

Good News

Newly opened our Namsai Office:
2nd Mile, Namsai,
Arunachal Pradesh.
(M) 7002786249, 9612845442



26 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

www.thehillstimes.in

THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. II

Issue No. 112

RNI-ASSEN/2023/86488

GUWAHATI, MONDAY, JUNE 23, 2025

PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8

'Shradhanjali' scheme, Rabha devp council get nod

Assam cabinet approves key policy measures, welfare schemes

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 22: A cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday approved a series of significant policy decisions and welfare initiatives aimed at promoting inclusive growth, infrastructure development, and social justice across the state.

The announcements were made by the Chief Minister following the meeting.

According to an official statement, one of the major decisions includes the approval of the 'Shradhanjali' scheme, which seeks to facilitate the lawful and dignified transportation of the bodies of deceased individuals who are domiciles of Assam but die outside the state.

Set to be implemented from October 1, 2025, the scheme will cover youth engaged in low-paying jobs and cases of death under special circumstances such as accidents or murder. It will not apply to deaths occurring during medical treatment outside Assam.

The Special Branch of Assam Police has been designated as the nodal agency for the



scheme, with a DIG-rank officer assigned as the nodal officer.

Family members will be able to inform authorities via local administration, the police, or the 112 emergency number, and a

dedicated social media account will also be set up for communication.

The Cabinet also approved the creation of the Rabha Development Council, which will work for the socio-economic, educational,

and cultural upliftment of Rabha communities residing outside the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council area.

This decision is aimed at ensuring equitable development for Rabha people living beyond the jurisdiction of RHAC.

In a move to boost employment opportunities for women, the Cabinet approved a proposal to fill up to 50 per cent of Supervisor posts in the Women and Child Development Department from among serving Anganwadi Workers who have at least 10 years of experience.

The remaining posts will be filled through direct recruitment by the State Level Recruitment Commission for Class III posts.

In a landmark decision, the Cabinet has declared the transgender community as a "Socially and Educationally Backward Class" in Assam, aligning with directions from the Supreme Court.

The District Commissioners will ensure that applicants seeking Transgender Identity Cards provide proof of being original inhabitants of Assam. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stage set for final kill op at Barichuk well blowout site



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 22: The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC), in collaboration with international well control specialists from Cudd Pressure Control, is in the final stages of preparation for the "final kill" operation at Well No. RDS#147A at Barichuk, Bhatiapur in Sivasagar district, where a blowout occurred on the morning of June 12.

According to an official release issued by ONGC on Sunday, a significant progress has been made at the site with the successful removal of ten trailer loads of rig material by the Crisis Management Team. The clearance of the site has paved the way for the upcoming well capping operation.

To facilitate the complex procedure, heavy equipment necessary for the final capping process is being mobilised to the site.

In tandem, expert teams have conducted a detailed inspection of the elevated portion of the rig mast to plan the safe removal of the tubing stacked in the rig.

A specialised long-boom crane is being brought in for this critical operation and is expected to be deployed at the earliest.

Air quality monitoring at and around the site is ongoing.

As per the current readings, there are no detectable hydrocarbon traces beyond a 30-metre radius from the well.

Based on these assessments, residents living beyond a 500-metre radius from the incident site have been advised that it is now safe to return to their homes and resume daily activities, including cooking and use of electricity.

ONGC has also reported a further decline in gas pressure from the well, a development that is expected to enhance safety during the capping process.

As a preventive measure, water blanketing of the well is being maintained round-the-clock to suppress any potential flammable emissions.

Meanwhile, ONGC continues to extend full support to the district administration at the relief camps.

The corporation is providing round-the-clock medical assistance to those affected, reiterating its commitment to the safety and well-being of the local population in the operational zone.

The final kill operation is expected to bring an end to the ongoing gas leak crisis, with all agencies involved working in close coordination to ensure a safe and controlled resolution.

Magur seized

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 22: Karbi Anglong police on Sunday seized four quintals of banned Thailand Magur (Clarias gariepinus) catfish from a Tata Yodha truck (NL-07AA-5900) during a routine naka check at the Dillai police check post. The consignment, originating from Nagaon, was en route to Dimapur. The seized fish was buried at the premises of the Fishery Department office. Joint Director of the department, Mohan Teron, confirmed the action, citing the Assam Fish Seeds Act, 2005, which prohibits the propagation, sale, and marketing of Thailand Magur due to its harmful impact on native fish species. Authorities said legal action will be initiated under the provisions of the Act.

Four-day 'Ambubachi Mela' begins in Kamakhya temple

GUWAHATI, June 22: The annual 'Ambubachi Mela' at Kamakhya temple, atop the Nilachal hill in Guwahati, commenced on Sunday with around 12 lakh devotees expected to attend the religious event till June 25, officials said.

The mela is held for four days in June every year when the temple doors are closed, coinciding with the ritualistic menstrual cycle of Goddess Kamakhya.

"Today marks the beginning of the #Ambubachi Mahayog, an annual celebration of Maa Kamakhya's divine femininity. Spiritual Gurus and devotees from across the country will dawn upon the sacred Nilachal Hills to pray for Bharat," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on X.

"I welcome all pilgrims to Assam & wish everyone a divine experience and the choicest



blessings of Maa Kamakhya," he added.

Temple authorities said the doors were closed at 2.56 pm on Sunday with the start of 'prabriti', and worship will resume after 3.19

am on Thursday morning, after 'nribriti'.

The 'Ambubachi Mela' is held over the four days when the temple doors are closed.

Officials said around 12 lakh devotees from across the country, including many from abroad, are expected to attend the mela, and wait for the resumption of worship to pay obeisance to the goddess. Provisions for toilets, street lights, health camps and barricades on roads at certain locations have been made, while the street leading to the main temple has been closed for all vehicles, except emergency and utility services, they said.

Besides, police personnel and volunteers have also been deputed in the area.

Sarma had earlier said that camps to accommodate around 20,000 devotees have been set up. (PTI)

India is on the side of peace and humanity: PM Modi to Iran President Pezeshkian

NEW DELHI, June 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday conveyed to Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian India's "deep concern" over Iran's conflict with Israel and called for immediate de-escalation of the situation through "dialogue and diplomacy".

The phone conversation initiated by Pezeshkian came hours after the US bombed three major nuclear sites -- Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan -- in Iran, bringing itself into the Israel-Iran conflict.

In a social media post, Modi said he expressed "deep concern" at the recent escalations and that dialogue and diplomacy is the way forward for the early restoration of regional peace.

"We discussed in detail about the current situation. Expressed deep concern at the recent escalations," Modi said.

"Reiterated our call for immediate de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward and for early restoration of regional peace, security and stability," the prime minister added.

President Pezeshkian briefed PM Modi in detail and shared his perspective on the current situation in the region, especially the ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) said.

The US attack on the Iranian nuclear facilities has triggered fears of a wider regional conflict, with many leading countries and blocs calling for restraint. The PMO said Modi conveyed to the Iranian president that India was on the side of peace and humanity.

"In this context, the prime minister emphasised the need for immediate de-escalation, dialogue and diplomacy as the way forward. He reiterated India's support for early restoration of regional peace, security and stability," it said in a statement.

Modi thanked Pezeshkian for the continued support being extended for the safe return and repatriation of the Indian community, it said.

The two leaders reiterated the shared commitment to continue to work for strengthening bilateral cooperation in different areas including trade and economic cooperation, science and technology and people-to-people ties, the PMO said.

The two leaders agreed to remain in touch. Soon after American B-2 bombers struck the Iranian installations with "bunker buster" bombs, US President Donald Trump said the Iranian nuclear facilities were "completely and totally obliterated" and warned of more attacks if Iran does not agree on peace. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Raja murder case: Meghalaya cops arrest 2 more in Madhya Pradesh

SHILLONG/INDORE, June 22: A special investigation team (SIT) of the Meghalaya Police arrested two persons in Madhya Pradesh in connection with the murder of Indore businessman Raja Raghuvanshi, a senior officer said.

With the fresh apprehensions, the total number of people arrested in the case rose to seven.

The SIT on Saturday night arrested a property dealer for concealing a box belonging to Raghuvanshi's wife Sonam, who hid it in a flat in Indore after the murder last month.

"Meghalaya Police SIT arrested one Silome James from Bhonrasa toll-gate in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh while he was trying to flee to Bhopal around 7.30 pm on Saturday. He is a property dealer and lessee of a building at Heera Bagh Colony in Indore where Sonam had stayed and kept the jewellery and other items she took

with her after the incident," East Khasi Hills district SP Vivek Syiem told PTI.

Later, the SIT nabbed a security guard, identified as Balla Ahirwar, from his native village in Ashok Nagar district of Madhya Pradesh around 2 am on Sunday. He was posted at the property.

The two will be produced before a court in Indore, seeking a transit remand for being taken to Shillong for further investigation, he added.

The box is believed to have contained key evidence linked to the murder, according to sources. The arrested property dealer led the SIT to the place where he had disposed of all the items of the box by burning, the officer said. A member of the SIT said that Sonam's boyfriend Raj Kushwaha owned a firearm and this was kept at the property along with jewellery and a laptop.

At the site where James had burnt the box, there were no signs

of the pistol, laptop or any of the jewellery belonging to Raja, he said, adding that a forensic team had also visited the spot and collected all available evidence.

The flat was rented out to murder co-accused Vishal Chauhan by James, who runs a property management firm in Indore, they said.

On June 13, James told reporters that Chauhan approached him on May 30 and rented the flat for Rs 17,000 per month, signing a formal agreement.

However, when the Meghalaya Police later searched the flat, it was found vacant, as per the sources.

Sonam stayed in the flat for several days on return from Meghalaya, before eventually surrendering to police in UP on June 8, the sources said. Indore-based transport businessman Raghuvanshi married Sonam on May 11 in Indore and the couple left for their (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Four Afghans residing illegally in Assam held

GUWAHATI, June 22: Four Afghanistan nationals residing illegally in Assam's Guwahati city for last 10 years were arrested on Sunday, an officer said.

He said various documents, including those issued by the central and state governments, were recovered from them.

"Based on specific information, we conducted a raid at a house in Hatigaon area of Guwahati and arrested those four people," the officer said. Those Afghanistan nationals have been residing in the area since 2015.

The officer said they were involved in illegal money lending business at high rates of interest to individuals, using coercion to get the money back.

"Many incriminating documents, including government of India and government of Assam documents, have been recovered from them. We have also found some filled up government forms and papers which can be used as supporting documents," he said.

The police started an investigation, the officer added. (PTI)

Assam far from 13,428 MW rooftop solar energy generation potential Steps initiated to bridge gap: Officials

GUWAHATI, June 22: Although Assam has an estimated potential of 13,428 MW of rooftop solar (RTS) power generation, it is currently producing a mere 60 MW, officials said.

Officials and experts, however, said efforts were underway to reverse the trend with the state's Integrated Clean Energy Policy (ICEP) targeting the generation of 1,900 MW of rooftop solar power by 2030, a sharp increase from the 300 MW goal outlined in the Assam Renewable Energy Policy (AREP), 2022.

"Assam is at a pivotal moment in its climate change and energy journey. Fossil fuel dependence isn't going away soon but we are making a determined push," Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Assam Climate Change Management Society (ACCMS) Hirdesh Mishra said.

Assam is one of the most climate-vulnerable states in India and there is an urgent need for a transition to clean, reliable and locally available sources of energy, Mishra, also the Additional Principal Conservator of Forests (Climate Change), said.

Financial access remains a major



hurdle and economics drives everything. Rooftop solar power will flourish as costs come down, Mishra added.

The estimated technical potential for RTS ranges between 7,321 MW in a conservative scenario and 13,428 MW under a high-utilisation scenario.

"With strong policy backing, growing consumer interest, and a rapidly evolving vendor ecosystem, the state is well-positioned to scale rooftop solar power across both urban and rural areas," the

IFS officer said.

As part of the state government's recently announced ICEP, RTS has been categorically structured across three segments -- government, commercial and industrial (C&I), and residential.

The responsibility for all three segments has been assigned to the electricity distribution company, Assam Power Distribution Corporation Limited (APDCL).

APDCL's Deputy Manager (New and Renewable Energy) Baishali Talukdar said the state has

made substantial progress under the PM Surya Ghar Scheme and to date, 20,000 solar installations have been successfully established, aggregating a capacity of around 60 MW.

She pointed out that there are certain key hurdles such as limited consumer awareness, less number of solar vendors with skilled technicians, high upfront costs to be paid by consumers despite subsidies, and prolonged delays in availing loans by interested consumers.

"APDCL is, however, proactively addressing these issues through targeted awareness campaigns, streamlined vendor empanelment processes, and use of digital platforms for faster processing," she said.

An environmental think-tank, International Forum for Environment, Sustainability and Technology (iFOREST), has conducted research and survey on the prospects of RTS in the state and called for focused interventions on high potential regions and consumer categories.

iFOREST Programme Director Mandvi Singh said that RTS is especially important for Assam because it is a land-neutral technology. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Union minister Sonowal inspects upgraded Haibargaon railway station

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 22: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Sunday visited the recently upgraded Haibargaon Railway Station in Nagaon district, which has been redeveloped under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

According to official information, the station has undergone significant infrastructural enhancement at an estimated cost of ₹15.85 crore. The redevelopment includes improved facilities aimed at ensuring better passenger experience and security.

During his inspection, Sonowal reviewed the newly installed amenities, including a spacious and well-maintained circulation area, enhanced parking facilities, modern waiting rooms, clean and hygienic toilets and urinals, and advanced AI-enabled CCTV surveillance systems for passenger safety. The Union Minister also interacted with local residents during the visit and enquired about their experiences with the new infrastructure.

His visit drew public and media attention, with questions emerging



about his potential return to state politics. Responding to media queries, Sonowal stated that he is ready to take on any responsibility entrusted to him by the party, fuelling speculation about his future political role in Assam.

The Minister was accompanied by senior officials including Commissioner Debashish Sarma, Superintendent of Police Swapnil Deka, Divisional Railway Manager Samir Lohani, and other administrative (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ten DHD-U militants surrender in KA

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, June 22: In a major breakthrough for regional security, ten members of the newly-formed militant outfit Dimasa Halan Dui United (DHD-U) surrendered before the Assam Police in Dhanir under Karbi Anglong district, signalling their intent to return to the mainstream.

The surrender was facilitated under the supervision of Karbi Anglong Superintendent of Police Sanjib Kumar Saikia, APS, following a sustained intelligence-based operation initiated in April. Acting on reports that DHD-U was mobilising to revive an underground separatist movement in the hill districts, security forces launched a coordinated effort to track the group's activities. During the operation, police recovered a significant cache of arms and ammunition from the group.

The seizure included one AK-47 rifle, three pistols, a grenade and several rounds of live ammunition. Speaking on the development, SP Saikia (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Militant arrested, arms and ammunition seized

IMPHAL, June 22: A militant belonging to the banned outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) was arrested in Imphal West district of Manipur, a police statement said on Sunday.

A large cache of arms and ammunition were also seized in separate search operations in Imphal East and Kakching districts.

The arrest and arms seizures were made on Saturday, it said. A total of 19 'demand letters', used for extortion, were seized from the possession of the militant, identified as Yanglem Sadananda Singh (26), the statement said.

