' logo was unveiled in 2018, and TTDC has also introduced its own branded offerings. Further efforts are underway to establish more processing units for green tea, orthodox tea, and CTC (Crush, Tear, Curl) variants, officials said.

In an innovative distribution strategy, TTDC has also started selling 'Tripureswari Packet Tea' through Public Distribution System (PDS) outlets, bringing locally-produced tea directly into ration shops.

Beyond industry-focused steps, the state government has undertaken measures to improve the lives of tea workers, too.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY), housing has been provided to 3,339 tea labourer families, reinforcing the administration's focus on inclusive rural development, they said. (PTI)

## Tripura Congress to launch outreach campaign from June 22

**HT Correspondent**

**AGARTALA, June 15:** In line with the directives of the All India Congress Committee (AICC), the Tripura Pradesh Congress Committee (TPCC) on Sunday announced a state-wide public outreach campaign starting from June 22.

The campaign aims to highlight the alleged failures of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government at both the Centre and in the state.

Following a key organisational meeting held at the Congress Bhavan in Agartala, TPCC President Asish Kumar Saha said that leaders from across the state -- including District and Block Presidents and representatives of various wings of the party -- were present to plan the campaign.

"As per instructions from the AICC, we will launch a block-level door-to-door campaign starting June 22," Saha said. "The focus will be on raising awareness about the deteriorating condition of the country and Tripura under the BJP regime. We will also communicate the proactive steps taken by Congress leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Sonia Gandhi, and Mallikarjun Kharge -- including the push for a caste-based census."

Saha, a former BJP MLA, also made a controversial claim that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had agreed to a ceasefire in the wake of the Pahalgarh terror attack due to alleged pressure from then-U.S. President Donald Trump.

He further added that Congress workers would distribute leaflets highlighting key issues such as rising unemployment, inflation, a worsening law and order situation, and increasing crimes against women.

"We are reaching out to the public directly, seeking their support and trust by laying bare the ground realities and failures of the BJP government," Saha said.

## Bid to restore sacredness of Mt Kanchenjunga Two-day sanctification ceremony begins in Sikkim

**GANGTOK, June 15:** A two-day sanctification ceremony began in northern Sikkim on Sunday to restore the sacredness of Mt Kanchenjunga, which was recently scaled from the Nepal side, organisers Sikkim Bhutia Lepcha Apex Committee (SIBLAC) said.

The event, which is being held at Kabi Lungtsok, was attended by leaders and supporters of various parties, including BJP and CAP, besides SIBLAC members and local citizens during the day, they said.

Addressing the gathering, SIBLAC advisor S D Tshering emphasised the spiritual and cultural sanctity of Mt Kanchenjunga, saying it should be protected without turning the matter into a political issue.

The event was peaceful and was marked by calls for cultural sensitivity and the preservation of spiritual heritage.

A recent expedition from Nepal stirred a major controversy in Sikkim, where indigenous beliefs consider Mt Kanchenjunga as a sacred mountain on which no human should set foot.

The sanctification puja was carried out as a symbolic act of restoration of the mountain's sacredness through rituals and prayers.

The puja began a day after SIBLAC wrote



letters to the Nepal government and Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA), urging them to immediately halt a planned expedition to Mt Kanchenjunga, citing the mountain's deep spiritual and cultural significance to the indigenous communities of Sikkim.

SIBLAC urged the authorities to reconsider their decision to allow a joint mountaineering expedition involving climbers from India and Nepal, which is scheduled to begin from Nepal on June 18 under the aegis of India's National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS).

According to SIBLAC, Mt Kanchenjunga is not merely a geographical landmark but a sacred entity, revered as a guardian deity by the Sikkimese people.

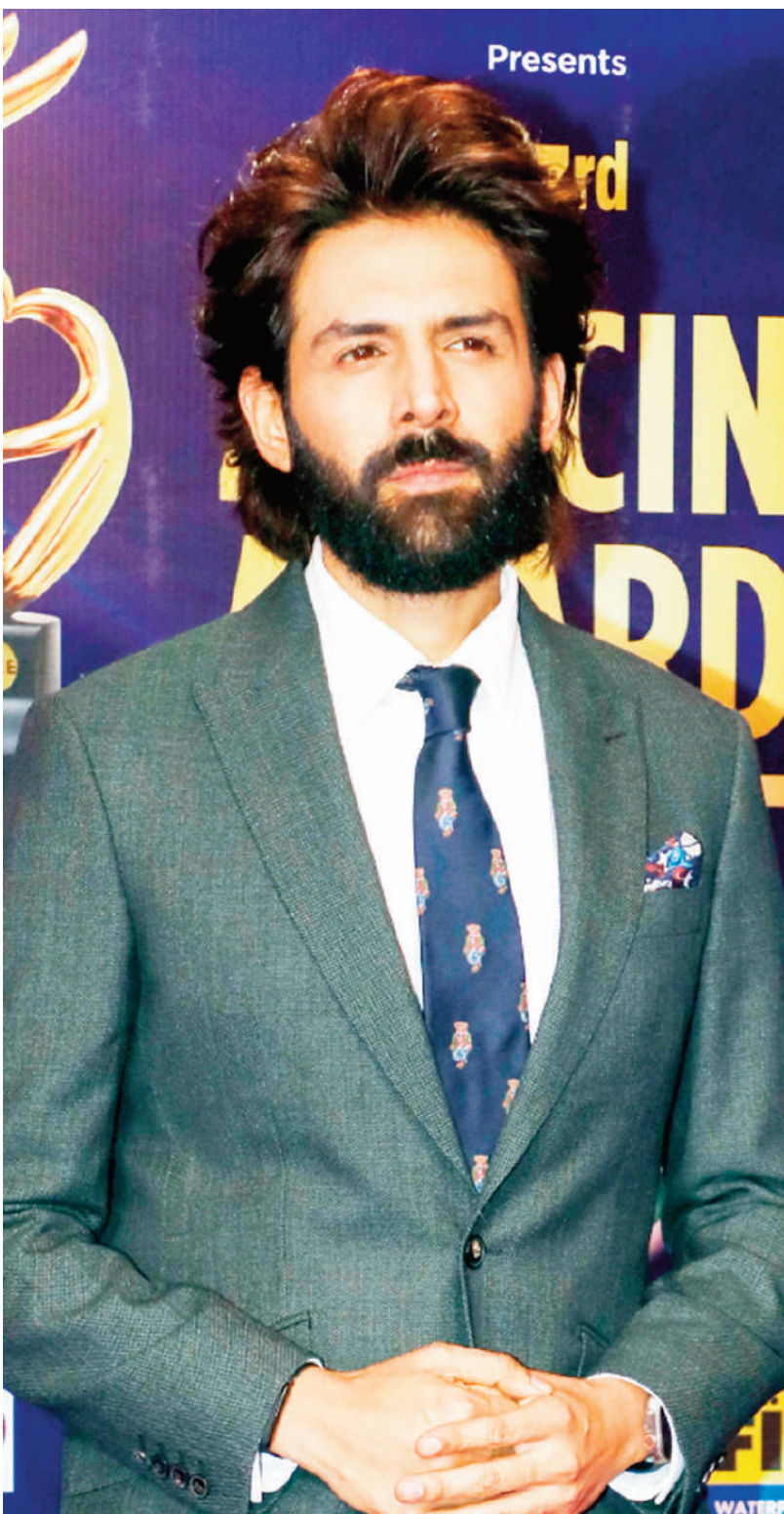
The organisation noted that the mountain is central to the state's religious and cultural heritage, and is associated with annual prayers and ceremonies deeply rooted in local traditions.

