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DHARTI AABA JANJATIYA GRAM UTKARSH ABHIYAN (DAJGUA)

100-Bed Residential Hostels
in high/higher secondary schools

A flagship initiative under PM's leadership



Shri Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

Objectives

- Enhance educational access in remote tribal areas
- Ensure inclusive and continuous education
- Improve academic performance
- Create local employment
- Ensure community development
- Promote social & gender equity

Implementation in Assam

- 2024-25
87 Hostels | 230 Villages | ₹339 Crore
- 2025-26
122 Hostels | 312 Villages | ₹476 Crore

Total: 209 Hostels | 542 Villages | ₹815 Crore
(Unit Cost: ₹3.90 Crore) | Covers 23 Districts

Foundation Stone Laying Ceremony - July 29, 2025

By
Shri Dharmendra Pradhan
Union Minister for Education

DAJGUA - HOSTELS IN DISTRICT

BAKSA - 2 | BISWANATH - 13 | CHARAIDEO - 1 | CHIRANG - 10 | DARRANG - 2 | DHEMAJI - 31
DIBRUGARH - 3 | DIMA HASAO - 17 | GOALPARA - 4 | GOLAGHAT - 4 | HOJAI - 1
JORHAT - 1 | KAMRUP - 7 | KARBI ANGLONG - 41 | KOKRAJHAR - 21
LAKHIMPUR - 8 | MORIGAON - 1 | NAGAON - 1 | SONITPUR - 4 | TAMULPUR - 2
TINSUKIA - 6 | UDALGURI - 4 | WEST KARBI ANGLONG - 25

Marking the anniversary of the National Education Policy 2020

Indian economy has look and feel of 'steady as she goes' for FY26: FinMin

NEW DELHI, July 28: Indian economy has the look and feel of "steady as she goes" for the current fiscal, the finance ministry said on Monday even as it flagged slowing credit growth.

In its monthly economic review, the ministry said the first quarter of fiscal 2025-26 (FY26) presents a picture of resilient domestic supply and demand fundamentals.

With inflation remaining within the target range and monsoon progress on track, the domestic economy enters the second quarter of FY26 on a relatively firm footing.

While geopolitical tensions have not elevated further, the global slowdown, particularly in the US (which shrank by 0.5 per cent in Q1 2025), could dampen further demand for Indian exports.

"Continued uncertainty on the US tariff front may weigh on India's trade performance in the coming quarters. Slow credit growth and private investment appetite may restrict acceleration in economic momentum," it said.

Further, given the deflationary trend in the wholesale price index, one has to observe economic momentum in nominal quantities. Measured in constant prices, economic activity may appear healthier than it is, the review report said.



"All that said, the economy has the look and feel of 'steady as she goes' as far as FY26 is concerned," it said.

The report noted despite monetary easing and a strong bank balance sheet, credit growth has slowed, reflecting cautious borrower sentiment and possibly risk-averse lender behaviour.

"A growing preference for bond markets, particularly commercial papers among corporates due to lower borrowing costs, may also explain the shift," it said.

tensions, geopolitical volatility, and external uncertainties, India's macroeconomic fundamentals have remained resilient.

Aided by robust domestic demand, fiscal prudence and monetary support, India appears poised to continue as one of the fastest-growing major economies, with various forecasters, including S&P, ICRA, and the RBI's Survey of Professional Forecasters, projecting GDP growth rates for FY26 in the range of 6.2 per cent and 6.5 per cent, it said.

The report said high-frequency indicators reflected broad-based strength, registering strong year-on-year growth.

While the manufacturing and construction sectors continued to expand, the services sector anchored the overall economic growth in Q1 of FY26.

As of now, favourable progress in the southwest monsoon has bolstered agricultural activity, leading to higher kharif sowing compared to the previous year.

Adequate fertiliser availability and comfortable reservoir levels augur well for a healthy harvest outlook, providing fresh impetus to rural incomes and consumption, the ministry said. (PTI)

Piggybacking on initiatives like the Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme, the ministry said it is time for corporates to set the ball in motion.

The Reserve Bank has cumulatively reduced the short-term lending rate (repo) by 100 basis points since February.

With an outlay of Rs 99,446 crore, the ELI scheme aims to incentivise the creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs in the country over a period of 2 years, with special focus on the manufacturing sector.

The report said that despite global headwinds marked by trade

nomonic activity may appear healthier than it is, the review report said.

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The report noted despite monetary easing and a strong bank balance sheet, credit growth has slowed, reflecting cautious borrower sentiment and possibly risk-averse lender behaviour.

"A growing preference for bond markets, particularly commercial papers among corporates due to lower borrowing costs, may also explain the shift," it said.

TCS layoffs: Meity keeping close watch on situation; IT union writes to labour minister

NEW DELHI, July 28: The IT Ministry is keeping a close watch on situation arising out of Tata Consultancy Services' (TCS) decision to lay off over 12,000 employees, and is in touch with the Tata Group company, sources said on Monday.

The move comes as India's largest IT services company is preparing to lay off two per cent of its global workforce this year, in what it describes as a broader strategy to become a "future-ready organisation", with focus on investments in technology, AI deployment, market expansion, and workforce realignment.

The bulk of the impact will be felt on middle and senior grades at TCS. The IT Ministry is keeping a close watch on the entire situation, and is in touch with the tech company, sources said.

The ministry is concerned and will go into the underlying causes that has prompted the move.

The blue-chip stock dipped 1.76 per cent closing at Rs 3,079.05 apiece on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) on Monday, as news of layoffs sent fresh tremors in the tech circles.

Meanwhile, the Nascent Information Technology Employees Senate (NITES) has approached Union Minister for Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya, and urged that the government issue a notice to TCS seeking an explanation.

"The IT employees' union has termed TCS' latest move as unethical, inhumane, outright illegal.

"The law clearly states that no employee who has served for over a year can be retrenched unless the company provides one month's notice or wages in lieu, pays statutory retrenchment compensation, and notifies the government. TCS has not complied with any of these legal requirements," NITES alleged, terming the move a blatant and wilful viola-

tion of the law. The impact of such action is devastating, NITES said in its letter, adding that thousands of working professionals with families, EMIs, and financial commitments would suddenly lose their livelihood. The psychological, emotional, and financial trauma of this move is unimaginable, Harpreet Singh Saluja, President of NITES, wrote in the letter. NITES alleged that TCS' move, in no way, can be called restructuring.

"This is a mass sacking dressed in corporate jargon... If a company of TCS's scale is allowed to carry out mass layoffs without following due process and without consequences, it will set a dangerous precedent for other companies," Saluja wrote in the letter to the labour minister.

TCS's proposed move "will normalise job insecurity, erode employee rights, and severely damage trust in India's employment ecosystem," NITES emphasised. It has appealed to the government to take immediate cognizance of this development and issue a notice to TCS seeking an explanation.

NITES has urged the government to direct the company to immediately halt all terminations and reinstate affected employees, and initiate an inquiry into the systemic pattern of forced exits, delayed onboarding, and unlawful retrenchments by TCS.

It has also batted for framing of stricter safeguards for the IT sector, arguing that the industry currently suffers from lack of enforceable employment protections.

"If this injustice is not addressed immediately, NITES, along with allied IT employee unions across India, will be forced to organise nationwide protests, legal campaigns, and public demonstrations to ensure that the voices of thousands of affected employees are heard," NITES said. (PTI)

Lions Club of Guwahati lays foundation stone for Jal Kendra at Paltan Bazar

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: In a move aimed at promoting access to clean drinking water and public hygiene, the Lions Club of Guwahati City laid the foundation stone for a Jal Kendra at the Guwahati Sahitya Sabha Complex in Paltan Bazar on Monday. The initiative is part of the Lions Club's "One Club, One Permanent Project" campaign focused on sustainable community service.

According to an official release, the Jal Kendra is being developed as a permanent facility to provide safe drinking water to the local population, reinforcing the Club's ongoing commitment to civic welfare and health-oriented public initiatives. The foundation stone-laying ceremony was attended by Guwahati Mayor Mrigen Sarania and Ward No 13 Councillor Ratna Singh. The event marked a collaborative step forward in addressing community needs with long-term impact. The project is spearheaded by Club President Lion Sunil Kathotia and Project Chairperson Lion Binod Kumar Lohia.

Both were commended for their leadership and vision. The core leadership team also includes Treasurer Lion RK Poddar, Immediate Past President Lion Sanjay Agarwal, Past Presidents Lion Sanjay Sanganeria and Lion Ajay Agarwal, and Secretary Lion Subham Agarwal—members who have played an instrumental role in shaping the Club's service activities across Guwahati.

Kotak Mutual Fund launches earnings-focused equity scheme

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company Ltd (KMAMC), the sponsor of Kotak Mutual Fund, has announced the launch of the Kotak Active Momentum Fund, an open-ended equity scheme aimed at leveraging stocks that display strong earnings momentum.

According to an official statement issued by the fund house, the scheme will remain open for public subscription between July 29 and August 12, 2025.

The fund follows the momentum investing strategy, which typically involves buying stocks demonstrating upward price movements, but the Kotak Active Momentum Fund goes a step further by focusing on "Earnings Momentum."

This approach identifies stocks that show consistent earnings growth, upward revisions in earnings estimates, and favourable analyst ratings, backed by solid business fundamentals.

Explaining the rationale behind the launch, Nilesh Shah, Managing Director of KMAMC, stated, "Markets are a slave to earnings. Historically, earnings have

outperformed price across both bull and bear phases. This enduring pattern is the foundation of our fund. At Kotak Mutual Fund, we've developed a model that goes beyond mere price trends."

The fund's selection universe comprises the top 250 listed companies by market capitalisation.

A proprietary model, developed in-house by KMAMC, evaluates momentum through a blend of earnings growth, sales performance, and analyst sentiment. After applying rigorous filters, the fund constructs a diversified portfolio of 40 to 50 stocks.

This portfolio is regularly reviewed and dynamically rebalanced to capture new opportunities while managing risk.

Fund Manager Rohit Tandon emphasized the data-driven nature of the investment strategy, saying, "We've integrated investment strategy with data science to create a fund that captures momentum driven by earnings. The Kotak Active Momentum Fund is built on a simple conviction: when earnings rise and upgrades follow, prices eventually align. Our model captures this with discipline and data."

Contd. from Page 3...

New India can go

is baseless and completely incorrect, he said. It was Pakistan's director general of military operations who requested his Indian counterpart to end the strikes, the minister asserted.

Singh's statement comes in the backdrop of Trump's claims of mediation to end the conflict between India and Pakistan. "The objective of Operation Sindoor was to destroy the terror nurseries nurtured by Pakistan over the years. The objective was to provide justice to the families who lost their loved ones in the Pahalgam terror attack," Singh told the House. "The overall politico-military objective of Operation Sindoor was to punish Pakistan for carrying out a proxy war through terrorism. This was the reason armed forces were given complete freedom to select targets and give a befitting response," he said.

Singh added that the idea behind Operation Sindoor was not to start a war but force the adversary to bend through demonstrative use of force. Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi sought to know from the defence minister why Operation Sindoor was halted. "Aapne roki kyun (why did you halt)," asked Gandhi, a question that had ruling party members on their feet. The minister said he had already spoken about it and the Leader of Opposition should listen to his speech. "Operation Sindoor symbol of our strength... demonstrated that India will not remain silent if anyone harms its citizens," Singh said. (PTI)

Sarma seeks Delhi's

courses in frontier disciplines such as Artificial Intelligence, Quantum Computing, and Robotics. Taking to social media, Sarma remarked, "This institution... will be one of the first universities built on an entirely industry-oriented academic approach."

The Finance Minister's Office also acknowledged the meeting via an official post on X. Present during the interaction were Union Minister of State for External Affairs and Textiles Pabitra Margherita, Lok Sabha MP Kamakhya Tasa, and Rajya Sabha MPs Rameswar Teli and Kanad Purkayastha. In another key engagement, the chief minister called on Union Minister for Coal and Mines G Kishan Reddy at Shastri Bhawan. The two leaders held a 25-minute long discussion focused on revitalising Coal India's operations in Margherita, with the goal of making them "more vibrant, robust and productive."

Sarma expressed gratitude for the minister's support, posting, "Had an excellent meeting... Grateful to the Hon'ble Minister for his time."

Rounding off the day's meetings, chief minister Sarma also met Union Jal Shakti Minister CR Paatil at Shram Shakti Bhawan to deliberate on ways to strengthen the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission in Assam. He was accompanied by Dr KK Dwivedi, Principal Secretary to the chief minister, and Kavitha Padmanabhan, Resident Commissioner of Assam Bhawan, New Delhi.

Assam govt prepares for

order situation during the eviction drive. "There are enough security personnel deployed, and we are fully prepared. Apart from our own personnel, we have taken support from CRPF for the eviction exercise," the official said, without sharing further details. Meanwhile, the Nagaland government issued an advisory to the bordering districts to keep a strict vigil so that displaced people cannot cross into the state following the eviction drive.

On July 25, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited Uriamghat to inspect the areas that have been encroached upon. He said nearly 70 per cent of the encroachers had vacated the land voluntarily, and those who had settled on the land came from various districts in Assam, such as Cachar, Sribhumi, Dhubri, Barpeta, Hojai, Nagaon and Morigaon, as well as from other states, including West Bengal and Bihar.

The CM had said on July 21 that 1.29 lakh bigha (over 42,500 acre) have been cleared of encroachment in the last four years, and around 29 lakh bighas (more than 9.5 lakh acres) of land are still under encroachment in the state. (PTI)

India, Japan review ties

They also exchanged views on global and regional issues of importance, the MEA said in a statement. "The dialogue was instrumental in reviewing progress in various dimensions of our ties, exploring new areas of collaboration and contributing to further deepening the bonds of friendship and cooperation between India and Japan," it added. (PTI)

Rijiju slams Opposition

debate on Operation Sindoor is taking place. RSP MP N K Premachandran, an opposition member, said all they wanted was an assurance from the government that it will consider their demand for discussion on the SIR. (PTI)

3 terrorists killed

terrorists have been neutralised in an intense firefight. Operation Continues," the Chinar Corps of the Army said. (PTI)

Drugs seized, two arrested

illegal in India because it contains methamphetamine, a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act, and caffeine. (PTI)

Assam teachers turn mentors

And the candid jottings were revealing," Azad told PTI. It was not just the usual desire to score more marks, but these young minds were facing anxieties about their future, pressure from peers and parents, difficulties with certain subjects and troubles at home, he said.

When Azad announced the 'Each One Reach One' initiative for the session 2024-25, teachers came out voluntarily to 'adopt' such students for the entire session. "There was no instruction on whom to 'adopt'. The teachers identified their wards themselves. And not just the teachers, principals, vice-principals, headmasters and even the two assistant commissioners of the RO 'adopted' students," the DC said.

As many as 2,260 students in 42 KVVs were adopted by 1,450 teachers in the first session, with the mentorship continuing for the same student in some cases for the second year now.

Out of these, 183 Class-10 students were mentored, achieving a 99.5 per cent pass rate, and 285 Class-12 students were supported, recording a 98.6 per cent success rate, he said.

The mentors also identified key learning and developmental gaps, like 29.4 per cent struggled with literacy skills, 21.7 per cent had issues in STEM subjects, 12.6 per cent faced attention and focus difficulties, while 9.1 per cent showed emotional and behavioural concerns.

Sharing stories of some of the successful mentorships, he cited the instance of Keya, a 'Balvatika-3' student of PM Shri KV, AFS Jorhat. A hypersensitive child, Keya had difficulty even sitting still when she joined school.

"Managing her boundless energy was a challenge, which was successfully done by her mentor as Keya began participating in activities and even started writing beautifully, with the 'written work' initially the biggest challenge for her," Azad said. (PTI)

India raised compensatory

respectively. The report also reviewed the use of CAMPA funds during this period. National CAMPA approved ₹ 38,516 crore for state annual plans between 2019-20 and 2023-24.

States released ₹ 29,311 crore to their forest departments, of which ₹ 26,001 crore was utilised. This means only 67.5 per cent of the approved outlay was spent. The utilisation varied widely, with Manipur, Andhra Pradesh and Arunachal Pradesh utilising 100 per cent, 100 per cent and 97.8 per cent of the funds released to them, respectively. Mizoram reported utilisation above 91 per cent, Sikkim 97.7 per cent, Karnataka 96.6 per cent and Odisha 87.9 per cent. Chhattisgarh recorded 95 per cent utilisation of the funds released, and Gujarat spent more than it released, utilising 116 per cent due to carryover balances. Several states lagged behind.

Tamil Nadu used only 67.9 per cent of the funds released, while Jammu and Kashmir spent 62.5 per cent. Haryana also underperformed, using 57.4 per cent. West Bengal spent 81.1 per cent and Delhi just 26.9 per cent, the lowest among all states. Telangana reported 60.4 per cent utilisation, and Andaman and Nicobar Islands spent 53.1 per cent of the released funds. The CEC said "delays in submission of annual plans by states, late release of funds, and the lack of dedicated CAMPA offices affect seasonal forestry operations".

Monitoring of survival rates remains weak, and multiple layers in the fund release process contribute to under-utilisation, it said. Despite these shortcomings, it said progress under the statutory framework has been "significant" given initial difficulties, including disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With thousands of hectares of natural forests lost each year to development projects, the report warns that gaps in plantation survival and underutilisation of funds undermine the very purpose of the CAMPA mechanism. The compensatory afforestation regime originated from a series of orders in the landmark TN Godavarmam Thirumulpad vs Union of India case of 1995. (PTI)

VLCC launches guaranteed placement initiative to strengthen Skill India Mission

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: VLCC India, a leading wellness and beauty brand, has announced its formal integration into the Government of India's skilling and vocational mission with the launch of a 100% guaranteed job placement initiative for eligible students.

As part of the move, the company will also offer scholarships of up to 100% for meritorious and underserved candidates enrolling in its vocational training programmes. The announcement coincided with the inauguration of 14 new VLCC School of Beauty institutes in key Indian cities, taking the brand's total to over 106 training centres nationwide.

The expansion is designed to strengthen the reach of the Skill India Mission, with a particular focus on Tier 2 and Tier 3 towns where access to employment remains limited. "This is more than a skilling initiative, it's a movement," VLCC MD and CEO Vikas Gupta said. "We are not just teaching job-ready skills; we are enabling confidence and financial independence for thousands of young Indians. With our heritage in beauty and wellness and strong industry linkages, we are proud to guarantee placement, not just promise it." The initiative will be delivered through the VLCC School of Beauty, which has trained over one lakh students since its inception in 2001. With over 100 certified courses and workshops ranging from beginner to advanced levels, the institute caters to a wide range of learners, including working professionals, school leavers, and aspiring entrepreneurs.

Dyson launches 'The Difference is Dyson' campaign with Deepika Padukone

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: Global technology company Dyson has launched its latest campaign, 'The Difference is Dyson', featuring Dyson Beauty Brand Ambassador Deepika Padukone.

The campaign encourages individuals to explore styling options for all hair types without heat damage, reinforcing Dyson's commitment to hair health and innovation-driven beauty solutions. Announcing the campaign, Dyson India Managing Director Ankit Jain stated that the initiative celebrates individuality while highlighting Dyson's advanced styling technology.

"It reinforces Dyson's commitment to innovation and bringing the hair styling range closer to con-

sumers that provide superior styles for all hair types, with no heat damage," Jain said.

He also noted that Deepika Padukone's association underscores the brand's technology-first approach to redefining hair styling.

Deepika Padukone echoed this sentiment, saying: "I have always believed that beauty lies in embracing your individuality. Working with Dyson, I have seen firsthand how their products deliver real results, no matter what your hair type. 'The Difference is Dyson' to me means celebrating different styles and maintaining natural shine, while knowing your hair is cared for, every step of the way." The campaign showcases Dyson's focus on high-performance styling without compromising hair health.

India must scale up manufacturing sector, establish its own robust supply chain: Official

KOLKATA, July 28: A top Ministry of External Affairs official on Monday emphasised the importance of partnerships to accelerate India's economic growth.

India must scale up its manufacturing sector and establish its own robust supply chain, which will subsequently boost exports, the official added.

"India needs to have partners to achieve high rates of growth. The country also needs to create its own supply chain. Global dynamics have now shifted from the Transatlantic to the Indo-Pacific. India needs to grow at a higher rate to meet the target of becoming a developed country by 2047," Dammu Ravi, Secretary (Economic Relations), Ministry of External Affairs, said.

Speaking at a session organised by the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) here, Ravi said the GDP of the



country is growing.

"We are USD 4 trillion economy now. The country needs to grow at more than the current average growth rate of 6.5 per cent per annum to become a developed economy to meet that target," he added.

He said the country has moved from a command economy to a liberalised economy. "The openness had brought a boom in the economy. The private sector has leapt forward. The country also needs to do a lot", he added.

Touching upon technological

transformation, Ravi said the world has moved from the industrial revolution to an era driven by artificial intelligence (AI).

"We have entered an AI-driven era. Today, we talk about responsible AI. Rules are needed so that human values are not undermined," he added.

"India needs to create an AI ecosystem, which requires state intervention to ensure uninterrupted power supply," he said.

On the issue of logistics, Ravi stressed the need to bring down costs.

"India's logistics cost is 12 per cent of GDP. This must be reduced to boost efficiency. Our industry needs to conquer overseas markets," he said.

Regarding Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), Ravi said they should be seen beyond exports and imports and valued at economic cooperation. (PTI)

New India can go to any extent to uproot terror: Rajnath Singh

Rajnath says Operation Sindoor paused after achieving objectives; warns of resumption if provoked again Oppn's push for answers on Trump's ceasefire claims

NEW DELHI, July 28: Decisive action has replaced dossiers and the new India can go to any extent to uproot terrorism, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Monday while stating that Operation Sindoor was on pause as the armed forces had achieved the desired objectives.

Initiating the special discussion on "India's strong, successful and decisive Operation Sindoor in response to the terror attack in Pahalgam" in the Lok Sabha, Singh said the military action against Pakistan had sent a clear message to supporters of terrorism that India was committed to defend its motherland.

Just as the debate started in the Lok Sabha, security forces in Jammu and Kashmir reported that

three terrorists have been gunned down after a massive firefight.

"Today, dossiers have been replaced by decisive action. Today's India thinks differently and acts differently. We believe that if the adversary uses terrorism as part of strategy and does not understand the language of peace, then standing firm and being decisive is the only option," Singh said.