Also, in a search operation in Mayophung-Sanasabi Hill in Imphal East district, a .303 bipod mounted rifle, seven .303 cartridges, two heavy-calibre mortars, 20 heavy-calibre mortar shells, two IEDs, four radio sets with charger, a pistol with three cartridges, 12 grenades and a bulletproof jacket were seized, it said.

In another search operation in the foothills of Chingkhel Ching Phaknung village in Imphal East district, an INSAS light machine gun with magazine, an INSAS rifle with magazine, two self-loading rifles with magazines, a sniper rifle, a .32 pistol with magazine, six 5.56mm INSAS cartridges, twenty-one 5.56mm empty cases and four 9mm empty cases were seized.

In the third search operation in Nongmaikhong Makha Leikai hill range in Kakching district, an SMG carbine with two magazines, an AK-47 rifle, two single-barrel guns, one modified 9mm pistol with two magazines, three IEDs (weighing about 2 kg), eight wire detonators, and 10 PEK explosive packets each weighing 125 gm were seized. (PTI)

Plantation drive held in Morigaon



HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, June 22: A tree plantation drive was organised on Sunday at Baghara Chariali, Sarbanjan Siva Mandir, and Majgaon Namghar in Morigaon by Jeeban Jeuti Krishak Sangha (JKS) and Seuj Paribesh Suraksha Monch Asom (SPSMA), two prominent non-governmental organisations working in the field of conservation and farming in Assam.

Members of the organisations planted saplings of various species, including Spanish Cherry, Night Jasmine, and Mango, as part of the initiative to promote environmental sustainability.

The campaign was inaugurated by Laksheswar Deka, Advisor of the Business Association.

The event was also attended by several notable individuals, including Basanta Deka, former President of the Assam Jatiyatadabi Yuva Chhatra Parishad (Morigaon District) and former Secretary of Baghara Anchalik Samiti; and Deben Das, Advisor of Baghara Anchalik Samiti.

Young writer Jayant Sagar Saikia from Jagiroad graced the programme as the chief guest.

Speaking at the event, President of the All Assam Krishak Sangha (AAKS) Tulshi Deka extended his gratitude to all participants and urged collective support for the ongoing 'Morigaon - Tree Village, Our Village, Clean Village' mission.

NFR announces permanent augmentation of three trains

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 22: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced the permanent augmentation of three key train services and the extension of a temporary augmentation in another, effective from July 1, 2025.

The information was shared through an official statement issued by NFR on Sunday.

As part of the initiative to enhance passenger experience and meet growing demand, Train No. 12042/12041 New Jalpaiguri-Howrah-New Jalpaiguri (Shatabdi Express), operating six days a week, will be permanently augmented with one Vistadome coach.

The train will now run with a total of 15 coaches, with the revised composition taking effect from both New Jalpaiguri and Howrah from July 1.

Train No. 12067/12068 Guwahati-Jorhat Town-Guwahati (Jan Shatabdi Express), which also runs six days a week, will similarly be augmented with a Vistadome coach, increasing the total number of coaches to 16. This change will be effective from Guwahati and Jorhat Town from July 1.

In another development, Train No. 15417/15418 Alipurduar-Silghat Town-Alipurduar (Rajya Rani Express), running tri-weekly, will be permanently augmented with one additional AC 3-tier coach. The revised 12-coach composition will come into effect from Alipurduar on July 1 and from Silghat Town on July 2.

Review meeting on 'Eti Koli Dutti Paat' scheme held

Push for inclusive, error-free beneficiary enrolment under tea workers' welfare scheme in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 22: A district-level review meeting of the District-Level Implementation Committee (DLIC) for the Mukhya Mantri "Eti Koli Dutti Paat" Asoni scheme was held on Sunday at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Kokrajhar.

The meeting assessed the progress and implementation of the scheme, which provides one-time financial assistance to tea garden workers and employees.

According to an official statement, the meeting was chaired by Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Guardian Minister of Kokrajhar, who underscored the importance of inclusive and transparent execution.

He urged officials to ensure that no eligible beneficiary is left out during the implementation process.



MLA of 30-Kokrajhar East (ST) LAC, Jiron Basumatary, also attended the meeting and reviewed the ongoing beneficiary verification efforts.

He stressed the need for diligence at the field level to ensure accuracy and fairness.

District Commissioner Masanda M Pertin highlighted the need for meticulous documentation and strong inter-departmental coordination to ensure timely and efficient delivery of the scheme's benefits.

The meeting was attended by ADCs Wadiul Islam and Subhram Aditya Bora, Lead District Manager of UCO Bank, representatives of tea garden communities, and other departmental officials.

The gathering concluded with a collective resolve to ensure smooth and effective implementation of the scheme for the welfare of tea garden workers across the district.

Tripura to be declared India's third fully literate state

HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, June 22: Tripura is poised to script a historic milestone as it becomes the third state in India to achieve full literacy, following Mizoram and Goa.

The official declaration will be made by Chief Minister Manik Saha on June 23 at a formal ceremony to be held at Rabinindra Shatabarshiki Bhawan in Agartala.

Confirming the development, an official from the Education Department said, "Tripura becomes the third state in India to attain full literacy, after Mizoram and Goa. Among Union Territories, Ladakh holds the distinction of being the first to achieve this feat. This is a monumental social achievement that reflects the state's unwavering commitment to education."

This accomplishment has been made possible through the effective implementation of the ULLAS - New India Literacy Programme (Understanding Lifelong Learning for All in Society), launched in 2022 under the National Education Policy 2020.

The programme aims to achieve universal adult literacy in India by 2027.

Tripura's School Education Department led the initiative, with coordination from the State Literacy Mission Authority and SCERT.

The mission mobilized retired teachers, school and college students, and trained volunteers at various levels. Study materials were developed in Bengali, English, and Kokborok to ensure linguistic inclusivity.

A total of 2,228 volunteers under the Youth Literacy Corps and 943 Social Consciousness Centres were instrumental in extending education to the state's remotest areas.

"From informal backyard classes to literacy sessions in hilly market zones, the campaign reached across social and geographic boundaries. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2023-24, Tripura's literacy rate rose from 93.7% to 95.6%, surpassing the 95% threshold set by the central government for full literacy," the official added.

Tripura's literacy journey has been long and determined.

In 1961, the literacy rate was a mere 20.24%.

It gradually improved to 87.22% by the 2011 Census, placing Tripura just behind Kerala and Mizoram.

While earlier campaigns focused largely on the ability to sign names, the present literacy drive emphasizes functional literacy—including basic mathematics, digital transactions, and financial awareness.

The event on June 23 will be graced by several dignitaries from the central and state education departments. Preeti Meena, Director (Adult Education), Ministry of Education, Government of India, and Raval Hemendra Kumar, Special Secretary (Education), Government of Tripura, will attend as guests of honour.

Lalnunemi Darlong, Director, SCERT, will be the special guest, and N C Sharma, Director, Secondary and Basic Education and State Project Director, Samagra Shiksha, will preside over the function.

Dumper truck fraud unearthed in Margherita; four detained, one absconding

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, June 22: A case of suspected fraud and illegal sale of a dumper truck has come to light at Margherita Co-District and the Bomgar border area in Arunachal Pradesh, following the alleged dismantling and unauthorised sale of a yellow ten-wheeler dumper truck bearing registration number AR 07 1113.

The vehicle had remained abandoned in a broken-down state for a long period and was allegedly used for illegal coal transportation. It was initially rented on a three-month contract by one Mokibur Rehman from Ghana Kanta Gogoi, a resident of Borphathar Chiring Gaon. However, Rehman later informed Gogoi that the vehicle was damaged and then severed all communication.

The dumper was reportedly sold without the owner's consent by a group that included Avinash Pradhan (31) of Bargolai Zamadar Basti in Margherita, Anil Agarwala alias Nanu (51) of Tinsukia's Naupukhuri Taxi Stand, and Manab Phukan.

Based on a First Information Report filed by Gogoi at the Ledo Police Outpost, police detained Pradhan, Agarwala, Ril Bahadur Thapa (41) of Ramkrishna Nagar in Tinsukia, and Basanta Panika (32) of Bhimpura. Investigations revealed that Thapa and Panika, both drivers by profession, used a crane (registration number AS 23 AC 0394) to transport the vehicle from Bomgara to a scrapyard in Tinsukia, reportedly owned by Arun Shah.

The dumper was dismantled at the scrapyard without the owner's permission. The premises are allegedly linked to a business associate of a local MLA's nephew.

Junmoni Gogoi, wife of the complainant, claimed that the prime accused, Avinash Pradhan, admitted to selling the dumper's engine, gearbox, and three wheels to Agarwala for ₹1.95 lakh.

Disputes over payment reportedly led to complications in the illegal transaction.

Police have recovered dismantled parts of the vehicle and registered a case at Margherita Police Station (Case No. 74/25) under Sections 303(2), 317(4), 324(5), and 3(5) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The four arrested individuals have been remanded to judicial custody, while another accused, Manab Phukan, remains absconding at the time of filing this report.



Additionally, the temporary augmentation of Train No. 15713/15714 Katihar-Patna-Katihar (Intercity Express) with one AC 3-tier economy coach has been extended for another year.

The coach will be available on nominated days from July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026. NFR stated that the inclusion of Vistadome coaches is aimed at offering passengers an immersive travel experience, especially along scenic routes.

The measures reflect NFR's continued efforts to improve capacity, comfort, and overall service quality across its network.

Safai workers urge govt to address long-pending demands

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, June 22: Municipality Safai workers from several districts of Upper Assam held a meeting in Sivasagar on Sunday to press for the fulfillment of their long-pending demands and called for a thorough inquiry into alleged irregularities in various Municipal Boards.

Speaking at the gathering, N. Basfor, a Safai workers' leader from Sivasagar, said that the government has continued to overlook the legitimate concerns of the workers despite their consistent support for the ruling BJP during elections. He alleged that government funds intended for Safai workers have been misappropriated by members of various municipal bodies.

The workers also demanded a meeting with chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to present their demands and bring to his attention the alleged corruption in municipal administrations.

Before the meeting, the Safai workers assembled at the historic Sivadol temple and offered prayers to Lord Shiva, seeking divine blessings for the success of their campaign.

Special screening of 'Sitaare Zameen Par' organised for underprivileged and differently-abled children in Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, June 22: In a heartwarming gesture that combined entertainment with social impact, the JCI Alumni Club and JCI Dibrugarh Greens jointly organised a special screening of the film 'Sitaare Zameen Par' for underprivileged and differently-abled children at Galleria Cinema, Dibrugarh, on Sunday morning.

The event, titled "Ek Movie Sitaron Ke Sang," was part of a community outreach initiative aimed at providing a joyful and inspiring experience to children who seldom get such opportunities. More than 40 differently-abled children attended the screening, accompanied by Jyotsna Sonowal, founder of Prerona Pratibandhi NGO.

Additionally, 20 children from another NGO, Kalyan Ashram, also participated in the event.

Members of both JCI units, along with volunteers and guests, joined the first morning show, which proved to be a deeply emotional and meaningful experience.



The film, featuring Aamir Khan and Genelia D'Souza, revolves around a disgraced basketball coach who is tasked with training a group of neurodivergent individuals. The story unfolds into a powerful narrative of transformation, inclusion, and the uplifting power of sports.

Notably, the film includes ten newcomers portraying the young athletes, earning praise for its sensitive storytelling.

Allegations of fraudulent practices by Flipkart surface in Jagiroad

HT Correspondent
JAGIROAD, June 22: Residents of Jagiroad have raised serious allegations against e-commerce platform Flipkart, accusing the company of fraudulent practices related to product delivery and refunds.

According to local customers, Flipkart has allegedly failed to collect cancelled items, resulting in non-refund of advance payments.

Several users claimed that products paid for in advance were not delivered, yet marked as delivered by the company. Further complaints include instances of undelivered goods being falsely updated as delivered on the platform, and reports of rude behaviour by some delivery personnel, which have added to customer dissatisfaction.

Locals have urged Flipkart's higher authorities to take immediate steps to address these grievances and prevent recurrence of such incidents.

Special youth drowns in Sootea

HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 22: Tension and grief gripped the Gorpai area in southern Jamugurihat after a 35-year-old youth, Dipak Sutar, was found dead in a pond under mysterious circumstances on Saturday morning.

According to reports, Sutar had gone missing from his residence in the early hours of the day. Despite efforts by family members to trace him, he remained unlocated until villagers spotted his slippers near a nearby pond. Suspecting something amiss, locals searched the waterbody and recovered his body. Sources said that Sutar had been working in a private company outside the state and had returned home a few months ago. He was reportedly suffering from mental illness and was undergoing treatment at the time of the incident.

Ahmedabad crash victim's mortal remains reach Manipur, thousands pay tributes

IMPHAL, June 22: Thousands of people lined up on both sides of the roads to pay tributes to Ahmedabad crash victim Kongbrailatpam Nghanthoi Sharma, whose mortal remains were brought to Manipur on Sunday.

Sharma was an air crew member of the London-bound Air India flight AI 171 which crashed into a hostel complex in Ahmedabad's Meghannagar moments after take-off from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport at 1.39 pm on June 12, killing 270 people, including 241 on board. One passenger survived.

"The moment was profoundly moving... She was received with deep dignity, solemn respect, and heartfelt sorrow by Team Imphal Airport, not merely as colleagues in uniform but as family in mourning -- united in silence and reverence."

"With bowed heads and heavy hearts, she was tenderly handed over to her family, friends, and loved ones, whose presence spoke volumes of the love they carry and the void her absence leaves behind," Imphal airport said in a post on Facebook.

A cousin of Nghanthoi Sharma said that airport officials, family members and others paid floral tributes to her mortal remains after it was brought to Imphal airport aboard an IndiGo flight.

Her mortal remains were accompanied by her father



and elder sister who had gone to Ahmedabad for DNA testing, she added.

The mortal remains were later taken to her residence in Thoubal on an open truck as thousands lined up on both sides of the road to pay their tributes. Her last rites would be conducted later in the evening, another family member said.

The mortal remains of another crew member from Manipur, Lamnunthem Singson, were brought to the state on June 19. The remains were brought to Kangpokpi district via road from Dimapur airport aboard an IndiGo flight from Ahmedabad. Her final rites were conducted the next day. (PTI)

233rd mid-term Indian Road Cong meeting held in Aizawl

A Correspondent
AIZAWL, June 22: The 233rd Mid-Term meeting of the Indian Road Congress (IRC) convened in Aizawl on Sunday, bringing together senior officials and experts to deliberate on strategies for advancing road development and infrastructure across the country.

According to official information, the meeting witnessed the participation of the Secretary-General of the IRC, the Additional Director General of the Border Roads Organisation (BRO), and senior officials from the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, among others.

The forum provided an opportunity to share experiences, discuss best practices, and define future priorities for strengthening the quality, safety, and reach of India's road network.

Delivering the keynote address, Jitendra Kumar, VSM, Additional Director General, BRO East, emphasised the importance of collaborative efforts among various stakeholders.

He outlined successful practices from recent infrastructure projects and advocated for enhanced coordination between central and state agencies, contractors, and local communities to ensure timely and sustainable execution of road projects.

The discussions covered a wide range of technical and policy-oriented topics, including the adoption of innovative construction technologies, environmentally sustainable maintenance practices, and the use of new materials to enhance road durability.

Emphasis was also laid on capacity building, digitisation in project management, and resilience planning in the face of climate-induced challenges.