The letters further referenced the 2001 notification by the Government of Sikkim, which banned mountaineering activities on the mountain out of respect for local beliefs. They also invoked provisions of Article 371F and Sikkim's special status within the Indian Constitution, emphasising the protection of indigenous customs and religious sentiments.

SIBLAC warned that any expedition involving summiting Kanchenjunga, particularly from Nepal, could be perceived as a serious cultural violation, and called for the mountain to be treated with spiritual reverence rather than as a site for adventure tourism.

SIBLAC had earlier urged the Sikkim government to enforce the standing prohibition on climbing Mt Kanchenjunga, citing the sacred status of the mountain and the legal protections already in place. It had condemned the summit attempt by a group of mountaineers in May. (PTI)





## Kartik Aaryan celebrates one year of 'Chandu Champion': It transformed me mentally and physically

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** Bollywood actor Kartik Aaryan says "Chandu Champion" will always hold a special place in his heart as the film completed one year from its release.

Directed by Kabir Khan, whose credits include "Ek Tha Tiger", "Bajranghi Bhaijaan", "83" and "Kabul Express", the film released on June 14, 2024. It featured Aaryan in the role of India's first Paralympic gold medalist, Murlikant Petkar.

Aaryan shared a post on his Instagram handle on Saturday and penned a lengthy note along. The actor said the film transformed him mentally and physically.

"'Chandu Champion' will always hold a special place in my heart- not just because it has earned so many accolades, honours, and immense

love both in India and on global platforms- but because it transformed me, both mentally and physically, forever," he began.

"Portraying India's first Paralympic gold medalist, Padma Shri Murlikant Petkar, on the big screen remains one of the most honorable and incredible achievements of my life. I hope this champion journey never stops...

Thank you, Kabir sir and Said sir, for trusting me with this film. And heartfelt gratitude to the audience for always standing by my side in every decision I make." He also said the film has been selected for the 27th edition of the Shanghai International Film Festival, which began on Friday. "Chandu Champion" also featured Vijay Raaz, Bhuvan Arora and Rajpal Yadav in pivotal roles. (PTI)

## T'gana govt presents film awards at glittering event, Allu Arjun receives best actor award

**HYDERABAD, June 15:** Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Saturday presented the state government's Gaddar Telangana Film Awards 2024 in various categories, including the Best Actor award to Allu Arjun for his performance in the blockbuster movie 'Pushpa-2'.

At a glittering event here Saturday night, Reddy, accompanied by his deputy Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka, presented the Paidi Jairaj Film Award (Indian Film Personality) to veteran director Mani Ratnam.

Renowned actor N Balakrishna received the NTR Film Award, while popular actor Vijay Devarakonda was given the award named after veteran Telugu actor Kantha Rao.

Speaking on the occasion, the CM highlighted his government's vision to make Telangana a \$3 trillion economy by 2047. He said the film industry should also witness impressive growth to make a contribution in the vision.

Addressing renowned direc-

tor SS Rajamouli, who was present on the occasion, he said Hollywood and Bollywood should make Hyderabad their home. The government is ready to support the film industry to realise this, he said.

Speaking on the occasion, Balakrishna thanked the Telangana government for conferring the awards named after late folk singer and balladeer Gaddar.

He appreciated the state government for resuming the presentation of film awards after 10 years.

In his speech, Arjun, who incidentally was arrested in December last year over the stampede at a theatre here where 'Pushpa-2' was screened, thanked the Reddy and the Deputy CM for the award.

He also thanked director Rajamouli for his suggestion to release 'Pushpa-1' in Hindi. The 'Pushpa' phenomenon would not have been possible otherwise, he said.

The CM also handed over the awards announced for the years 2014 to 2023. (PTI)



## Kajol, Karan Johar, Allu Arjun and others extend wishes on International Father's Day

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** Kajol, Suniel Shetty, Allu Arjun, and Karan Johar, were among several film celebrities who extended their heartfelt wishes on International Father's Day 2025 on Sunday. Father's Day is celebrated every year on the third Sunday of June.

Kajol shared a post on her Instagram handle comprising a throwback picture.

"Confidence is the one thing people say I have in abundance... here's to the man who gave it to me and taught it to me ... he used to call me his tigress and always told me to be as loud and proud as I wanted without a filter! It's his birthday this week as well and somehow it seems appropriate that father's day comes so close to his birthday. #loveyouday #missyoueveryday #happyfathersday," she wrote.