Rejecting US President Donald Trump's claims of mediating a ceasefire between India and Pakistan, the minister added, "Operation Sindoor was paused as the armed forces had achieved the desired politico-military objectives and there was no pressure to end the conflict with Pakistan."

If Pakistan indulges in fresh



misadventure, it will resume again, he added.

Singh asserted that India now believes in taking decisive action as peace overtures have not yielded desirable results.

The defence minister also

made light of the opposition attacks against the government on the loss of military assets in the four-day war and urged political rivals to ask the number of Pakistani aircraft downed by India.

"It is the opposition's job to ask

questions of the government. Our opposition members kept asking how many of our aircraft were shot down, but they never asked how many Pakistani planes our forces had shot down," Singh said.

"If you want to ask questions, then ask if any of our soldiers were harmed in this operation. The answer is no, none of our soldiers were harmed."

Singh said Indian armed forces launched Operation Sindoor on the intervening night of May 6-7 to deliver justice to those who lost their loved ones in the Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attacks in Pahalgam on April 22.

To say or believe that Operation Sindoor was stopped under any pressure (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Alleged mastermind of Pahalgam terror attack shot dead: Officials

SRINAGAR, July 28: In a major breakthrough, the Army's elite para commandos on Monday shot dead the alleged mastermind of the Pahalgam terror attack along with two of his associates in an encounter in a forest area on Srinagar's outskirts in Kashmir, officials said here.

The officials said Sulieiman alias Asif, who is believed to be the mastermind of the April 22 attack, was killed after the security forces launched a surprise operation following a technical signal indicating the use of a satellite phone that was also used by the

perpetrators of the Pahalgam attack.

The other terrorists killed in the Army action, codenamed 'Operation Mahadev', have been identified as Jibran -- who was allegedly involved in the Sonamarg Tunnel attack last year -- and Hamza Afghani.

As many as 26 persons -- mostly tourists -- were shot dead by terrorists at Baisaran meadows in Pahalgam, which prompted the armed forces to launch Operation Sindoor on May 7 against the terror infrastructure in Pakistan. (PTI)

Sarma seeks Delhi's backing for Assam growth drive

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several Union Ministers during his official visit to the national capital, briefing them on Assam's socio-economic progress and seeking further central assistance to accelerate development initiatives in the state.

The meetings, which took place at various locations in New Delhi including Parliament House and ministerial offices, were part of the chief minister's engagements to highlight Assam's achievements and future goals.

According to an official statement, during his forenoon meeting with Prime Minister Modi at Parliament House, Sarma provided a detailed account of Assam's advancements in socio-economic indicators, noting that the state had achieved near saturation of key welfare schemes being implemented by both the Centre and the



State Government.

He also conveyed Assam's eagerness to host the Prime Minister on September 8, a visit expected to mark the inauguration of the year-long birth centenary celebrations of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika as well as the commissioning of India's first bio-ethanol plant at Numaligarh in Golaghat district.

As a token of respect and cul-

tural pride, the chief minister presented Modi with a traditional gamocha and commemorative mementoes.

Sharing the moment later on social media, Sarma posted on X (formerly Twitter), "Had the privilege of calling upon Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri @narendramodi ji in New Delhi today. Briefed him on Assam's notable strides across

socio-economic indicators... On behalf of the people of Assam, I conveyed our anticipation to welcome him on 8th September—a moment that will mark another milestone in our state's development journey."

Later in the day, chief minister Sarma met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman at Parliament House, where he reiterated Assam's developmental trajectory and sought the continued support of the Finance Ministry in propelling the state towards greater economic growth.

He also formally invited Sitharaman to lay the foundation stone of Kanaklata Barua University at Gohpur, named after the revered Assamese freedom fighter Birangana Kanaklata Barua.

According to the official statement, the upcoming university is set to be the first in India built on a completely industry-oriented academic model, with plans to offer specialised (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Assam govt prepares for mega eviction drive in Golaghat, to affect 2,000 families

GOLAGHAT, July 28: The Assam government is preparing to clear more than 10,000 bigha (over 3,300 acre) of land from alleged encroachments in Golaghat district, which will affect at least 2,000 families, officials said on Monday.

The eviction drive will begin on Tuesday morning in Rengma Reserve Forest in Uriamghat along the Assam-Nagaland border in Sarupathar sub-division, they said.

"The exact details are still being worked out as the surveys continued today as well. However, it will be over 10,000 bigha of land, where around 2,000 families encroached," a senior Forest Department official said.

For carrying out the eviction drive, the authorities have divided the entire area into nine zones, and are doing the survey accordingly, he said.

"An extensive land survey of 30 villages in the Rengma Reserve



Forest was done. It was found that thousands of bigha of forest land were converted into agricultural land by the encroachers," another official said.

A district administration official said proper notices were served by the Forest Department to the encroachers, giving them seven days to vacate the place.

"Following this, most of the sus-

pected encroachers started vacating places such as Chilanjan, Kherbari, and Dayalpur," he said.

Many of the suspected encroachers are from Nagaon, Morigaon and Sonitpur districts, and most belong to the minority community, he added. The Assam Police has stationed a senior officer from the headquarters in Golaghat to oversee the law and (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Drugs seized, two arrested



GUWAHATI, July 28: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said Yaba tablets worth over Rs 6 crore have been seized in Cachar district and two persons have been arrested in this connection.

"@CacharPolice seized 20,000 Yaba tablets worth Rs 6 crore in an anti-narcotics operation. 2 peddlers were arrested in this regard", the chief minister posted on X.

"Another strong strike by @as-sampolice against the drug menace", he added.

Necessary legal procedures have already been initiated, he added.

Yaba, meaning crazy medicine in Thai, is (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

3 terrorists killed in encounter

SRINAGAR, July 28: Three terrorists, including one involved in last year's attack at the Sonamarg tunnel project, were killed on Monday by the Army's elite para commandos in a gun battle in a forest area on Srinagar's outskirts in Jammu and Kashmir, officials said here.

Security agencies suspect that one of the perpetrators of the April 22 Pahalgam attack was also among the three terrorists eliminated under Operation Mahadev, but his identity is yet to be confirmed.

According to officials, the Army launched the operation in the forests of Harwan following a technical signal that was similar to the device used by terrorists in Pahalgam.

The terrorists were killed in an exchange of fire during the cordon and search in Mular village. One of the slain terrorists has been identified as Jibran, who, officials said, was involved in the attack on the Sonamarg Tunnel project at Gagangir in October last year. Seven people, including a doctor, were killed in the attack.

Security forces and intelligence sleuths were ascertaining the identity of two other slain terrorists, as one of them is believed to be Suleiman, one of the perpetrators of the April 22 terror strike at Baisaran in Pahalgam that left 26 persons, mostly tourists, dead.

One M4 carbine rifle, two AK rifles and other munitions were recovered from the site.

At around 1130 hours, one party comprising personnel from 24 Rashtriya Rifles and 4 Para unit had detected the group of three terrorists and neutralised them by springing a surprise on them, an official said.

Inspector General of Police (Kashmir Zone) V K Birdi said it was a long-drawn operation which was going on till the last reports.

"Three bodies have been sighted. It will be premature to comment on other details," Birdi said, adding that full details will be made public after the operation is over. Earlier, Srinagar-based Chinara Corps in a post on X said three terrorists were killed under Operation Mahadev. "Three (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Rijiju slams Opposition after its demand on SIR holds up Op Sindoor debate in LS

NEW DELHI, July 28: The Opposition's demand on the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar held up the scheduled discussion on the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor in the Lok Sabha for a couple of hours on Monday, prompting the government to accuse it of betrayal after initially agreeing to the debate.

The Congress, however, said all they wanted was "30 seconds" to speak on the SIR, adding that it is difficult for opposition leaders to get even a few moments to raise an important issue.

The "Special discussion on India's strong, successful and decisive Operation Sindoor in response to terrorist attack in Pahalgam" finally began at 2 pm instead of the noon after Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju told the House that the government is open to discussion on any issue subject to rules and the Chair's permission. He, however, made no direct

mention of the SIR and said members of the ruling alliance and the Opposition have given notices on many issues.

The Lok Sabha's Business Advisory Committee, which includes leaders from different parties and is chaired by Speaker Om Birla, will take a final decision, Rijiju added.

Opposition members began raising the SIR issue as soon as the House met and then again protested after it reconvened at noon for the discussion on Operation Sindoor, forcing another adjournment.

Rijiju told reporters following the adjournment that a few minutes before the discussion was to start, the Opposition wanted the government to give an assurance that it would allow a debate on the SIR in Bihar after the discussion on Operation Sindoor is over.

The Opposition, he said, is running away from a discussion on

Operation Sindoor after an initial agreement and is now putting pre-conditions.

Rijiju said Parliament runs in accordance with rules and accused the Opposition of going back on its commitment and of betrayal.

"The Opposition is looking at ways to run away from the debate on Operation Sindoor," he claimed. Opposition members, however, rejected the charge.

Congress MP K C Venugopal told reporters that the SIR is one of the most important issues related to democracy as every citizen is "worried" if he can lose his voting rights on some ground.

"There should be discussion on the SIR also. We wanted permission to speak for 30 seconds and then government can share its view. It is difficult for the Opposition to get mic even for 30 seconds," he told reporters, insisting that it was due to the Opposition's demand that a (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

India, Japan review ties

NEW DELHI, July 28: India and Japan on Monday reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties, especially in the areas of defence, economic security, trade and investment and infrastructure. The issues were discussed by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Japan's Vice Foreign Minister Takehiro Funakoshi.

"During the dialogue, the foreign secretary and his counterpart reaffirmed the growing importance of the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership for peace, prosperity and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

It said both sides exchanged views on the entire spectrum of the multi-faceted India-Japan bilateral relationship, including political ties, defence and security, economic security, trade and investment, infrastructure cooperation, technology and people-to-people exchanges. (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Report, filed earlier this month, revealed that utilisation of funds under CAMPA varies sharply across states

India raised compensatory afforestation over 1.78 lakh ha from 2019-20 to 2023-24: Report

NEW DELHI, July 28: India raised compensatory afforestation over 1,78,261 hectares of land against a target of 2,09,297 hectares between 2019-20 and 2023-24, achieving 85 per cent of the planned area, the Supreme Court-mandated Central Empowered Committee has said in a report.

The report, filed earlier this month, revealed that utilisation of funds under the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) varies sharply across states.

According to it, Gujarat, Chandigarh, Mizoram and Madhya Pradesh recorded full achievement of their targets.

Madhya Pradesh planted 21,746.82 hectares, fully achieving



its target of 21,107.68 hectares, while Karnataka also met nearly its entire target, covering 2,761.26 hectares against 2,775.12 hectares. Arunachal Pradesh planted

20,719.46 hectares against 21,478.03 hectares, achieving 96.6 per cent. Uttar Pradesh reported 96.4 per cent achievement, planting 5,877.16 hectares against 6,096.7

hectares.

Assam covered 1,149.64 hectares against 1,191.82 hectares, achieving 93.8 per cent. Sikkim planted 609.52 hectares, achieving 92.3 per cent, while Punjab achieved 4,019.72 hectares against 4,471.94 hectares, about 89.9 per cent, according to the report.

In contrast, Meghalaya had one of the lowest coverage, achieving only 114.56 hectares against a target of 514.76 hectares or 22.3 per cent. Manipur planted 666.94 hectares against 1,759.84 hectares, achieving 37.9 per cent.

Kerala covered 171.80 hectares against 433.06 hectares, achieving 39.7 per cent. West Bengal achieved only 748.25 hectares against 1,911.74 hectares, about 39.2 per

cent. Tamil Nadu planted 84.76 hectares against 262.39 hectares, achieving 32.3 per cent. Andhra Pradesh reported 3,471.88 hectares against 8,663.46 hectares, covering only 40.1 per cent.

The survival percentage of plantations varied significantly, with Arunachal Pradesh and Assam reporting 40-75 per cent and 45-90 per cent of survival rate, respectively.

Kerala, Manipur and Meghalaya recorded a survival rate of 45-74 per cent, 55-76 per cent and 40-70 per cent. Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and Jharkhand reported a survival rate of 69-80 per cent, 60-80 per cent, 54-60 per cent, 60-66 per cent and 78-98 per cent, (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Assam teachers turn mentors to help students tide over anxiety, disorders

GUWAHATI, July 28: For Keya, Shristi and Mofida -- students of different Kendriya Vidyalayas of Assam -- grappling with challenges in the form of hyperactiveness, social anxiety, fear of certain subjects and lack of self-confidence had become a routine affair.

Help finally arrived in the form of their very own school teachers, who donned the role of a mentor to guide not only Keya, Shristi and Mofida, but thousands like them, to tide over academic problems, performance anxiety, behavioural difficulties and even issues at home.

They are among more than 2,000 students of the state who benefited from an innovative programme, 'Each One Reach One', which has now completed a year now.

"The teachers give their cent per cent in the classroom. But, not all students can move with the pace of the teachers and some need help.

Not just academic help, but also guidance to tide through their emotional problems, peer pressure and parental issues," Chandrashekhara Azad, Deputy Commissioner of Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, Guwahati regional office (RO), said.

"This initiative is to lend a helping hand to the students in need of some special attention, be it in their academics, behavioural issues or even problems at home that are impacting their mental wellbeing," he said.

The idea to launch the programme germinated when Azad was interacting with students appearing for their board exams last year.

"I asked them to write down what is it that they feared the most, especially with an important exam coming. I assured them it would be kept anonymous. (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Freedom is never given; it is won.
—A. Philip Randolph

EU overreach on Russian oil

The European Union's latest attempt to control the flow of Russian oil globally by extending sanctions beyond its jurisdiction represents an alarming case of geopolitical overreach. In its 18th sanctions package, approved on July 18, the EU banned the import of refined petroleum products derived from Russian crude even when processed outside Russia—such as in Indian or Chinese refineries. While such restrictions can legally apply within the EU, they hold no binding authority over sovereign, non-EU nations like India, China, or Turkey. The idea that the EU can dictate who buys Russian oil, how it is refined, and where it is re-exported is fundamentally incompatible with international law. India is neither a party to the EU nor a signatory to any agreement that grants Brussels such oversight. Any attempt to penalize Indian companies such as Nayara Energy—49.13 percent owned by Russia's Rosneft—or restrict the country's oil imports, would be both diplomatically provocative and legally indefensible. Such actions lack precedent and would risk undermining the principles of sovereign trade autonomy.

India's energy trade with Russia has deepened significantly since the outbreak of the Ukraine conflict. In 2024–25 alone, India imported over \$50.3 billion worth of crude oil from Russia, with the latter now accounting for over 44 percent of India's oil basket. At the same time, India's exports of refined petroleum products—primarily diesel and jet fuel—were valued at over \$85 billion, with Europe traditionally being a key destination. Refiners like Reliance Industries Limited (RIL), which is India's largest importer of Russian crude, shipped nearly 2.83 million barrels of diesel and 1.5 million barrels of jet fuel monthly to Europe during the first seven months of this year. The EU's ban may now force RIL and other Indian refiners to find alternative destinations for their products or negotiate lower prices, which could dent margins and threaten India's \$15 billion export earnings from the European market. Nonetheless, the sanctions also create an opportunity: a sharper discount on Russian crude—whose cap has now been reduced to \$47.60 a barrel—could help India secure more cost-effective inputs, assuming it successfully diverts exports to other markets in Asia, Africa, or Latin America.

What's most striking is that even as the EU enforces sweeping trade restrictions, it excludes close Western allies such as the US, UK, Norway, Switzerland, and Canada from some of the new rules—exposing the selective and self-serving nature of these measures. While the United States has so far refrained from fully endorsing the EU's latest curbs, its silence suggests tacit approval. Still, the global oil trade is largely conducted in dollars, giving Washington—not Brussels—significant influence over payment systems. That said, India and China, which together purchased 85 percent of Russia's crude oil in June, have continued their energy relations with both Russia and Ukraine. India alone imported over \$1 billion in goods from Ukraine in the past year while exporting close to \$187 million, indicating balanced bilateral ties.

Chinese Manjha: The edge of death sold openly

By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

In every city, every street, every locality, when children and teenagers go out to fly kites, their only aim is to touch the sky. But unfortunately, now this kite flight stops only after taking someone's life. The reason for this is not any ordinary thread, but a deadly product—Chinese Manjha. This Manjha is no longer just a string of kites, it has become the enemy of the life of the common man walking on the road. Every day, there are such news in the newspapers that a person's neck was cut by the Manjha, some bird's wings got entangled in the Manjha and got peeled, some school child's neck was badly injured, some bike rider suddenly fell unconscious, because he did not know that death was hanging in his way on a transparent thread.

The biggest irony of today is that we are living in an era where technology has made everything fast, sharp and cheap. The ill-effects of that are this Chinese Manjha. It is made of fine fibres of nylon, plastic and metal which may look like a normal string, but it has a sharp edge like glass. It neither breaks, nor melts nor is it easily visible. It flutters in the air and when it hits someone's neck, face or hand, it tears the skin and leaves a deep wound in the body. In many cases, this Manjha acts like a sharp weapon and even cuts the veins of the neck, due to which the bleeding does not stop immediately and the victim even dies.

The question is that when this Manjha is so deadly, how is it being traded openly? This Chinese Manjha is still being sold on the roadside, in markets, on online websites. The ban is only on paper, no action is being taken on the ground level, nor any strictness. This silence of the administration is as sharp and dangerous as this Manjha. In a way, this is a silent approval for that product, which is getting red with someone's blood every day. When action is not taken despite the law, the trust of the public breaks and the morale of the wrong traders increases further.

Another problem is that those who use this Manjha do not realize the seriousness of its ill-effects. They think that this Manjha is strong, they can cut more kites with it and win the competition. But they forget that this victory can become the defeat of someone's life. If they visit the emergency ward of hospitals even once and see the condition of people injured by Chinese Manjha, then perhaps they would never pick it up. Sometimes even children get injured due to this Manjha. This Manjha makes such cuts on their delicate bodies that it makes the heart tremble. Imagine, an innocent child is riding a bicycle and suddenly this Manjha gets wrapped around his face—the wounds on his eyes, cheeks or neck will not heal for the rest of his life. This Manjha has become a curse not only for humans but also for animals and birds. Every year thousands of birds get injured or die after getting entangled in this Manjha. Especially on occasions like Makar Sankranti and Independence Day when kite flying is at its peak, eagles, pigeons, parrots and other birds flying in the sky get injured after getting entangled in this Manjha. Wings of many birds get cut, eyes of some burst and some die hanging in the Manjha entangled in trees or roofs. These scenes shake any sensitive person from within, but unfortunately in the game of kites we only see the thrill of our victory, not the pain of someone losing their life.

If the administration wants, immediate action can be taken on this. First of all, a complete ban on the sale of Chinese Manjha will have to be implemented by running special campaigns in all the districts. Shops in the markets should be regularly checked and strict legal action should be taken against any trader found with this Manjha. There should be a provision of not only fine but also jail sentence so that people get scared. Along with this, awareness campaign is also necessary at the level of society. Information about the ill effects of this Manjha should be given in schools, colonies, panchayats and among the youth. It should be conveyed to the general public through radio, TV and social media.

This responsibility is not just of the administration, but of all of us. If each one of us takes a pledge that we will not use this manjha, then the traders will automatically stop selling it. It should be decided in every house that children will be kept away from this manjha and they will be told that the only true victory is that which is achieved without harming others. After all, there can be no game greater than humanity.

It must also be understood that on our roads this Manjha has become a medium of murder and not just an accident. A bike rider who was going to his work as usual, his neck gets cut and he dies on the spot. The family keeps waiting, but a dead body returns. This incident is no longer rare, it is happening again and again. Calling it an accident is now a crime. It is a moral, legal and human duty to stop it.

The sooner steps are taken to completely ban Chinese Manjha, the sooner we can save countless lives. If we do not wake up now, then in the coming times this Manjha will become a warning by taking the life of someone close to us. A civilized society is not one that only makes laws, but one that guarantees the safety of every individual. And when death is floating on the roads, on the roofs, in the sky in the form of this manjha (string), then the most important thing is to cut this thread of death. Now the time has come for us to say – 'Fly the kite, but do not drop life.'

The IMDT Act: Assam's Controversial Immigration Law

The Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, commonly known as the IMDT Act, holds a significant yet contentious place in the history of Assam and India's approach to immigration. Passed by the Indian Parliament during Indira Gandhi's tenure, this legislation was introduced to address the growing concern of illegal immigration, particularly from Bangladesh, into Assam. Its primary aim was to identify and deport illegal migrants while ensuring that genuine citizens, especially minorities, were not unfairly targeted or harassed. However, the Act's implementation, limited exclusively to Assam, sparked intense debates, criticism, and legal battles, ultimately leading to its repeal in 2005. The story of the IMDT Act is not just about a piece of legislation but about the complex interplay of identity, politics, and justice in a region shaped by its unique history and demographics.

The backdrop to the IMDT Act was the Assam Agitation, a mass movement that shook the state from 1979 to 1985. Led by the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) and other groups, the agitation was a response to the influx of migrants, primarily from Bangladesh, which many Assamese believed threatened their culture, language, economy, and political representation. The fear was not unfounded. Assam, a state with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, had witnessed significant demographic changes due to migration, both before and after India's independence. The porous border with Bangladesh, coupled with economic disparities, made Assam a destination for many seeking better opportunities. For the local population, this influx raised concerns about land ownership, job competition, and the preservation of their identity.

The agitation, marked by protests, strikes, and tragic incidents like the Nellie Massacre of 1983, demanded a mechanism to identify and deport illegal migrants. The IMDT Act was the central government's response to this crisis, intended to balance the demands of the agitators with the need to protect genuine citizens from wrongful accusations.

The IMDT Act aimed to establish a quasi-judicial process to identify illegal migrants and deport them. Unlike the Foreigners Act of 1946, which applied to the rest of India, the IMDT Act was tailored specifically for Assam. It set up tribunals, presided over by retired judges, to adjudicate cases of suspected illegal migrants.



The Act defined an illegal migrant as someone who entered India on or after March 25, 1971, without valid documentation. This date was significant, as it marked the beginning of the Bangladesh Liberation War, which led to a massive influx of refugees into India. The Act sought to differentiate between those who arrived before this date, many of whom were granted citizenship, and those who came afterward, who were deemed illegal.