The meeting concluded with a resolution to establish dedicated working groups to oversee the implementation of joint initiatives and track the progress of key targets.

The IRC Secretariat will circulate a comprehensive summary of the proceedings and action points to all member organisations. Follow-up sessions are planned for later this year to review progress, address challenges, and refine strategies based on the evolving needs of the road infrastructure sector.

Special camps under 'Dharti Aaba Janbhagidari Abhiyan' launched



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 22: Special outreach camps have been launched in Kokrajhar district under the Government of India's flagship initiative, 'Dharti Aaba Janbhagidari Abhiyan', aimed at empowering tribal communities through enhanced awareness and service delivery.

According to an official statement, the camps are being held from June 20 to July 8, 2025, across various tribal villages in the district.

The objective of the campaign is to raise awareness about tribal rights and entitlements, facilitate enrolment in welfare schemes, and ensure direct access to government benefits.

Key departments such as Health, Agriculture, and Banking institutions are actively involved in the initiative. They are offering on-ground services including health check-ups, financial inclusion support, agricultural assistance, and guidance on accessing various government schemes.

The campaign, grounded in the principle of public participation, reflects the government's focus on inclusive development and improving last-mile service delivery in tribal areas.

ational and meaningful experience.

The film, featuring Aamir Khan and Genelia D'Souza, revolves around a disgraced basketball coach who is tasked with training a group of neurodivergent individuals. The story unfolds into a powerful narrative of transformation, inclusion, and the uplifting power of sports.

Notably, the film includes ten newcomers portraying the young athletes, earning praise for its sensitive storytelling.

The initiative was widely appreciated for its compassion and commitment to inclusivity, turning an ordinary Sunday into a memorable celebration of resilience and humanity.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness. -Desmond Tutu

Trump's lunch invite to Munir

Pakistan Army Chief Gen Asim Munir had lunch with President Donald Trump at the White House on Wednesday. Missing from the menu was the delectable 'Ambush Modi', the main course. Gen. Munir must not have known. But not many knew till Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri woke up the Indian media and let the cat out of the bag. President Trump had called Prime Minister Narendra Modi up in the dead of Tuesday night and invited him to the White House. President Trump and Gen. Asim Munir had to settle for whatever there was on the table. One report said Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth were also at the lunch. First reports said General Syed Asim Munir, who had promoted himself to Field Marshal, had been invited to join in the US Army's 250th anniversary celebrations. But then, the US army said 'no' and Munir got the lunch invitation. But minus President Trump's surprise dish, the lunch failed to live up to the small-talk in the White House Cabinet Room thanks to Prime Minister Modi, a killjoy! And there wasn't even a dress-code. Of late, Trump has taken on the mantle of peacemaker and warmonger, both rolled into one. Witness Trump's dangerous shenanigans in the Iran-Israel war and the Modi-Munir ambush was planned to land President Trump yet another shot at a Nobel-winning deal. The little thing Trump didn't take seriously was that India has never accepted "third-party intervention on Kashmir" and Trump thought he would solve the "1000-year Kashmir problem" in a matter of one lunch meeting, with no indignation to neither India nor Pakistan! Trump erred and Modi spelled it out to him during the Tuesday night telephonic conversation. Modi also told Trump that the "ceasefire" Trump kept claiming was an "understanding" worked out by the DGMOs of India and Pakistan and that Trump should stop claiming it as his accomplishment. Trump won't be getting the five-stars that Munir gave himself. The "ceasefire worked out by Trump" with trade and tariff as trade-off was bull! And Trump's lunch for Gen. Asim Munir was not the banquet Trump thought it would turn out to be. Trump's friend Modi refused to take the bait and with the ambush thwarted, the message was loud and clear. Pakistan's move to "internationalize" the Kashmir imbroglio had no takers in India, neither the ruling BJP nor the main opposition Congress were for giving the United States any defining role.

"No ceasefire", only a "bilateral understanding" between India and Pakistan till as long as Pakistan did not break "new normal" and then it will be an "act of war". Even Trump could not have said it so straight and forthright to Iran. Gen. Asim Munir might have caved in to Trump talk, but to expect an Indian prime minister, any Indian prime minister, to succumb to pressure was asking for the distant moon. President Trump's problem is he revels in acting the bully. Maybe it has to do with his days with the 'WWE', the world of wrestling, and his sojourn in the construction industry, another rough and tumble arena! Trump is also a survivor of "too clever by half" lot and he truly believes the President of the United States is the emperor of all that he surveys.

Unemployment rate among youth rose sharply to 15 per cent in May 2025

By: Dr. Gyan Pathak

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) Monthly Bulletin for May 2025 has revealed that unemployment rate among youth (age group 15-29 years) rose sharply to 15 per cent from 13.8 per cent a month ago in April. Urban unemployment rate in urban areas of the country rose from 17.2 per cent to 17.9 per cent, and in rural areas it rose from 12.3 per cent to 13.7 per cent during this period. The bulletin reveals several other disturbing trends on the unemployment front.

It also revealed that India's unemployment rate was up from 5.1 per cent in April to 5.6 per cent in May. The Centre for Monitoring India Economy (CMIE) data showed unemployment rate in April 2025 at 7.73 per cent, and in May 2025 at 7.25 per cent (urban 8.4 per cent and rural 6.1 per cent). As on June 20, CMIE shows an unemployment rate of 6.9 per cent on 30-day moving average basis.

PLFS bulleting for May 2025 shows unemployment in urban areas at 6.9 per cent, up from 6.5 per cent in April. For rural areas it increased from 4.5 per cent to 5.1 per cent during this period.

As for youth unemployment is concerned, in rural areas, young male unemployment rose to 14 from 13 per cent while young female unemployment rose from 10.7 to 13 per cent during this period. For male youth in urban areas, unemployment rate in April was 15 per cent, which rose to 15.8 per cent in May. For urban youth female, unemployment rate was very high at 24.4 per cent in May, up from 23.7 per cent in April 2025. At all India basis, youth male unemployment rose to 14.5 per cent in May from 13.6 per cent in April. For youth female, it rose from 14.4 per cent to 16.3 per cent.

All India male unemployment rose from 5.2 per cent in April to 5.6 per cent in May. Female unemployment during this period increased from 5 per cent to 5.7 per cent.

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) in Current Weekly Status (CWS) among persons of age 15 years and above was 54.8% during May 2025 as compared to 55.6% during April, 2025. LFPR in rural areas was 56.9% and LFPR in urban areas was 50.4% during May, 2025 for persons of the same age group.

LFPR in CWS for male of age 15 years and above in rural and urban areas were respectively 78.3% and 75.1% during May, 2025 which marked a marginal decline from the corresponding LFPR estimates of 79.0% and 75.3% respectively for rural and urban areas during April, 2025. LFPR among female of age 15 years and above for rural areas was 36.9% during May, 2025.

Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in CWS in rural areas among persons of age 15 years and above was 54.1% during May, 2025. WPR in urban areas among persons of the same age group was 46.9% in May 2025 with the overall WPR at the country level observed as 51.7% during May, 2025 as compared to 52.8% observed during April, 2025. WPR for female of age 15 years and above for rural and urban areas were respectively 35.2% and 23.0% in May, 2025 and the overall female WPR of the same age group at the country level was observed as 31.3%. It said that the changes are expected in the monthly PLFS ratios due to increased frequency and seasonal changes but do not necessarily reflect secular trends. There would be attributable to a combination of seasonal, academic and labour market-related factors.

In rural areas, employment shifted away from the primary sector (agriculture) (from 45.9% in April to 43.5% in May 2025) to secondary and services sectors. Decline in female LFPR, especially in rural areas (more than 1 percentage point) due to fewer women working as casual labourers and unpaid helpers. Reduction in agricultural activities with the end of Rabi harvest season for both male and female in the rural areas may have brought about the downward shift in number of workers.

In urban areas, changes were more marginal with slight declines in own account workers and casual labourers, affecting workforce numbers. The decline in LFPR and WPR and the rise in Unemployment Rate were driven largely by seasonal agricultural patterns, higher summer temperature experienced in May in some parts of the country due to which physical outdoor work gets limited and movement of some unpaid helpers to domestic chores, especially in the higher income (top 3 deciles) rural households. (IPA Service)

Kamakhya Temple - The heritage and spiritual significance

The Kamakhya Temple has earned worldwide fame as a major center of Shakti worship, but its significance is not confined to the religious sphere alone. Its mythological origins, the importance of tantric practices, the uniqueness of its architecture, its social impact, its role in environmental conservation, the profundity of its religious rituals, its cultural glory, and its relevance in the modern context have established Kamakhya as a holistic pilgrimage site.

According to mythological narratives, this temple is located at the sacred site where the yoni (womb) of Goddess Sati fell. This belief stems from the mythological tale of Shiva and Sati, which forms a significant part of Hindu mythology. In the context of the insult to Shiva at Daksha's yajna, Sati immolates herself, and a grief-stricken Shiva begins the Tandava dance, carrying her body. Vishnu dismembers Sati's body with his Sudarshana Chakra, and the parts fall at various places across India, which are recognized as Shakti Peethas. Kamakhya is one of these 51 Shakti Peethas and is considered the highest center of Shakti worship. This mythological backdrop lends a profound dimension to the spiritual significance of Kamakhya Temple, as it is regarded as a symbol of feminine power. Through this narrative, the temple establishes a deep connection with creation, nature, and energy, fostering a spiritual bond in the minds of devotees. This belief elevates Kamakhya beyond a mere religious site, making it a sacred center for connecting with the primal energy of life. The depth of this mythological narrative enhances the temple's spiritual glory, establishing it as a supreme pilgrimage site for devotees. The philosophical aspects associated with this mythological belief position Kamakhya as a spiritual hub that conveys a message about the power of creation, the glory of nature, and the profound significance of the cycle of life. This narrative inspires devotees to seek answers to life's deeper philosophical questions. The profoundness of this mythological backdrop provides a unique dimension to the temple's spiritual significance, cementing its status as the highest center of Shakti worship. Through the depth of this mythology, Kamakhya Temple creates a profound spiritual connection in the hearts of devotees, making it an unparalleled pilgrimage site.

The architecture of Kamakhya Temple is regarded as a unique specimen of Indian temple construction, reflecting its artistic and spiritual importance. The temple is built with a distinct blend of the Nagara style and Assam's local architectural traditions, harmonizing deeply with the geographical setting of Nilachal Hill. The most notable feature of the temple's sanctum sanctorum is the absence of any idol, a departure from traditional Indian temple practices. Instead, a natural rock formation resembling a yoni is worshipped as the symbol of the Goddess. The natural spring emanating from this rock is considered a symbol of the Goddess's sanctity, adding a unique dimension to the temple's spiritual significance. This feature distinguishes Kamakhya from other Shakti Peethas and establishes it as a highly sacred center. The cave-like structure of the temple, its intricate stone carvings, and the natural beauty of Nilachal Hill create a serene and meditative environment. This ambience evokes a profound spiritual experience in the minds of devotees, further enhancing the temple's spiritual significance. This architectural feature positions Kamakhya not only as a religious site but also as an invaluable heritage of Indian art and culture. The harmony between the temple's structure and the natural beauty of Nilachal Hill establishes it as a supremely sacred center. Through this architectural uniqueness, the temple fosters a deep connection between nature and spirituality, providing devotees with a sense of oneness with nature. This aspect elevates Kamakhya as one of India's greatest temples, showcasing a remarkable synthesis of art, culture, and spirituality. The distinct features of the temple's structure deepen its spiritual and cultural significance, establishing it as a unique specimen of Indian architecture.

Kamakhya Temple has gained global recognition as a primary center of tantric worship, adding a new dimension to its spiritual importance. According to tantric scriptures, Kamakhya is one of the key centers of the ten Mahavidyas, where Goddess Kamakhya is worshipped as Tripura Sundari. This aspect of tantric practice lends profound depth to the temple's spiritual significance. The core philosophy of tantra involves attaining self-realization through connection with divine energy. The sacred



rock in Kamakhya's sanctum and the spring emanating from it are considered symbols of energy for tantric practitioners. Practitioners who meditate at this site strive to achieve a balance of physical, mental, and spiritual energies. The secrecy and profundity of tantric worship make Kamakhya particularly significant for both ordinary devotees and tantric practitioners. This aspect of tantra provides a unique dimension to the temple's spiritual ambience, offering devotees an opportunity for a deep connection with the Goddess. The importance of tantric practice positions Kamakhya not only as a religious center but also as a sacred hub for spiritual knowledge. The blend of philosophical and practical aspects of tantra further enriches Kamakhya's spiritual significance. This profundity of tantric practice establishes Kamakhya as a vital site for tantric practitioners worldwide. Through this aspect of tantra, Kamakhya Temple guides practitioners toward a profound path of spiritual practice, helping them realize the deeper meaning of life. The significance of tantric worship positions Kamakhya as a unique spiritual center, attracting practitioners from various parts of the world. This dimension of tantric practice provides a profound layer to Kamakhya's spiritual significance, reinforcing its status as the highest center of Shakti worship.

The 'Ambubachi Mela' of Kamakhya Temple is a significant aspect of its spiritual and cultural importance. Held annually in the month of Ashadh, this festival is considered a symbol of the Goddess's menstruation, conveying a profound message of reverence for feminine power and connection with nature. During this time, the temple's sanctum remains closed, and devotees perform worship outside. This tradition reflects the glory of feminine power and the importance of a deep connection with nature. During the Ambubachi Mela, millions of devotees gather, seeking the Goddess's blessings. This festival holds not only religious significance but is also regarded as an integral part of Assam's social and cultural identity. It fosters a sense of unity and harmony among local communities, reflecting the temple's social impact. Various religious and cultural programs are organized during the festival, showcasing the depth of traditions and beliefs associated with the temple. The diversity and profundity of the Ambubachi Mela establish Kamakhya as a universal pilgrimage site, where people from different communities come together to worship the Goddess. Through this festival, Kamakhya Temple conveys a profound message of social unity and cultural diversity, further enriching its social and spiritual significance. The importance of the Ambubachi Mela positions Kamakhya as a central site of Assam's cultural identity, fostering unity and harmony among local communities. Through this festival, Kamakhya Temple plays a vital role in promoting Assam's cultural heritage, adding a new dimension to its social significance.

From a historical perspective, the origins of Kamakhya Temple are ancient. References to the temple are found from the reign of the Varman dynasty (350-650 CE) of the ancient Kamarupa kingdom. The Chinese traveler Hsien Tsang's accounts also mention Kamakhya, describing it as a temple dedicated to a deity worshipped by the non-Brahman Kirata tribe. The earliest inscriptional reference to Kamakhya is found in the 9th-century Tezpur inscription of the Mlechchha dynasty's Banamalavaradeva. Historically, the temple has been destroyed several times, particularly during Muslim invasions in the medieval period. Archaeological evidence suggests that the current structure of the temple was rebuilt in the 16th century by the Koch king Nara-

narayan. However, the religious significance of this site has existed since ancient times. Ancient texts such as the Kalika Purana and Devi Bhagavata mention Kamakhya, affirming its mythological and historical importance. The role of patronage by various dynasties is crucial in the temple's history. The Koch, Ahom, and other rulers made significant contributions to the temple's development and preservation. This historical backdrop positions the temple not only as a religious site but also as a symbol of Assam's political and cultural

DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

history. The patronage of various rulers has profoundly influenced the temple's architecture, management, and religious rituals. This historical significance establishes Kamakhya as an integral part of Assam's cultural identity, reflecting the depth of its heritage. This historical aspect reveals the temple's deep connection with Assam's political and social history, establishing it as a historical asset. The historical backdrop further enriches Kamakhya Temple's cultural and spiritual significance, positioning it as a central site of Assam's heritage. The profundity of this historical aspect establishes Kamakhya as a historical and cultural treasure, reflecting its deep connection with various facets of Assam's history.