Karan Johar uploaded a series of pictures on his Instagram alongside his late father and producer Yash Johar.

"He made films with soul & for the soul.....and he lived life with even more. He taught me that good storytelling begins with you....and your good heart. Thank you for giving me the courage to feel deeply. Thank you for giving me the courage to show these feelings on the biggest screens possible. Happy father's day papa, thank you.... for you," he wrote.

Sharing a post, Suniel Shetty wrote, "No big post. No fancy words. Just a heart full of gratitude and a quiet thank you.... For the love that never asked for anything in return. For being my first hero, my silent strength, My forever home. Happy Father's Day."

"Happy Father's Day to my GOD," Allu Arjun wrote in his post. Genelia D'Souza shared an Instagram story and wrote, "Happy Father's Day. If the going gets tough - the tough gets going, is something that you have always taught me.. N without this mindset - I wouldn't be half the person I am- So Thank you for being my strength - Everytime I feel I can't, I remember you saying that I can and I go ahead. TO MY BIGGEST FAN FROM YOUR BIGGEST FAN."

Athiya Shetty wrote, "Happy Father's Day to my greatest strength. Love you, @suniel.shetty (heart emotion)."

Tiger Shroff re-posted a video of him alongside Jackie Shroff on his Instagram story. "Happy daddy day @apnabhidu," he said. (PTI)



## Ryan Coogler praises Christopher Nolan, calls him 'mentor'

**LOS ANGELES, June 15:** Ryan Coogler, best known for helming "Sinners" and "Black Panther" film series, says acclaimed filmmaker Christopher Nolan is like his "mentor", and credits him for making the world richer with his movies.

Coogler said both Nolan and his wife and producer Emma Thomas are "amazing people", but before that they are "lovers of cinema".

"This is my guy (Nolan). I've come to know him. I've come to know his wife...Amazing

people," he said, according to the entertainment news outlet IndieWire.

"First and foremost, they're just lovers of cinema, and lovers of family. The world is richer because they're making movies. He is a mentor of mine."

Coogler's latest work is "Sinners", which he directed and wrote. It released in April. He is also working on the third installment of the "Black Panther" franchise. The film will star Denzel Washington. (PTI)

## From street food to nightlife, Chinese rapper Jackson Wang soaks in all things India

**MUMBAI, June 15:** Popular singer-rapper Jackson Wang, who is on his second trip to India, says he is in the country to "observe, absorb and be inspired" by everyday lives, whether it is sampling Mumbai's street food or playing cricket on the beach with locals.

Wang is in Mumbai to promote his upcoming album "Magic Man 2". He previously visited the country for a performance at Lollapalooza India in 2023.

During his week-long trip, the singer said he has picked up words like 'Namaste', and 'Shukriya'. He hopes to spend the rest of his time "without a direction and destination."

"I can just go out and experience it myself, and not someone trying to show me around the town. So, whatever the locals are doing, I want to just follow, observe, absorb, learn and also be inspired," Wang told PTI.

The 31-year-old singer is a part of the popular K-pop group

"Got7", and is credited for hits such as "Blow" and "100 Ways".

Wang's new album "Magic Man 2" is a follow-up to his popular 2022 album of the same name.

The singer's video of eating spicy street food like vada pav and meeting Hrithik Roshan has already gone viral on social media. His meeting with Roshan also sparked rumours of a possible collaboration on "Krish 4". But Wang said these reports are fake.

"When we're together, especially Hrithik and I, we don't talk about work. So work-related stuff is never brought up in our conversation," he said, adding that "Krish 4" is a big movie but he is not there.

Asked what all he has experienced during his short trip.

Wang said, "I forgot the name, but I liked the yoghurt and the crispy ball with beans in it. I've also had a sandwich on the street with mayonnaise and cheese, and

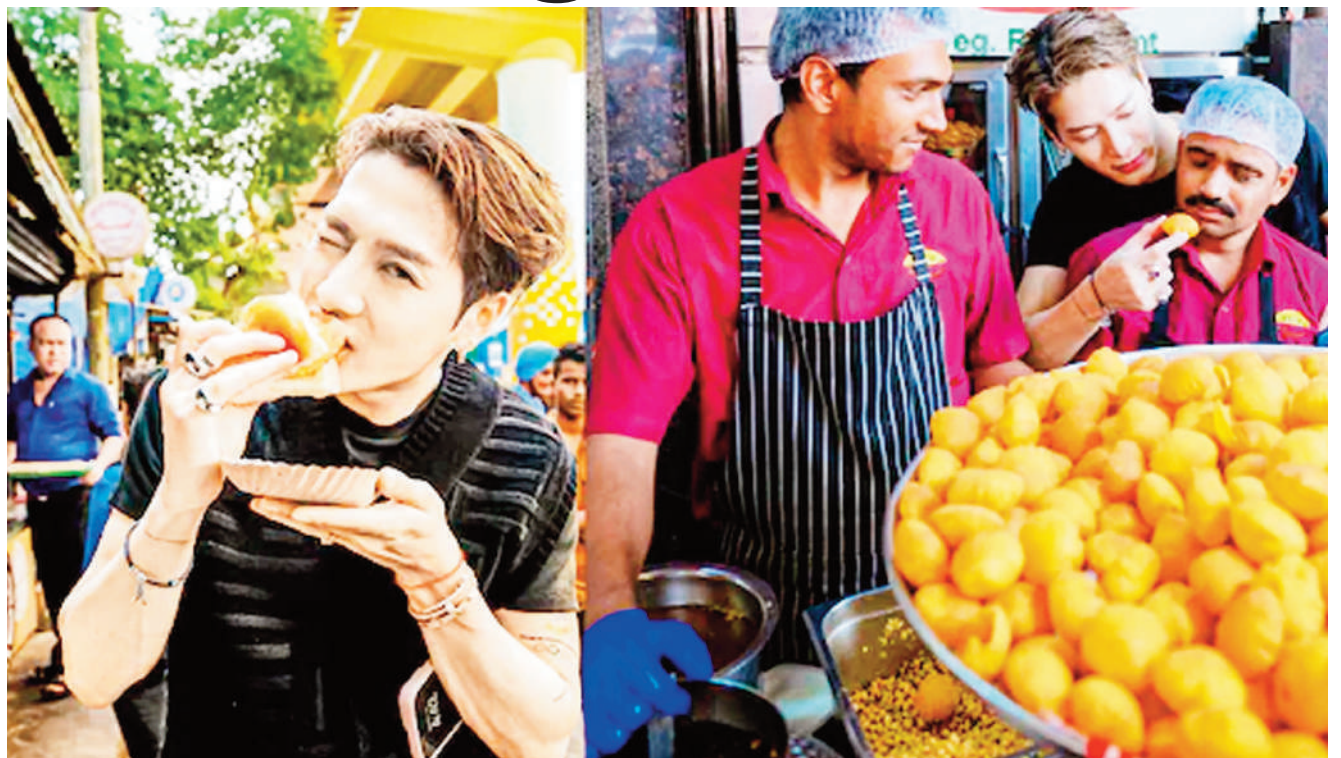
the potato ball inside the bun, I like that too. I am allergic to chilis, but I am okay with spices. I had a great time."