The Act's procedural framework made its implementation challenging and, in the eyes of its critics, ineffective. For someone to lodge a complaint against a suspected illegal migrant, they had to meet strict criteria. The complainant needed to reside within three kilometers of the accused, pay a fee of ten rupees, and could file no more than ten complaints. These restrictions were meant to prevent frivolous accusations but ended up making the process cumbersome. Once a complaint was filed, the accused could prove their citizenship with basic documents like a ration card or voter ID, which were relatively easy to obtain, even fraudulently. If the case proceeded, it was heard by a tribunal, but the burden of proof lay heavily on the complainant and the authorities, unlike the Foreigners Act, where the accused had to prove their citizenship. This reversal of the burden of proof became a focal point of contention, as it made convictions rare and allowed many suspected illegal migrants to evade deportation.

The numbers tell a stark story. Over the two decades the IMDT Act was in force, thousands of cases were filed, but only a small fraction resulted in convictions. Reports suggest that out of tens of thousands of complaints, fewer than 2,000 individuals

were declared illegal migrants, and even fewer were deported. Critics argued that the Act was designed to protect illegal migrants rather than deport them, accusing it of being a political tool to appease certain communities for electoral gains. In Assam, where the issue of illegal immigration was deeply emotive, this perception fueled resentment among those who felt the Act undermined their struggle to safeguard their identity and resources. Many Assamese believed the Act enabled illegal migrants to integrate into society, acquire documents, and even vote, thereby altering the state's demographic and political landscape.

On the other hand, supporters of the Act, particularly minority communities, saw it as a shield against harassment. Assam's complex social fabric includes indigenous Assamese, tribal groups, and a significant population of Bengali-speaking Muslims and Hindus, many of whom migrated legally decades ago. During the Assam Agitation, there were instances of violence and discrimination against minorities, particularly Bengali Muslims, who were often labeled as "foreigners" without evidence.

The IMDT Act's stringent requirements for filing complaints were intended to prevent such targeting. For these communities, the Act was a safeguard, ensuring they were not arbitrarily branded as illegal migrants or stripped of their rights. This division between those who saw the Act as too lenient and those who viewed it as a necessary protection made it a lightning rod for controversy.

The Act's journey came to a head in 2005, when the Supreme Court of India, in the landmark case Sarbananda Sonowal v. Union of India, struck it down as uncon-

stitutional. The petitioner, Sarbananda Sonowal, who later became Assam's Chief Minister, argued that the Act was ineffective in addressing illegal immigration and violated Article 355 of the Constitution, which mandates the state to protect against external aggression and internal disturbance. The three-judge bench agreed, describing the Act as "the biggest hurdle" in identifying and deporting illegal migrants. The court pointed to the low conviction rates and the procedural complexities, noting that the Act placed an undue burden on authorities while allowing illegal migrants to exploit loopholes. It directed that cases of suspected illegal migrants in Assam be handled under the Foreigners Act, aligning the state with the rest of the country.

The repeal of the IMDT Act was a turning point, but it did not resolve the underlying issue of illegal immigration. Instead, it intensified debates about citizenship, identity, and border security in Assam. The Supreme Court's ruling was celebrated by those who had long opposed the Act, but it also raised concerns among minorities about potential misuse of the Foreigners Act. The issue of illegal immigration continued to shape Assam's politics, culminating in initiatives like the National Register of Citizens (NRC) update in 2019, which sought to create a definitive list of citizens in the state. The NRC process, too, was fraught with challenges, as millions were left off the final list, raising questions about their fate and highlighting the ongoing complexity of the issue.

The legacy of the IMDT Act is a reminder of the delicate balance between national security, human rights, and regional identity. For Assam, the Act was both a response to a genuine crisis and a source of frustration, as it failed to deliver on its promise of effectively addressing illegal immigration. Its repeal marked a victory for those advocating stricter measures, but it also underscored the need for a fair and transparent system to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens without fueling division or mistrust.

The Act's history reflects the broader challenges of managing migration in a diverse and densely populated country like India, where borders are porous, and histories are intertwined. It teaches us that addressing such issues requires not just laws but also empathy, clarity, and a commitment to justice for all. Even today, the echoes of the IMDT Act resonate in Assam's ongoing struggle to define who belongs and how to protect the state's unique identity while upholding the principles of fairness and humanity.

How the ICJ's advisory opinion transforms Global Legal Responsibility

By: Dipak Kurmi

In a defining moment for international climate justice, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered a powerful advisory opinion on July 23, 2025, marking a pivotal legal and moral development in the global response to climate change. The Court unanimously affirmed that states have binding legal obligations to combat climate change and protect the Earth's climate systems, not merely as a political or ethical ideal, but as a duty rooted in international law. While advisory opinions are not enforceable verdicts, the legal gravitas and moral weight of the ICJ's pronouncement have the potential to reshape how nations, courts, and communities perceive climate responsibility.

The ruling explicitly stated that countries and territories are obligated to take actions — to the fullest extent of their capacities — to mitigate climate change. Human-induced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the Court warned, are not just abstract pollutants but direct threats to biodiversity, public health, and human life. The advisory opinion reflects growing judicial recognition that climate change is not only an environmental issue but a legal and human rights concern, implicating states in potentially actionable breaches if they fail to act with due diligence.

The Legal Scope of an Advisory Opinion

An ICJ advisory opinion is a formal interpretation of international law, typically requested by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) or its specialized agencies. Though non-binding in nature, these opinions carry considerable persuasive authority and serve as guiding principles for national and international courts. They do not impose direct legal consequences, but their role in setting legal norms and influencing policy decisions is profound. The United Nations itself affirms that such opinions carry both "legal weight and moral authority."

The July 2025 opinion was delivered in response to a formal request by the UNGA on March 29, 2023. The General Assembly had asked the ICJ to clarify the obligations of states under international law in protecting the environment, particularly against GHG emissions, and to outline

the legal consequences if those obligations were breached. What began as an initiative by a group of Pacific Island law students in 2019 had, over six years, evolved into a global campaign — led by Pacific Island Students Fighting Climate Change and joined by over 1,500 civil society organizations — and eventually culminated in a worldwide legal milestone. The campaign was formally embraced and championed by the island nation of Vanuatu, which has long stood at the frontlines of climate vulnerability.

Key Findings of the Opinion

At the heart of the ICJ's opinion lies the assertion that the obligation to prevent environmental harm exists under customary international law. It is no longer sufficient for states to claim action; they must demonstrate meaningful and proportional efforts aligned with the scale of the crisis. The Court leaned heavily on scientific evidence from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and emphasized that states must adopt — and enforce — rigorous measures to cut emissions and protect the climate system. Importantly, this due diligence requirement is not passive; it includes active oversight, administrative enforcement, and the prevention of harmful activities even by private actors.

In an important clarification, the Court noted that Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) — voluntary national climate goals submitted under the Paris Agreement — are not enough unless they represent each state's "highest possible ambition." The ICJ held that countries must not merely commit on paper but also act with seriousness and vigilance in implementing climate goals. This elevates NDCs from aspirational documents to potential benchmarks of legal compliance, subject to scrutiny under international law.

The Court made it clear that obligations relating to climate change are not derived from a single treaty but form an interconnected web of international legal instruments. It cited the UN Charter, the Kyoto Protocol, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the Paris Agreement, among others. These treaties, which are legally binding, collectively form the framework within which



states must operate. Additionally, the Court referenced other relevant conventions such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), thereby highlighting the broad legal ecosystem surrounding climate obligations.

The ICJ also recognized the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment — a significant affirmation that links environmental degradation with the erosion of human rights. This recognition aligns with recent trends in international jurisprudence that increasingly position environmental health as an intrinsic component of human dignity and intergenerational equity. While the Court refrained from assigning individual responsibility to specific states, it clarified that a failure to meet climate obligations could constitute a breach of international law. Such breaches, it said, may require reparations — including guarantees that the wrongful acts will not recur and compensation for affected states. This is a bold legal opening for climate-vulnerable nations seeking justice through litigation or diplomatic pressure.

Implications for Global Climate Politics

The ICJ's advisory opinion comes at a time of widespread disillusionment with international climate negotiations. For over three decades, the world's attempts to forge meaningful collective action on climate change have largely fallen short. Countries continue to miss emissions targets. Finance commitments from developed nations remain unfulfilled. Some major economies have even backtracked on their climate responsibilities — notably, the United States temporarily withdrew from the Paris Agreement without facing legal consequences.

The ICJ opinion offers a counterpoint to this inertia. It reinforces the legal sanctity of environmental obligations and creates a new platform for courts and activists to pursue climate accountability. By asserting that legal consequences can follow inaction, the ICJ has raised the stakes for nations that have previously treated climate policy as negotiable or optional.

As environmental lawyer Ritwick Dutta observes, the opinion may also help develop more robust international environmental law, particularly in holding violators accountable. Most current conventions, while rich in principles, are weak on enforcement. The ICJ opinion might pave the way for more meaningful compliance mechanisms and could even pressure nations like the United States to ratify treaties such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and UNCLOS, which they have long resisted.

The Indian Context: Navigating Opportunities and Pressures

For India, the ICJ's opinion presents both challenges and opportunities. India has historically contributed little to global GHG emissions, but as the third-largest current emitter, it is under growing pressure to accelerate its transition toward renewable energy. India remains heavily reliant on coal but has announced a commitment to reach net-zero emissions by 2070 — a timeline more conservative than that of many developed nations.

The ICJ's opinion emphasizes the broader protection of climate systems — forests, rivers, grasslands, oceans — beyond the narrow metric of carbon emissions. This perspective could shift how climate action is interpreted in India's courts and policies. For example, the Indian Supreme Court's decision in the Great In-

dian Bustard case prioritized solar energy over biodiversity conservation — a dilemma that could be reassessed under the ICJ's holistic approach.

The opinion also reinforces the legal burden on both state and private entities to avoid environmental harm. This could result in increased litigation and judicial scrutiny of corporate polluters and regulatory failures. Already, the Indian government has acknowledged in an affidavit before the Supreme Court that continued coal dependence poses risks to both public health and the economy. This alignment with the ICJ's findings strengthens the legal basis for phasing out fossil fuels while investing in sustainable alternatives.

Environmental activists like Harjeet Singh warn that the ICJ's nuanced view on differentiated responsibilities — which may re-evaluate static labels of "developed" and "developing" countries — could challenge India's long-held position in climate negotiations. However, Singh also emphasizes that the primary responsibility for the climate crisis remains with developed nations due to their disproportionate historical emissions. Any recalibration of responsibilities must be just and equitable, taking into account both capabilities and vulnerabilities.

A Legal Compass for the Climate Struggle Ahead

Ultimately, the ICJ's advisory opinion does not offer immediate solutions to the climate crisis. It does not impose penalties or force nations to act. But it does provide a comprehensive and authoritative legal interpretation that climate change is not just a political failure but a potential legal breach. It empowers national courts, civil society groups, and vulnerable states to demand accountability and justice. It breathes new life into international environmental law and gives future generations a powerful legal framework to stand upon.

In an era marked by rising temperatures, biodiversity loss, and deepening inequality, the ICJ has delivered not merely an opinion, but a call to conscience — backed by law. The climate crisis is no longer just a planetary emergency; it is a legal reckoning in motion. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Assam observes Deshbhakti Divas statewide to honour Tarun Ram Phookan's legacy

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: Deshbhakti Divas was observed across Assam on Monday to mark the 86th death anniversary of Deshbhakti Tarun Ram Phookan, with solemn tributes and reflective programmes held in Charaideo, Diphu, Nagaon, and Sonitpur, Jorhat and others.

Organised by respective district administrations in association with their Information and Public Relations Offices (DIPROs), the events aimed to honour the contributions of the eminent freedom fighter while instilling the values of patriotism, public service, and moral integrity among the younger generation.

In Diphu, Karbi Anglong district observed the day at the Circuit House, beginning at noon.

According to an official statement, the event featured addresses by prominent personalities including Padma Shri Dhaneswar Engti, Everester Khorsing Terang, writer Bhabha Prasad Deori, Dr Monalisa Rongpipi of Diphu Government College, senior journalist Sonju Bora, and resource person On Teron.

Speakers recalled Phookan's pivotal role in India's independence movement, his political and literary contributions, and his commitment to public welfare.

They also urged youth to embrace his ideals of unity, discipline, and dedication to national development.



The event was attended by officials of the Deputy Commissioner's office, members of Diphu Lekhika Samaroh, and students from various schools, with cultural and literary activities reinforcing the spirit of national pride.

In Charaideo, the District Information and Public Relations Office in collaboration with the district administration hosted a commemorative programme at the Deputy Commissioner's conference hall. The event commenced with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp and floral tributes by dignitaries.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Srawana Sonowal delivered the welcome address, while retired educator Moni Gogoi delivered the keynote speech, describing Phookan as "a priceless asset to Assam."

Recounting his role in the Non-Cooperation Movement and principled political

choices, Gogoi urged students to carry forward his values with conviction.

Students from three local higher secondary schools participated in drawing, recitation, and speeches, adding vibrancy to the event coordinated by District Poshan Abhiyan Coordinator Dipen Baruah.

Assistant Commissioner and in-charge DIPRO Rini Hazarika delivered the vote of thanks, while ADC Sonatrishna Gharphalia and officials from various departments were also present.

In Nagaon, Deshbhakti Divas was observed with a day-long programme at Shahid Bhawan auditorium.

The programme opened with the state anthem, followed by floral tributes to Tarun Ram Phookan by Deputy Commissioner Devashish Sarma and other dignitaries. In his address, the DC spoke about Phookan's patriotic legacy and the importance of youth involvement in societal progress.

The keynote address was delivered by Dr Indrajit Bezbaruah, Principal of Samaguri College, who reflected on Phookan's socio-political contributions. Biba Phukan of the Nagaon District Mukti Yujaru Sammilani also spoke.

A cultural segment featured a group performance by DC office staff and a solo rendition by singer Riturani Moushumi.

The event was attended by dignitaries including Nagaon Municipal Board Chairperson Ambika Majumdar, Zila Parishad CEO Manoj Kumar Sikaria, and District Development Commissioner Debajani Chaudhury. In Sonitpur, the observance was held at Conference Hall-I of the DC's office in Tezpur.

District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das led the floral tribute ceremony, joined by ADCs Kabita Kakati Konwar, Twahir Alam, Kamal Baruah; Election Officer Ahmadullah Thakuria; DIPRO Ankita Gogoi; and other officials, students, and teachers.

In his welcome address, the DC highlighted the continued relevance of Phookan's ideals and emphasised the need to motivate the youth towards public service and intellectual growth.

Dr Bhubaneswar Saharia, President of Tarun Asom Sangha and former Controller of Examinations at Tezpur University, delivered the keynote address urging students to connect with India's freedom struggle and draw inspiration from historical legacies.

The event concluded with the DC's appeal to cultivate reading habits and foster a spirit of lifelong learning.

Deshbhakti Divas, observed in remembrance of Tarun Ram Phookan's death anniversary, served as a state-wide tribute to a towering figure in Assam's and

India's freedom movement.

The commemorations across districts reflected a unified effort to preserve and propagate his legacy, while also encouraging civic responsibility, historical awareness, and patriotic values among students and the wider public.

In Jorhat 'Deshbhakti Divas' by the Jorhat district administration with support from the office of the District Information and Public Relations Officer (DIPRO), Jorhat, in a solemn ceremony held at the conference hall of the Jorhat DC office complex.

At the programme presided over by the Jorhat District Development Commissioner Rajib Roy, Dr Soumitra Puzari, Principal, Jorhat College (Amalgamated), who was the appointed speaker on the occasion, delivered a speech on the life and contributions of the great freedom fighter, whose works enriched the Assamese society in the education, literary, social and political spheres.

On behalf of Jorhat District Freedom Fighters' Association Niren Sharma, an executive member, too spoke about the immense contributions of Tarun Ram Phookan.

Earlier, the DIPRO, Rajat Sen, delivered the welcome address. District administration and Zila Parishad officials paid floral tributes in front of the portrait of the great freedom fighter.

Ashok Singhal distributes land title certificates to forest dwellers in Biswanath



HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 28: The Biswanath District Administration on Monday officially distributed land title certificates to 2,145 eligible claimants residing on forest land under the Forest Rights Act.

The ceremonial distribution was inaugurated by Assam's Health and Family Welfare Minister and Biswanath Guardian Minister Ashok Singhal in the presence of Behali MLA Diganta Ghatowal.

Beneficiaries from across all assembly constituencies of

Biswanath district received land titles as part of the State Government's ongoing initiative to safeguard the social and cultural rights of the state's indigenous population through the implementation of the Forest Rights Act.

Speaking on the occasion, minister Ashok Singhal said the distribution of land titles reflects the government's commitment to protecting indigenous communities by ensuring rightful ownership of land.

He further noted that the government is closely monitoring field-

level implementation through dedicated Forest Rights Committees, and reiterated that similar efforts are underway across other districts as well.

Biswanath Deputy Commissioner Seemanta Kumar Das delivered the welcome address, while the event was moderated by Anjan Bora.

MLA Pramod Borthakur of Biswanath also addressed the gathering and congratulated the beneficiaries.

The programme was attended by MLAs Pramod Borthakur (Biswanath), Diganta Ghatowal (Behali), and Utpal Borah (Gohpur), along with newly elected Biswanath ZPC Chairperson Sunita Tanti, Superintendent of Police Subhasish Baruah, CEO Liza Talukdar, Additional Deputy Commissioners Dhruvajyoti Das and Lukumani Bora, ADC Asim Bargohain, and other officials including Sub-Divisional Welfare Officer Pushpankar Patir, social worker Asim Kumar Das, and members of the Forest Rights Committee.

The title distribution marks a key milestone in the State Government's drive to formalise land ownership among forest-dwelling communities.

World Hepatitis Day observed by Kamrup Metro NHM

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: The Kamrup Metropolitan District unit of the National Health Mission (NHM) observed World Hepatitis Day on Monday with a special programme held at the Satgaon Urban State Ayushman Health Mandir in Guwahati.

The event was inaugurated by Dr Laxman S, Mission Director, NHM Assam.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Laxman S highlighted the importance of early detection and prevention of hepatitis, a liver inflammation that can lead to serious health complications.

He urged the public to get tested and vaccinated, particularly against hepatitis B.

The Mission Director also called upon health workers to ensure that every pregnant woman is tested for hepatitis B and that a timely birth dose of the hepatitis B vaccine is administered to newborns within 24 hours of delivery.

The event was attended by Lakhim Dutta, Special Duty Officer, NHM Assam; Dr Apurba Krishna Sharma, Joint Director of Health Services, Kamrup Metropolitan District; Dr Jadumani Katak, State Resource Officer, National Viral Hepatitis Control Pro-



gramme; and other officials.

The observation aimed to raise awareness about hepatitis and reinforce the state's commitment to viral hepatitis prevention and control through community outreach and strengthened healthcare services.

Udhorlangso Youth Club conducts cleaning plantation drive

HT Bureau
DIPHU, July 28: The Udhorlangso Youth Club of Ramsing Tisso village in Phuloni organised a cleaning drive cum tree plantation programme on Sunday to promote environmental awareness and community participation.

Led by Club president Loveson Terang, secretary Sonse Tisso, and adviser Jiten Bey, the youth volunteers cleared tall grasses from both sides of the village roads and collected discarded plastic bottles and polythene bags from the area.

Following the cleaning activity, over 100 saplings were planted across the village to enhance greenery and improve air quality.

Temporary bamboo fencing was also installed around the saplings to protect them from cattle and goats.

Speaking on the occasion, adviser Jiten Bey—who also serves as the president of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (East Karbi Anglong District Committee)—said that the initiative saw active participation of more than 100 local youths, reflecting the community's commitment to environmental stewardship.

Awareness drive held on trafficking, witch-hunting

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, July 28: An awareness programme on human trafficking and witch-hunting was held at the Kushtoli Gaon Panchayat office on Monday, organised by the Laharighat ICDS Project Office.

The initiative is part of a broader state-wide campaign aimed at curbing rising cases of human trafficking and witch-hunting through sustained public sensitisation. As part of the event, a rally was carried out across Kushtoli Bazaar under the aegis of the Laharighat ICDS Project, drawing participation from local residents and community leaders.

Son hacks mother to death in Misa

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, July 28: A 60-year-old woman, Sujita Banu, was brutally hacked to death by her son at No. 4 Danga area of Hatigaon Tea Estate under Misa Police Station on Monday morning.

According to sources, the accused, identified as Jalaluddin, attacked his mother with a sharp weapon near their residence.

Upon being informed, a team from Misa Police, accompanied by a magistrate, rushed to the spot and found the woman's body lying on the ground. The body was sent to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem.

Jalaluddin was arrested shortly after the incident and is currently being interrogated at Kaliabor Police Station, police said. A case has been registered and further investigation into the incident is underway.

Kokrajhar University gets new VC

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, July 28: Prof Ganesh Chandra Wary on Monday formally took charge as the new Vice-Chancellor of Kokrajhar University. A welcome ceremony was held on the university campus in the presence of officials, faculty and staff, as well as representatives of the Bodo Sahitya Sabha, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and the Alumni Association, who extended a warm reception to the incoming Vice-Chancellor.

Prof Wary, a professor of Physics, previously served as the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Cotton University before assuming charge at Kokrajhar University. After taking office, Prof. Wary said he would work to strengthen academic standards and create a student-oriented environment on campus. He emphasised that the university would seek to offer high-quality educational services and become an attractive centre of learning for the region.

KATSSA demands ILP in KA to curb possible influx of illegal immigrants

HT Bureau
DIPHU, July 28: The Karbi Anglong Territorial Social Security Association (KATSSA) on Monday expressed concern that illegal immigrants evicted from districts like Dhubri and Goalpara may attempt to enter Karbi Anglong, and reiterated its demand for implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system in the district.

Addressing a press conference at the KATSSA office in Manja, association president Semson Engti said, "Those evicted by the State Government have moved in various directions to seek shelter. If illegal immigrants, including illegal Bangladeshis, enter Karbi Anglong, there is no existing mechanism to check or prevent it. Karbi Anglong urgently needs to implement ILP."

Engti stated that a memorandum on the matter had already been submitted to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

He further added that while the State Government had undertaken eviction drives against illegal settlers in other districts, similar demands for evicting illegal encroachers from Professional Grazing Reserves (PGR) and Village Grazing Reserves (VGR) in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, have been consistently ignored despite protests, strikes, and demonstrations by indigenous groups.

KATSSA urged the KAAC to take up the matter with the State Government and push for the introduction of ILP in both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong to safeguard indigenous interests.