The spiritual significance of Kamakhya Temple is not limited to tantric or Shakti traditions but reflects a synthesis of various religious beliefs. The site holds immense importance for devotees of Buddhist, Jain, and various Hindu sects. This universality positions Kamakhya as a cultural bridge. The temple's ambience offers devotees a profound spiritual experience beyond religious boundaries. The harmony of peace, sanctity, and energy in its environment creates a unique experience in the minds of devotees. The spiritual energy of this site inspires devotees to seek answers to life's deeper philosophical questions. Kamakhya's universal spirituality establishes it as a sacred center for people from diverse communities, conveying a message of unity that transcends religious divisions. Through this universality, the temple unites people from various religious traditions, creating a cultural and spiritual bridge. This aspect positions Kamakhya as a unique pilgrimage site, fostering a sense of unity and harmony among people of different religious beliefs. The temple's universal spirituality makes it an attractive center for people from various parts of the world, conveying a message of unity amidst religious diversity. The temple's influence on the lifestyle, economy, and social system of the local community is evident. The various traditions associated with the temple, such as worship practices, festivals, and rituals, have enriched Assam's cultural identity. Additionally, the temple's importance for tourism has strengthened the local economy. The arrival of millions of devotees and tourists has significantly impacted local businesses, transportation, and hospitality sectors. These economic activities associated with the temple have improved the lifestyle of the local community while promoting Assam's cultural heritage. Kamakhya's social impact positions it as a central site in Assam's social fabric, fostering unity and solidarity among local communities. This social aspect reflects the temple's profound influence on Assam's social life, establishing it as a cultural hub. Through this social impact, Kamakhya Temple is regarded as a central site of Assam's social and cultural identity, fostering a sense of unity and harmony among local communities.

Even in the modern era, the temple re-

mains a sacred pilgrimage site for devotees. In the age of science and technology, people continue to find spiritual peace and inspiration at this site. The temple's management system and modernization efforts have helped preserve its heritage while connecting with the new generation. The steps taken for environmental conservation and tourist facilities have further enhanced the temple's modern relevance. The modernization of the temple's management has improved facilities for devotees, while efforts to preserve its heritage have kept its cultural significance intact. In the modern context, Kamakhya's relevance positions it as an inspiring site for the new generation, capable of harmonizing tradition and modernity. This modern relevance makes Kamakhya an attractive center for people from various parts of the world, establishing a beautiful synthesis of tradition and modernity. This modern relevance positions Kamakhya as a living heritage, serving as a source of spiritual and cultural inspiration for the new generation.

Various steps have been taken to preserve the natural beauty of Nilachal Hill and the temple's environment. These efforts have maintained the sanctity of the temple's environment while providing a serene ambience for tourists and devotees. These environmental conservation efforts position Kamakhya as an eco-friendly pilgrimage site, fostering a deep harmony between nature and spirituality. This aspect further enhances Kamakhya's modern relevance, establishing it as a responsible pilgrimage site. These conservation efforts have preserved the sanctity of Kamakhya's environment, positioning it as an environmentally conscious pilgrimage site. This aspect further enriches Kamakhya's spiritual and cultural significance, establishing it as an eco-friendly pilgrimage site. The environmental conservation aspect positions Kamakhya as a modern and responsible pilgrimage site, reflecting the importance of nature conservation.

The religious rituals associated with Kamakhya Temple further deepen its spiritual significance. From daily worship to special festival rituals, all reflect the depth of the temple's traditions and beliefs. Through these rituals, devotees establish a profound connection with the Goddess, enriching their spiritual lives. The depth and diversity of these rituals position Kamakhya as a unique pilgrimage site, offering devotees opportunities to connect with various religious traditions. These rituals enrich the temple's spiritual ambience, providing devotees with a profound spiritual experience. Through these religious rituals, Kamakhya Temple creates a sense of deep peace and sanctity in the minds of devotees, further enhancing its spiritual significance. The profundity of these rituals establishes Kamakhya as a spiritual hub, helping devotees realize the deeper meaning of life.

The various traditions, festivals, and rituals associated with the temple have enriched Assam's cultural heritage. These traditions have fostered a cultural connection between Assam's tribal and non-tribal communities. The traditions of art, music, and dance associated with the temple have introduced Assam's cultural identity to the global stage. This cultural significance positions Kamakhya as a symbol of Assam's cultural heritage, fostering a sense of pride among local communities. This cultural aspect reflects the diversity and depth of Assam's cultural heritage, establishing Kamakhya as a cultural hub. This cultural significance makes Kamakhya an attractive center for people from various parts of the world, promoting Assam's cultural heritage. This cultural aspect positions Kamakhya as a central site of Assam's cultural identity, fostering pride and unity among local communities.

From this analysis of Kamakhya Temple's heritage and spiritual significance, it is clear that it is not merely a religious site but a symbol of India's cultural, historical, spiritual, and environmental heritage. Its mythological origins, the importance of tantric worship, the beauty of its architecture, its social impact, its environmental significance, the depth of its religious rituals, its cultural glory, and its modern relevance make it a unique site. This temple not only provides devotees with religious solace but also inspires them to seek answers to life's deeper philosophical questions. The holistic significance of Kamakhya Temple establishes it as an invaluable asset in India's spiritual realm, attracting people from various parts of the world. The temple's heritage and spiritual importance position it as a sacred center, creating a beautiful harmony between nature, culture, spirituality, and modernity.

Widows' Rights are Human Rights too

By: Vinod Chandrashekar Dixit

23rd June is an International Widows Day a global observance dedicated to raising awareness about the challenges faced by widows around the world. To become a widow is to experience profound personal tragedy. For many women around the world, the devastating loss of a partner is magnified by a long-term fight for their basic rights and dignity. Despite the fact that there are more than 258 million widows around the world, widows have historically been left unseen, unsupported, and unmeasured in our societies. The ordinary term for a widow in India is "vidhya" which originates from the Sanskrit word "vidhi" which means "to be destitute".

There are around 55 million widows in India. It is well known that in India widows tend to face many difficulties and deprivations because of negative social attitudes towards them and social restrictions that are placed upon them and their activities. Indian family as a social institution is well known for the emotional and physical support that it provides, for its extended members, many a time

but it fails to respond the needs of women, especially for women in difficult circumstances e.g. for widows. The widows are the unacceptable face of India, many leading agencies including Central and local governments have failed them, politicians with rare exceptions have ignored them and wider society continues to exploit them.

As widows move through their own experiences of grief, loss, or trauma after the death of a spouse, they may also face economic insecurity, discrimination, stigmatization, and harmful traditional practices on the basis of their marital status. It is observed that a widow from a relatively well-up family may be subject to greater cruelty and abuse by her in-laws than a lower caste widow who free enough to work outside in the public space and to remarry.

It is well known that in India widows tend to face many difficulties and deprivations because of negative social attitudes towards them and social restrictions that are placed upon them and their activities. They are subject to patriarchal customs, religious laws and widespread discrimination in inheritance rights. Many suffer abuse and exploitation at the hands of family members, often in the context of

property disputes. Many widows have flocked to the city of Vrindavan – a city that has become internationally recognised. Many continue to hold myths and stigmas against widows. Sometimes, widows are believed to be witches who have dark supernatural powers. On other occasions, they are accused of having committed a grave sin in their previous birth for which they are punished with widowhood. A widow not only deals with the loss of her husband but also faces numerous physical and socio-economic hardships that can cause psychological trauma. These women are susceptible to depression, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness, and loss of self worth and confidence.

Empowering widows to support themselves and their families also means addressing social stigmas that create exclusion, and discriminatory or harmful practices. The stigma surrounding widows endures today and ought to be addressed. It is undoubtedly good that governments, NGOs, and other entities are working to support widows – but there is a broad societal need, one no less than a moral and social imperative, to end the stigma surrounding widowhood. (The author is a freelance journalist, writer & cartoonist)

Flood and River erosion control in Assam: A landmark progress in four years under Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma

By: Kishore Upadhyay

Floods and river erosion are long-standing challenges for Assam due to its unique topography and the volatile nature of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries. Recognizing the critical need for a sustainable and resilient approach, the Government of Assam under the leadership of Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma has undertaken a transformative journey in flood and erosion management from 2021 to 2025. This report highlights the remarkable achievements, strategic investments, and innovative initiatives launched in the last four years to mitigate the impact of floods and protect lives and livelihoods.

Massive Infrastructure Expansion: Embankments and Sluice:

The government has made remarkable strides in strengthening Assam's flood management infrastructure, marked by an unprecedented expansion in flood-protected areas. A comparative analysis of data from two key periods—2001 to 2016 and 2021 to 2025—reveals a transformative shift in the approach to flood mitigation. Between 2001 and 2016, only 105 kilometers of new embankments were constructed over 15 years, averaging 10.5 kilometers annually. In sharp contrast, the period from 2021 to 2025 saw the construction of 450 kilometers of embankments in just four years, averaging 112.5 kilometers per year. This more than tenfold increase underscores a significant policy change and a renewed commitment to protecting vulnerable regions from recurrent flooding.

A similar surge is evident in the installation of sluice gates, which play a crucial role in regulating water flow and mitigating the impact of excessive rainfall and river swelling. During 2001–2016, just 12 sluice gates were installed, averaging 1.2 gates annually. However, from 2021 to 2025, the number soared to 43 sluice gates within four years—an annual average of 10.75 gates. This nearly nine-fold increase highlights the government's intensified efforts to



modernize and expand the flood management system. The scale and speed of these developments reflect a proactive and forward-looking strategy that prioritizes climate resilience and the safety of Assam's flood-prone communities.

Ensuring Quality and Transparency in Project Implementation

To uphold high standards of project execution, the state government adopted a robust framework emphasizing transparency and accountability. Transparent procurement practices were adopted, streamlining the bidding process to eliminate delays and curb corruption. This ensured that all procedures were conducted fairly and openly.

Additionally, the contractor selection process was made more stringent, with civil works awarded only to technically qualified agencies possessing a proven track record. This approach not only enhanced operational efficiency but also fostered a culture of responsibility and quality in project delivery.

Integrated River Basin Management Approach

The Assam Integrated River Basin Management Project (AIRBMP) marks a transformative shift in how Assam addresses its longstanding water-related challenges. Adopting a holistic, basin-wide strategy, the project aims to comprehensively manage the state's water resources while systematically mitigating the recurring threats of floods and riverbank erosion that affect millions of lives annually.

Phase I of the project, with a sanctioned budget of ₹1,000 crore, focuses on the Buridihing, Beki, and Jadhah rivers. This phase is dedicated to building new embankments, upgrading existing drainage systems, and undertaking ecological restoration efforts to revive the natural balance of these river basins. The initiative combines engineering with environmental stewardship to ensure both safety and sustainability for communities living along these rivers.

Phase II, with a proposed budget of ₹2,000 crore, expands the project's reach to include new river clusters: Dikhow-Desang, Kol-

long-Kopilli-Killing, Puthimari, and Aie-Manas. This phase emphasizes integrated water resource management and basin-level flood planning. By considering the hydrological interconnectivity between rivers, the approach aims to optimize resource utilization, strengthen climate resilience, and establish long-term flood mitigation systems that are adaptive and inclusive.

Climate-Resilient Flood Management

The Brahmaputra Integrated Flood and River Erosion Management Project, with an allocation of ₹2,000 crore, is a comprehensive initiative aimed at mitigating flood and erosion risks along the main stem of the Brahmaputra River. Focused on the districts of Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Morigaon, Kamrup, and Goalpara, the project adopts a multi-pronged approach involving both structural and non-structural measures. Key components include the strengthening and reinforcement of embankments, ecological restoration, and the implementation of advanced river management practices to enhance resilience against seasonal



flooding. By addressing long-standing challenges posed by the Brahmaputra's dynamic flow, the project aims to protect lives, livelihoods, and critical infrastructure in some of Assam's most vulnerable regions.

Data-Driven Decision Making and Technological Innovations

Hydro-Informatics Unit (HIU): A Technological Nerve Centre

The Hydro-Informatics Unit (HIU) has emerged as a pioneering technological hub, playing a crucial role in revolutionizing flood management and water resource planning in Assam. It specializes in real-time flood forecasting by employing advanced digital hydrological models, enabling timely and data-driven responses to potential flood threats.

The unit also conducts in-depth river morphological analyses, providing critical insights for the effective planning and reinforcement of embankments across vulnerable regions. By creating Integrated Flood Risk Management Plans, the HIU fosters a proactive approach to disaster preparedness. Furthermore, it serves as a platform for academic research and

capacity-building, supporting local institutions and professionals in developing expertise in hydro-informatics and related fields.

Telemetry Network Expansion

To further strengthen the state's flood monitoring infrastructure, the HIU has deployed 91 telemetry stations strategically across Assam, backed by a significant investment of ₹38 crore. These stations form the backbone of the state's real-time hydrological monitoring capabilities. Looking ahead, the unit plans to install an additional 800 advanced sensors aimed at vastly improving the real-time collection of hydrological data.

This expansion will significantly enhance early warning systems, facilitating quicker responses and better disaster preparedness. By integrating this technological upgrade, the HIU aims to safeguard lives and livelihoods through smarter, data-led flood risk management.

Nature-Based Solutions: Wetlands as Natural Buffers

The Government of Assam is strategically leveraging the state's natural ecosystems to mitigate the impact of floods by restoring key

wetlands. A total of 15 wetlands across 9 districts have been identified for restoration under this initiative, with a sanctioned budget of ₹692 crore.

The primary objective of the project is to enhance the water retention capacity of these wetlands, thereby delaying surface runoff during peak flood periods. This approach is expected to significantly reduce the severity of downstream flooding and erosion, promoting long-term ecological balance and community resilience in flood-prone areas.

The Assam government's bold and strategic initiatives over the past four years represent a paradigm shift in flood and erosion control. By combining robust infrastructure, data-driven management, and nature-based solutions, Assam is setting a benchmark for resilient water management in India. The significant achievements in embankment expansion, basin-level planning, and technological adoption reinforce the state's preparedness to face future climate uncertainties while safeguarding its people and natural heritage.

Sharad Pawar is categorical about no alliance with Ajit Pawar in any poll

By: Rahil Nora Chopra

The political arena of Maharashtra witnessed a twisting development as Sharad Pawar and his nephew Ajit Pawar will fight against each other again, this time in the Malegaon co-operative sugar mill elections in Bamarati. Maharashtra deputy chief minister Ajit Pawar, as head of the Nilkanteshwar panel, has declared his candidature for the cooperative elections for the chairman post. On the other hand, Sharad Pawar has also announced his candidature as representative of NCP SP's Baliraja Sahakari Bachav panel. Another group, the Sahakar Bachav panel, led by Ranjan Taware, is also contesting, making it a triangular battle. The election is scheduled for June 22, with results to be declared on June 24. The Pawar vs Pawar difference comes as Sharad Pawar refused for any possibility of an alliance with his nephew for the upcoming local body elections. Meanwhile, NCP Chief Sharad Pawar indicated that the party's pre-poll alliance with constituents of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) will continue during the upcoming civic polls, similar to how it was during the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections in Maharashtra. He also expressed the need to give due importance to the Shiv Sena (UBT) for its strength in Mumbai.