Wang, who previously collaborated with Punjabi singer Diljit Dosanjh on the track "Buck", considers the actor-singer a close friend.

"We're friends, we are in shoots, and I'm a big fan of his. He shows me a lot of love, and I appreciate him as a senior, as a legendary icon. We never know when it will happen. It probably will happen," he said.

With nearly a decade in music industry, Wang said he has learnt the importance of taking time off.

"When I was recharging, I started writing my personal diaries, which turned into music. The way the entire 'Magic Man 2' looks is what I felt internally, it's not based on one thing, it's everything in general. Every single song is about what and how I feel about reality, society, and humanity." (PTI)





## Aishwarya Pissay storms to victory in INRC Round 2

**NASHIK, June 15:** Aishwarya Pissay of Petronas TVS Racing overcame initial hiccups in the first stage and made up for lost time with a blistering final stage to clinch the ladies title in Round 2 of the 2025 FMSCI National Rally Championship for two-wheelers here on Sunday.

Despite losing nearly 44 seconds due to technical issues in the opening special stage, India's only FIM World Cup winner and three-time world champion remained undeterred as she rode aggressively through the remaining stages.

Aishwarya won with a commanding lead of one minute and 34 seconds.

Former champion Ryhana Bee of Chennai finished second.

Competing on a challenging 17.5km stretch of broken tarmac, Aishwarya clocked 50 minutes, 02.803 seconds to keep the championship lead after two rounds.

"I lost a lot of time in the first stage. So I was a bit cautious in the second and went all out in the third, not leave anything to chance. It is a well-fought race and I had a lot of fun on the bike," said Aishwarya. (PTI)

## Aurionpro Grandmaster Chess to begin in Mumbai from June 16

**MUMBAI, June 15:** Over 400 players from 17 countries are expected to compete in the Rs 40 lakh Aurionpro International Grandmaster Chess tournament and junior international event, to be held simultaneously from June 16 to 24.

In the Grandmaster section, the top billing has been given to GM Levon Pantoşia of Georgia. GM Petrosyan Manuel from Armenia is the second seed while GM Luka Paichadze, also from Georgia, is the third seed.

The 12-year-old FIDE Master Aansh Nerurkar leads the Indian charge in the junior section, with strong challenge expected from Madhesh Kumar of Pondicherry and Maharashtra's Avirat Chaudhan.

The star attraction, however, is 12-year-old woman International Master Oshini Gunawardhana from Sri Lanka, whose presence adds international flair and excitement to the field. (PTI)

## Looking good for spinners thus far: Kuldeep Yadav on pitch expectations in England

**BECKENHAM, June 15:** Now that one half of the seasoned spin duo is not part of the Indian Test team, Kuldeep Yadav is spending more time with Ravindra Jadeja on the tour of England and the initial assessment of the pitches has made him more confident going into the series beginning on June 20.

The retirement of R Ashwin has put more responsibility on Jadeja, who has played 12 Tests in England. The sole specialist spinner in the squad, Kuldeep Yadav, has only bowled nine overs in his sole Test appearance here.

Experts have tipped Kuldeep to play a crucial role as India eye their first series win in England since 2007. If not the series opener at Leeds, the spinners are expected to get help at other venues including Birmingham, Lord's and the Oval.

"The wickets are looking good for spinners. It has been good for batting (in Intra Squad game here). First day there was moisture, seamers got help but as the game progressed, spinners got in the game," Kuldeep said on the sidelines of the Intra Squad game here.

The wrist spinner said he hopes to get some assistance from the surfaces over the course of the five games.

"There is bounce for spinners on this surface. Today is day three, I am yet to bowl. The ball is turning a bit and I hope it is the same in the series as well," said Kuldeep.

The Kanpur cricketer misses Ashwin in the dressing room but his retirement has led to him spending more time with Jadeja.

## Hazlewood prioritising IPL over national team raises eyebrows: Johnson

**SYDNEY, June 15:** Former Australian pacer Mitchell Johnson has lashed out at compatriot Josh Hazlewood for prioritising the Indian Premier League over the World Test Championship final against South Africa, saying it had raised "eyebrows".

One of Royal Challengers Bengaluru's standout bowlers, Hazlewood, 34, had rejoined the southern franchise after the IPL was temporarily suspended due to the border flare-up between India and Pakistan, even as some other Australian players decided against returning to India for the remainder of the tournament.

RCB went on to defeat Punjab Kings to lift their maiden IPL trophy with Hazlewood, who ended up with 22 wickets this season, accounting for dangerous opener Priyansh Arya in the final.