Outreach drive during Durand Cup opening held in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, July 28: The Army Recruiting Office, Narangi, conducted a focused outreach initiative during the opening ceremony of the Durand Cup 2025 at the SAI STC Stadium in Kokrajhar on Monday. The programme aimed to inform and inspire youth about career opportunities in the Indian Army. Organised amidst the vibrant atmosphere of one of India's oldest football tournaments, the initiative featured interactive displays and a dedicated information centre.

Representatives from the recruiting office engaged directly with students, aspiring candidates, and local youth, offering detailed guidance on various

NFR concludes 71st Management Development Programme

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 28: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) successfully concluded the 71st Management Development Programme (MDP) for Senior Supervisors on July 25 at the Training Centre of the Dibrugarh Workshop.

According to an official statement, the week-long programme aimed to strengthen leadership skills, enhance managerial capabilities, and reinforce organisational values among senior supervisory personnel.

SP Beck, SDGM & CVO/NFR, attended the closing ceremony as chief guest and distributed certificates to all participants.

In his address, he stressed the vital role of supervisors in maintaining safety, discipline, and productivity, and urged them to align personal objectives with the broader mission of Indian Railways.

AASAA protests in Margherita over MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasha's remarks

HT Correspondent
MARGHERITA, July 28: A protest was held at Makum Bagan Tinali in Margherita on Monday by the Margherita Regional Committee of the All Adivasi Students Association of Assam (AASAA), in response to a recent statement made by Kaziranga MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasha during a podcast interview.

According to the protesters, the MP had remarked that members of the Adivasi community, particularly those following Christianity, face obstacles and therefore should not be granted Scheduled Tribe status.

The statement has triggered widespread reactions across the state and has since gone viral.

APCC stages protest in Jorhat demanding CBI probe into death of Jyoshita Das

HT Correspondent
JORHAT, July 28: The Jorhat district and town block units of the Indian National Congress (INC) recently staged a protest rally demanding a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into the recent death of Jyoshita Das, a 30-year-old Assistant Engineer of the Public Works Department (PWD), Bongaigaon. The protest was held in response to a directive issued by the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC).

Party members, including several women, raised slogans against the State Government and the Chief Minister, calling for an impartial and thorough inquiry into the circumstances that led to the engineer's death.

Das was found hanging in her room a few days ago, with a handwritten suicide note recovered from the scene.

In the note, she reportedly ac-

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Israeli strikes kill at least 36 people in Gaza, officials say, as some aid restrictions eased

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), July 28: Israeli strikes killed at least 36 Palestinians in multiple locations across Gaza on Monday, local health officials said, a day after Israel eased aid restrictions in the face of a worsening humanitarian crisis in the territory.

The dead included a newborn who was delivered in a complex surgery after his mother, who was seven months pregnant, was killed in a strike, according to the Nasser Hospital.

Israel announced Sunday that the military would pause operations in Gaza City, Deir al-Balah and Muwasi for 10 hours a day until further notice to allow for the improved flow of aid to Palestinians in Gaza, where concern over hunger has grown, and designate secure routes for aid delivery.

Israel said it would continue military operations alongside the new humanitarian measures. The Israeli military had no immediate comment about the latest strikes, which occurred outside the time frame for the pause Israel declared would be held between 10 am and 8 pm.

Aid agencies have welcomed the new aid measures, which also included allowing airdrops into Gaza, but said they were not enough to counter the rising



hunger in the Palestinian territory.

Images of emaciated children have sparked outrage around the world, including from Israel's close allies. US President Donald Trump on Sunday called the images of emaciated and malnourished children in Gaza "terrible."

Israel has restricted aid to varying degrees throughout the war. In March, it cut off the entry of all goods, including fuel, food and medicine to pressure Hamas to free hostages.

Israel partially lifted those restrictions in May but also pushed ahead on a new US-backed aid delivery system that has been wracked by chaos and violence. Traditional aid providers also have encountered a similar breakdown

in law and order surrounding their aid deliveries.

Most of Gaza's population now relies on aid. Accessing food has become a challenge that some Palestinians have risked their lives for.

The Awda hospital in central Gaza said it received the bodies of seven Palestinians who it said were killed Monday by Israeli fire close to an aid distribution site run by the US- and Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation. The hospital said 20 others were wounded close to the site. GHF did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The pregnant woman and her child were killed along with 11 others after their house was struck

in the Muwasi area, west of the southern city of Khan Younis, according to a hospital run by the Palestinian Red Crescent.

Another strike hit a two-story house in the western Japanese neighbourhood of Khan Younis, killing at least 11 people, more than half of them women and children, said the Nasser Hospital, which received the casualties. At least five others were killed in strikes elsewhere in Gaza, according to local hospitals.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on most of the strikes. It said it was not aware of one strike in Gaza City during the pause that health officials said killed one person.

In its October 7, 2023, attack, Hamas killed 1,200 people and took 251 hostages. It still holds 50, more than half Israel believes to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed more than 59,800 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Its count doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians, but the ministry says over half of the dead are women and children. The ministry operates under the Hamas government. The UN and other international organisations see it as the most reliable source of data on casualties. (AP)

Thailand, Cambodia agree to 'immediate and unconditional' ceasefire, Malaysian PM says



PUTRAJAYA (MALAYSIA), July 28: Thailand and Cambodia have agreed to an "immediate and unconditional" ceasefire in a significant breakthrough to resolve deadly border clashes that entered a fifth day, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim said Monday.

Anwar, who chaired the talks as head of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional bloc, said both sides have reached a common understanding to take steps to return to normalcy following what he called frank discussions.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet and Thai Acting Prime Minister Phumtham Wechayachai have agreed to an "immediate and unconditional ceasefire" with effect from midnight local time Tuesday, Anwar said as he read out a joint statement.

"This is a vital first step towards de-escalation and the restoration of peace and security," Anwar said.

Military and officials from both sides will also hold meetings to defuse border tensions, he said. The foreign and defence ministers of Malaysia, Cambodia and Thailand have been instructed to "develop a detailed mechanism" to implement and monitor the ceasefire to ensure sustained peace, he added.

Hun Manet and Phumtham hailed the outcome of the meeting and shook hands at the conclusion of the brief press conference.

Hun Manet said he hoped that bilateral ties could return to normal soon so that some 300,000 villagers evacuated on both sides could return home.

It is "time to start rebuilding trust, confidence and cooperation going forward between Thailand and Cambodia," he said.

Phumtham said the outcome reflected "Thailand's desire for a peaceful resolution."

The fighting flared last Thursday after a land mine explosion along the border wounded five Thai soldiers. Both sides blamed each other for starting the clashes, that have killed at least 35 people and displaced more than 260,000 people on both sides. Both countries recalled their ambassadors and Thailand shut all border crossings with Cambodia, with an exception for migrant Cambodian workers returning home.

The Malaysian meeting followed direct pressure from US President Donald Trump, who has warned that the United States may not proceed with trade deals with either country if hostilities continue.

The joint statement said that the US is a co-organiser of the talks, with participation from China. The Chinese and American ambassadors to Malaysia attended the meeting that lasted over two hours.

The violence marks a rare instance of open military confrontation between ASEAN member states, a 10-nation regional bloc that has prided itself on non-aggression, peaceful dialogue and economic cooperation.

Evacuees from both sides of border earlier prayed for a ceasefire deal.

At an evacuation shelter in Cambodia's Siem Reap province far away from the border, Ron Mao, 56, said she and her family fled their home a kilometre away from the front line when fighting broke out Thursday. They took refuge in a shelter but moved again to another camp further away after hearing artillery shelling.

"I don't want to see this war happen. It's very difficult and I don't want to run around like this," she said.

As Trump shows off his golf courses for Britain's leader, crisis in Gaza looms



EDINBURGH, July 28: US President Donald Trump once suggested his golf course in Scotland "furthers" the US-UK relationship.

Now he's getting the chance to prove it. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer arrived Monday for a meeting with Trump at a golf course owned by the president's family near Turnberry in southwestern Scotland. Starmer and his wife, Victoria, lingered on the steps chatting at length with the president, who pointed proudly to parts of the property.

Later, the leaders will be at Aberdeen, on the country's northeast coast, where there's another Trump golf course and a third is opening soon.

During his first term in 2019, Trump posted of his Turnberry property, "Very proud of perhaps the greatest golf course anywhere in the world. Also, furthers UK relationship!" Starmer is not a golfer, but toggling between Trump's Scottish shows shows the outsized influence the president puts on properties bearing his name — and on golf's ability to shape geopolitics.

However, even as Trump may want to focus on showing off his golf properties, Starmer will try to centre the conversation on more urgent global matters.

He plans to urge Trump to press Israel to allow more aid into Gaza and attempt to end what Downing St. called "the unspeakable suffering and starvation" in the territory, while pushing for a ceasefire in Israel's war with Hamas.

Britain, along with France and Germany, has criticised Israel for "withholding essential humanitarian assistance" as hunger spread in Gaza. Over the weekend, Starmer said Britain will take part in efforts led by Jordan to airdrop aid after Israel temporarily eased restrictions.

But British Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds acknowledged Monday that only the US has "the leverage" to make a real difference in the conflict.

Entering Monday's meeting, Trump said "there are a lot of starving people" in Gaza and said he and Starmer would be talking about it. Pressed on if mass starvation was occurring there, the Republican US president said, "I don't know," but he suggested what he'd seen on television indicated it might be.

"Those children look very hungry," Trump said.

That was more empathy than Trump showed about the crisis in Gaza on Sunday night, when he was focused more on how he's not personally gotten credit for previous attempts to provide food aid.

"It's terrible. You really at least want to have somebody say, 'Thank you,'" Trump said.

The president added, "It makes you feel a little bad when you do that" without what he considered proper acknowledgement.

Starmer is under pressure from his Labour Party lawmakers to follow France in recognising a Palestinian state, a move both Israel and the US have condemned. The British leader says the UK supports statehood for the Palestinians but that it must be "part of a wider plan" for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Also on Monday's agenda, according to Starmer's office, are efforts to promote a possible peace deal to end fighting in Russia's war with Ukraine — particularly efforts at forcing Russian President Vladimir Putin to the negotiating table in the next 50 days.

Trump in the past sharply criticized Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for also failing to express enough public gratitude toward US support for his country, taking a similar tack he's now adopting when it comes to aid for Gaza.

The president, though, has shifted away from that tone and more sharply criticized Putin and Russia in recent weeks.

On Tuesday, Trump will be at the site of his new course near Aberdeen for an official ribbon-cutting. It opens to the public on August 13 and tee times are already for sale — with the course betting that a presidential visit can help boost sales. (AP)

Kim Jong Un's sister rejects outreach by South Korea's new president

SEOUL (SOUTH KOREA), July 28:

The influential sister of North Korea leader Kim Jong Un rebuffed overtures by South Korea's new liberal government, saying Monday that its "blind trust" in the country's alliance with the US and hostility toward North Korea make it no different from its conservative predecessor.

Kim Yo Jong's comments imply that North Korea - now preoccupied with its expanding cooperation with Russia - sees no need to resume diplomacy with South Korea and the US anytime soon. Experts say she likely hopes to drive a wedge between Seoul and Washington.

"We clarify once again the official stand that no matter what policy is adopted and whatever proposal is made in Seoul, we have no interest in it and there is neither a reason to meet nor an issue to be discussed," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by state media.

It's North Korea's first official statement on the government of South Korea.

Bangladesh govt sets up probe panel to investigate school jet crash

DHAKA, July 28: The Bangladesh government has formed a nine-member commission to investigate last week's crash of its Air Force training jet into a school here that killed 34 people, mostly students, according to a media report.

The F-7 BGI aircraft, a training fighter jet manufactured in China, experienced a "mechanical fault" moments after takeoff and crashed into a two-storey building of Milestone School and College in Dhaka's Uttara area on last Monday.

The probe commission headed by former secretary AKM Zafar Ullah Khan has been asked to submit its report within four weeks. The Daily Star newspaper cited a Cabinet Division gazette issued on Sunday. (PTI)

rean President Lee Jae Myung, which took office in early June with a promise to improve badly frayed ties with North Korea.

Lee's government has halted anti-Pyongyang frontline loudspeaker broadcasts, taken steps to ban activists from flying balloons with propaganda leaflets across the border and repatriated North Koreans who were drifted south in wooden boats months earlier.

North Korea complains of South Korea-US military drills

North Korea has shunned talks with South Korea and the US since leader Kim Jong Un's high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with President Donald Trump fell apart in 2019 due to wrangling over international sanctions. North Korea has since focused on building more powerful nuclear weapons targeting its rivals and declared a hostile "two-state" system on the Korean Peninsula to terminate relations with South Korea.

Kim Yo Jong called Lee's steps "sincere efforts" to develop ties, but said the new government still plots to "stand in confrontation" with North Korea. She mentioned the upcoming summertime South Korea-US military drills, which North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal.

Lee said it's important to restore trust between the Koreas as he met Unification Minister Chung Dong-young and asked about his thought on the latest North Korean statement. Chung, whose job makes him the top South Korean official on North Korea, later told reporters that he intends to propose to Lee that South Korea and the U.S. "adjust" their military exercises.

Chung's remarks, which could mean scaling back South Korea-US training as a way to get North Korea to return to talks, will likely invite strong criticism from conservatives, who support expanded South Korea-US training to cope with North Korea's advancing nuclear program. (AP)

Imran Khan accuses Pak Army chief of sacrificing national interest to maintain hold on power

LAHORE, July 28: Pakistan's jailed former premier Imran Khan has lashed out at Army chief Asim Munir, saying the general was disgracing the military and sacrificing national interest to maintain his hold on power.

"The country is being run under Munir's law, and the ISI is giving it protection... He is prepared to sacrifice every national interest to maintain his hold on power. This army chief is disgracing the military just as Yahya Khan once did," Khan said in a recent post on social media. He was referring to former army chief General Yahya Khan, under whose regime East Pakistan witnessed a civil war, resulting in the rise of an independent state - Bangladesh.

Khan's comments come ahead of his party's campaign against the "puppet government", starting next month.

At this time, the Senate, the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and the President are all unconstitutional. A sham constitutional court was created, which reduced our seats in parliament," Khan, who has been in jail for two years in multiple cases, added. In an unprecedented move, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's seats were simply handed over to others. The constitutional courts, which are meant to deliver justice, are now filled with Munir's minions, Khan alleged.

He also accused Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja of perpetrating a historic electoral fraud.

"A judge of the Islamabad High Court is not hearing my appeals for seven months because he, too, receives instructions from Munir. At this time, Munir's law prevails in our country, as if he owns Pakistan," he said. (PTI)

Pakistan has seen a sharp rise in terrorist attacks, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, since the TTP called off its ceasefire with the government in November 2022. (PTI)

Pak security forces kill 3 TTP militants, including mastermind of 2024 attack on Chinese, in Karachi

KARACHI, July 28: Three Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants, including the mastermind behind an attack on Chinese engineers last year, were killed in an encounter in the southern port city of Karachi, officials said on Monday.

Raja Umer Khattab, a Senior Counter-Terrorism Department (CTD) official, said the operation was carried out Sunday night jointly by the CTD and personnel of intelligence agencies, Dawn reported. "The teams raided a house in the Manghopir area in Karachi," he said.

He said that terrorists opened fire when they spotted the police teams approaching them, triggering a gunfight that lasted over an hour.

All three terrorists were killed during the operation, he said, adding that they belonged to the TTP. A suicide jacket, three grenades, a Kalashnikov rifle, two pistols and a large cache of ammunition were recovered from the site, he added.

Additional Inspector-General of Police, Counter-Terrorism Department, Azad Khan, said the terrorist, who carried a Rs 20 million bounty for plotting the 2024 Liberty Textile attack targeting Chinese nationals, was among those killed during the operation. The TTP militant, identified as Zafran, was also linked to the Karachi Police Office assault.

On November 5 last year, a private security guard opened fire and injured two Chinese nationals in a textile mill in Karachi. The guard fled after the attack. At that time, investigators had suspected that it was a targeted attack.

Pakistan has seen a sharp rise in terrorist attacks, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, since the TTP called off its ceasefire with the government in November 2022. (PTI)

What to expect, and what not to, at UN meeting on an Israel-Palestinian two-state solution

UNITED NATIONS, July 28: The UN General Assembly is bringing high-level officials together this week to promote a two-state solution to the decades-old Israel-Palestinian conflict that would place their peoples side by side, living in peace in independent nations.

Israel and its close ally the United States are boycotting the two-day meeting, which starts Monday and will be co-chaired by the foreign ministers of France and Saudi Arabia.

Israel's right-wing government opposes a two-state solution, and the United States has called the meeting "counter-productive" to its efforts to end the war in Gaza. France and Saudi Arabia want the meeting to put a spotlight on the two-state solution, which they view as the only viable road map to peace, and to start addressing the steps to get there.

The meeting was postponed from late June and downgraded from a four-day meeting of world leaders amid surging tensions in the Middle East, including Israel's 12-day war against Iran and the war in Gaza.

"It was absolutely necessary to restart a political process, the two-state solution process, that is today threatened, more threatened than it has ever been," French Foreign Minister Jean-Noel Barrot said Sunday on CBS News' "Face the Nation."

Here's what's useful to know about the upcoming gathering.

Why a two-state solution?
The idea of dividing the Holy Land goes back decades.

When the British mandate over Palestine ended, the UN partition plan in 1947 envisioned dividing the territory into Jewish and Arab states. Israel accepted the plan, but upon Israel's declaration of independence the following year, its Arab neighbors declared war and the plan was never implemented. Under a 1949 armistice, Jordan held control over the West Bank and east Jerusalem and Egypt over Gaza.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek those lands for a future independent state alongside Israel, and this idea of a two-state solution based on Israel's pre-1967 boundaries has been the basis of peace talks dating back to the 1990s.

The two-state solution has wide international support. The logic behind it is that the population of Israel — along with east Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza — is divided equally between Jews and Palestinians.

The establishment of an independent Palestine would leave Israel as a democratic country with a solid Jewish majority and grant the Palestinians their dream

of self-determination.

Why hold a conference now?

France and Saudi Arabia have said they want to put a spotlight on the two-state solution as the only viable path to peace in the Middle East — and they want to see a road map with specific steps, first ending the war in Gaza.

The co-chairs said in a document sent to U.N. members in May that the primary goal of the meeting is to identify actions by "all relevant actors" to implement the two-state solution — and "to urgently mobilize the necessary efforts and resources to achieve this aim, through concrete and time-bound commitments."

Saudi diplomat Manal Radwan, who led the country's delegation to the preparatory conference, said the meeting must "chart a course for action, not reflection." It must be "anchored in a credible and irreversible political plan that addresses the root cause of the conflict and offers a real path to peace, dignity and mutual security," she said.

French President Emmanuel Macron has pushed for a broader movement toward a two-state solution in parallel with a recognition of Israel's right to defend itself. He announced late Thursday that France will recognize the state of Palestine officially at the annual gathering of world leaders at the U.N. General Assembly in late September.

About 145 countries have recognized the state of Palestine. But Macron's announcement, ahead of Monday's meeting and amid increasing global anger over desperately hungry people in Gaza starting to die from starvation, makes France the most important Western power to do so.

What is Israel's view?
Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects the two-state solution on both nationalistic and security grounds.

Netanyahu's religious and nationalist base views the West Bank as the biblical and historical homeland of the Jewish people, while Israeli Jews overwhelmingly consider Jerusalem their eternal capital. The city's eastern side is home to Judaism's holiest site, along with major Christian and Muslim holy places.

Hard-line Israelis like Netanyahu believe the Palestinians don't want peace, citing the second Palestinian uprising of the early 2000s, and more recently the Hamas takeover of Gaza two years after Israel withdrew from the territory in 2005. The Hamas takeover led to five wars, including the current and ongoing 21-month conflict.

At the same time, Israel also opposes a one-state solution in which Jews could lose their majority. Netanyahu's preference seems to be the status quo, where Israel maintains overall control and Israelis have full rights than Palestinians, Israel

deepens its control by expanding settlements, and the Palestinian Authority has limited autonomy in pockets of the West Bank.

Netanyahu condemned Macron's announcement of Palestinian recognition, saying it "rewards terror and risks creating another Iranian proxy, just as Gaza became."

What is the Palestinian view?
The Palestinians, who label the current arrangement "apartheid," accuse Israel of undermining repeated peace initiatives by deepening settlement construction in the West Bank and threatening annexation. That would harm the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state and their prospects for independence.

Ahmed Majdalani, a member of the PLO Executive Committee and close associate of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, said the meeting will serve as preparation for a presidential summit expected in September. It will take place either in France or at the U.N. on the sidelines of the high-level meeting, U.N. diplomats said.

Majdalani said the Palestinians have several goals, first a "serious international political process leading to the establishment of a Palestinian state."

The Palestinians also want additional international recognition of their state by major countries including Britain. But

expect that to happen in September, not at Monday's meeting, Majdalani said. And he said they want economic and financial support for the Palestinian Authority and international support for the reconstruction and recovery of the Gaza Strip.

What will happen — and won't happen — at the meeting?

All 193 UN member nations have been invited to attend the meeting and a French diplomat said about 40 ministers are expected. The United States and Israel are the only countries who are boycotting.

The co-chairs have circulated an outcome document which could be adopted, and there could be some announcements of intentions to recognize a Palestinian state. But with Israel and the United States boycotting, there is no prospect of a breakthrough and the resumption of long-stalled negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians on an end to their conflict.

Secretary-General António Guterres urged participants after the meeting was announced "to keep the two-state solution alive." And he said the international community must not only support a solution where independent states of Palestine and Israel live side-by-side in peace but "materialize the conditions to make it happen." (AP)

Inter-state vehicle theft racket busted in Itanagar

57 luxury cars worth ₹ 30 crore recovered



ITANAGAR, July 28: The Itanagar Capital Police have dismantled a major inter-state vehicle theft and smuggling racket, recovering 57 high-end stolen cars valued at over ₹ 30.5 crore, an officer said on Monday.

This is the largest single recovery of stolen vehicles by a police station in India till date, he said.

The police also arrested five people associated with the gang. Capital SP Jummar Basar told

reporters here that the police registered a suo-motu FIR after receiving intelligence inputs about a sophisticated vehicle smuggling network operating across multiple states. The police also formed a Special Investigation Team to probe into the case.