RESURGENT CONGRESS IN UTTAR PRADESH PREPARING FOR 2027 STATE POLLS

Putting an end to the speculations of any rift, the Samajwadi Party (SP) has cleared that its alliance with the Congress will continue in Uttar Pradesh and that the two parties will contest the next assembly polls scheduled in 2027, in the state together. However, Akhilesh Yadav asserted that the INDIA alliance remains firm strong and intact as usual. He expressed confidence that the alliance will play a prominent role in bringing political change to Uttar Pradesh and in ousting the BJP government from power. He commented in response to Congress MP Imran Masood's statement that the Congress is not a beggar seeking seats from the Samajwadi Party. Both parties are key members of the INDIA coalition, which was formed ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections to challenge the ruling party BJP. SP sources said that Akhilesh's remarks were also aimed at spreading a clear message to the party leaders and workers, who were sceptical about the continuation of the alliance between the two parties. The Congress's resurgence in the 2024 general elections, winning 6 of the 17 seats it contested as part of the SP-Congress alliance, has clearly changed the dynamics. While the SP emerged as the primary challenger to the BJP with 37 seats, the Congress believes its revival is no longer symbolic. Now the next year

panchayat elections will determine whether this Congress-SP coalition evolves into a cohesive force or fractures under the weight of competing aspirations.

UDDHAV THACKERAY AND EKNATH SHINDE FIGHTING FOR KEEPING RESPECTIVE BASES IN MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray blamed the BJP for trying to scuttle the possibility of his party's alliance with the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena led by his estranged cousin Raj Thackeray. Uddhav was addressing at his party's 59th foundation day rally in Mumbai and used one of his frequent barbs, referring to the Shinde-led faction as gaddars (traitors) for breaking away from him three years ago and aligning with the BJP. In response, Maharashtra's Deputy CM Eknath Shinde slammed Uddhav for betrayal and hunger for power. Shinde said "You abandoned his ideology, tied up with the Congress and NCP, the same people Balasaheb fought all his life". Both Thackeray and Shinde addressed rallies of their respective parties in Mumbai to celebrate the 59th foundation day of Shiv Sena, founded by Uddhav's father Bal Thackeray in 1966. While the Shinde-led Shiv Sena held its event at the NSCI Dome in Worli, the Sena (UBT) rally was at Shantimukhand Hall in the Sion area. The two rival Senas battled for control over Mumbai, and Marathi voters. Now one thing is clear, the legacy of Bal Thackeray remains the battleground, but the war is somehow now being personal.

MANGANI LAL MANDAL IS FIRST PRESIDENT OF BIHAR RJD FROM EBC COMMUNITY

The political activity in Bihar is heating up as Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) President Lalu Prasad Yadav called upon party leaders and workers in Patna to gear up and ensure victory of the INDIA bloc in Bihar assembly elections due in October-November so that a government is formed under the leadership of Tejashwi Prasad Yadav. Addressing his party's state executive meeting in Patna, Lalu congratulated the RJD's new state president Mangani Lal Mandal, who was elected unopposed. He replaced senior leader Jagdanand Singh. Speaking on the occasion, Leader of the Opposition in the Bihar Assembly Tejashwi Yadav told party leaders to stop concerning much about party tickets for the assembly elections and work diligently to bring the INDIA alliance to power. The occasion was the State council meeting of the RJD in Patna's Gyan Bhavan where veteran socialist leader Mangani Lal Mandal was officially elected new State president. The RJD had State presidents from Scheduled Caste, Muslims, Backward Class and forward class in the past but for the very first time the party has assigned a State president from the EBC community. (IPA Service)

The spiritual significance of Ambubachi Mela

By: Satyabrata Borah

The Ambubachi Mela, held annually at the Kamakhya Temple atop the Nilachal Hill in Guwahati, Assam, is one of India's most significant spiritual and cultural festivals. Celebrated during the monsoon month of June, typically beginning on the seventh day of the Assamese month of Ahaa, this four-day event draws devotees, sadhus, tantrics, and spiritual seekers from across India and beyond. Rooted in the ancient traditions of Shaktism and Tantra, the Ambubachi Mela is a profound celebration of divine feminine energy, fertility, and the interconnectedness of human life with nature. Its spiritual significance is multifaceted, encompassing devotion to the goddess Kamakhya, tantric practices, reverence for nature, and the recognition of the sacredness of womanhood. This essay explores the deep spiritual dimensions of the Ambubachi Mela, highlighting its role as a unique confluence of faith, mysticism, and cultural unity.

At the heart of the Ambubachi Mela lies the Kamakhya Temple, one of the 51 Shakti Peethas, sacred sites associated with the goddess Sati in Hindu mythology. According to legend, when Sati's body was dismembered by Lord Vishnu to pacify the grief-stricken Lord Shiva, her yoni (womb) fell at Nilachal Hill, making it a potent center of Shakti worship. Unlike most temples where deities are worshipped in anthropomorphic forms, the Kamakhya Temple venerates the goddess as a yoni-shaped stone, symbolizing creation, fertility, and the divine feminine. The term "Ambubachi" derives from the Sanskrit words "ambu" (water) and "bachi" (flow or sprouting), signifying the life-giving essence of water and the fertility of the earth. During the Ambubachi Mela, it is believed that Goddess Kamakhya undergoes her annual menstrual cycle, a period when the temple remains closed for three days. On the fourth day, after special rituals and purification ceremonies, the temple reopens, marking the beginning of the vibrant mela. This unique reverence for the goddess's menstruation underscores the festival's spiritual core, celebrating the creative and nurturing power of the feminine.

The spiritual significance of the Ambubachi Mela is deeply tied to Shaktism, a Hindu tradition that worships the divine feminine as the ultimate source of cosmic energy. Kamakhya is revered as the goddess of desire, fertility, and empowerment, embodying the primal energy (Shakti) that sustains life. The festival is a time when devotees seek her blessings for prosperity, spiritual growth, and liberation. The closure of the temple during the goddess's menstruation is not seen as a period of impurity but as a sacred time when her divine energy is at its peak. Devotees believe that the earth, personified as the goddess, is in a state of rest and rejuvenation during these three days. The temple's reopening signifies her return to accessibility, showering devotees with her grace. The Ambubachi cloth, a piece of red cloth believed to be moistened by the goddess's menstrual blood, is distributed as a sacred offering. This cloth is considered highly auspicious, symbolizing the goddess's blessings

and her life-giving power.

The Ambubachi Mela is also a significant occasion for tantric practitioners, as Kamakhya is one of the most important centers of Tantra in India. Tantrism, a spiritual tradition that seeks to harness divine energy through esoteric rituals, finds a fertile ground during this festival. Sadhus, ascetics, and tantrics from across the country converge at Nilachal Hill to engage in meditation, mantra recitation, and complex rituals aimed at attaining spiritual enlightenment. The festival's atmosphere is charged with mysticism, as these practitioners perform secretive ceremonies to connect with the divine feminine energy. The belief that the Brahmaputra River turns red during Ambubachi, symbolizing the goddess's menstruation, adds to the mystical aura. Though this phenomenon may have natural explanations, such as iron-rich soil washing into the river during the monsoon, for devotees, it is a divine sign of the goddess's presence and power. The Ambubachi Mela thus serves as a spiritual crucible where the boundaries between the material and the divine blur, offering practitioners a unique opportunity to transcend worldly limitations.

Beyond its religious and tantric dimensions, the Ambubachi Mela carries profound spiritual significance in its reverence for nature and the cycles of life. In Assam's agrarian society, the festival is closely linked to the rhythms of the natural world. During Ambubachi, agricultural activities such as plowing, sowing, and harvesting are traditionally paused, reflecting the belief that Mother Earth, like the goddess, is in a state of rest during her menstruation. This practice underscores the festival's deep ecological consciousness, emphasizing the need to honor and protect the earth. The rituals observed during Ambubachi, such as abstaining from cooking by certain groups and purifying household items, reinforce the idea of spiritual and physical cleansing. These customs highlight the interconnectedness of human life with the environment, encouraging devotees to live in harmony with nature. The festival thus becomes a spiritual reminder of humanity's responsibility to preserve the earth's sanctity and fertility.

The Ambubachi Mela also fosters a sense of spiritual and social unity, bringing together people from diverse backgrounds. Devotees from different castes, communities, and regions gather at Kamakhya, creating a vibrant tapestry of faith and devotion. The festival transcends social barriers, as sadhus, householders, and pilgrims share the same sacred space, united by their reverence for the goddess. The mela's festive atmosphere, with its colorful stalls, devotional music, and communal prayers, creates a sense of collective spirituality. This unity is further amplified by the participation of international devotees, who are drawn to the festival's unique blend of mysticism and devotion. The Ambubachi Mela thus serves as a spiritual melting pot, where diverse traditions and beliefs converge in a shared celebration of the divine feminine.

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Ambubachi Mela is its celebration of womanhood and the sanctity of female biological

processes. In many cultures, menstruation is stigmatized or considered impure, but the Ambubachi Mela elevates it to a divine act. By venerating the goddess's menstruation, the festival challenges patriarchal norms and affirms the sacredness of women's bodies. This reverence for the feminine extends beyond the spiritual realm, influencing social attitudes and fostering respect for women. The festival's emphasis on fertility and creation underscores the vital role of women in sustaining life, both biologically and spiritually. For many devotees, particularly women, attending the Ambubachi Mela is an empowering experience, as it validates their identity and their connection to the divine feminine. This aspect of the festival makes it a powerful statement of gender equality and spiritual inclusivity.

The spiritual practices observed during the Ambubachi Mela also emphasize inner purification and self-discipline. Devotees undertake fasting, meditation, and other austerities to cleanse their minds and bodies, preparing themselves to receive the goddess's blessings. The consumption of raw milk during the festival, believed to ward off snakebites, reflects the integration of local folklore with spiritual practices, reinforcing the connection between the physical and metaphysical worlds. The rituals performed during Ambubachi, such as offering flowers, incense, and prayers, are not merely external acts but pathways to inner transformation. For many, the festival is a time to reflect on their spiritual journey, seek forgiveness for past transgressions, and renew their commitment to a life of righteousness.

The Ambubachi Mela's spiritual significance is further enriched by its historical and cultural context. The Kamakhya Temple has been a center of worship for centuries, attracting devotees from ancient times to the present day. Its location in Assam, a region known for its syncretic blend of Hindu, tribal, and Buddhist traditions, adds to the festival's unique character. The mela is not only a religious event but also a cultural celebration, showcasing Assam's rich heritage through music, dance, and traditional crafts. The festival's ability to preserve and promote these traditions while remaining a vibrant spiritual event speaks to its enduring relevance.

The Ambubachi Mela is a profound spiritual event that encapsulates the essence of Shaktism, Tantra, and reverence for nature and womanhood. It is a celebration of the divine feminine, a time for inner purification, and a testament to the unity of diverse communities. By honoring the goddess's menstruation, the festival challenges societal taboos and affirms the sacredness of life's natural processes. Its mystical atmosphere, rich rituals, and ecological consciousness make it a unique spiritual experience that resonates with devotees and seekers alike. Held in the sacred precincts of the Kamakhya Temple, the Ambubachi Mela continues to inspire millions, serving as a powerful reminder of the divine feminine's role in sustaining the universe and the interconnectedness of all life. Through its celebration of faith, nature, and humanity, the mela remains a beacon of spiritual and cultural heritage, illuminating the path to divine connection and self-realization.

Amit Shah warns Naxals of no respite from ops during monsoon, rules out talks

RAIPUR, June 22: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Naxalites won't get rest during monsoon as operations against them will continue during rains, even as he ruled out talks and appealed to the ultras to lay down arms and join the journey of development.

Since January last year, more than 400 Maoist ultras have been gunned down by security forces in separate encounters in the state, the most notable being the killing of Nambala Keshav Rao alias Basavaraju (70), the general secretary and top most operative of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), in Bastar on May 21. "Every time during monsoon, Naxalites used to get rest (as swollen rivers hamper anti-Naxal operations inside dense forest). But this time, we will not let them sleep during monsoon and we will move further to achieve the target of 31/3 (2026 to eliminate Naxalism)", Shah said.

He appealed to Naxals to surrender, join the journey of development and avail of the benefits of a "lucrative" surrender policy.

"No need for talks. Just give up armed struggle and join the mainstream. I wholeheartedly welcome all those who have laid down arms



and joined the mainstream and assure them whatever promises the Chhattisgarh government and the Centre have made to them will be fulfilled. We will try to help you even more," he added.

Speaking after laying the foundation stones for the National Forensic Science University (NFSU) campus and a Central Forensic Science Lab in Chhattisgarh's Nava Raipur Atal Nagar, he said the complete implementation of Bharatiya Nyay Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam will make India's criminal justice system the most modern, speedy and scientific justice sys-

tem in the world. "The country will enter into an era of more evidence-based criminal justice. After complete implementation of three criminal laws, any FIR registered in any corner of our country will ensure justice to the complainant and the victim up to the Supreme Court within 3 years. There will be no delay in justice for more than three years," he said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of making India a developed nation by 2047 not only focuses on innovation, infrastructure, industrial and economic progress but also ensuring timely justice and the three new laws will help in this regard, he said. "There was a time

when arguments for justice were based on feelings or imagination and evidence, but I believe that where there is proof, scientific evidence, only then the accurate result comes. With the help of FSL (forensic science lab), India will be among the countries with the highest conviction rate in the world in a few years," he said.

The new laws make it mandatory for the forensic science team to visit the scene of any crime in which the punishment is more than seven years, Shah said.

Shah said the NFSU campus in Nava Raipur will cost Rs 145 crore and CFSL Rs 123 crore, adding these will come up in three years.

Graduation from NFSU means a job guarantee and youth of Chhattisgarh must grab this great opportunity, he added. "In the coming years, 32000 forensic experts will emerge every year and our requirement is not more than 30000 every year. We will become self-reliant in the field of forensic science.

Yesterday, someone sent me a survey which claims the global forensic technology market is worth USD 20 billion and will be worth 55 billion US dollars by 2036 with a 13 per cent compound annual growth rate," he said. (PTI)

BJP accuses CPI(M) of 'violence' Minister Sivankutty alleges Raj Bhavan behind ABVP protests

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 22: Kerala General Education Minister V Sivankutty on Sunday claimed that the protests by the BJP's youth and student groups against him, over the 'Bharat Mata' controversy, were aimed at causing riots in the state and were allegedly held on instructions of the Raj Bhavan.

Hitting back at the CPI(M), BJP state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar accused the Left party of trying to suppress protests by resorting to violence against the protesters.

He warned that if the Left government uses force to suppress protests, it will face retaliation in the same manner.

Earlier in the day, Sivankutty told reporters that he has been attacked and his travels obstructed during the last couple of days after he walked out of a programme at the Raj Bhavan where a portrait of 'Bharat Mata' -- as seen in RSS events -- was displayed.