Hazlewood, a vital cog in the Australian pace battery in the WTC final at Lord's which South Africa won by five wickets on Saturday, could manage only two wickets.

"We've seen concerns about Hazlewood's fitness in recent years, and his decision to prioritise returning to the delayed Indian Premier League over his national team preparations raised eyebrows," wrote Johnson, who played six IPL seasons, representing Kolkata Knight Riders, Kings XI Punjab (Punjab Kings) and Mumbai Indians, in the West Australian. Taking aim at senior players like Mitchell Starc, Hazlewood, captain Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon, among others, he said that if their aim was to prolong their send-offs till after the Ashes, it was a wrong mindset.



"Our successful 'big four' bowling attack of Mitchell Starc, Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Nathan Lyon can't be taken for granted as a lock going forward either. If veteran players are sticking around just for the Ashes as a send-off, it does beg the question of whether that's the right mindset. It's crucial that we embrace the future and build confidence in selecting our next Test players," added Johnson, who has more than 550 wickets in international cricket.

He argued that players like young Sam Konstas, Josh Inglis and even 36-year-old pacer Scott Boland, who were desperate to perform for the country weren't finding a place in the national side. "Players on the

fringe such as Sam Konstas, Josh Inglis and Scott Boland, despite being 36, have a different mentality. They're eager to prove themselves every time they get a chance.

"I'm not being overly critical of an ageing team which has achieved plenty together. Our established players including the senior bowling quartet, Usman Khawaja, (Steve) Smith and (Marnus) Labuschagne have achieved some great things."

He said that the upcoming Test series against the West Indies was the right opportunity to give deserving players an opportunity to showcase their talent. "It's essential to consider when the right time is to make some tough calls. The upcoming

three-Test Windies tour seems like an excellent opportunity to give deserving players a chance to shine, and the finger injury to Smith might have the silver lining of prompting some regeneration.

"Finding a specialist No.3 is crucial, and with the form Labuschagne has shown over the past 18 months, it's hard to justify moving him back into that position. Trying to make changes in all top-three batting slots at once would indeed be risky, and I don't think the selectors will go that route," he argued.

"Konstas looms as a solid option for the pitches in the West Indies, especially with an experienced player in Khawaja alongside him," he added. (PTI)

## Sam Burns holds steady on soggy Oakmont to lead US Open

**OAKMONT (US), June 15:** The closest Sam Burns has come to a major championship is sharing a house with a close friend who already has three of them. He has been inspired by Scottie Scheffler the last few years. The next step is to join him as a major champion.

Burns held steady after missing a short par putt late Saturday in the U.S. Open, responding with a beautiful pitch for a tap-in birdie and two scary putts down the hill from inside 60 feet to save par on the 18th hole at rain-soaked Oakmont for a 1-under 69.

That gave him a one-shot lead over major-tested Adam Scott and J.J. Spaun, with Viktor Hovland not far behind as the only four players to survive par.

Burns was at 4-under 206. He has five PGA Tour titles, the last one more than two years ago, and is coming off a playoff loss last

week in the Canadian Open.

At stake for Burns is a chance for the 28-year-old from Louisiana to become the sixth American at 30 or under to capture his first major since 2020. Scheffler has won 19 times worldwide the last three years, including three majors, most recently last month at the PGA Championship.

"Scottie's obviously an incredible player. I don't think I need to say that," Burns said with a laugh. "We obviously spend a lot of time together and being able to talk to him and just kind of learn from him and ask him questions, it's been really cool."

Scheffler has won his three majors in what turned out to be blowouts. Sunday at Oakmont was shaping up to be anything but that.

Scott, who only climbed back into the top 50 in the world less than a year ago and hasn't seri-



ously challenge in a major in nearly seven years, became only the third player at par or better for the opening three rounds in a U.S. Open at Oakmont.

He birdied three of his last six holes for a 67, getting into the final group when J.J. Spaun made bogey from the bunker on the

18th hole and shot 69. Scott is the only player among the top 10 who has won a major. That was 12 years ago at the Masters. No one has ever gone more than 11 years between their first and second major titles.

"Putting ourselves in these positions doesn't just happen by fluke," Scott said. "I really haven't been in this kind of position for five or six years, or feeling like I'm that player. But that's what I'm always working towards. It's not that easy to figure it all out."

"But if I were to come away with it tomorrow, it would be a hell of a round of golf and an exclamation point on my career."

Spaun, who lost in a playoff at The Players Championship in March, kept pace with Burns throughout the back nine until the end. He looked comfortable under the pressure, making only two bo-

## Bhakatpara Kabaddi Centre organises cycle rally



**HT Correspondent**  
**MANGALDAI, June 15:** As part of the Khelo India initiative, a cycle rally was organised on Sunday by the Bhakatpara Kabaddi Centre.

The rally was led by international masters' athlete and national-level kabaddi player Kunjalata Boro, along with distinguished sports organiser and veteran athlete Ashok Daimary. It commenced at 5 am from Bhakatpara and proceeded to the residence of retired physical instructor Purandar Chamuah in Jyotinagar, Mangaldai.

On this occasion, a brief event hosted by Purandar Chamuah was held, during which Shanti Kumari Boro, a Class X student of Bhakatpara Higher Secondary School, was honoured. Shanti Kumari Boro, daughter of Narayan Boro and Pratima Boro from Tetelibhanguri, Bhakatpara, has represented Assam three times in national kabaddi competitions, demonstrating exceptional sportsman-

ship. She has now been invited to the selection camp of the Indian Sub-Junior Kabaddi team.

During the event, Purandar Chamuah's family also felicitated athlete Kunjalata Boro. Ashok Kumar Daimary, and Ganesh Dutta, who has been associated with sports journalism for the past 35 years. The event was attended by former football referees and brothers Prabin Chamuah and Shailendra Chamuah, among others.

Speaking at the event, Kunjalata Boro stated that such cycle rallies are organised every Sunday to promote sports. She further highlighted that seven players from the Bhakatpara Kabaddi Centre under Khelo India have represented Assam in national competitions so far.