"The operation commenced on July 2 and led to the recovery of 57 stolen vehicles from various parts of the Itanagar Capital Region. All the vehicles, mostly luxury and

high-end models, were found to be linked to theft cases registered in Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and other states," Basar said.

About the modus operandi of the gang, the SP said that its members primarily targeted expensive cars in Delhi-National Capital Region and adjoining states.

After stealing the vehicles, the criminals partnered with brokers who tampered with engine and chassis numbers, created forged

registration papers, and facilitated the vehicles' transport to Arunachal Pradesh.

Once in the state, the cars were sold to unsuspecting buyers at prices well below market value.

Preliminary investigations have revealed the possibility of international connections to the racket, the SP said.

Basar added that certain digital financial trails and patterns in cross-border movement suggest the involvement of foreign handlers or transactions.

"This angle is currently under detailed investigation, and the police are working to trace the money flow and potential overseas links," he said.

Efforts are continuing to locate and apprehend the remaining members of the network, some of whom are believed to be operating from outside the state.

The SP emphasised that more recoveries are expected as the investigation progresses.

Basar also urged citizens to verify ownership history of vehicles via the VAHAN portal or through respective RTOs before purchasing any second-hand vehicle.

He warned against buying vehicles without proper and genuine documentation and appealed to the public to immediately report any suspicious sellers or vehicles to the nearest police station. (PTI)

Khandu unveils transformative initiatives to mark Arunachal's 50 years of statehood



ITANAGAR, July 28: Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday unveiled a comprehensive set of development initiatives to commemorate 50 years of Arunachal Pradesh's statehood, describing the occasion as "not just a celebration, but commitment in action".

In a message shared on social media, Khandu highlighted a series of landmark projects and schemes that reflect the state government's focus on education, healthcare, women's empowerment, rural electrification, and youth development.

The initiatives, which form part of the state's Golden Jubilee vision, are designed to leave a lasting impact on the lives of citizens across all sections of society.

Among the major announce-

ments is the establishment of 50 Golden Jubilee Model Schools with a total investment of ₹ 500 crore, aimed at transforming education at the grassroots.

Alongside infrastructure development, the government has also introduced the Golden Jubilee Merit Award, which will provide financial assistance of ₹ 2 lakh to students securing admission into top-tier institutions such as IITs, IIMs, AIIMS, and national law universities (NLUs).

Further promoting inclusive development, Khandu announced the launch of the Golden Jubilee Daughters scheme, under which every girl child born in the state and fully immunised will receive ₹ 50,000.

"It's a step towards dignity,

health and empowerment," Khandu said in a post on X, emphasising the importance of supporting girls from birth through proactive state intervention.

Rural and border area development also featured prominently in the Golden Jubilee roadmap, with Khandu announcing that 50 micro-hydel projects will be set up under the Golden Jubilee Border Village Illumination initiative.

These projects are expected to bring sustainable electricity to remote border villages, thereby improving the quality of life and boosting local livelihoods.

"We are lighting up lives and livelihoods," Khandu said.

To strengthen healthcare infrastructure, the chief minister also revealed that 60 Primary and Community Health Centres (PHCs and CHCs) across the state will be upgraded under the Golden Jubilee Health Mission, enhancing medical access in far-flung and under-served areas.

"As we mark 50 glorious years of Arunachal's statehood, we're not just celebrating a milestone, we are building the future," Khandu said, adding that these initiatives reflect our commitment to creating a more inclusive, empowered, and self-reliant Arunachal.

The initiatives underscore the state government's long-term vision of development and inclusivity, ensuring that the celebrations go beyond ceremonial events and translate into tangible progress on the ground. (PTI)

DC emphasises on timely completion of road projects under Vibrant village programme



ITANAGAR, July 28: Dibang Valley Deputy Commissioner Bekir Nyorak has emphasised the importance of quality and timely completion of road projects under the Vibrant Village Programme (VVP).

The DC visited the border villages in Dambuen and Mipi circles of the district on July 26 to 27 to assess the progress of various ongoing road projects, an official said on Monday.

The VVP project aims to connect unconnected border villages including Achali, New Achuli, Atoto, Achengo, and Echito in the Dambuen circle, as well as Ahungo, Ediya, and Kamuyi in the Mipi circle, the official said.

Nyorak directed concerned engineers and contractors to accelerate the pace of work.

The DC also visited the construction site of the Mipi to Andreia ICBR road in the Mipi circle, a project being overseen by 62 RCC of Border Roads Organisation (BRO).

The 62 RCC BRO officer commanding Tanay Agarwal briefed about the project's progress, its current status and key challenges. (PTI)

Arunachal: Civil-military fusion meet sets roadmap for border development



ITANAGAR, July 28: In a significant move to boost coordination and address critical development and strategic concerns in Arunachal Pradesh's border district of Anjaw, the first-ever civil-military fusion meeting was held at Hawaii on Monday.

Key outcomes included a proposal to institutionalise a joint coordination committee, discussions on boosting local livelihoods through Army procurement, and plans for regular fusion meetings to fast-track initiatives.

Anjaw Deputy Commissioner Millo Kojin called for deeper collaboration between the civil administration and the Army, noting the latter's vital role in emergency logistics and development support, an official statement informed here.

He emphasised aligning efforts

with the vision of Viksit Bharat and Viksit Arunachal, and highlighted ITBP's Mission Himveer as a model, where 30 per cent of supplies are procured locally, for the Army to emulate.

Kojin also proposed setting up CSD canteens in remote areas, offering skill development to youth, and supporting Agniveer recruitment through awareness drives.

Administrative challenges like manpower shortage and road erosion in Mompani were also flagged.

Commandant of the 82 Mountain Brigade, Brigadier Jaspreet Singh, stressed the Army's "whole-of-nation" approach and urged the civil administration to support tourism promotion, especially in Walong.

He called for joint efforts in improving Agniveer application rates through local outreach and

motivation.

Deputy Commander of the Brigade, Col Deepak Kataria, raised concerns about power shortfalls in Walong and Kibithu, poor banking access, and limited helicopter services affecting both tourism and emergency response.

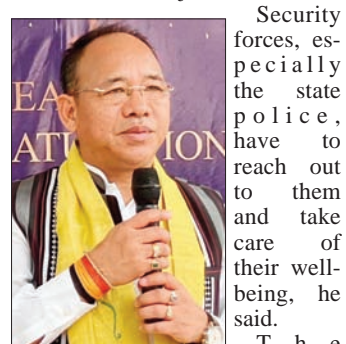
He pressed for urgent repair of key FSB routes (14, 16, and 17) and solid waste management systems to improve civic infrastructure. Lt Col Vinay Kumar shared progress under Operation Sadbhavna, including workshops for skills and healthcare, and plans to set up AI and Robotics Labs in the area.

Captain Neeraj from Sparrow 82 Mountain Brigade proposed launching a community radio centre in Walong, seeking administrative help for infrastructure and licensing. (PTI)

Arunachal home minister briefs Gov on law and order situation

ITANAGAR, July 28: Arunachal Pradesh Home Minister Mama Natung called on Governor KT Parnaik on Monday and discussed matters concerning law and order in the state with a particular focus on the challenges faced in the Tirap, Changlang, and Longding (TCL) districts.

The governor emphasised that all-out efforts should be made to instil a sense of security among the people, particularly the vulnerable section of society, an official statement from the Raj Bhavan said.

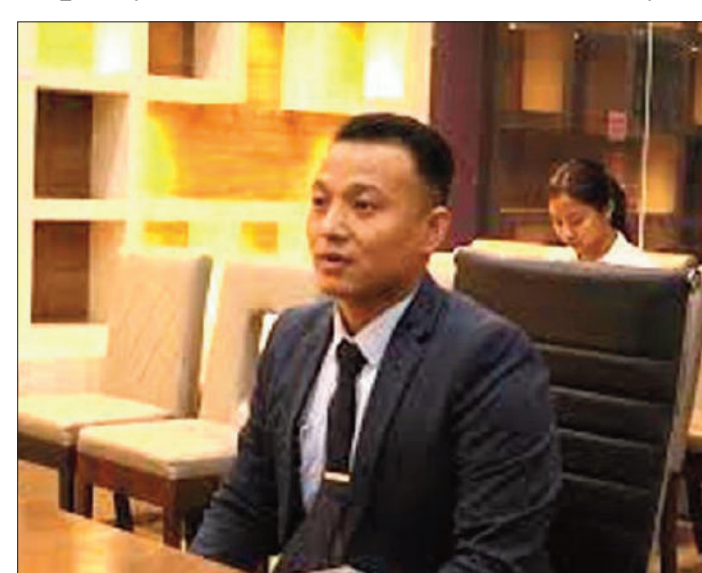


Security forces, especially the state police, have to reach out to them and take care of their well-being, he said.

The governor, who chaired a security review meeting at Namsai on July 26, shared his observations with the home minister regarding the challenges faced by villagers living in far-flung and difficult-to-access locations in the TCL region.

Effective governance must include not just security but also inclusive development, he emphasised. (PTI)

PPA appoints Oken Tayeng as legislature party leader in Arunachal Assembly



ITANAGAR, July 28: The People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) has appointed Mebo MLA Oken Tayeng as the Legislature Party leader in the state Assembly.

The decision was taken during a PPA Legislature Party meeting held on Sunday, which was chaired by party president Nabam Vivek. Alongside Tayeng's appointment, the party also named Tawang MLA Namgye Tsering as the deputy Legislature Party leader and Liromoba MLA Pesi Jilen as the chief whip of the party, Vivek, who is also the MLA from Doimukh, said on Monday.

"This is a necessary step to strengthen the party's structure in the Assembly," Vivek stated, adding that the party will soon fill various vacant functional posts at different organisational levels.

The PPA had initially secured two seats in the April 19 Assembly elections last year. However, its legislative strength increased to six after four MLAs from the National People's Party (NPP) recently joined the party fold.

The former NPP MLAs who switched allegiance to the PPA include Namgye Tsering (Tawang), Pesi Jilen (Liromoba), Tapi Darang (Pasighat East), and Oni Panyang (Mariyang-Geku), all of whom are first timers.

In the 60-member Arunachal Pradesh Assembly, the ruling BJP has 46 MLAs, followed by the PPA with six, Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) three. The Congress and NPP have one member each, and three legislators are Independents. (PTI)

Miscreants set ablaze school building in Arunachal's West Siang

ITANAGAR, July 28: Unidentified miscreants set on fire the annexure building of an Upper Primary School in Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district, police said on Monday.

The annexure building of the school at Lipu Bagra village, in which nursery, Class I, and Class II classes were held, was completely gutted in the blaze, the police said.

The incident occurred on Sunday near Aalo, the district headquarters town.

"The fire incident is shrouded in mystery. There were no eyewitnesses, and no call was made to the fire station at Aalo. One teacher who lives near the school was also unaware of the incident," West Siang Superintendent of Police (SP) Kardak Riba said.

Police have registered a case under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property (PDPP) Act, and are investigating the case using technical evidence.

Aalo West MLA Topin Ete has expressed shock and condemned the incident.

"I am deeply disturbed by the unfortunate incident at Lipu Bagra, where miscreants set fire to the Upper Primary School in the dead of night. Although I am currently out of station on unavoidable official duties, I have been in constant touch with the district administration," he said in a statement.

The BJP MLA said he has directed officials to take immediate relief measures and instructed the DDSE to make alternative arrangements to ensure that students' education continues without interruption.

Calling for strict action against the culprits, Ete added, "Education is the foundation of our society. Such cowardly acts will not shake our collective resolve. I stand in full solidarity with the students, teachers, and the community of Lipu Bagra. Together, we will rebuild, stronger and more united than ever." (PTI)

Arunachal Gov flags off woman Everest's seven-summit expedition

ITANAGAR, July 28: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) K T Parnaik on Monday flagged off celebrated woman Everest mountaineering expedition, a mission to scale the highest peaks on all seven continents.

The flag-off ceremony was held at Raj Bhavan as Yano embarked on one of the most formidable challenges in global mountaineering.

In a symbolic gesture, Parnaik handed over a ceremonial ice axe bearing the Indian Tricolour and the Arunachal Pradesh state emblem to Yano, in the presence of state Sports Minister Kento Jini, who also extended financial support to support her mission.

Describing the event as a celebration of courage and conviction, Parnaik lauded Yano's determination, calling her journey a representation of the indomitable spirit that dares to dream beyond boundaries.

He noted that only a few people across the world have attempted the seven-summit expedition, and praised Yano for her bold commitment to join that elite league.

"Yano carries with her the blessings of the people of Arunachal, the dreams of a new generation, and the resilient, peaceful, and unstoppable spirit of our state," the governor said.

He urged her to showcase to the world the strength, grace, and tenacity of a



daughter of Arunachal.

In a tribute to her earlier feat of summiting Mount Everest on May 21 last year, the governor presented her with the 'Land of Rising Sun' plaque, recognising her as a beacon of inspiration for the entire state.

Yano is the fifth woman from the state and the first from the Nyishi community to summit Mount Everest.

Sports Minister Kento Jini, in his address, commended the state government's

efforts in promoting sports, particularly adventure sports, and highlighted the various incentives and policies designed to support athletes.

He emphasised the government's progressive reservation policies for sportspersons, which create greater access to education and employment for talented youth.

To inspire future generations, the governor had specially invited students from

the Sangey Lhaden Sports Academy, cadets from the 1st Arunachal Pradesh NCC Battalion, and members of the Bharat Scouts and Guides to attend the ceremony.

Also present at the occasion were Sports and Youth Affairs secretary Abu Tayeng, Sports director Tadar Apa, and other dignitaries, who extended their support and encouragement to Kabak Yano. (PTI)

SIR row: SC says no interim stay on draft electoral roll, asks EC to accept Aadhaar, voter ID

NEW DELHI, July 28: Under-scoring the "presumption of genuineness" of Aadhaar and voter ID, the Supreme Court on Monday refused to stay the publication of draft electoral rolls in poll-bound Bihar and said it would once and for all decide pleas against Election Commission's special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The top cop asked the poll panel to continue accepting Aadhaar and voter ID for the SIR exercise in Bihar in compliance with its order, saying both documents had a "presumption of genuineness".

"As far as ration cards are concerned we can say they can be forged easily but Aadhaar and voter cards have some sanctity and have presumption of genuineness. You continue accepting these documents," a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joydalya Bagchi said.

The bench would on July 29 fix the time schedule to conduct the final hearing of the matter.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for NGO Association for Democratic Reforms, said the electoral rolls should not be finalised in the interim, pressing for an interim stay on the publication of the draft rolls on August 1.

The bench, however, referred to the top court's previous order noting the petitioners did not press for an interim relief, which couldn't be allowed now and said the matter would be interpreted once and for all. Sankaranarayanan said the interim relief of stay on the publication was not pressed as the top court had assured that the matter would be listed for hearing before August 1.

The bench noted the election commission's statement that the enumeration forms for the SIR could be submitted even after the



publication of draft rolls.

"Don't undermine the power of the court. Trust us. If the court agrees with your submission and if any illegality is found, then this court will quash everything then and there," the bench said.

On July 10, a bench headed by Justice Sudhanshu Dhulia asked the EC to consider Aadhaar, voter ID and ration cards as valid documents as it allowed the poll panel to continue with its exercise in Bihar.

The top court on Monday said it prima facie agreed with the July 10 order and the Election Commission of India (ECI) accepted in its counter affidavit that Aadhaar, voter cards and ration cards could be accepted.

While expressing its reservation on ration cards, the bench endorsed the "presumption of genuineness" of the other two documents.

Sankaranarayanan said despite ECI's assertion in the counter affidavit of accepting Aadhaar and voter cards, ground reports suggested otherwise.

Justice Kant said the election commission suggested the list of 11 documents for SIR was not inclusive but exhaustive and they

were using both Aadhaar and voter IDs for the purpose of identification. Senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for election commission, said Aadhaar was not a proof of citizenship and voter card was not relied upon as it was a revision exercise or else there was no use of such an exercise.

Justice Kant then remarked, "Any document on earth can be forged. The election commission can deal with cases of forgery on a case to case basis. Instead of en masse exclusion it must be en masse inclusion."

Justice Bagchi, on the other hand, referred to the election commission saying none of the 11 documents referred for SIR were conclusive and asked why couldn't someone uploading only Aadhaar be included.

Dwivedi said the poll panel was accepting both Aadhaar and voter IDs but with certain supporting documents.

The bench asked the lawyers appearing for different parties to submit the timeline and the time they required for arguments by July 29.

The EC affidavit has justified its ongoing SIR of electoral rolls in Bihar, saying it adds to the purity

of the election by "weeding out ineligible persons" from the electoral rolls.

The poll panel, while justifying its June 24 decision directing the SIR, has said all major political parties were "involved" in the exercise and deployed more than 1.5 lakh booth-level agents to reach out to eligible voters, but opposed it in the apex court.

The SIR adds to the purity of elections by weeding out ineligible persons from the electoral rolls, the ECI has said in a detailed affidavit filed to counter the allegations of petitioners, which include several political leaders, civil society members and organisations.

In a rejoinder affidavit, the petitioner NGO claimed the electoral registration officers were vested with broad and unchecked discretion that could result in disenfranchisement of a significant segment of Bihar's population.

"SIR order dated June 24, 2025, if not set aside, can arbitrarily and without due process disenfranchise lakhs of citizens from electing their representatives, thereby disrupting free and fair elections and democracy in the country, which are part of the basic structure of the Constitution," the NGO said.

Exclusion of Aadhaar and ration cards, it argued, from the list of acceptable documents in the SIR of Bihar's electoral rolls was patently absurd and the ECI gave no valid reason for its decision.

RJD MP Manoj Jha, who has also challenged the SIR exercise, in his rejoinder filed through advocate Fauzia Shakil said news reports claimed instances where voters complained booth level officers hadn't visited their houses or neighbourhoods and were found forging voters' signatures on forms and uploading them. (PTI)

Pahalgam-Op Sindoor debate Cong asks how many Indian jets were downed, whom did PM 'surrender' to

NEW DELHI, July 28: The Congress on Monday said Home Minister Amit Shah must take responsibility for the "security lapses" that allowed the Pahalgam terror attack, while asking the Centre to clarify how many Indian jets were downed during Operation Sindoor and "before whom did Prime Minister Narendra Modi surrender" to halt the military action against Pakistan.

Participating in a special discussion in the Lok Sabha on "India's strong, successful and decisive Operation Sindoor in response to the terror attack in Pahalgam", Congress's deputy leader in the House Gaurav Gogoi said according to the government, its intention was not to occupy territory. He asked the government why was it not so as "if not today, then when will we take Pakistan-occupied Kashmir back?"

Gogoi also slammed the government over US President Donald Trump's claim, made "26 times", that he used trade to bring about a ceasefire between India and Pakistan. The Congress leader said Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been saying since the Uri and Pulwama attacks that "humne ghar mein ghus ke mara", "we destroyed terror infrastructure" and is making the same remarks even now.

"They are still saying that Operation Sindoor is incomplete and Pakistan can do this again. Then how is this a success? They themselves are saying that our intention was not of war. Why was it not so? They say it was not to take territory. Why was it not so? When will we take Pakistan-occupied Kashmir back? If not today, then when?... The most horrendous terror attacks have happened under your government," Gogoi said. He said the opposition wants to know from Modi that if Pakistan was ready to kneel before India, "why did you stop and before whom did you surrender?"

"Trump has made the claim 26 times that he used the threat of trade to bring a ceasefire between India and Pakistan. He says five to six jets have been downed. One jet is of crores and crores (of rupees). That is why we want to know from the defence minister, the country has the courage to listen to the truth, he must answer as to how many fighter jets were downed," the Congress leader said. "This information, this truth, is not just for Indian citizens, it is important for soldiers, they are also being lied to," he added.

Gogoi said there are just "35 Rafale fighter jets in the country" and if some have been downed, "it is a big loss". He made the remarks while referring to a statement of Chief of Defence Staff General Anil



Chauhan, who said in an interview that India rectified its tactics and hit deep inside Pakistani territory after suffering losses during Operation Sindoor.

The Congress leader also cited the remarks of Indian Defence Attache in Indonesia, Group Captain Shiv Kumar, and Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Rahul R Singh to corner the government. He pointed out that according to Group Captain Kumar, there were constraints that hampered the military operations and Lt Gen. Singh had said that India contended with and battled against China during Operation Sindoor.

Gogoi asked Defence Minister Rajnath Singh why did he not name China during his address in the Lok Sabha and said he must disclose how much support that country was providing to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor that was launched in the aftermath of the April 22 Pahalgam attack to target terror infrastructure in Pakistan and PoK.

Referring to Singh's speech earlier, Gogoi said he gave a lot of information, but did not say as the defence minister how the terrorists came to Pahalgam.

"The country wants to know ... 100 days have passed, but this government has not brought the terrorists to justice," he said.

The home minister kept saying that the backbone of terrorism has been broken, but the Uri, Balakot and Pahalgam incidents still happened, he said.

"Who will take responsibility, the (Jammu and Kashmir) LG? It is the home minister who must take responsibility. You cannot hide behind the LG. This government is such a coward and is so weak that it blamed even tour operators for the Pahalgam attack," the Congress leader said.

He claimed that the security framework and those who take decisions have become arrogant and they behave as if no one can question them. (PTI)

SIT begins site inspections over 'mass burials' in Dharmasthala

DHARMASTHALA (KARNATAKA), July 28: A team of police officials from the SIT, constituted by the Karnataka government to probe alleged mass burial sites in Dharmasthala, began site inspections on Monday, police said.

Accompanied by land records officials, local police, and district authorities, the Special Investigation Team visited multiple locations, including the bathing ghats of the Nethravati river at the entrance of Dharmasthala.

The SIT, along with Kadaba Tahsildar Prabhakar Khajure, conducted a mahazar (preliminary site inspection) at the Nethravati riverbank, based on complaints lodged by local groups alleging that parts of the land may have been used for mass burials.

The inspection was ordered by Dakshina Kannada Deputy Commissioner Darshan H V after the matter gained local and media attention. The complaint alleged that skeletal remains could be buried beneath a portion of the ghat area where excavation had reportedly been carried out in the past.

No remains were found during the inspection, police said, adding that a detailed investigation involving forensic experts will be conducted in the coming days. (PTI)

Mamata launches 'Bhasha Andolan' against BJP-EC's alleged 'backdoor NRC' bid

BOLPUR (WB), July 28: In a fiery escalation of her anti-BJP offensive ahead of the 2026 Assembly polls, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Monday launched 'Bhasha Andolan' (Language Movement), accusing the Centre and the EC of conspiring to implement the NRC "through the backdoor" and unleashing "linguistic terror" on Bengali-speaking migrants.