He said that as a minister, MLA and a citizen, he has the right to protest against the actions of the Governor at the Raj Bhavan and that is what he did.

"The Governor has said that he will continue with it (the portrait) and we have not responded to that," he added.

Subsequently, the BJP youth wing Yuva Morcha and student organisation -- Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) -- attacked him and obstructed his vehicle at various places in the state during the last two days, the minister claimed.

Meanwhile, Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar, in an interview given to BJP mouthpiece Janabhumi, said that the concept of 'Bharat Mata' became more clear to him when he was jailed during the emergency period in the country.

He said that during that time he saw the concept of Bharat Mata as being above ideology and politics.

"I got a strong urge to work more for Bharat Mata. The inspiration to become a 'sangh pracharak' also became stronger during that time," he said in the interview.

Sivankutty, during his press conference in the morning, also al-



leged that at one such protest, ABVP activists tore apart the national flag, a claim reportedly denied by the student organisation.

The minister also alleged that the protests and attacks against him were being carried out on the instructions of the Raj Bhavan, "but they were unable to gather enough youth for the same".

He said that the protests against him by the two organisations were carried out by a handful of youngsters who acted as "suicide squads" and jumped in front of his moving vehicle.

ABVP and Yuva Morcha activists had waved black flags at the minister's vehicle in Kozhikode on Saturday and also burned his effigy in protest against his walkout from the Raj Bhavan event.

Sivankutty said that ABVP and Yuva Morcha should realise that showing support to the Governor, who is allegedly acting contrary to the Constitution, will turn people against them.

He also claimed that two hardcore RSS activists in the Raj Bhavan were advising the Governor to act in this manner. The minister said that he will not name them, but everyone knows them very well.

The Congress too spoke out against the Governor's recent actions and said the Raj Bhavan should not be turned into a venue for political activities.

Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) chief Sunny Joseph also said that protests against the Governor's actions need not be taken to the streets.

Later in the day, Chandrasekhar, in a statement, claimed that it was the CPI(M) which was behind the

violence against the ABVP and Yuva Morcha protesters because the BJP exposed the Left party's "anti-nationalism" and "appeasement politics". He also accused the Left parties of being "intolerant" towards protests against them.

The BJP leader said that protests against the Governor by the Students Federation of India and the Democratic Youth Federation of India -- the student and youth wings of the CPI(M), respectively -- were acceptable, but agitations against a Left minister were not.

This is an "authoritarian style" of communist parties, he claimed. He warned that if attacks on BJP and related organisations' workers are not stopped, the Left parties and their leaders will have to pay a heavy price.

"If the CPI(M) is trying to suppress the protesters by taking the law into its own hands, and if the police decide to help them by standing by, then the national movements, including the BJP, will take to the streets," the BJP leader said.

He also said that criticising and insulting the 'Bharat Mata', a sentimental concept for the country, was not acceptable and whosoever dares to do so will face a strong protest in a democratic manner.

Chandrasekhar further warned that if the Left government's decision was to suppress the protests by force, there were those on the other side who were capable of retaliating in the same manner. The southern state has been witnessing a tussle between Arlekar and the Marxist party-led LDF government over the display of 'Bharat Mata portrait' during official events at the Raj Bhavan here. (PTI)

Counting for Ludhiana West assembly bypoll on Jun 23

LUDHIANA, June 22: The counting of votes for the Ludhiana West assembly bypoll will be taken up on Monday after a fierce electoral fight that Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann described as a battle between "humility" and "arrogance".

The June 19 bypoll has been regarded as a litmus test for the ruling AAP as it seeks to maintain its hold over Punjab, while the Congress looks to regain its foothold over the urban constituency which it held six times in the past.

The Aam Aadmi Party fielded Sanjeev Arora (61), a Rajya Sabha member and Ludhiana-based industrialist who is also known for his social welfare work, for the bypoll. On the other hand, the opposition Congress placed its bet on former minister and Punjab Congress working president Bharat Bhushan Ashu (51).

The BJP field senior leader Jiwan Gupta, a member of the core committee of the party's Punjab unit, while the SAD named Parupkar Singh Ghuman, a lawyer and the former president of Ludhiana Bar Association, as its candidate. While the main contest is between the AAP and Congress, the bypoll outcome will also shed light on how the BJP performs among urban voters in Punjab. It is also going to be a test of the leadership of SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal as his party looks to resurrect itself after a series of crushing electoral losses.

The bypoll, necessitated following the death of AAP MLA Gurpreet Bassi Gogi in January, registered 51.33 per cent polling, a sharp drop from the 64 per cent voting registered in the 2022 Assembly polls. There were 14 candidates in the fray for the bypoll.

A foolproof security arrangement has been put in place at the Khalsa College for Women which will serve as the counting centre, an official said on Sunday. (PTI)

Stealth frigate INS Tamal to be commissioned into Indian Navy on July 1

NEW DELHI, June 22: Indian Navy's Russian-manufactured guided missile frigate INS Tamal that carries an array of missiles and surveillance systems will be commissioned into the force at Russia's coastal city of Kaliningrad on July 1.

The ship has 26 per cent indigenous components, including the BrahMos long-range cruise missile for targeting both at sea and land, officials said.

The 125m long, 3900-tonne warship, packs a lethal punch as it features an impressive blend of Indian and Russian cutting-edge technologies and best practices in warship construction, according to the Indian Navy.

Upon commissioning, Tamal will join the 'Sword Arm' of the Indian Navy, the Western Fleet.

It will not only be a symbol of Indian Navy's growing capabilities, but also exemplifying collaborative strength of the India-Russia partnership, Indian Navy spokesperson Commander Vivek Madhwal said.

INS Tamal would be the eighth Krivak class frigates to be inducted from Russia over the past two decades. The warship has been built at Yantar shipyard in Kaliningrad, and is the last such platform to be inducted from a foreign source, the officials said.

The commissioning ceremony will be presided over by Vice Admiral Sanjay J Singh, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command. Several high-ranking Indian and Russian defence officials will attend the event.

INS Tamal is the second ship of the Tushil Class, which are the upgraded versions of their predecessors, Talwar and Teg classes.

India as part of the broader contract for Tushil class is also building two similar frigates called the INS Tripud class at Goa Shipyard Ltd with transfer of technology and design assistance from the Russian side.

By the conclusion of this series of ships, Indian Navy will be operating 10 ships with similar capabilities and commonality in equipment, weapon and sensor fit over four different classes, the officials said.

Tamal's construction was closely overseen by an Indian team of specialists from the Warship Overseeing Team stationed at Kaliningrad. (PTI)

Left parties condemn US strikes on Iran

NEW DELHI, June 22: Left parties on Sunday strongly condemned the US strikes on nuclear sites in Iran and said the move was a grave violation of Iranian sovereignty and the UN Charter.

In a statement issued here, the Left parties said the US action will inflame global tensions, destabilise West Asia and have severe economic repercussions.

"The undersigned five Left parties strongly condemn the United States' bombing of Iran. This is a grave violation of Iranian sovereignty and the UN Charter, and it will inflame global tensions, destabilise West Asia and have severe economic repercussions," they said in the statement.

The statement was jointly issued by the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, Revolutionary Socialist Party and Forward Bloc.

The five Left parties said the US and Israel are justifying their attacks by claiming that Iran was on the verge of developing a nuclear weapon, however, it is important to note that the director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Rafael Grossi, said on June 19 that they did not have any proof of a systematic effort on Iran's part

to develop a nuclear weapon. "Even US intelligence agencies acknowledged that they did not possess conclusive evidence indicating that Iran was developing a nuclear weapon. Furthermore, Iran remains a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)," they said.

The Left parties said Israel launched an attack on Iran on June 12 to sabotage any potential negotiations between the latter and the US and now, the US has joined Israel in this act of aggression, even though President Donald Trump had given a two-week window to Iran for talks. "This clearly demonstrates that the US-Israel axis has little regard for its own intelligence assessments or any diplomatic process, and is intent on imposing war on Iran and the entire West Asian region. This makes it evident that the real intention is to destroy Iran, establish imperialist hegemony over West Asia, and control the global flow of resources," they said.

"This attack is aimed at serving the interests of the military-industrial complex and enabling international capital to navigate its way out of the prolonged crisis," they said.

The Left parties compared the situation with the US invasion of Iraq, which they said was done on "similarly unverified claims that were later proven false". (PTI)

Blocking of Strait of Hormuz will impact India's energy procurement: Experts

NEW DELHI, June 22: Any blocking or disruption of traffic through the Strait of Hormuz -- a narrow passage connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea -- will have significant global and regional impact including for India's energy security, strategic affairs experts said on Sunday.

Following the US bombing of three major Iranian nuclear sites this morning, Tehran has indicated that closing the Strait of Hormuz for shipping is one of the options on the table to pressure its adversaries.

Nearly 30 per cent of global oil and a third of the world's LNG (liquefied natural gas) passes through the Strait daily and its closure would immediately reduce global supplies triggering a spike in prices, they said.

The shutting down of the narrow passage would have significant global repercussions across energy markets and it will impact India's energy security as well, said Dr Laxman Kumar Behera, Associate Professor at Special Centre for National Security Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Behera said any disruption in the critical shipping lane, which is a geopolitical flash-point, will majorly impact



India's crude oil import from Iraq and to an extent from Saudi Arabia.

Captain D K Sharma (ret'd), a former Indian Navy spokesperson who closely follows developments in the Gulf region, too said Iran's threat to block the Strait of Hormuz could lead to significant disruptions in global oil trade.

Any disruption in shipping traffic could impact insurance premiums, causing costlier rerouting of oil shipments, he said.

"Oil prices are expected to surge due to increased tensions in the region, with some analysts predicting prices to reach USD 80-USD 90 per barrel or even USD 100 per barrel if Iran responds with retaliatory measures," he noted.

Sharma also said that the

currencies of countries in the region may experience significant volatility, and investors may look for other stable markets that could impact the region's economic growth.

According to a recent analysis by the International Energy Agency, even a brief disruption of passage through the Strait of Hormuz will have a significant impact on oil markets. "With geopolitical and economic uncertainties affecting oil producers and consumers alike, oil supply security remains high on the international energy policy agenda," it said.

The US on Sunday morning bombed three major nuclear sites -- Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan -- in Iran, bringing itself into the Israel-Iran conflict. Later, US President Donald Trump said the Iranian nuclear sites were "totally

obliterated".

On its part, Iran warned that the US strikes will have "everlasting consequences".

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the US has committed a "grave violation" of the UN Charter, international law and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty by attacking Iran's "peaceful nuclear installations".

"The events this morning are outrageous and will have everlasting consequences," he said.

Behera said Iran will also face economic consequences if it shuts down the Hormuz Strait as such a move will severely cripple Tehran's exports.

Since the start of Iran's hostilities with Israel, Iranian officials have spoken about the possibility of shutting the Strait.

Mohammad Javad Hosseini, the deputy chief of mission at the Iranian embassy, on Friday said closing the Strait of Hormuz is an option.

"We have many things on the table, but it doesn't mean that we are going to do it now. It depends on the situation and how the other players want to go. If they want to solve the problem, definitely some of these things will be put aside," he said. (PTI)

CORRIGENDUM

The earlier Tender Notice which was published on 11th June 2025. The name of work in Sl. No. 4 for **Construction of Forester-I Quarter at Range Office Campus under Eastern Range, Bokajan = 1 No 20,00,000/-** is hereby cancelled due to some technical error and the other work item will be remain same.

Sd/-

Divisional Forest Officer
Karbi Anglong East Division,
Diphu

GOVT. OF ASSAM

OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONER::WEST KARBI ANGLONG::HAMREN
PIN-782486

No.WKA/DDMA/RECRUITMENT/2025/28

Dated-16/06/2025.

NOTIFICATION

All the candidates who had applied earlier for the post of Field Officer, DDMA, are requested to attend the walk-in interview along with all original documents and testimonials on **24/06/2025 from 10:00 AM** onwards in the Conference Hall of office of the District Commissioner, West Karbi Anglong, Hamren.

Sd/-

District Commissioner cum Chairman, DDMA
West Karbi Anglong, Assam

No.WKA/DDMA/RECRUITMENT/2025/28-A

Dated-16/06/2025.

ADVERTISEMENT

Interested and eligible candidates are invited for the following post (purely temporary and on contractual basis) for District De-Addiction Centre (DDAC), At Langting, Dist.: Dima-Hasao (Assam). will be provided by the NGO. The applications and Bio-Data have to be sent through email on news.doboka@gmail.com / what sop Number. 7002982242/9707606580 /6901787935 in pdf format on or before 28 June, 2025. Interview on 30 June 2025

Sl. No.	Name of posts	No. of posts	Education Qualification	Honorarium/Salary
1	Nurse	1	GNM	15000.00

For any Queries:

Contact No. 9707606580/7002982242/9435787175

General Secretary, North East Rural Welfare Society (NERWS)

Bhogiram Pathar, Doboka, Near Statfed,

P.O- Doboka, Dist:- Hojai (Assam), Pin-782440

Won't be easy for Virat and Rohit to play 2027 WC: Ganguly

KOLKATA, June 22: It won't be easy for Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to remain fit and find a place in India's ODI World Cup squad in 2027, former captain Sourav Ganguly says.

"All of us must understand, just like everyone, the game will go away from them and they will go away from the game," Ganguly told PTI in a lengthy interview at his residence.

The next ODI World Cup is scheduled in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia and by the time the prestigious ICC event is played Kohli will be 38 years old and Rohit will touch 40.

Till then India have 27 ODIs to play spread across nine bilateral series. That means Kohli and Rohit will hardly get 15 international games a year.

"It won't be easy, with 15 games a year," Ganguly said.

With 25,000 runs and 83 international hundreds between them, both Kohli and Rohit have expressed their desire to play the 50-over global event after recently retiring from Test cricket.

Ganguly, an exceptional ODI batter during his career, was asked if he had any word of advice for them.

"I have got no advice. I think they know the game as much I do. They will take a call," Ganguly acknowledged that finding a player of the caliber of Kohli to replace him won't be easy, though he is not worried about Indian cricket after the retirement of the two stalwarts. (PTI)

Pant plays the numbers game beautifully, has his own computer: Shastri

LEEDS, June 22: Rishabh Pant "plays the numbers game beautifully and has his own computer" whose working only he knows, feels former India head coach Ravi Shastri after the swash-buckling wicketkeeper-batter's audacious and entertaining show against England in the opening Test here.

Pant hit an audacious 134 off just 178 balls with the help of 12 fours and six sixes to entertain the Headingley crowd with his unorthodox batting on Day 2. The 'falling paddle', the post-century somersault, there was majesty and madness in equal measure in Pant's memorable knock.

"Outrageous. He (Pant) plays the numbers game beautifully, plays the way he wants. He will block for a bit and then shift gears," Shastri said on Sky Sports.

"He has his own computer and only he knows how it works. That's his USP. That's what puts bowlers under pressure and makes him box office, a real entertainer and a match winner," said the former India all-rounder about Pant's 'method to madness'.

"That's why there was that celebration. Thanking the man upstairs for giving him the opportunity," said Shastri.

"I think his recovery from that accident had a lot to do with the frame of his body and being mid-20s. When I saw him in hospital, it wasn't a pretty sight. Knee in a mess, scars all over the place, bruises all over the place." (PTI)

Ganguly was Team Director of DC between 2018-19 and 2022-24

Definitely no politics, but open to coaching India: Ganguly

KOLKATA, June 22: Former skipper Sourav Ganguly has categorically ruled out entering politics, but says he is not averse to coaching the Indian team.