After covering approximately 14 kilometres, the participating athletes returned to Bhakatpara following the brief ceremony. Notably, this centre was established in Bhakatpara in September 2023.

## ATPA Shield: Nagaland Police win inaugural match

**HT Correspondent**  
**JORHAT, June 15:** Nagaland Police defeated Victoria Club of Jorhat in the inaugural match of the ATPA Shield Football Tournament, held at Jorhat Stadium. Nagaland Police beat Victoria Club by a score of 4-1. The match was inaugurated by veteran sports organiser Jatni Saikia. Tomorrow's match will be played between Moran Town Club and Jorhat Town Club.

## The Club World Cup is finally up and running and soccer may never be the same

**MIAMI GARDENS (USA), June 15:** After more than a year of uncertainty and criticism, the Club World Cup kicked off in Miami on Saturday and soccer may never be the same.

At least that's what FIFA president Gianni Infantino has been telling anyone who would listen.

"This tournament will be the start of something historic that will change our sport for the better," he said this week as part of an exhausting schedule of public engagements to drum up interest in the month-long event staged across 11 cities in the United States.

Soccer's newest tournament is what the sport has been waiting for, Infantino says, and on Saturday, despite considerable push-back and obstacles, he turned his personal passion project into a reality.

The Swiss lawyer, who holds one of the most powerful positions in the world as head of soccer's governing body, was on hand at a largely full Hard Rock Stadium to watch Lionel Messi's Inter Miami draw 0-0 with Egyptian team Al Ahly in the opening game of his super-sized Club World Cup.

The match may have been underwhelming, but the occasion — kicked off with a lavish opening ceremony featuring music, dance routines and fireworks — was a moment of immense pride for Infantino and conclusive proof of his influence over the most popular sport on the planet.

Despite his assertions, it's not clear how much soccer really wanted another elite tournament. But this was his baby — so much so that his name is etched not once, but twice, onto a giant golden trophy crafted by Tiffany & Co. that will be lifted by the winner on July 13.



It has gone ahead against the backdrop of legal challenges in Europe, threats of strike action from players and fears of injury and burnout for the biggest stars.

There have been concerns about overreach by FIFA — which has traditionally focused on national team soccer — and the detrimental impact a new club competition would have on domestic leagues.

But nothing was going to stand in the way of Infantino's plans to expand the Club World Cup from its previous guise as a seven-team mid-season mini tournament to a 32-team extravaganza that could one day rival the Champions League and Premier League as one of the most popular and

wealthiest competitions in the world.

Time will tell if it lives up to Infantino's billing, but he has navigated the biggest hurdle of all by getting this inaugural edition off the ground.

It is locked into the calendar — every four years — and teams such as Champions League winner Paris Saint-Germain have already qualified for the next edition in 2029.

"Maybe not now in its first edition, but it will become an incredibly important competition to win," PSG coach Luis Enrique said.

He may have a point. Peculiarly, and despite the global nature of soccer, the club game has largely been restricted to continental competition, aside from the previous guise of the Club World Cup, which was often looked on as little more than a exhibition.

Still, it remains unclear how

much of an appetite there is for another soccer tournament in a calendar that has reached saturation point.

So a crowd of more than 60,000 at the Hard Rock Stadium likely came as a relief to FIFA, though it is not known how many of those in attendance paid anything like the \$349 being quoted for seats in December.

FIFA has not offered definitive numbers on the amount of tickets sold for the tournament as a whole and prices were slashed as the opening game approached. But there were only pockets of empty seats in the stands, with many red-shirted fans of Al Ahly in attendance.

"We've been looking forward to it for a long time," said Peter Sadek a fan originally from Egypt and now living in Orlando. "At least 50 more just from our area (are coming). It's been bubbling up for a long time and you can see how many are here."

Other Al Ahly fans had traveled directly from Egypt, with red shirts outnumbering the pink of Miami in parts of the stadium.

If only Messi could have crowned Infantino's big night with a moment of magic.

He certainly tried. His stunning curling effort from long range, deep into extra time would have been the perfect finish. Instead, Al Ahly goalkeeper Mohamed Elshenawy tipped the ball onto the crossbar to deny the Argentine great and Infantino that prize moment.

Not even Infantino can have everything, it seems. (AP)

## U17 world champion Mansi Lather wins trial for junior Asian Championship

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** Cadet world champion Mansi Lather on Sunday booked her ticket to the U20 Asian Championship to be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan from July 5-13, after winning the trials in the women's 68kg category here.

Mansi, who also won a bronze at the senior Asian Championship in March this year, prevailed over Delhi's Srishti in the final.

Also making the Indian squad in 59kg weight class was Muksan Nandal who last month won a gold in the UWW Ranking Series Mongolia Open. She beat Maharashtra's Ashlesha Kalyan in the final. Muskan trains at Sir Chhotu Ram Akhada in Rohtak under coach Mandeep Singh. Another wrestler from the same training centre winning the trial was Muskan Malik in women's 65kg after she beat Maharashtra's Roshni in the final.

Other women wrestlers who have qualified for the Championships were Shruti (50kg), Saarikha (53kg), Reena (55kg), Neha Sharma (57kg), Anjali (62kg), Harshita (72kg) and Kajal (76kg). The trials were held at IG Stadium.

The trials for men's freestyle and Greco Roman style were held in Lucknow on June 14.

Freestyle squad: Ankush (57kg), Anuj (61kg), Ashwani (65kg), Sourabh (70kg), Vivek (74kg), Amit (79kg), Sachin (86kg), Sachin (92kg), Vishal (97kg) and Jashpooran (125kg). (PTI)



# I would like to build a team culture where everyone is secure and happy: Gill

**LONDON, June 15:** Someone who never dreamt of leading the national cricket team, India's new Test skipper Shubman Gill has set himself the goal of creating a team culture where every player is "secure and happy."

A transitional India will search for their maiden Test series victory in England since 2007, and the first match is scheduled to take place at Leeds on June 20.