Launching the statewide 'Bengali Language Movement' from Bolpur, the cultural crucible shaped by Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, Banerjee declared she would "give up her life but not her language" and vowed to stand against attempts to erase Bengali asmita (pride), disenfranchise the poor, or drive out migrants under the guise of electoral roll revision.

She alleged that the BJP-led Centre, in collusion with the EC, was targeting minorities, OBCs, the poor, and Bengali-speaking voters through the Special Summary Revision, to strike off genuine names from the voter list in a covert NRC-like exercise. Daring the EC to delete names of genuine voters, Banerjee warned that such "steps would attract consequences."

Leading a rally of TMC supporters and returnee Bengali migrants, Banerjee said, "We will stop this conspiracy to jeopardise our existence in the name of linguistic terror and an attempt to implement NRC by the backdoor."

"I will not allow NRC to be imple-

mented in Bengal as long as I am alive. I won't allow detention camps to be built here. Try removing names from Bengal... there will be consequences. Are you ready to face the music from our mothers, our sisters, and our cultural groups when they decide to rise against you in non-violent manners?" she warned. Waving to cheering crowds and holding a portrait of Tagore, Banerjee walked the three-kilometre-long protest march from the Tourist Lodge Crossing to Jamboni bus stand, flanked by ministers, senior party leaders, and local elected representatives. "We have no enmity with any language. I am not against any language. I believe that unity in diversity is the foundation of our nation. But if you try to erase our language and culture, we will resist peacefully, powerfully, and politically," Banerjee said.

Banerjee had last week issued a clarion call to TMC workers to prepare for a fresh agitation from July 28, calling it a second 'Language Movement', drawing parallels with the historic 1952 protest in Dhaka (then East Pakistan) where students sacrificed their lives demanding recognition of Bengali as an official language of Pakistan.

The United Nations later declared February 21 as International Mother Language Day to commemorate that struggle. Alleging that the Election Commission was working at the behest of the Centre, Banerjee said, "A former minister in the BJP government



is now trying to delete names of voters from the electoral list to assist his friend in the double-engine government. I dare them to omit genuine voters in the name of electoral roll revision. We will not allow them to make Bengalis homeless in their own country." "I warn the Election Commission - if you dare delete names from Bengal's voter list, you will witness Chhau dance, dhamsamadol, conch shells, cymbals, and war drums. Have you heard such sounds before? We will make you hear them," she said, drawing cheers from the audience. In a veiled warning to the state block-level officers, who also serve as EC officials during the electoral roll revision process, she said, "Remember, BLOs are government employees of this state. Do not harass people in the name of voter list revision."

Banerjee further invoked the cultural and historical legacy of Bengal, urging people never to forget their Asmita (pride), mother tongue, and motherland. (PTI)

Stop ranting about war, talk about dialogue with Pak: Mufti to Centre

SRINAGAR, July 28: Peoples Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti on Monday said that if India has to move forward and prosper, it should stop "ranting" about war with Pakistan and take the path of dialogue and reconciliation.

Speaking at an event organised at Sher-e-Kashmir Park here to mark the party's 26th foundation day, Mufti asserted that people of Jammu and Kashmir want peace with dignity and they will "interfere" in the country's foreign policy when it comes to Pakistan.

She appealed to the Centre to view and listen to the people of Jammu and Kashmir "with your hearts" and unless they do so, the India-Pakistan "issue will not get resolved".

"I want to tell the Government of India that the people of Jammu and Kashmir are not your enemies. We want peace with dignity. We want peace through friendship, not war," Mufti said addressing party workers.

"You sent delegations across the world to talk about what happened during Operation Sindoor, in Pahalgam, and what is happening in 'Kashmir'. It is Kashmir that faced hardships during the conflict. So if a Kashmiri does not demand dialogue with Pakistan, who else will?" Mufti asked. Mufti asked the Central government to take the path of reconciliation.

"If our country has to move forward, then stop ranting about war and talk about dialogue (with Pakistan). If you want to prove your mettle in the world and overcome China, then enter a dialogue and take the path of reconciliation," she said. Asserting that Jammu and Kashmir has been a huge challenge for all the prime ministers until now, Mufti said she is not reluctant to say that if Prime Minister Narendra Modi so will,

"he can resolve the Kashmir issue because he has been elected by 120 crore people".

"He (Modi) has the power. He went to Lahore uninvited, no one questioned him," she said.

Referring to the upcoming Asia Cup cricket tournament in the UAE, the former chief minister of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir said that sports should not be mixed with politics. "I am happy that India has decided to participate in the Asia Cup even as everyone is saying they should not. Let the sports be," she said.

Mufti said whenever the people of Jammu and Kashmir talk about peace and dialogue with Pakistan, they are told not to interfere in the country's foreign policy. "I want to tell Delhi what India's foreign policy is without Jammu and Kashmir. We had war, it caused destruction. I want to tell the government that we will interfere in the foreign policy and ask you to become the Big Brother because your war is fought in Jammu and Kashmir," she said.

The PDP chief also asked the government to desist from a "weapons race" with Pakistan and focus on the country's pressing issues.

"There is another war now -- whether India buys more weapons or Pakistan," she claimed.

"See China, see its GDP and where it has reached. India has more population and more youths than China, but we are far behind. It is not me who is saying this, our external affairs minister has stated that we cannot compete with China," Mufti said.

"Meanwhile, Pakistan is living on loans. It is behind Bangladesh, has less GDP and more unemployment. In our country, we provide free ration to 80 crore people." (PTI)

Indore teacher suffering from rare bone disorder seeks President's nod for euthanasia

INDORE, July 28: A 52-year-old government school teacher from Indore, who is suffering from a rare bone disorder that has confined her to a wheelchair, has sought President Droupadi Murmu's consent for euthanasia. The administration, however, is trying to dissuade her, although she remains steadfast in her demand, an official said.

Euthanasia is the practice of painlessly putting to death a person suffering from painful and incurable disease or incapacitating physical disorder.

Talking to PTI on Monday, Chandrakanta Jethwani, a science teacher at the government primary school in Jabran Colony, said she suffers from osteogenesis imperfecta, a rare genetic disorder that affects bone formation and makes bones extremely fragile.

"I have made an appeal for euthanasia to the President through the media. I have already pledged my eyes and body. I want medical students to study my disease after my death," she said. Jethwani said she initially used a walker to move around and managed to ride a scooter, but after being allegedly prescribed wrong medication in 2020, her condition deteriorated, and she has since been wheelchair-bound. She still attends school using a wheelchair.

"My parents and siblings have passed away. I am completely broken, physically and financially," the unmarried teacher said. Pawan Chauhan, joint director in charge of the social justice department, said, "We have sent a clinical psychologist to counsel the teacher. If required, we will arrange another counselling session." District project coordinator Vinay Mishra said that the education department has been providing all possible support to Jethwani and has assigned her to a school she can easily access.

Jethwani, however, continues to press for her euthanasia request and has demanded that until she receives the President's approval, the administration



should assign a female attendant to care for her 24 hours a day. "I will never commit suicide. I will wait for a week or two for the President's permission for euthanasia. If I do not receive it, I will stop consuming food and water," she added.

The Supreme Court has recognised the right to die with dignity as a fundamental right, specifically allowing for passive euthanasia under certain conditions. This includes the option for terminally ill patients to execute a "living will" to refuse medical treatment, particularly if they are in a persistent vegetative state and unable to communicate their wishes.

The apex court laid down guidelines for the process of passive euthanasia, including the formation of medical boards to assess the patient's condition and the validity of their wishes. In 2023, the Supreme Court modified guidelines to simplify the process for passive euthanasia, making it less cumbersome for patients and families. These modifications included streamlining the process of withdrawal of life support and reducing the involvement of government officials.

The guidelines mandate a structured process involving medical boards to assess the patient's condition and ensure informed consent from the patient or their designated representatives. (PTI)

SB43154 drug used in cancer research shows promise against COVID-19 in preclinical studies: Scientists

NEW DELHI, July 28: After a long battle and research, Indian scientists have found out that a drug used in cancer studies has the potential to provide substantial protection against the coronavirus infection in preclinical studies.

Remarkably, even after more than 50 consecutive generations exposed to the drug, the virus was unable to develop resistance. Scientists from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) have jointly found that the drug -- SB431542, an ALK5 inhibitor -- is highly effective against the coronavirus.

This discovery was a collaborative effort between the National Centre for Veterinary Type Culture in Hisar and National Institute of Virology (NIV) under the ICMR in Pune, said NIV Director Dr Naveen Kumar.

The study was first released as a preprint on bioRxiv and has since been accepted for publication in the Journal of Virology. If future human trials confirm its effectiveness, the drug could become a groundbreaking tool in the fight against COVID-19.

Since December 2019, when the coronavirus emerged from China's



Wuhan, it has spread to nearly every country in the world. Since 2020, more than 30 anti-Covid vaccines have received the World Health Organization's (WHO) approval for global use.

"However, health experts believe vaccines alone are not enough. The virus continues to mutate, and many existing treatments like Remdesivir and monoclonal antibodies will quickly lose effectiveness," Kumar said.

In this context, Indian scientists have been screening small molecule inhibitors that mainly target cellular kinases and phosphatases. One such compound, SB431542 -

originally developed to block TGF-β (Transforming Growth Factor-beta) signalling and commonly used in preclinical cancer, inflammation and fibrosis research -- has now been found by Indian researchers to also inhibit the coronavirus effectively.

Kumar explained that SB431542 fights the virus in three fronts. It first blocks the virus from entering human cells by targeting the TGF-β/Smad pathway. Secondly, it disrupts the ability of the virus to assemble inside cells by interfering with ORF3a-related lysosomal dysfunction. Finally, it prevents the virus from killing the

infected cell (a process called apoptosis), which helps stop the virus from escaping and spreading to other cells. This three-pronged approach has not been observed in any existing antiviral drug.

Interestingly, the drug acted through both direct and indirect mechanisms -- it directly targets the viral ORF3a protein and indirectly hinders the virus by blocking the host cell's TGF-β signaling pathway.

SB431542 was also tested against the chicken coronavirus (Infectious Bronchitis Virus or IBV) in specific pathogen-free chicken embryos. Embryos treated with the drug developed normally and showed no mortality, while those in the untreated control group failed to develop properly and did not survive.

Kumar emphasised that even after exposing the virus to the drug over 50 successive generations (passage), it failed to develop resistance. This suggests that the chances of the virus evolving a drug-resistant variant against this compound are extremely low. This is a major advancement over existing antivirals like Remdesivir, against which the virus builds resistance quickly. (PTI)

Sweeping reforms, crackdown on evasion drive 104% GST growth in Nagaland Nagaland records sharp surge in GST revenue

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, July 28: Nagaland recorded a sharp surge in GST revenue, with 104% jump in June alone.

The state tax department celebrated this milestone at the commissioner of taxes office in Dimapur, reporting a sharp rise in GST revenue owing to sweeping internal reforms and intensified enforcement measures, an official release said on Monday.

In a remarkable year-on-year comparison, the department has posted a 43% increase in April, 44% in May, and an astounding 104% in June 2025.

Petroleum revenue also saw a substantial 31% rise in the first quarter of FY 2025-26.

The department credits these gains to structural improvements, skill development initiatives, adoption of best practices, and a revamp of enforcement mechanisms.



To further support enforcement efforts, additional chief secretary and finance commissioner Sentiyanger Imchen flagged off four new vehicles, including mobile squads and enforcement Boleros. These will aid field mobility and enhance outreach across the state. Abhinav Shivam, Commissioner Of State Taxes, expressed appreciation to the state government for supporting the department's operational needs. "The addition of these vehicles is a much-needed boost. It will help us plan and execute field operations more effectively," he said, anticipating an immediate visible impact.

Shivam also lauded the tireless efforts of tax officers and the business community's growing compliance. He emphasised the significance of sincere tax reporting, but warned against persistent challenges like fake invoicing, ITC fraud, and underreporting. He urged businesses to address these issues and support the ongoing reforms.

"The surge in tax collection is proof that Nagaland is adapting swiftly to the changing GST landscape," Shivam noted, "Our officials are second to none in the country."

Highlighting the broader impact, he added, "A stronger tax base doesn't just mean higher state spending, it also increases Nagaland's share in national resource allocation. Every rupee invested in the tax department yields multifold returns."

Two women arrested with heroin

AGARTALA, July 28: Two women were arrested with drugs worth Rs 15 lakh from Bankumari area within East Agartala police station limits, police said on Monday. Acting on a tip-off, a team from East Agartala police station detained the two women at Bankumari auto stand on suspicion on Sunday night.

"During the search, 0.975 grams of heroin packed in six packets were recovered from the possession of the two women, identified as Rozina Begum (35) of Sonamura and Kalsam Begum (35) of Bishalgarh in Sepahijala district. Accordingly, they were arrested for drug possession," West District SP Kiran Kumar said.

The estimated market value of the seized narcotics is around Rs 15 lakh, an official said. (PTI)

'Rain could be reason for missing coal'

SHILLONG, July 28: Meghalaya Excise Minister, Kyrmen Shylla on Monday said heavy rainfall in Meghalaya could be a reason for the disappearance of over 4,000 metric tons of coal, as noted in the 31st interim report submitted by Justice (Retd) BP Katakay to the Meghalaya High Court.

He said the coal might have been washed away due to high rainfall, making it difficult to determine if the disappearance was due to natural causes or illegal activities.

On July 25, the High Court directed the State to take action against those responsible and trace the persons who may have illegally lifted the coal.

"I am not justifying. Meghalaya receives the highest rainfall. You never know because of the rain, it got carried away," Shylla said.

However, he said he lacked sufficient details to confirm the cause and that all mining and transportation should be done legally.

He also addressed allegations of illegal coal mining, stating that evidence is required, and various departments are tasked with verifying such claims. He expressed hope that the announcement of scientific mining by the Chief Minister would deter illegal activities, as people welcome the legal route. (NNN)

Army conducts exercise in Sikkim to test drones, AI-enabled sensors in high-altitude conditions

GANGTOK, July 28: The Indian Army conducted an exercise in the high-altitude areas of East Sikkim to test new technologies, including AI-enabled sensors and drones, designed to improve battlefield awareness, real-time surveillance and quick decision-making, a statement said. During 'Exercise Divya Drishti', troops of Trishakti Corps used a mix of ground-based systems and aerial platforms, including UAVs, to carry out realistic scenarios.

The key highlight of the exercise was the use of AI-enabled sensors linked with advanced communication systems. This setup ensured smooth and secure data

flow between command centres, improving situational awareness and enabling faster, better decisions, creating a strong sensor-to-shooter link, the statement said.

Lieutenant General Rakesh Kapoor, Deputy Chief of Army Staff, reviewed the exercise and its outcomes on behalf of Army Headquarters. "Exercise Divya Drishti has been a great success. We tested cutting-edge technologies in realistic field conditions. The lessons will help develop future technologies, doctrines, and tactics across the Indian Army, making us ready for any adversary and any terrain," said Lt Gen Zubin A Minwalla, the General Officer Commanding, Trishakti Corps. (PTI)

CM Manik Saha blames ally Tipura Motha for attack on BJP members, vows strict action

AGARTALA, July 28: Blaming ally Tipura Motha for the attack on BJP members in Khowai district, Tripura CM Manik Saha said he has directed the police to take strict action against the perpetrators.

Saha visited the state-run GB Pant Hospital on Sunday night to meet the injured BJP workers.

"Strongly condemn the violent & undemocratic attack by TIPRA Motha party workers during Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi Ji's #MannKiBaat programme at Ashrambari," he said in a Facebook post.

"Several BJP karyakartas injured, 3 undergoing treatment at GB Hospital. I visited the hospital, instructed doctors to provide best care & directed police to take strict action against perpetrators. Such disgraceful acts won't be tolerated," he added.

The incident happened in Ashrambari in Purba Taksaiya, a remote tribal village, in the Champahover police station area on Sunday morning.

The Pradyot Debbarma-led Tipra Motha, a part of the BJP-led government in the state, denied its involvement in the incident, which triggered a political storm in the state.

"BJP workers had gathered at a house to listen to the 'Mann Ki Baat' programme. Suddenly, a group of miscreants attacked them, injuring three persons. All of them were taken to a nearby health facility," Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Khowai Kudiarasu told PTI.

"Preliminary investigation revealed internal rivalry led to the attack, and it had nothing to do with 'Mann Ki Baat'. An



FIR was lodged, and an investigation is underway. No arrest has been made so far," he said.

The BJP's Janajati Morcha general secretary Bipin Debbarma claimed that seven party members were injured in the attack.

Three vehicles and 10 motorcycles belonging to BJP members were also set on fire by the attackers, police said.

Forest minister Animesh Debbarma, a leader of Tipra Motha, denied the party's involvement in the incident.

"I don't know what the BJP has said. We do not attack leaders or workers, or supporters of our allies. There might be a conspiracy to create such a situation. In no way is the party involved in the attack," he claimed. (PTI)

TPCC blames BJP govts for collapse of state education system

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, July 28: The Tripura Pradesh Congress has launched a sharp attack on both the Central and State governments, blaming them for the worsening education crisis in the state.

The party accused the BJP-led administrations of deliberate negligence, prolonged vacancy of teaching positions, and bureaucratic indifference that has crippled government schools across Tripura.

In a statement the Tripura Congress on Monday, alleged that the Centre's rigid, industry-oriented National Education Policy (NEP) has accelerated the privatization and commercialization of education.

It further claimed that the state government's "Tughlaq-like" decisions and anti-education policies over the past seven and a half years have pushed the public education system to the brink of collapse.

The party highlighted that thousands of teaching posts remain vacant, affecting classroom learning in every school.

"The situation is particularly alarming in the Autonomous District Council (ADC) areas, where over 300 schools are reportedly functioning with just one teacher. Several schools are also said to lack graduate teachers for Classes 9 and 10, forcing students to take to the streets in protest and blockade roads to demand teachers", said the PCC.

Quoting official data, the Con-



gress said students in government schools are failing to achieve even basic learning levels.

It held the previous Education Minister responsible for widespread mismanagement and corruption, which continues to plague the department.

As a result, an increasing number of underprivileged families are withdrawing children from government schools and turning to private institutions, while unemployed youths face a bleak future due to recruitment delays.

"A key flashpoint remains the indefinite delay in the publication of results of the STGT (Selection Test for Graduate Teachers) held in 2022. The recruitment of 350 graduate teachers has reportedly been stalled due to a legal challenge over flawed implementation of the reservation policy. While the High Court directed the Education Department to revise the

reservation norms and proceed with appointments, the department's decision to challenge the ruling in the Supreme Court has frozen the process. Despite repeated appeals by candidates to the government and Chief Minister Manik Saha—who also holds the Education portfolio—no resolution has been offered. Many aspirants have already crossed the age limit for eligibility, while others are at risk of doing so", said Congress.

The Congress also dismissed the government's recent announcement of 1,600 new teacher recruitments as an attempt to deflect public attention from the core issues.

It accused the administration of routinely cancelling job notifications, reissuing advertisements, and failing to maintain transparency in exams and reservation policies.

Sikkim MP urges Edu Ministry to include tribal languages as optional subjects in CBSE classes 11, 12

GANGTOK, July 28: Sikkim's lone Lok Sabha MP Indra Hang Subba on Monday wrote to the Ministry of Education seeking the inclusion of Rai, Sherpa, Tamang and Gurung languages as optional second vernacular subjects in classes 11 and 12 of CBSE schools in the Himalayan state.

He endorsed a joint representation submitted by four prominent community organisations – Sikkim Akhil Kirat Rai Sangh, Denjong Sherpa Association, Sikkim Tamang Buddhist Association, and All Sikkim Gurung (Tamu) Buddhist Association, an official statement said.

Subba called on Union Minister of Education Dharmendra Pradhan at his office in Parliament House, and also met the Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar at his official residence to convey the urgency and cultural importance of the matter, it said.

The communities had expressed concern over the ministry's earlier rejection of this request, conveyed through a letter dated December 20, 2024.

In his communication, Subba urged the ministry to reconsider the decision in light of

the educational, constitutional, and cultural significance of the proposal.

"These languages are already part of the CBSE curriculum in classes 9 and 10. Discontinuing them in senior secondary classes breaks the academic continuity and undermines efforts at cultural and linguistic preservation," Subba said.

He further emphasised that the demand is logistically feasible and aligns with the spirit of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which promotes multilingualism and inclusion of regional languages.

The representation highlights that the inclusion would not require additional resources or examination days, as students are only required to choose one second language from an existing set of options, it said.

Subba also noted that this move would strengthen the Union government's commitment to inclusive and equitable education while upholding Article 29 of the Constitution, which protects the interests of minorities. Subba has requested the ministry to direct CBSE to introduce these languages from the 2025-26 academic session in schools. (PTI)

Five militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, July 28: Security forces arrested five militants belonging to three proscribed outfits involved in extortion activity from Imphal East and Thoubal districts, police said on Monday.

Three active cadres of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Apunba City Meitei) were arrested from Imphal East district on Sunday, they said.

Two of them were arrested from Huidrom village while they were on their way to a brick field to collect extortion money. Another was later arrested from Kairang Manning Leikai area upon their disclosure, the police said.

An active cadre of the proscribed Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (SOREPA) was arrested from Thoubal district.

A KCP (MFL) militant was arrested from his residence at Eshingthambi Mapan in Imphal East district. (PTI)

Two persons arrested for attack on BJP workers in Tripura: Police

AGARTALA, July 27: Two persons were arrested for their alleged involvement in the attack on BJP workers when they were listening to PM Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat radio programme in Tripura's Khowai district, police said on Monday.

The arrest came hours after Chief Minister Manik Saha's strong message to the police for taking action against those who are involved in "shameful and undemocratic" act.

At least seven BJP workers were injured in the attack, while three were admitted to BGP Hospital (in Agartala). Ten bikes of BJP workers and two vehicles were also torched by alleged Tipra Motha Party (TMP) supporters.

"Based on the FIR, police have arrested two persons for their alleged involvement in the attack on BJP workers, while two more were brought for interrogation," Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Khowai, Kudiarasu said.

He said the two arrested persons will be produced before a local court on Monday seeking police remand for further interrogation.

In the FIR, BJP's Mandal president, Ashrambari Assembly constituency in Khowai district, Jayanta Debbarma has named 30 people accusing them of carrying out an attack on party workers.