Ganguly, who will turn 53 this July, was the Team Director of Delhi Capitals between 2018-19 and 2022-24.

"I never really thought about it because I got into different roles," Ganguly told PTI in a free-wheeling podcast interview when asked if he would like to coach the Indian team.

"I finished (competitive cricket) in 2013 and then became Board (BCCI) President," said Ganguly, noting that his biggest contribution to Indian cricket in that role was to promote women's cricket. When suggested that he could have contributed more by becoming India coach, Ganguly said: "We'll see what the future holds. I'm just 50 (53), so let's see what happens. I'm open to it. We'll see where it goes," the veteran cricketer.

One thing he is not getting into is politics.

Asked if he would like to join a political party ahead of West Bengal assembly elections in 2026, Ganguly said with a smile: "I am not interested."

What if he is promised the state chief minister's post? "I am not interested," he repeated.

Ganguly was all praise for incumbent coach Gautam Gambhir, who he feels, has picked up pace as coach since Champions Trophy victory in Dubai earlier



this year.

"Gautam (Gambhir) is doing a good job. He started off a little slow, losing to Australia and New Zealand, but he picked up with the Champions Trophy. This is going to be a big series (vs England)," Ganguly said.

Asked how astute a tactician Gambhir is, Ganguly praised the southpaw's passion and his ability to express his opinions in a straight forward manner.

"I haven't seen him from very close in this role, but I know he is very passionate. I haven't ob-

served his strategies closely because I haven't worked with him as a coach.

"He's very straightforward, he sees things clearly, and he's very open about what he feels, about the team, players, people, everything. From the outside, you can tell he's a very transparent person - what you see is what you get."

Ganguly recollected his playing days when he found Gambhir to be very respectful towards senior. "I've played with him. He was a great guy with a lot of

respect for me and the senior players. Even now, I can see he is extremely passionate about his job."

Ganguly also feels that with just a year into the job, Gambhir should be allowed time to grow as a coach and learn with passage of time. "I wish him all the best. He's just a year into the job, and this will be an important (England) tour. He struggled a bit in Australia, but just like everyone else, he'll learn, he'll grow, and he'll become better." (PTI)

Dortmund beat Mamelodi Sundowns 4-3 in blistering hot Club World Cup match

CINCINNATI, June 22: Borussia Dortmund was gifted an easy goal at the beginning of the match and held off a late response from the Mamelodi Sundowns on a fiercely warm day to win 4-3 in the Club World Cup group stage on Saturday.

Both teams and the crowd of 14,006 at TQL Stadium sweat from high temperatures that forced a heat advisory and cooling breaks called at the referee's discretion. Temperatures approached 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 Celsius).

The Sundowns opened the scoring early on an impressive breakaway that Lucas Ribeiro Costa finished in the 11th minute. Dortmund evened the score in the 16th minute when Sundowns goalie Ronwen Williams inadvertently passed to Dortmund's Felix Nmecha right in front of the net. Nmecha easily footed it in. Dortmund stole all momentum on the play and increased its lead to 3-1 at half-time. Serhou Guirassy scored in the 34th minute and Jobe Bellingham in the 45th.

Khuliso Mudau's own goal on an attempt to deflect Daniel Svensson's cross in front of the net made it 4-1 in the 59th before Mamelodi centered itself and began putting pressure on the German club. The Sundowns scored two straight goals — Iqraam Rayners' double-header that first hit the post before his sec-

ond effort scored in the 62nd and Lebo Mothiba's shot in the 90th minute. It wasn't enough for the South African club to overcome its mistakes. Of note: American midfielder Gio Reyna, forced to be with Dortmund rather than with the U.S. national team at the CONCACAF Gold Cup, dressed but didn't play for the second straight match.

Nmecha's equalizer was made too easy for the Bundesliga club.

Dortmund rises to the top of Group H, passing the previously leading Sundowns, who approach a critical match against Fluminense on Wednesday. Dortmund will meet Ulsan on Wednesday. "I think we did very well first of all, but we just lacked a bit of concentration in a few little bits. ... But we did very well. I mean, we should be proud of ourselves. We gave them a hard time."

— Tashreeq Matthews, Sundowns forward. "I think the conditions made it so difficult, especially for us, being a European team. They played a fantastic game, and I'm sure they're used to that kind of weather, but we definitely aren't. It's something we are going to have to adapt to as the tournament goes on, and that's just the demands of this competition. So yeah, it was really difficult, but in the game, you have to find little fixes and mechanisms to deal with it, to try and play fast." (AP)

After 2022 heartbreak, Indian women eye fresh start in Asian Cup Qualifiers

CHIANG MAI (THAILAND), June 22: More than three years after a COVID outbreak in the team derailed their campaign in the last AFC Women's Asian Cup, India will make a fresh bid for a place in the continental showpiece, with Mongolia being their first test in the Qualifiers here on Monday.

The upcoming edition of the premier tournament will be held in Australia next year.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that the continent's top competition has been somewhat ill-fated for the Blue Tigresses in the last few decades.

India last made it to the AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2003. And when they hosted the tournament in 2022, a COVID outbreak in the side meant that India had to withdraw after only the first game and the results were declared void.

While India do have three podium finishes in the erstwhile Asian Women's Championship (runners-up in 1980 and 1983, and third place in 1981), they have not achieved anything for more than 40 years.

Besides the opener against Mongolia, India (ranked 70th) will face Timor Leste (ranked 158th) on June 29, Iraq (ranked 173rd) on July 2 and hosts Thailand (ranked 46th) on July 5, at the Chiang Mai Stadium.

Only the group winners will



qualify for the final tournament in Australia in March 2026, which will also serve as a qualifier for the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2027.

Apart from Thailand, India have never faced the other three Group B opponents before.

"We don't have much information about Mongolia, Timor Leste and Iraq. They haven't played any matches recently. We do know a bit about Thailand. They played two games against Nepal in the last window, and one of them was closed doors," said head coach Crispin Chhetri.

"I tried different variations in our friendlies (against Uzbek-

India women lose 0-2 to Belgium, suffer sixth straight defeat in European leg

ANTWERP (BELGIUM), June 22: The Indian women's hockey team went down 0-2 to Belgium to suffer its sixth successive defeat in the European leg of the FIH Pro League and inch closer to relegation here on Sunday.

After two goalless quarters, Belgium scored twice in quick succession in the third quarter to win the reverse fixture a day after a 5-1 mauling of the beleaguered Indian side.

Ambre Ballenghien broke the deadlock in the 40th minute of the game and Lien Hillewaert struck the team's second goal in the 43rd minute.

The result has seen India drop to the ninth and last spot on the table with 10 points from their 14 matches.

On the other hand, this win ensured Belgium remained in the third place behind Netherlands and Argentina who are in the first and second position respectively.

After Saturday's debacle, India began aggressively with a clear intent to overcome the disappointment of the previous loss. They tried to find space backed by good pace as India built on a good momentum.

India even won a penalty corner early in the quarter but could not convert.

Meanwhile, with six minutes left for the first hooter, a defensive error gave Belgium their first PC of the match. A slow attempt by the hosts eventually led to the umpire awarding a penalty stroke.

But a good video referral by India showed that it was Jyoti's stick, and the video umpire ruled it as a long corner.

The second quarter witnessed

some brave surge by Indian attackers, moving forward with pace and vigour. Skipper Salima Tete led the charge as she took a couple of shots on goal herself but Belgian defence was resurgent.

At half-time, India had two PCs while Belgium had one, and 10 circle entries as opposed to India's eight. It was an evenly played out match until the half-time break.

In the third quarter, India seemed to lose the plot. Though they began optimistically with a PC being awarded to them, India couldn't execute.

But Belgium made no such mistake when they won a PC in the following minutes.

Ballenghien took the shot from the left which was deflected by India goalie Savita. But the ball rebounded and was perfectly lofted into the post. India responded quickly with a PC but failed to equalise.

Belgium came back to pump another one into India's post through a PC. They played a similar variation, sending the ball to the left and Hillewaert was perfectly positioned to get the right deflection with no Indian defender posing a threat.

Conceding two quick goals put India under the pump in the final quarter.

Staring at relegation with just two wins in the entire season, India had their task cut out. But there was no respite in the fourth quarter either.

Deepika and Jyoti traded chances in this quarter, trying to find India a goal. They remained goalless despite Neha, Salima, Navneet and Rutuja being in the right places, pushing for that much-needed strike. (PTI)

climatise to the weather conditions and adjust to time difference. The weather here is more humid than in Bengaluru. The training ground is great and we're shaping up well for the forthcoming matches. We also played a full 90-minute match among ourselves on Thursday," said Chhetri.

With an average age of 23.6 years, Chhetri has named a fairly young squad consisting of a lot of newcomers. But that's not to say there's a dearth of experience.

For a Malavika, there's a Dangei Grace, for a Priyadarshini, there's an Anju Tamang, for a Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi, there's a Nangbam Sweetie Devi.

"We have a very good mix of youth and experience. We had 18-year-old goalkeeper Monalisha (Moirangthem) debut against Uzbekistan. I'm not scared to play with youngsters because this is how they are going to gain experience. And playing such important AFC matches will help us grow," said Chhetri.

"Staying and working together for more than 45 days has done a great deal of good for their chemistry, and now what matters is executing it on the pitch. The focus on the training pitch has shifted more to tactical details." (PTI)

Fleetwood seizes control after Scheffler blowup and leads Travelers by 3

CROMWELL (USA), June 22: Tommy Fleetwood was so locked in on good golf he didn't realize until after his 7-under 63 that he didn't miss a fairway in the Travelers Championship. And he certainly wasn't aware of the stunning blowups behind him by Scottie Scheffler and Justin Thomas.

All three started a steamy, hot Saturday tied for the lead, but not for long. Scheffler celebrated his 29th birthday by starting a round with a triple bogey for the first time in his PGA Tour career. All it took was missing the fairway into thick rough, airmailing the green from a front bunker, two chips and two putts.

He never quite recovered, posted a 72 for only his fifth score over par in 55 rounds this year, and was nine shots behind.

Thomas was still in the mix until a wild hook off the tee at the par-5 13th, letting the driver loose that landed near the marshal spot-

ting the shot. After reloaded from going out-of-bounds, it took three chips left of the green and two putts for a quadruple-9. He shot 73 and was 10 shots out of the lead.

Fleetwood avoided those blunders to build a three-shot lead. At stake is a chance to add a PGA Tour title to a resume that includes seven European titles, three Ryder Cup appearances and a regular fixture among the top 25 for the last two years.

"I'm on top of a lot of stat lines for people that haven't won on the PGA Tour, so to always be a No. 1 at something is always nice," he said with a laugh.

"Yeah, of course I would love to win on the PGA Tour. I think it's like an element of your career that everybody wants, and I of course want it. I haven't, this year especially, I don't feel like I've given myself ... I've given myself a back-end chance a couple of times this year, but I've not been



in contention. So this is like my first real chance, so I'm really excited about that and looking forward to it."

The immediate challengers at steamy TPC River Highlands are New England's favorite son and Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley (63) and Russell Henley,

who had a 61 one day after calling a penalty on himself when there initially was some question it was a penalty.

Henley thought it moved a golf ball duple away.

"When it happened it kind of shocked me a little bit," Henley said of his chip on left of the

eighth green in the second round. "I still hit the shot, and as the ball was rolling on the green I was thinking, 'Something just happened there.' So I knew. I knew that the ball moved. I just felt it was the right thing to do."

Missing are Scheffler and Thomas, both tied for the 36-hole lead with Fleetwood. On a day without wind — just stifling heat — in which the scoring average was 68, Scheffler and Thomas combined to play 5-over par.

Fleetwood only missed three greens and his toughest save a 6-footer after missing the ninth green to the left with a wedge. He holed a 65-foot putt on the fifth hole and converted plenty of other chances, while running his bogey-free streak to 32 holes going into Sunday.

He also made eagle on the 13th hole for the second day, giving him three eagles for the week. They don't hand out crystal for that at the Travelers, only red um-

brellas. But it allowed Fleetwood to get some separation for Henley and Bradley going into Sunday.

Fleetwood, a 34-year-old from England, was at 16-under 194. He has finished among the top 20 in eight of his 14 starts this season. He just feels he hasn't given himself any chances.

Jason Day ran off three straight birdies on the back nine to salvage a 67 and was five shots back. No one else was closer than eight shots of Fleetwood.

Scheffler hasn't finished out of the top 10 since March and remarkably he ended the day with a birdie for a tie eighth. The start was a shocker.

He drove left into the 5-inch rough and hit wedge into a front bunker with a decent lie. But he caught all ball and sent it over the green, leaving him a tough pitch up the slope and over a mound toward the hole. The first pitch came up short and rolled back down into the rough.

He hit a flop to 15 feet and two-putted for triple bogey, his first on the tour since the BMW Championship last August.

Bradley, whose name has not vanished from Ryder Cup consideration as a player, won the Travelers two years ago and cleared a major hurdle trying to perform before New England fans, now chanting, "U-S-A! U-S-A!" at him at every turn.

He likes his position of chasing. He still knows he needs to play well.

"Oh, man, you're going to have to shoot something at least in the mid 60s, probably where I am, probably lower," Bradley said. "But it's doable out here. When you play a course where you've got to make birdies it brings a different challenge. You can't have a stretch of 1-over par for seven holes or you lose a million shots."

"So in some aspects it's difficult just like a hard course would be." (AP)

Won't be easy for Virat and Rohit to play 2027 WC: Ganguly

KOLKATA, June 22: It won't be easy for Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma to remain fit and find a place in India's ODI World Cup squad in 2027, former captain Sourav Ganguly says.

"All of us must understand, just like everyone, the game will go away from them and they will go away from the game," Ganguly told PTI in a lengthy interview at his residence.

The next ODI World Cup is scheduled in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia and by the time the prestigious ICC event is played Kohli will be 38 years old and Rohit will touch 40.

Till then India have 27 ODIs to play spread across nine bilateral series. That means Kohli and Rohit will hardly get 15 international games a year.

"It won't be easy, with 15 games a year," Ganguly said.

With 25,000 runs and 83 international hundreds between them, both Kohli and Rohit have expressed their desire to play the 50-over global event after recently retiring from Test cricket.

Ganguly, an exceptional ODI batter during his career, was asked if he had any word of advice for them.

"I have got no advice. I think they know the game as much I do. They will take a call," Ganguly acknowledged that finding a player of the caliber of Kohli to replace him won't be easy, though he is not worried about Indian cricket after the retirement of the two stalwarts. (PTI)

Pant plays the numbers game beautifully, has his own computer: Shastri

LEEDS, June 22: Rishabh Pant "plays the numbers game beautifully and has his own computer" whose working only he knows, feels former India head coach Ravi Shastri after the swash-buckling wicketkeeper-batter's audacious and entertaining show against England in the opening Test here.

Pant hit an audacious 134 off just 178 balls with the help of 12 fours and six sixes to entertain the Headingley crowd with his unorthodox batting on Day 2. The 'falling paddle', the post-century somersault, there was majesty and madness in equal measure in Pant's memorable knock.

"Outrageous. He (Pant) plays the numbers game beautifully, plays the way he wants. He will block for a bit and then shift gears," Shastri said on Sky Sports.