"It was like, not even in my dreams, I thought I wanted to be the captain of the Indian cricket team. So, apart from all the silverware and trophies aside, I really would like to build a team culture where everyone is very secure and happy," Gill told Skysports.

But Gill knew that the task was easier said than done.

"I know it can be a very difficult environment, especially with all the competition and the number of matches that we play, different squads coming in. But if I'm able to do that, I think that would be my goal," he added.

"So, keeping a secure environment and making the player feel secure in his abilities and his capabilities I feel is one of the most important things that a leader has to do."

Gill acknowledged that Rohit Sharma,

who retired from Test cricket on May 7, had laid out a clear path for him.

"It can seem like he is not aggressive, but Rohit is very aggressive in terms of his tactics. He is someone who is very clear with his communication prior to the matches, during the series and even after the series, what he wants from the players."

Gill said he wanted to follow the path of his predecessor Rohit, who had always put the team ahead of individuals.

"The kind of environment Rohit bhai kept, even if Rohit bhai is swearing at you, you would not take it to your heart. That's just kind of his personality. I think that's a great trait to have."

"He's firm, but even if he's being hard on you, you know that it's not coming from his heart. It's coming from a team perspective," added Gill.

The 25-year-old said he had a conversation with Rohit on the road ahead for the team.

"This is a conversation that I've had with Rohit bhai a couple of times that ideally in the next 5, 7 or 10 or 15 years, where would we want the Indian cricket team culture to be?"

Gill also said he learned so much from the "proactive" leadership of Virat Kohli.

"When I played under Virat, I think his



proactiveness in Test matches with the field or with the ideas or with his thinking was something that I liked and that I picked up. If he thinks that, okay, this plan is not working, he would immediately have another plan, communicate to the bowler what he wants from them," he noted.

Gill also provided a gist of his conversation with head coach Gautam Gambhir and chief selector Ajit Agarkar before taking up the leadership role.

"They just want me to be able to express myself as a leader. I mean, that's what they have told me, there are no expectations. They are not expecting me to,

you know, to do something that I'm not capable of."

"But you definitely have some kind of expectations from yourself as a leader and as a player. So those are the expectations that I have from myself," he added.

Gill also revealed that he hid all the captaincy talk even from his father, his biggest source of support in his career.

"I don't even think he (father) dreamt of me being the Indian Test captain, like even myself as well. All I remember when I was young, all my dreams were to play for India and win matches."

"So yeah, he called me when the news broke out, I think a couple of days before. But I knew sometime before (the news flashed), but I didn't tell him because I wanted to tell him when it's official. But we had a very heartfelt conversation once he got to know that I've been named the captain," he said.

Gill already has a taste of Gambhir's style of coaching from his days at the Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL, but he was confident of adjusting to him in the national environment.

"Gautam bhai is very determined, very committed. And he's also very clear with his communication, what he wants from the players and what kind of mindset that he would want the players to have."

"Gautam bhai focuses more on the kind of attitude or the mindset that he requires from the team or the players."

Gill's crisis management ability will be put to test when he will have to decide on the workload of premier pacer Jasprit Bumrah.

Chief selector Agarkar had already made it clear that it's highly unlikely that India will have the services of Bumrah throughout the series.

"It's more based on match to match and see how much workload there has been on him. That's what we are trying to look at. You need to see how much workload he had in this particular match."

"We don't want to have a predetermined mindset. Okay, these are the matches that he would want to play because there are so many factors that can not go in your favour in determining whether he is going to play the next match or not," he explained.

Gill said he has not decided upon any plan to counter England's 'Bazball' method of cricket in the series.

"I don't want to have a preconceived notion of how I would want to go about things. There might be a case, you know, they can come out playing aggressive cricket and can lose a few wickets," he said. (PTI)

## India suffer sixth consecutive defeat in Pro League, lose 2-3 to Australia



**ANTWERP (BELGIUM), June 15:** The Indian men's hockey team's wretched run in the European leg of the FIH Pro League continued as it endured sixth defeat in a row, losing 2-3 to Australia, here Sunday.

India have already lost matches to Netherlands, Argentina even as all the games were close.

Former India captain Manpreet Singh, who played his 400th match on Sunday, failed to inspire his side despite taking the early lead.

Sanjay (3rd minute) and Dilpreet Singh (36th) scored for India, while Tim Brand (4th), Blake Govers (5th) and Cooper Burns (18th) sounded the board for Australia.

India stared on a positive note, dominating the early share of exchanges. Three minutes into the match, India took the lead through Sanjay who scored from a rebound from their first penalty corner.

But India's joy was short-lived as Tim Brand equalised a minute later, beating goalkeeper Krishan

Bahadur Pathak all ends up.

A minute later, Australia took lead when Blake Govers scored from top of the circle, again beating Pathak all ends up.

The Kookaburras thereafter completely dominated the proceedings, earning as many as four penalty corners, the last of which was converted by Cooper Burns in the 18th minute.

In the 24th minute, Pathak made a good save to deny Davis Atkin. Australia had another penalty corner soon but Pathak was up to the task. In the 27th minute, India secured back-to-back penalty corners but failed to utilise the chance. India bounced back after the change of ends when Dilpreet Singh scored in the 36th minute after being set up by Shilanand Lakra and Abhishek.

Thereafter Australia dominated the proceedings.

The Kookaburras pressed hard on the Indian defence and earned as many as three penalty corners in the last 10 minutes but Pathak stood firm in the front of the goal to deny the opponents.

India will next play Belgium here on June 21. (PTI)

## India women's hockey team loses 1-2 to Australia in Pro League



**LONDON, June 15:** The Indian women's hockey team fought on equal terms against Australia but conceded a last-minute goal to lose 1-2 in its FIH Pro League match here on Sunday. This was India's second consecutive defeat to the same opponents as they had lost 2-3 on Friday.

India took the lead in the third minute through a field goal from Vaishnavi Phalke and they were 1-0 up at half-time. But Australia restored parity in the 37th minute through Amy Lawton.