The chief minister on Sunday held BJP's ally Tipra Motha Party (TMP) responsible for the attack on BJP members in Khowai district and directed the police to take strict action against the perpetrators.

"Strongly condemn the violent & undemocratic attack by TIPRA Motha party workers during Hon'ble PM Narendra Modi Ji's #MannKiBaat programme at Ashrambari," he said in a Facebook post. (PTI)



Meghalaya gets its first centrifuged latex unit, to benefit 3,000 rubber farmers in Garo hills

SHILLONG, July 28: In a significant boost to rubber cultivation and value-addition in western Meghalaya, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday inaugurated the state's first centrifuged latex manufacturing unit in East Garo Hills, aimed at processing raw rubber and benefiting over 3,000 farmers engaged in rubber plantations across the region.

This is the second such unit in the Northeast and marks a major milestone in Meghalaya's efforts to support rural livelihoods and promote agri-based entrepreneurship, according to a statement by the CMO.

The 18.8-crore project at Koksi Nengsat under Songsak C&RD Block has been funded by the state government through the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA). It is implemented by Sr Rose, founder of Mendipathar Multipurpose Cooperative Society (MMCS).

"This unit is a boon for Garo hills and the state as a whole. Since our government took office in 2018, our priority has been to understand the concerns of our farmers and come up with interventions to support them. We have launched several schemes like FOCUS, FOCUS+, and CM Farm+ to empower our farmers," the chief minister said.

Sangma said while the prime minister has set a goal to double farmers' income, Meghalaya needs to go beyond doubling, given the significant dependence of the population on agriculture.



"To achieve our \$10 billion economy target, we must improve the livelihood and income opportunities for our farmers," he added.

Citing examples of successful agri-based ventures in the state, Sangma mentioned the Nokma ice-cream unit that produces 1 lakh packets daily, the Awang chips processing unit, and mushroom farming initiatives in Mendipathar.

These, he said, have helped farmers in areas like Rongara, Tikrikilla, and Mendipathar.

"The rubber sheet industry in Garo hills has long suffered due to middlemen from outside the region. This new processing unit will change that. It will offer competitive prices and reduce the transportation burden. I urge all rubber farmers to sell

their produce to this unit," he said.

Highlighting the need to shift from reliance on government jobs, the chief minister said the state is working to create an entrepreneurial ecosystem.

"We need to encourage our youth to take up entrepreneurship. Through CM Elevate, we are supporting start-ups and new business ventures," he said.

During the programme, Sangma also laid the foundation for Meghalaya's first fruit dehydration unit, which will come up at a cost of ₹ 23 crore.

The facility, to be completed by November 2026, will have a processing capacity of 7,400 metric tonnes annually and benefit over 5,000 farmers by ensuring assured procurement and better price realisation. (PTI)

No.A/BKD/Quotation/2025-26/527-29 Date 28/07/2025

NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

Sealed quotation are invited affixing Rs.8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only court fee stamp from reputed Dealer/Supplier for supply of the following items under Baksa Forest Division as per the following terms and condition to the office of the Divisional Forest Officer, Baksa Forest Division, Mushapur.

The Quotation must submit a self-attested copy of Firm/Dealer/Supplier up to date Registration, GST Registration certificate, Income Tax Return, Annual Turnover, Bank Certificate etc. along with the quotation.

The dates of receipt of Quotation are fixed on 11/08/2025 Upto 3PM & the Quotation will be opened on the same date & place at 4 PM

Sl. No.	Item	Specification	Quantity (HA/RM)	Rate to be quoted (including GST & other charges if any) Per unit/per set
1	Erection of Fencing	Cost of chain-linked fence (4 ft. with 12 Gauge, 3inch mesh size) with 2 strands barbed wire to be fitted on the RCC post of 1.55m height above ground at 6ftt apart including transportation, fitting and fixing for 1 RM @ Rs.1661/- as per estimate	2204	3660844.00
2	Advance Works	Site selection, surveying, demarcation, Jungle cutting, burning etc.15DLA/HA @ Rs.344/-/DL.	50	258000.00
Total Rs.			2254	3918844.00 (Say Rs.3918912/-)

Detailed Quotation may be seen at the office of the undersigned during office hours in all working days.

Sd/- Divisional Forest Officer,
Baksa Forest Division, Mushapur

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/2125

BHUMI PEDNEKAR TURNS SHOWSTOPPER FOR VETERAN FASHION DESIGNER RITU KUMAR AT INDIA COUTURE WEEK

NEW DELHI, July 28: Veteran designer Ritu Kumar showcased her latest collection, Threads of Time: Reimagined, at the ongoing India Couture Week, with actor Bhumi Pednekar gracing the ramp as her showstopper.

At 80, Kumar remains a formidable force in Indian fashion, known for championing traditional Indian craftsmanship through her signature designs. Speaking at a post-show press conference, she remarked, "Today, we are a really strong contender for the world of fashion and crafts. In most other countries, this is limited to a museum; here we are celebrating the living craftsmanship."

Threads of Time: Reimagined blended bridal and Indian wear with fusion silhouettes, showcasing a balance between timeless tradition and modern versatility. The collection stood out for its intricate gold embroidery, a hallmark of Kumar's aesthetic, adorning a range of garments — from contemporary cuts to loose, comfortable silhouettes.

A rich palette dominated the run-

way, led by bridal reds, and expanded into hues commonly found in Indian wardrobes such as fuchsia, baby blue, yellow, and mauve. Accessories were kept minimal, allowing the garments and embroidery to speak for themselves.

The musical curation matched the theme of heritage meets modernity. From the soul-stirring Aik Alif by Saen Zahoo to upbeat tracks like Beat Goes On and Christine, the soundtrack created a striking contrast that reflected the spirit of the collection.

Pednekar made a statement as she walked the ramp to the haunting sufi classic Chhap Tilak Sab Chhini Re, dressed in a gold embroidered lehenga. Styled with emerald studs, bold lipstick, and a trailing cape in place of a traditional dupatta, the look offered a fresh take on the modern Indian bride.

"It's beautiful, it's rich, it's comfortable and it's just timeless. That's pretty much what my aesthetic is," Pednekar said, praising the outfit. She also reflected on her personal relationship with fashion, calling it

a powerful form of self-expression:

"My choices give me a lot of strength and courage... It gives me the opportunity to question the status quo through my fashion choices and that's one of the biggest reasons I resonate with the brand so much."

Ritu Kumar, joined on the runway by her son Amrish Kumar, CEO of the label, shared her design philosophy:

"I prefer coming up with a collection that has depth rather than doing something that's just fast fashion. Indian textiles have never been limited to just bridal. We've clothed the world in diverse styles — and for that to continue, we must contemporise for today and tomorrow."

She also credited younger designers for carrying the legacy forward. (PTI)



Salman Khan recalls an advice his father Salim Khan gave him



NEW DELHI, July 28: Bollywood star Salman Khan shared a piece of advice his father and legendary scriptwriter Salim Khan gave him and said he regrets not knowing it before.

Salman posted a picture of himself on his Instagram handle on Saturday and attached a lengthy caption along. The post featured him sporting his signature Being Human t-shirt.

Remembering his father's words, the actor said someone can't make a person do anything if one doesn't want to.

"Present becomes your past, past catches up to your future, present is a gift, do right with it, mistakes repeated becomes a habit and then your character, don't blame anyone, no one can

make you do anything that you don't want to," he wrote in the caption.

The 59-year-old actor said he wished he had heard it earlier, but it's never too late. "My dad just said this to me, it's so true. Kash (I wish) I heard this earlier but never too late," he concluded.

Salman's latest work is "Sikandar", which was released on March 30. Directed by A R Murugadoss of "Gha-jini" and "Holiday: A Soldier Is Never Off Duty" fame, the film was produced by Sajid Nadiadwala's banner Nadiadwala Grandson Entertainment.

It also featured "Pushpa: The Rise" star Rashmika Mandanna. (PTI)

'Metro...In Dino' earns ₹ 55.16 crore at box office

NEW DELHI, July 28: Anurag Basu's directorial "Metro...In Dino" has crossed the mark of ₹ 50 crore with its domestic box office collection, the makers said on Monday.

Featuring a star-studded cast comprising Aditya Roy Kapur, Sara Ali Khan, Pankaj Tripathi, Konkana Sen Sharma, Ali Fazal, Fatima Sana Shaikh, Anupam Kher, and Neena Gupta, the music romance drama released in theatres worldwide on July 4.

The film is produced by Bhushan Kumar of T-Series and Anurag Basu Productions Pvt Ltd.

Production banner shared the box office collection on its official Instagram handle. The film has earned ₹ 55.16 crore nett at the domestic box office. "55.16 crore in 24 days," the text over the poster read.

"Metro...In Dino' is riding high on your hearts. Book your tickets now. Link in bio," read the caption.

The film follows the bittersweet relationships of four couples in a contemporary setting.

It is a spiritual sequel to Basu's film "Life in a... Metro". It was released in 2007, starring late actor Irrfan Khan, Kay Kay Menon, Sharma, Kangana Ranaut, Shilpa Shetty Kundra, Shinee Ahuja and Shinee Ahuja. Sharma is the only actor who featured in both films. (PTI)



Sunny Deol meets Dalai Lama: Truly unforgettable



NEW DELHI, July 28: Bollywood star Sunny Deol met Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama and called it a moment of deep honour and gratitude.

Deol shared a post on his Instagram handle on Monday morning, featuring him alongside Lama, whom he met while travelling to Ladakh.

"A moment of deep honour and gratitude. Met His Holiness, The Dalai Lama, during my journey through the serene landscapes of Ladakh. His presence, wisdom, and blessings filled my heart with peace. Truly unforgettable," the 67-year-old actor captioned the post.

On the work front, Deol has recently wrapped shooting for "Border 2", a sequel to his 1997 blockbuster film "Border", which went on to earn over Rs 600 million at the worldwide box office during its release. Helmed by J P Dutta, it chronicled a pivotal chapter from the 1971 India-Pakistan war. "Border 2" also stars Varun Dhawan, Diljit Dosanjh, and Ahan Shetty. It is directed by Anurag Singh.

The upcoming film is slated to hit the big screen on January 23, 2026, and is produced by Bhushan Kumar, Krishan Kumar, J P Dutta, and Nidhi Dutta. Deol will also star in "Lahore 1947" alongside Preity Zinta. The film is helmed by Rajkumar Santoshi and is produced under Aamir Khan's production banner Aamir Khan Productions. (PTI)

Tarun Tahiliani marks 30 years in fashion with 'Quintessence' bridal showcase at ICW 2025

NEW DELHI, July 28: Designer Tarun Tahiliani celebrated his 30th year in fashion at the Hyundai India Couture Week (ICW) 2025 by showcasing his latest couture collection that blended Indian craftsmanship with contemporary design.

Tahiliani, one of the top designers of India and a celebrity favourite, presented "Quintessence", a bridal collection that reinterpreted India's rich heritage with a modern, personal touch, at the Oberoi Hotel on Saturday evening.

During the showcase, the runway came alive with a regal palette of ivories, golds, deep reds, and soft pastels, brought to life through intricately embroidered sherwanis, structured lehengas, and delicately layered drapes.

The womenswear reflected a masterful fusion of tradition and modernity — a blush-toned saree embroidered with 3D floral motifs draped over a corset-style blouse.

Another ensemble featured a muted grey lehenga styled with a cropped blouse and a long, intricately embellished jacket.

While the menswear, exempli-

fied by a sharply tailored black sherwani with tonal embroidery, channelled royalty. The collection as a whole resonated with Tahiliani's hallmark "India Modern" aesthetic.

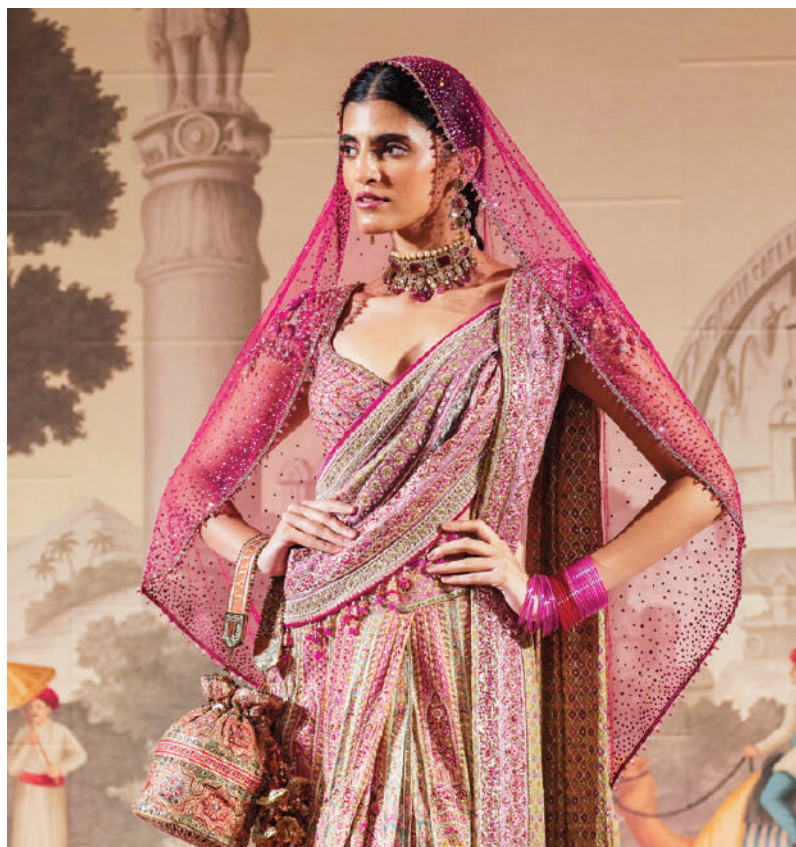
Each look was a marriage between opulence and lightness, heritage and innovation.

The backdrop was designed to evoke a sense of heritage, grandeur and nostalgic Indian royalty, enhancing the overall storytelling of the showcase.

The show ended on a powerful note with models walking out for the final time to the beats of the iconic 1995 pop track "Made in India" by Alisha Chinai, a song that captured the spirit of the collection.

"It's a great track. It's a very visceral process and we kept going back and forth... I thought that after all of this we got to slam it with something Indian core.

"And I love this song 'Made in India', like this line 'Japan se Russia'. And I said it's such a great contrast but it's so relevant and fantastic. We are who we are and why should we be anything else," Tahiliani told PTI after the show.



Recalling his journey in the fashion industry, Tahiliani said he forayed into the world of design intuitively and passionately.

"I just dived into it like I always do and tried to survive. I have always been hungry to learn because I looked at the work of great designers abroad like Christian Dior, who I love. I love Karl Lagerfeld, what he did for Chanel, and John Galiano, there were many others," the designer said, adding that he wanted to achieve the same level of excellence.

"But it takes a long time because I had to learn embroidery, I had to learn tailoring and I couldn't be that. I had to be my own thing, you have to develop your own voice. And that's where the fun is, that's the journey," he said.

Tahiliani, a business management graduate from the prestigious Wharton School in the US, recounted the moment he first told his father he wanted to become a fashion designer.

"My father used to say, 'I sent you to Wharton and you want to become a tailor?' And I said, 'Now dad, don't be ridiculous. We are starting a multi-brand store.'

"Then 20 years later, he said that everyone asks him 'Are you Tarun Tahiliani's dad?' And I said, 'Tell them that you are the dad of a tailor'. He didn't find that funny, but it was cute," the designer recalled.

Asked about his new collection "Quintessence" and the inspiration behind it, Tahiliani said it is always an "evolutionary thing".

"It's just building on myself. I hope when I come next year, it should be better than it is this year. We work on ourselves. I learn from real brides, I see the world, I have got multiple cultural references. It's all visceral, it's never one thing," he said.

Will there be a shift in the kind of bridalwear Tahiliani designs as Gen Z brides come of age? "Millennial or Gen Z, all this I don't know. I just decide what feels right," he replied.

The ICW 2025, an initiative of the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI), will come to a close on July 30. (PTI)

Euro 2025: England beat Spain in a penalty shootout after 1-1 draw to retain title

BASEL, July 28: More drama, another penalty shootout and never giving up.

England successfully defended its Women's European Championship title on Sunday in its own special way, thriving in high tension yet again to take down world champion Spain in a shootout in the final.

Chloe Kelly lashed in her spot kick to give England a 3-1 win on penalties after a 1-1 draw after extra time. "I was cool, I was composed, and I knew I was going to hit the back of the net," said Kelly, whose goals decided a second straight Women's Euros final, and also the semifinal five days earlier.

England goalkeeper Hannah Hampton saved spot kicks from Mariona Caldentey and Spain superstar Aitana Bonmati, before substitute Salma Paralluelo dragged her shot wide of goal.

The defending champion won the only way it knew how at this thrilling Euro 2025.

"It was the most chaotic tournament we played," said England coach Sarina Wiegman, who has



now won three straight Women's Euros titles.

England had fallen behind in the first half, fought back in the second and relied on its superb substitutes — including Kelly — just as it did against Italy and beating Sweden on

penalties previously in the knockout rounds. "I actually can't believe it myself," Wiegman said. "How can this happen? But it happens. We're just going to party tonight."

England leveled the score in the 57th on Alessia Russo's header from

a cross by Kelly after Caldentey had given Spain the lead in the 25th finishing Ona Batlle's cross.

Spain trailed for only four minutes in the entire tournament — and not for one second against England — yet could not seal its first Euro-

pean title against the team it beat in the World Cup final two years ago.

"I think this team deserved more. At least not living with this bitter feeling," Spain coach Montse Tomé said in translated comments.

Kelly had scored an extra-time winning goal for England at Wembley three years ago to beat Germany 2-1.

In extra time Spain had good possession in the England penalty area so many times yet did not force a decisive goal.

"It was cruel," Bonmati told Spanish broadcaster La 1, after being named best player of the tournament. "We played better, created more scoring chances, but in soccer sometimes that's not enough."

Spain goalkeeper Cata Coll saved spot kicks from England captain Leah Williamson and the first by Beth Mead.

It was appropriate in England's memorable tournament that Mead's penalty had to be retaken under a new soccer rule that allows a second chance when a player scores by slipping and touching the ball twice.

It did not matter after Hampton's saves. Arsenal attackers like scoring with perfectly placed headers from inviting crosses sent to the ideal spot. Spain took the lead Sunday with a very English goal — a full back's cross from the byline finding the head of an Arsenal player to score, on a rain-slicked field on an overcast, cloudy day.

The strong Spanish flavor leading to Caldentey's opener was in the neat passing to find Athenea del Castillo in the penalty area and her vision to see Ona Batlle's direct run into space.

Caldentey was in the Arsenal team that won the Women's Champions League final in May beating a Barcelona side with six starters who also lined up for Spain on Sunday. Spain used three more Barcelona players as substitutes.

The Arsenal forward line in that final, Russo and Kelly, combined to tie the Euro 2025 final. Kelly's penalty had to be retaken under a new soccer rule that allows a second chance when a player scores by slipping and touching the ball twice.

Diksha finishes strongly in final round as debutant Woad wins Scottish Open



AYRSHIRE (SCOTLAND), July 28: India's Diksha Dagar finished with a strong back nine in the final round of the Women's Scottish Open to give herself a boost for her next event, the AIG Women's Open, a Major.

Diksha, who made the cut on the line, added a second straight 71 to finish with rounds of 69-76-71-71 for a total of 1-under and a tied 39th position.

Diksha, who started on the 10th, had early setbacks with a bogey and a double bogey on the 12th and 13th but began her recovery with a birdie on the 18th. On the second Diksha birdied the third and then had three birdies in a row from the fifth to the seventh. But she dropped a shot on the eighth.

The other two Indian players, Pranavi Urs and Tvesa Malik, missed the cut earlier in the week.

English star Lottie Woad started her professional career in spectacular fashion with a three-stroke victory at Dundonald Links. It's a second LET title for Woad, who won the 2025 KPMG Women's Irish Open but as an amateur.

Woad made her professional debut this week, after securing her LPGA Tour card following a T3 finish at the Amundi Evian Championship.

Woad, who won the 2025 KPMG Women's Irish Open, went into the final day with a two-shot lead having been top of the leaderboard at the 36-hole and 54-hole marks.

The 21-year-old started with back-to-back birdies on the second and third holes before nine pars on the trot, but Woad then rolled in birdies on 13 and 14. A third bogey of the week happened on 16 for the former world number one amateur, but she finished in style with a birdie on 18 to win with a score of 21-under-par.

Woad becomes the first player to win on professional debut on the LET since Singapore's Shannon Tan at the 2024 Magical Kenya Ladies Open and the first on the LPGA Tour since Rose Zhang at the 2023 Mizuho Americas Open.

Korea's Hyo Joo Kim finished in second place on 18-under-par after a final round of 68 (-4).

Spain's Julia Lopez Ramirez equalled the round of the week with a 65 (-7) on the final day to finish in a tie for third place alongside Korea's Sei Young Hazarika.

The event featured races across Expert, Novice, Beginners, Open, Assam Open, 2-Stroke & Non-Geared categories, where participants navigated rugged curves and dirt terrain with precision and flair.

Campa Energy proudly supported the event as Title Sponsor, reflecting the growing private sector interest in youth engagement and road safety causes along with JK Tyres as Tyre Sponsor, Health City Hospital as Healthcare partner and Suvidhan Homestay as Hospitality partner.

AIFF to name head coach on Aug 1; Jamil front-runner but Constantine not ruled out



NEW DELHI, July 28: The next head coach of the Indian men's football team is set to be announced on August 1 when the executive committee of the national federation meets here with Khalid Jamil emerging as the frontrunner for the vacant job.

While Jamil appears to be the preferred candidate of the technical committee of the All India Football Federation (AIFF) in the three-man short-list, former India coach Stephen Constantine too remains in contention for the top job. "Yes, the executive committee is meeting on August 1 to take a decision on the men's senior national team head coach," a top official of the AIFF said. "The members have been given the CVs of all the three short-listed candidates and what they want as remuneration, etc.," he added.

The executive committee has a single point agenda — the appointment of the men's senior national team head coach.

Given the AIFF's current financial constraints, Jamil will be the favourite to succeed Manolo Marquez as the new head coach. Since the 48-year-old Jamil is currently with Indian Super League side Jamshedpur FC, he can immediately hit the road and be ready for the national team assignments.

There is a FIFA international match window in September and India play their AFC Asian Cup qualifying round games on October 9 and 14 — against Singapore home

and away.