"He has his own computer and only he knows how it works. That's his USP. That's what puts bowlers under pressure and makes him box office, a real entertainer and a match winner," said the former India all-rounder about Pant's 'method to madness'.

"That's why there was that celebration. Thanking the man upstairs for giving him the opportunity," said Shastri.

"I think his recovery from that accident had a lot to do with the frame of his body and being mid-20s. When I saw him in hospital, it wasn't a pretty sight. Knee in a mess, scars all over the place, bruises all over the place." (PTI)

Ganguly was Team Director of DC between 2018-19 and 2022-24

Definitely no politics, but open to coaching India: Ganguly

KOLKATA, June 22: Former skipper Sourav Ganguly has categorically ruled out entering politics, but says he is not averse to coaching the Indian team.

Ganguly, who will turn 53 this July, was the Team Director of Delhi Capitals between 2018-19 and 2022-24.

"I never really thought about it because I got into different roles," Ganguly told PTI in a free-wheeling podcast interview when asked if he would like to coach the Indian team.

"I finished (competitive cricket) in 2013 and then became Board (BCCI) President," said Ganguly, noting that his biggest contribution to Indian cricket in that role was to promote women's cricket. When suggested that he could have contributed more by becoming India coach, Ganguly said: "We'll see what the future holds. I'm just 50 (53), so let's see what happens. I'm open to it. We'll see where it goes," the veteran cricketer.

One thing he is not getting into is politics.

Asked if he would like to join a political party ahead of West Bengal assembly elections in 2026, Ganguly said with a smile: "I am not interested."

What if he is promised the state chief minister's post? "I am not interested," he repeated.

Ganguly was all praise for incumbent coach Gautam Gambhir, who he feels, has picked up pace as coach since Champions Trophy victory in Dubai earlier



this year.

"Gautam (Gambhir) is doing a good job. He started off a little slow, losing to Australia and New Zealand, but he picked up with the Champions Trophy. This is going to be a big series (vs England)," Ganguly said.

Asked how astute a tactician Gambhir is, Ganguly praised the southpaw's passion and his ability to express his opinions in a straight forward manner.

"I haven't seen him from very close in this role, but I know he is very passionate. I haven't ob-

served his strategies closely because I haven't worked with him as a coach.

"He's very straightforward, he sees things clearly, and he's very open about what he feels, about the team, players, people, everything. From the outside, you can tell he's a very transparent person - what you see is what you get."

Ganguly recollected his playing days when he found Gambhir to be very respectful towards senior. "I've played with him. He was a great guy with a lot of

respect for me and the senior players. Even now, I can see he is extremely passionate about his job."

Ganguly also feels that with just a year into the job, Gambhir should be allowed time to grow as a coach and learn with passage of time. "I wish him all the best. He's just a year into the job, and this will be an important (England) tour. He struggled a bit in Australia, but just like everyone else, he'll learn, he'll grow, and he'll become better." (PTI)

Dortmund beat Mamelodi Sundowns 4-3 in blistering hot Club World Cup match

CINCINNATI, June 22: Borussia Dortmund was gifted an easy goal at the beginning of the match and held off a late response from the Mamelodi Sundowns on a fiercely warm day to win 4-3 in the Club World Cup group stage on Saturday.

Both teams and the crowd of 14,006 at TQL Stadium sweat from high temperatures that forced a heat advisory and cooling breaks called at the referee's discretion. Temperatures approached 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 Celsius).

The Sundowns opened the scoring early on an impressive breakaway that Lucas Ribeiro Costa finished in the 11th minute. Dortmund evened the score in the 16th minute when Sundowns goalie Ronwen Williams inadvertently passed to Dortmund's Felix Nmecha right in front of the net. Nmecha easily footed it in. Dortmund stole all momentum on the play and increased its lead to 3-1 at half-time. Serhou Guirassy scored in the 34th minute and Jobe Bellingham in the 45th.

Khuliso Mudau's own goal on an attempt to deflect Daniel Svensson's cross in front of the net made it 4-1 in the 59th before Mamelodi centered itself and began putting pressure on the German club. The Sundowns scored two straight goals — Iqraam Rayners' double-header that first hit the post before his sec-

ond effort scored in the 62nd and Lebo Mothiba's shot in the 90th minute. It wasn't enough for the South African club to overcome its mistakes. Of note: American midfielder Gio Reyna, forced to be with Dortmund rather than with the U.S. national team at the CONCACAF Gold Cup, dressed but didn't play for the second straight match.

Nmecha's equalizer was made too easy for the Bundesliga club.

Dortmund rises to the top of Group H, passing the previously leading Sundowns, who approach a critical match against Fluminense on Wednesday. Dortmund will meet Ulsan on Wednesday. "I think we did very well first of all, but we just lacked a bit of concentration in a few little bits. ... But we did very well. I mean, we should be proud of ourselves. We gave them a hard time."

— Tashreeq Matthews, Sundowns forward. "I think the conditions made it so difficult, especially for us, being a European team. They played a fantastic game, and I'm sure they're used to that kind of weather, but we definitely aren't. It's something we are going to have to adapt to as the tournament goes on, and that's just the demands of this competition. So yeah, it was really difficult, but in the game, you have to find little fixes and mechanisms to deal with it, to try and play fast." (AP)

After 2022 heartbreak, Indian women eye fresh start in Asian Cup Qualifiers

CHIANG MAI (THAILAND), June 22: More than three years after a COVID outbreak in the team derailed their campaign in the last AFC Women's Asian Cup, India will make a fresh bid for a place in the continental showpiece, with Mongolia being their first test in the Qualifiers here on Monday.

The upcoming edition of the premier tournament will be held in Australia next year.

It wouldn't be wrong to say that the continent's top competition has been somewhat ill-fated for the Blue Tigresses in the last few decades.

India last made it to the AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2003. And when they hosted the tournament in 2022, a COVID outbreak in the side meant that India had to withdraw after only the first game and the results were declared void.

While India do have three podium finishes in the erstwhile Asian Women's Championship (runners-up in 1980 and 1983, and third place in 1981), they have not achieved anything for more than 40 years.

Besides the opener against Mongolia, India (ranked 70th) will face Timor Leste (ranked 158th) on June 29, Iraq (ranked 173rd) on July 2 and hosts Thailand (ranked 46th) on July 5, at the Chiang Mai Stadium.

Only the group winners will



qualify for the final tournament in Australia in March 2026, which will also serve as a qualifier for the FIFA Women's World Cup in 2027.

Apart from Thailand, India have never faced the other three Group B opponents before.

"We don't have much information about Mongolia, Timor Leste and Iraq. They haven't played any matches recently. We do know a bit about Thailand. They played two games against Nepal in the last window, and one of them was closed doors," said head coach Crispin Chhetri.

"I tried different variations in our friendlies (against Uzbek-

India women lose 0-2 to Belgium, suffer sixth straight defeat in European leg

ANTWERP (BELGIUM), June 22: The Indian women's hockey team went down 0-2 to Belgium to suffer its sixth successive defeat in the European leg of the FIH Pro League and inch closer to relegation here on Sunday.

After two goalless quarters, Belgium scored twice in quick succession in the third quarter to win the reverse fixture a day after a 5-1 mauling of the beleaguered Indian side.

Ambre Ballenghien broke the deadlock in the 40th minute of the game and Lien Hillewaert struck the team's second goal in the 43rd minute.

The result has seen India drop to the ninth and last spot on the table with 10 points from their 14 matches.

On the other hand, this win ensured Belgium remained in the third place behind Netherlands and Argentina who are in the first and second position respectively.

After Saturday's debacle, India began aggressively with a clear intent to overcome the disappointment of the previous loss. They tried to find space backed by good pace as India built on a good momentum.

India even won a penalty corner early in the quarter but could not convert.

Meanwhile, with six minutes left for the first hooter, a defensive error gave Belgium their first PC of the match. A slow attempt by the hosts eventually led to the umpire awarding a penalty stroke.

But a good video referral by India showed that it was Jyoti's stick, and the video umpire ruled it as a long corner.

The second quarter witnessed

some brave surge by Indian attackers, moving forward with pace and vigour. Skipper Salima Tete led the charge as she took a couple of shots on goal herself but Belgian defence was resurgent.

At half-time, India had two PCs while Belgium had one, and 10 circle entries as opposed to India's eight. It was an evenly played out match until the half-time break.

In the third quarter, India seemed to lose the plot. Though they began optimistically with a PC being awarded to them, India couldn't execute.

But Belgium made no such mistake when they won a PC in the following minutes.

Ballenghien took the shot from the left which was deflected by India goalie Savita. But the ball rebounded and was perfectly lofted into the post. India responded quickly with a PC but failed to equalise.

Belgium came back to pump another one into India's post through a PC. They played a similar variation, sending the ball to the left and Hillewaert was perfectly positioned to get the right deflection with no Indian defender posing a threat.

Conceding two quick goals put India under the pump in the final quarter.

Staring at relegation with just two wins in the entire season, India had their task cut out. But there was no respite in the fourth quarter either.

Deepika and Jyoti traded chances in this quarter, trying to find India a goal. They remained goalless despite Neha, Salima, Navneet and Rutuja being in the right places, pushing for that much-needed strike. (PTI)

climatise to the weather conditions and adjust to time difference. The weather here is more humid than in Bengaluru. The training ground is great and we're shaping up well for the forthcoming matches. We also played a full 90-minute match among ourselves on Thursday," said Chhetri.

With an average age of 23.6 years, Chhetri has named a fairly young squad consisting of a lot of newcomers. But that's not to say there's a dearth of experience.

For a Malavika, there's a Dangei Grace, for a Priyadarshini, there's an Anju Tamang, for a Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi, there's a Ngangbam Sweetie Devi.

"We have a very good mix of youth and experience. We had 18-year-old goalkeeper Monalisha (Nongmaithem) debut against Uzbekistan. I'm not scared to play with youngsters because this is how they are going to gain experience. And playing such important AFC matches will help us grow," said Chhetri.

"Staying and working together for more than 45 days has done a great deal of good for their chemistry, and now what matters is executing it on the pitch. The focus on the training pitch has shifted more to tactical details." (PTI)

Fleetwood seizes control after Scheffler blowup and leads Travelers by 3

CROMWELL (USA), June 22: Tommy Fleetwood was so locked in on good golf he didn't realize until after his 7-under 63 that he didn't miss a fairway in the Travelers Championship. And he certainly wasn't aware of the stunning blowups behind him by Scottie Scheffler and Justin Thomas.

All three started a steamy, hot Saturday tied for the lead, but not for long. Scheffler celebrated his 29th birthday by starting a round with a triple bogey for the first time in his PGA Tour career. All it took was missing the fairway into thick rough, airmailing the green from a front bunker, two chips and two putts.

He never quite recovered, posted a 72 for only his fifth score over par in 55 rounds this year, and was nine shots behind.

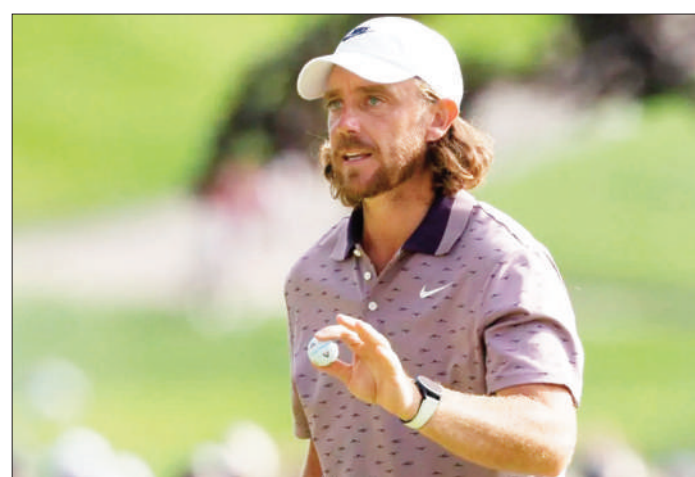
Thomas was still in the mix until a wild hook off the tee at the par-5 13th, letting the driver loose that landed near the marshal spot-

ting the shot. After reloaded from going out-of-bounds, it took three chips left of the green and two putts for a quadruple-9. He shot 73 and was 10 shots out of the lead.

Fleetwood avoided those blunders to build a three-shot lead. At stake is a chance to add a PGA Tour title to a resume that includes seven European titles, three Ryder Cup appearances and a regular fixture among the top 25 for the last two years.

"I'm on top of a lot of stat lines for people that haven't won on the PGA Tour, so to always be a No. 1 at something is always nice," he said with a laugh.

"Yeah, of course I would love to win on the PGA Tour. I think it's like an element of your career that everybody wants, and I of course want it. I haven't, this year especially, I don't feel like I've given myself ... I've given myself a back-end chance a couple of times this year, but I've not been



in contention. So this is like my first real chance, so I'm really excited about that and looking forward to it."

The immediate challengers at steamy TPC River Highlands are New England's favorite son and Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley (63) and Russell Henley,

who had a 61 one day after calling a penalty on himself when there initially was some question it was a penalty.

Henley thought it moved a golf ball duple away.

"When it happened it kind of shocked me a little bit," Henley said of his chip on left of the

eighth green in the second round. "I still hit the shot, and as the ball was rolling on the green I was thinking, 'Something just happened here.' So I knew. I knew that the ball moved. I just felt it was the right thing to do."

Missing are Scheffler and Thomas, both tied for the 36-hole lead with Fleetwood. On a day without wind — just stifling heat — in which the scoring average was 68, Scheffler and Thomas combined to play 5-over par.

Fleetwood only missed three greens and his toughest save a 6-footer after missing the ninth green to the left with a wedge. He holed a 65-foot putt on the fifth hole and converted plenty of other chances, while running his bogey-free streak to 32 holes going into Sunday.

He also made eagle on the 13th hole for the second day, giving him three eagles for the week. They don't hand out crystal for that at the Travelers, only red um-

brellas. But it allowed Fleetwood to get some separation for Henley and Bradley going into Sunday.

Fleetwood, a 34-year-old from England, was at 16-under 194. He has finished among the top 20 in eight of his 14 starts this season. He just feels he hasn't given himself any chances.

Jason Day ran off three straight birdies on the back nine to salvage a 67 and was five shots back. No one else was closer than eight shots of Fleetwood.

Scheffler hasn't finished out of the top 10 since March and remarkably he ended the day with a birdie for a tie eighth. The start was a shocker.

He drove left into the 5-inch rough and hit wedge into a front bunker with a decent lie. But he caught all ball and sent it over the green, leaving him a tough pitch up the slope and over a mound toward the hole. The first pitch came up short and rolled back down into the rough.

He hit a flop to 15 feet and two-putted for triple bogey, his first on the tour since the BMW Championship last August.

Bradley, whose name has not vanished from Ryder Cup consideration as a player, won the Travelers two years ago and cleared a major hurdle trying to perform before New England fans, now chanting, "U-S-A! U-S-A!" at him at every turn.

He likes his position of chasing. He still knows he needs to play well.

"Oh, man, you're going to have to shoot something at least in the mid 60s, probably where I am, probably lower," Bradley said. "But it's doable out here. When you play a course where you've got to make birdies it brings a different challenge. You can't have a stretch of 1-over par for seven holes or you lose a million shots."

"So in some aspects it's difficult just like a hard course would be." (AP)