The match was heading towards a draw but Lexie Pickering scored the winner from a penalty-corner variation in the 60th minute to break Indian hearts.

India made a bright start to the game as they won three back-to-back penalty corners in the very first minute, adding pressure on the Australian backline. India carried on their momentum and scored the opening goal as early as the third minute to take charge of the match.

Navneet Kaur carried the ball forward and passed it to Sharmila Devi to the left. Devi played it to the far post for Vaishnavi to deflect the ball into the net.

India continued to pile on the pressure as Navneet came close to extending the lead but narrowly missed the target.

Minutes later, Australia won two back-to-back penalty corners towards the end of first quarter but India did well at the back to maintain their lead.

Australia improved their performance in the second quarter and started creating goal-scoring chances. Both sides exchanged possession and battled it out in the midfield but they couldn't be separated in the second quarter as India headed into the second half with a goal in hand.

Australia were more dominant in the third quarter and caused troubles for the Indian defence. Greta Hayes came teasingly close to scoring a goal as she struck a shot towards an empty net. However, the ball was accidentally stopped by her own teammate.

In the 37th minute, Australia were on the attack again and Lawton managed to find the equaliser through a brilliant field goal.

Lawton did well to win the ball from an India defender and then unleashed a powerful shot from the edge of the circle, past the keeper into the bottom right corner.

In the fourth and final quarter, India earned a penalty corner but the Australian keeper was up to the task to keep her side in the contest.

In the 54th minute, India won four penalty corners in a row but they failed to find the net. In their third attempt, India were unlucky not to take the lead. Neha fired a shot which took a deflection and struck the post.

With 34 seconds left on the clock, Australia converted a penalty corner to complete their comeback in the match.

Tatum Stewart played the perfect pass to Pickering who deflected the ball into the net to hand Australia all three points. (PTI)

## BCCI trims daily allowances for staff, streamlines travel policy

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** The daily allowances of the BCCI staff across departments, which have not been paid since January, will finally be released following the streamlining of the domestic 'tournament allowance policy' by the board's top brass.

As per the existing BCCI travel policy, the employees are paid per diem of ₹ 15,000 for short-term travel (up to four days) and ₹ 10,000 for long travel usually relating to the Indian Premier League (IPL), Women's Premier League (WPL) and ICC events hosted by India. A one-time incidental allowance during the travel is ₹ 7500. According to the revised policy, the incidental allowance component has been removed and employees will now be paid a flat ₹ 10,000 per day for their time on the road. The IPL window is slightly longer than two months while ICC events also last at least a month.

A BCCI source told PTI that after tax deduction at source, the per day allowance comes to ₹ 6500.

As the policy was going to be revised, the BCCI staff including the finance, operations and media department have not been paid their daily allowances for

the IPL and WPL but now that the policy has been formulated, their dues should be cleared soon.

"A clear cut policy was needed in terms of allowances as some employees were claiming allowances even when they were operating out of the Mumbai headquarters during tournaments. Now that it has been devised, the dues will be cleared soon," added the source.

For more clarity, an employee who is travelling for the whole of 70-day IPL would be eligible for a daily allowance of ₹ 10,000 with the total claiming amounting to ₹ 7 lakh.

For someone who has limited travel during the IPL would be eligible to claim only 60 percent of the 70-day allowance and someone who is not travelling at all can claim 40 percent of the amount accrued for 70 days. As far as foreign travel is concerned, most BCCI employees are paid USD 300 per day.

On the other hand, the honorary office-bearers including president, secretary, treasurer, vice-president and joint secretary, are entitled to a daily allowance of USD 1000 on foreign tours. (PTI)

## DPL expansion on the cards, says DDCA director Shyam Sunder

**NEW DELHI, June 15:** The Delhi and District Cricket Association (DDCA) is planning to increase the number of teams in the second edition of the Delhi Premier League T20 tournament to eight, said its director Shyam Sunder Sharma.

The inaugural edition of the DPL was held last year with six teams, representing different zones in Delhi, competing in the franchise-based tournament.

"We are thinking of increasing facilities in DPL... there are talks of increasing the teams as well (from six to eight)," Sharma told PTI Videos, highlighting DDCA's plan to expand the tournament.

"The new DPL season will begin in the first or second week of August," he added.

Sharma said that DDCA was happy that a large number of players who competed in DPL last year had gone on to play in the Indian Premier League this year.

"A total of 14 cricketers (who competed in) DPL played in the IPL... players like Digvesh Rath, Ayush



Badoni and Priyansh Arya, among others," he said, adding that there were plans to give a boost to women's cricket as well.

DDCA recently kicked off a women's T20 tournament in which 41 affiliated club are taking part. Sharma said DDCA planned to add two more women's teams by next year.

"Our apex council is giving special focus to women's cricket. If any (affil-

iated) club fields its women's team, it will be given ₹ one lakh as subsidy and if they build their ground, then they will be given ₹ 2.5 lakhs."

Sharma said that the Arun Jaitley Stadium had undergone significant renovations and changes resulting in improved facilities for the players and spectators.

"We got a bad name sometimes when lights went off or the pitch

wasn't in good condition. So, we renovated the stadium to provide better facilities. It was a proud moment for our apex council when we were given the 'Best Pitch Award in IPL', which is a big achievement," he added.

With the BCCI shifting the venue for the three-match women's ODI series between India and Australia in September-October from Chennai to Delhi and Mullanpur, Sharma said DDCA was committed to providing the best facilities to the players.

The matches were moved to Delhi and Mullanpur as the Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai is undergoing a revamp of the outfield and pitches.

"We will provide the best facilities (for the women's ODI here). We will have a lot of facilities to generate spectator interest. We have a good curator staff and everything is ready for Australia series," said Sharma.

The DDCA is also planning to send players for umpiring courses to further nurture cricketing talent.

"We want to send a few players from DDCA for umpiring courses," he said. (PTI)

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