A former India mid-fielder and now an AFC Pro Licensed coach, Jamil was named the AIFF Coach of Year for 2023-24 and 2024-25 seasons. Marquez was in a dual role before parting of ways with the AIFF earlier this month. He was head coach of ISL side FC Goa simultaneously.

But it is not yet clear whether Jamil will also perform dual role or whether he will leave his work at Jamshedpur FC if he gets the India job. "It's the call of the executive committee and the members will take into account various factors," the source added.

The AIFF had also said that the executive committee, if required, can seek more names for the head coach's job.

"A key takeaway from the deliberations was the shared view that appointing a coach with a deep understanding of the Asian and Indian football ecosystem would be highly beneficial to the national team's immediate and future success," the AIFF said on Saturday.

In terms of international experience, Constantine is way ahead of Jamil. The Anglo-Cypriot has been in charge of the Indian team twice earlier — from 2002 to 2005, and from 2015 to the Asian Cup in 2019.

The 62-year-old UEFA Pro License holder has also coached East Bengal in the Indian Super League in 2022-23, and was till recently head coach of Pakistan. (PTI)

Divya Deshmukh beats Humpy to win Women's World Cup, becomes GM

BATUMI (GEORGIA) July 28: Teenaged Indian chess player Divya Deshmukh earned the biggest success of her career by clinching the FIDE Women's World Cup with a tie-break win over compatriot and more experienced Koneru Humpy here on Monday.

The victory not just earned the 19-year-old the prestigious title, but also made her a Grandmaster, something which looked improbable when she started the tournament. The victory for the Nagpur player came after the two classical games played on Saturday and Sunday ended in draws.

Having drawn the two classical games, it was the first set of tiebreakers that proved decisive as Humpy lost her nerves. Except the World Cup and the Women's World Championship, Humpy has won everything under the sun but, as fate or nerves would have it, the World Cup title eluded her.

Divya showed steely resolve on Monday, and the bonus for the de-



termination was the Grandmaster title, reserved for the champion of this event.

For the record, Divya became the 88th Grandmaster of the country and if she continues to remain resolute in her endeavour she has the ability to achieve great success.

Divya is now the fourth Indian woman player to achieve the GM feat after Humpy, Dronavalli Harika and R Vaishali.

the opening tiebreaker. However, Humpy returned the favour with her clock ticking away, and soon enough she was staring at a position where she had a rook, bishop and a pawn against Divya's Queen. The position, however, remained close to being equal and Humpy drew quite easily in the end. In the return game, Humpy employed the Catalan opening and again Divya was well prepared as she equalised without much ado. Humpy had sacrificed a pawn early but the ensuing queen-and-rook endgame was just a draw.

It was on the 40th move that Humpy lost her cool and tried to invade the opposition through a pawn sacrifice. Divya could have done better but the rook-and-pawns endgame she reached was still a draw. This was Divya's day as Humpy again ran a bit short of time and blundered in the endgame again, leading to a theoretically won position for Divya. (PTI)

Adrenaline meets advocacy at the Northeast Dirt Track Challenge 2025 in Guwahati

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 28: The engines thundered and spirits soared at the AEI Playground, Chandmari, as the Northeast Dirt Track Challenge 2025, organised by NBS Motor Sports, concluded with resounding success. With over 80 riders from Assam, Meghalaya, and Sikkim battling it out across seven action-packed categories, the event delivered a thrilling showcase of talent, discipline, and advocacy for safer roads.

First held in 1991, the Challenge has evolved into a flagship motorsport event that also champions road safety, responsible riding, and the discouragement of illegal street racing and road rage. This year's edition was conducted in association with the Department of Transport, Government of Assam, reinforcing



the State's commitment to youth-focused behavioural change on roads.

The event was officiated by Pijush Hazarika, Minister for Water Resources, Information & Public Relations, and Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of Assam,

who lauded the initiative for providing youth a structured platform to pursue their passion. Also present were Pranab Lahkar, Vice Chairman, ASTC, and Partho Sarathi Mahanta, IPS, Commissioner of Police and IGP (Traffic & Road Safety), whose presence lent strong support to the event's

public safety message.

"It's pleasing to see the riders performing so well in a professional race. I would like to wish all the participating riders a bright future so that they can bring accolades in the regional and national level," said Pijush Hazarika.

The event featured races across Expert, Novice, Beginners, Open, Assam Open, 2-Stroke & Non-Geared categories, where participants navigated rugged curves and dirt terrain with precision and flair.

Campa Energy proudly supported the event as Title Sponsor, reflecting the growing private sector interest in youth engagement and road safety causes along with JK Tyres as Tyre Sponsor, Health City Hospital as Healthcare partner and Suvidhan Homestay as Hospitality partner.

Divya is like MSD, she can perform incredibly well under pressure in big games: Ex-coach Srinath

NEW DELHI, July 28: Abundantly talented but more significantly, incredibly cool in crunch situations, that's how India's 88th Grandmaster and World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh was described by her formative coach Srinath Narayanan, who feels the 19-year-old chess wizard's composure is comparable only to cricket great M S Dhoni.

Divya became a part of the growing list of young achievers in Indian chess by clinching the FIDE Women's World Cup title in Batumi, Georgia, defeating an opponent twice her age in Koneru Humpy. The all-Indian final was a testament to India's growth and the fact that it stretched till the tie-breaker was a tribute to the depth of talent that the country has produced.

The 38-year-old Humpy is one of the most accomplished and compact players who has been

the flag-bearer of Indian women's chess for more than two decades. She has won countless titles, including two World Rapid Championships, two Asian Games gold medals and has also been a part of the Chess Olympiad gold-winning team.

Divya winning against her was a glorious moment for Indian chess.

"She's quite an aggressive player. But with time, Divya has become more all-round, more versatile. I think she's equally good across all the different formats... Classical, Rapid and Blitz," Srinath told PTI over phone from Chennai.

"And her strength is, I think, turning up in those big moments, crunch situations. Like how Mahendra Singh Dhoni used to win the matches in the last over."

"I saw something similar in Divya in those last-round situa-



tions or situations where everything was hanging in the high-pressure moments. She used to perform incredibly well under pressure in important matches."

Divya became the fourth woman and 88th overall from the country to become a Grandmaster, something which looked un-

likely at the start of the tournament at the beginning of the month.

Srinath, who coached the Nagpur teenager till 2020, says he understood that she was talented as early as in 2018. He also feels that she has the ability to become a world champion, having quali-

fied for the Candidates Tournament.

Divya's career graph so far has shown that she is driven and likes to take the challenge head on. A three-time gold medalist at the Olympiad, Divya has also won multiple gold medals at the Asian Championship, the World Junior Championship as well as the World Youth Championship.

However, coming into the women's World Cup and beating some of the biggest names in the business needed more than just luck, and here's where her talent came to the fore.

"Srinath says he found Divya 'incredibly talented' during their first meeting at the airport in 2016, when the team was leaving for Turkey to play in the World U-16 Olympiad.

"So, it (association) started around 2018. We met at the World Under-16 Olympiad. The

team was going to Turkey. I was the coach of the team and I met her for the first time at the airport. "She was incredibly talented. And she also had a certain kind of ability to win these big games and tournaments. So, in the very first tournament that I coached her, she won a very important game in the last round against Iran," said Srinath about the chess prodigy from Nagpur, whose parents are doctors.

"And because of that victory, we were able to win the silver medal in Turkey. I worked with her until 2020. And after that, during the (COVID-19) lockdown, the interactions became less." With her achievements, Srinath feels she was already "overqualified in terms of her playing level when she came into the women's World Cup."

"She is very strong. And in terms of her potential, she was

very much there (at the GM level even before the tournament started)."

He feels it was Divya's talent and aptitude that set her apart from the rest of the players when he first started coaching her.

"She was, I think, way more talented than most of the girls. She showed that talent during the World U-16 Olympiad in 2018. After that, during the 2020 Online Olympiad, Divya was instrumental in our win over China, which was a very important game. And she was one of the winners.

"Post that, in the same tournament, she was also winning in the final against Russia. Although the match was stopped halfway due to global internet outage and both the teams shared the gold, Divya was clearly one with the most promising position for us in that match." (PTI)

Ashwin calls out England's 'double standards'; Cricket fraternity backs India

NEW DELHI, July 28: Feisty R Ashwin called out England's "double standards" in their attempt to prematurely end the fourth Test as the cricket fraternity extensively supported India's decision to let Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar complete their well-deserved centuries instead of accepting home team's handshake offer.

Drama erupted at the start of the final hour of the match on Sunday when home skipper Ben Stokes offered to shake hands with Indian batters, realising that an outright result was not possible.

Jadeja and Washington batting on 89 and 80 respectively refused the offer, leaving the England captain frustrated. Stokes later said that he made the offer since he didn't want to risk injury to his fatigued frontline bowlers.

"Have you heard the term double standards? They played your bowlers all day, batted you out and suddenly when they're nearing hundreds, you want to walk off? Why should they?" Ashwin said on his YouTube channel.

"They have played all your bowlers since morning and taken it to a draw. They have worked hard, so you want them to leave their hundred?" the former off-spinner fumed.

India eventually called it a draw once both Jadeja and Washington brought up their centuries. It was Washington's maiden Test ton.

Both Ashwin and legendary Sunil Gavaskar said they would have had India bat mandated 15 overs.



"If I was the Indian captain, I would have played the entire 15 overs," Ashwin said.

Gavaskar echoed the same sentiment on Sony Sports: "I'd ask them to keep batting and keep the team on the field for the full 15 overs."

As England players crowded Jadeja, Stokes had sarcastically quipped "You're going to get a Test hundred against Harry Brook (part-time bowler)?"

"You ask, 'You want to make a hundred against Harry Brook? He has to make a hundred, you bring

Steve Harmison, Andre Flintoff bring any bowler - they didn't object, it was your call to bring Brook, not ours," Ashwin said. "These are Test runs, a century is earned, not gifted. Washington deserved it, Jadeja deserved it. Period."

Ashwin said India were well within their rights to refuse to call it a draw with the two batters going for their milestone.

"There were two reasons: one you didn't want to tire your bowlers. Fine. Second you were frustrated and thought 'If I'm not

happy, you shouldn't be either'. That's now how cricket works."

Former Australia keeper-batter Brad Haddin called out England for their poor sportsmanship.

"India showed tremendous fight on the final day. Then all of a sudden, it was a situation when England said they can't win so then let's stop the game because England are done playing," Haddin said on the 'WillowTalkPodcast'.

"I liked what India did, they earned the right to stay as long as they want. They had the right to make the hundred. Just because it

didn't go England's way and they didn't get the answer that they want, all of sudden they (England) weren't happy and started getting verbal.

"So things don't go England's way all of sudden it's everyone else's problem. Well done to India," Haddin said.

Former England captain Alastair Cook too backed India's decision, suggesting the momentum would serve them well heading into the fifth and final Test at The Oval, which they need to win to level the series.

"It was the right decision for (Jadeja and Washington) to carry on for the momentum they'll gain from it," Cook said on BBC's 'Test Match Special'.

"When you've been out in the field for 140 overs, you get frustrated. So, it is a little bit of frustration for England but I understand why India did it," he added.

Nasser Hussain, another former skipper, termed Stokes' decision to bowl Harry Brook after the handshake offer as "silly".

"I didn't have a problem with it. England seemed to have a problem with it. They were a bit tired, tired bowlers so they wanted to get off but two lads worked hard to get to 80s and 90s and they wanted to get Test match hundreds," Hussain said on 'Sky Sports'.

"Stokes didn't have to bowl Brook and look silly at the end. We make far too much of these things. They played well and all credit to India," Hussain said. (PTI)

Macau Open: Satwik-Chirag eye title run; Lakshya, Prannoy look to regain form ahead of Worlds



MACAU, July 28: Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will aim to extend their consistent run and grab their maiden title of the season at the Macau Open Super 300, starting Tuesday, as the top Indian shuttlers continue their preparations for next month's World Championships in Paris.

The Asian Games champions earned yet another semifinal finish at the China Open Super 1000 last week, going down to Malaysian second seeds Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik.

It has been a season of steady performances for the world No. 3 pair, who have made the semifinals at the India Open, Singapore Open, and Malaysia Open besides reaching the quarterfinals at the Indonesia Open. They, however, suffered a second-round exit at the Japan Open last week.

Despite multiple deep runs, Satwik and Chirag, seeded second this week, are yet to convert their form into a title win -- something they will be keen to change in the French capital. They face the Malaysian duo of Low Hang Yee and Ng Eng Cheong in the opening round. In the men's singles, former Commonwealth Games gold medallist Lakshya Sen will hope to rediscover his touch ahead of the World Championships. The 23-year-old from Almorá has shown glimpses of his potential but has struggled to close out key matches, including narrow losses to Li Shi Feng, Kodai Naraoka, and Shi Yu Qi in recent outings.

Sen opens against Korea's Jeon Hyeok Jin. Meanwhile, HS Prannoy, the 2023 World Championships bronze medallist, will look to string together a strong run after a second-round exit at the China Open. The 33-year-old will begin his campaign against a qualifier.

Teen sensation Ayush Shetty, seeded seventh, will also be in focus after clinching his maiden BWF title at the US Open Super 300 last month. He faces Chinese Taipei's Huang Yu Kai in the first round.

Fresh from a bronze medal in the World University Games mixed team event, Sathish Kumar Karunakaran will look to make an impact on the BWF Tour when he opens against Malaysia's Justin Hoh. In other men's singles matches, Manraj Singh will face compatriot Tharun Mannepani in an all-Indian clash, while S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian, Ritvik Sanjeevi Satish Kumar, and Kiran George are also in the fray.

In the women's singles, 16-year-old Unnati Hooda will look to carry forward the momentum from her stunning win over two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu at the China Open. She begins against seventh seed Julie Dawall Jakobson of Denmark. (PTI)

I think we have showed why we are a great team: Shubman Gill

MANCHESTER, July 28: India skipper Shubman Gill reckons the belief to stage an epic final day turnaround in the fourth Test against England stemmed from his partnership with KL Rahul and in doing so, they showed why they are a "great team". Starting their second innings 311 runs in arrears after England racked up a massive first-innings total, Gill, Ravindra Jadeja and Washington Sundar struck excellent hundreds to bail their team from the brink of defeat and remain in contention to level the five-match series.

"To be able to have that same mindset for 140 overs is very difficult, and that is what differentiates a good team from a great team, and I think we showed that today, that is why we are a great team," Gill told the BCCI TV.

"Zero for two and then the partnership between me and KL bhai, I think that's what ignited the belief that yes, we can achieve this task. Extremely, extremely happy. To be able to get a draw from the position that we were in yesterday is extremely satisfying," he added.

Rahul played a neat 90-run knock and was associated in a partnership of 188 runs with Gill, after which the day belonged to the duo of Jadeja and Washington.

Leading the Test team for the first time, the 25-year-old Gill has been prolific in this series and has already amassed 700 runs with four centuries including a double ton, but picked the one at Old Trafford as his best.

"I think this inning of mine was the most pleasing to me,"

Gill said.

The job was far from done for India when Gill was dismissed, but Jadeja and Washington batted with immense responsibility and showed character to deny the frustrated English players.

"When Jaddu bhai and Washy were batting, it was not easy. The ball was doing something but the way they both batted, so calmly... and to be able to get a Test century from there is when you realise how big an achievement it is," Gill lauded his teammates.

For Washington especially, the knock was very special as it was his maiden Test hundred. Needless to say, he was delighted to have scored a hundred when his team needed it the most.

"I think this hundred really means a lot and I'd genuinely love to dedicate this to my family because they've been extremely supportive throughout my time playing cricket right from day one. So, it definitely means a lot, a lot more for them," Washington said. That he had a seasoned campaigner like Jadeja at the other end benefited Washington during their undefeated match-saving partnership of 223 runs on Sunday.

"Jaddu bhai really played out those crucial spells, spinners were also getting a lot of purchase. So, we just wanted to focus really hard on watching the ball and it's just really special to have actually drawn this game.

"This draw really means a lot for the whole setup and I'm sure this game is going to give us a lot more confidence," Washington said. (PTI)

Shardul, Kamboj likely to be benched as India search for 'Ideal XI'



MANCHESTER, July 28: The long-winding five-match Test series in England has hit the home stretch but despite securing a memorable draw at Old Trafford, India continue to search for the "perfect" eleven, more specifically the right bowling combination, heading into the finale at The Oval in three days' time.

India's preference to bat till number eight at the expense of a specialist bowler has been constantly questioned over the course of the series and more so after Shardul Thakur, playing in place of the injured Nitish Reddy, was used for only 11 overs at Old Trafford.

But with India conceding more than 600 runs for the first time since 2014 at Old Trafford, the case for including an out and out wicket-taker like Kuldeep Yadav, who has been warming the bench for the past 40 days, is stronger than ever.

After an underwhelming debut, Anshul Kamboj is likely to make way for a fit-again Akash Deep or Prasidh Krishna.

Arsdeep Singh, who too has been a passenger like Kuldeep, has also recovered from a hand injury and would be dreaming of a Test debut in what has been a highly competitive and engaging series.

Though head coach Gautam Gambhir declared all the fast bowlers fit in his usual combative tone following the draw on Sunday, there is no denying that the pace pack, especially Jasprit Bumrah and Mohammed Siraj, are part of the tiring bunch on either side of the dressing room.

Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja, the architects of a famous draw, formed India's top six in the second innings over the course of the series and showed remarkable grit to bat out more than two sessions to save the game, completing fine hundreds in the process.

If that same template is followed at The Oval, Dhruv Jurel will come in to bat number seven and India can play four specialist bowlers by benching Shardul, who anyway has not been getting enough overs.

The fourth bowler can be Kuldeep with the pitch expected to aid spinners or an extra fast bowler.

By its own admission, the Indian team management has been consciously trying to fit Kuldeep into the playing eleven but the current template of batting till eight has prevented it from doing that.

"So Kuldeep, we are trying to find a way for him, but it is just (that we need) more consistent runs from our top six, so

that we can bring a guy like Kuldeep in," said India bowling coach Morne Morkel during the fourth Test.

"It's finding when he comes in, how we can find balance and how we can get that batting line-up to be a little bit longer and stronger. We've seen in the past that we've lost wickets in clumps."

"Kuldeep is world-class and he's bowling really well at the moment, so we're trying our best to find ways for him to get in," added the South African.

Recently-retired Test great R Ashwin can't understand India's obsession of batting till eight for a few extra runs when a strike bowler like Kuldeep can allow them to play with fewer runs. For him, picking Kuldeep in Manchester was a no brainer.

Considering the selection calls thus far, it can be said that India has been pretty firm about having a cushion with the bat in the lower-order. That will need to change if Kuldeep has to come into the scheme of things.

Bumrah has already played three Tests but with series on the line, he could turn up at The Oval and someone like Mohammed Siraj, the only Indian pacer to have featured in all the games, would be raising his hand up despite the heavy workload.

"On these wickets... You do not know whether you will lose the toss, you will win the toss. You do not know what sort of a start you are going to get. So when you pick a team, I think you will try and pick a balanced team," said India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak recently when asked about playing an extra bowler over an all-rounder.

"You cannot go like 'because last game three guys got 100s, we can play a batter less'."

"...sometimes we feel that six bowlers are not getting enough bowling. So when you have six options, anyway captain struggles to bowl all six equally. Picking an 11, you will always try and keep that balance of batting and bowling," he reasoned for India's existing selection approach. (PTI)

Can Sports Ministry stop Indo-Pak Asia Cup clashes? Not really



NEW DELHI, July 28: The India-Pakistan cricketing rivalry is set for a brief resumption at next month's Asia Cup but the mere announcement of it has triggered an avalanche of criticism on social media and a question. Can the sports ministry have a say in the matter?

Emotions are still running high after 26 people were gunned down by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir's popular tourist hub of Pahalgam in April. The gruesome killings even led to a brief military showdown between the old foes. Months later, the cricket teams of the two nations will clash in the Asia Cup.

"As of now, the BCCI does not come under the purview of the sports ministry as the National Sports Governance Bill is still to be passed. So, the ministry doesn't have a say, but we will wait and see how the BCCI responds to public sentiment," a sports ministry source told PTI.

Lieutenant General (Retd) KJS Dhillon, who served as the Director General of Defence Intelligence Agency, is among the prominent voices who have called for a boycott of any cricketing ties

with Pakistan. However, former BCCI President and captain Sourav Ganguly, while condemning terrorism, has stated that "sport should go on".

The sports ministry has maintained that any bilateral sporting engagement with Pakistan is "out of question" at this point.

But in multilateral contests, it would go by the Olympic Charter, which prohibits any discrimination based on political issues, which is why the government has stated that it would not stop Pakistan from coming to India for international events.

Adherence to the Charter is crucial to India's ambitious bid to host the 2036 Olympics.

Cricket too is part of the Olympic movement now and is set for a Games debut in 2028 in the T20 format. However, the eight-nation Asia Cup is not an ICC event and will be conducted by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), which is currently led by Pakistan Cricket Board chief Mohsin Naqvi.

The tournament features a scheduled India-Pakistan clash on September 14

with the potential of two more clashes later in the tournament. Crores are riding on these games as broadcasters expect high viewership and in turn high advertising rates. Sony Network has secured the eight-year broadcast rights from the ACC for USD 170 million.

It is reliably learnt, that unless there is mandatory India-Pakistan engagement in the continental showpiece, the channel would end up incurring heavy losses which also ends up affecting ACC's revenue projections.

The losses, while not hurting the cash-rich BCCI significantly, would have a cascading effect on the revenue of the remaining 24 ACC members, most of whom are developing cricket nations.

The National Sports Governance Bill has a provision for the sports ministry to step in and "impose reasonable restrictions" on the international participation of Indian teams and individual athletes when necessitated by "extraordinary circumstances" and in the "national interest." The bill was tabled in the Parliament last week but it is still some time before it becomes an act as it would need the approval of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha before the Presidential assent.

The ministry has stated that the BCCI will come under its purview once it becomes an act.

"The scenario changes when that happens. But as of now, it is status quo. It is the BCCI's call," the source said.

India and Pakistan have not engaged in the hugely money-spinning bilateral clashes since the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks in which Pakistan-backed terrorists killed more than 150 people.

But they have almost always faced off in multi-national events such as the World Cup and the Champions Trophy, generating high viewership both on ground as well on TV and online platforms. (PTI)

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