

Get Astorloger Solution for your Problems

Mayong Rabiojha

Contact: 8135981009

- Love Marriage Solution
- Paralysis • Asthma
- Joint Stiffness and pain
- Late Marriage • Bad Luck Removal
- Business Down & Planet Problem
- Ga-Bandhani Tabij
- Rajmohini Tabij, Powerful
- Quarrel of Husband & Wife

26 YEARS OF DEDICATED JOURNALISM

THE HILLS TIMES

www.thehillstimes.in

VOICE OF THE HILLS PEOPLE

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Vol .No. XXVI

Issue No. 183

RNI-ASSENG/2000/12862

DIPHU, KARBI ANGLONG, THURSDAY, JULY 17, 2025

PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

Himanta chairs review meeting at Kokrajhar medical college

'KMCH to be developed into a centre of excellence'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday conducted a detailed review of facilities and services at the Kokrajhar Medical College and Hospital (KMCH), underscoring the government's commitment to transforming the institution into a premier healthcare and teaching facility in the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

According to an official statement, Sarma inspected several key departments including the Out Patient Department (OPD), Intensive Care Unit (ICU), Blood Bank, Orthopaedic OPD, Central Clinical Laboratory, CT Scan Unit, Medical Records Department (MRD), and the Paying Cabins.

He reviewed the functioning of each unit and took note of the patient load—both indoor and outdoor—and the hospital's capacity to



deliver timely and advanced healthcare services to the people of Kokrajhar and neighbouring districts.

Later, the chief minister chaired a high-level meeting with officials, faculty, and healthcare administrators to identify and address critical

gaps in infrastructure, staffing, and service delivery.

During the meeting, Sarma assessed the availability of medical, paramedical, and support staff, and reviewed infrastructure provisions such as hostel facilities for students

and residential quarters for faculty and healthcare workers.

Highlighting the strategic importance of the college as the only government-run medical institution in the BTR, the chief minister reiterated that the State government is taking focused steps to develop KMCH into a centre of excellence.

Sarma also interacted with doctors, nurses, and students to understand the specific challenges they face on the ground.

He assured that appropriate measures would be taken to address infrastructural and operational concerns and emphasised the government's broader resolve to strengthen healthcare delivery and medical education in the region.

The chief minister was accompanied by minister for handloom and textile, UG Brahma, Rajya Sabha (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

8 new bills to be introduced in Parl during Monsoon session

NEW DELHI, July 16: A bill that seeks to preserve and protect geo-heritage sites and geo-relics is among the eight new draft legislation the government plans to introduce in the Monsoon session of Parliament beginning Monday.

Among the bills planned for the Monsoon session are the National Sports Governance Bill, the Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill and the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill.

The Monsoon session of Parliament is scheduled to commence from July 21 and there will be a total of 21 sittings of both Houses till August 21. The session will take a break from August 12 to August 18 for Raksha Badhan and Independence-Day celebrations.

The session is expected to witness



stormy confrontations between the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the opposition, including the Congress-led INDIA bloc. Among the likely flashpoints between the government and the opposition will be the Election

Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Bihar, ahead of the state Assembly polls later this year. The opposition is also expected to seek answers from the government on Operation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Cabinet clears PMDDKY with ₹ 24,000 cr annual outlay for 6 yrs

NEW DELHI, July 16: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved 'Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana' with an annual outlay of ₹ 24,000 crore for six years to cover 100 districts, benefiting about 1.7 crore farmers.

The scheme is in pursuance of the Budget announcement for 2025-26 to develop 100 districts to enhance agricultural productivity, increase adoption of crop diversification and sustainable agricultural practices.

The 'Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana' will be implemented through the convergence of 36 existing schemes across 11 departments, other state schemes and local partnerships with the private sector, I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said while briefing reporters about the decisions taken by the Cabinet.

He said the scheme will benefit about 1.7 crore farmers.

An official release said that the scheme aims to enhance agricultural productivity, increase adoption of crop diversification and sustainable agricultural practices, augment post-harvest storage at the panchayat and block levels, improve irrigation facilities and facilitate (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

People of Assam will send 'Raja' to jail for graft: Rahul

Himanta busy 24 hours a day handing over your wealth, land to Adani and Ambani, says Cong leader

CHAYGAON/ GUWAHATI, July 16: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday claimed that though Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma thinks he is a 'Raja', but he will be put in jail for corruption by the people of the state.

Alleging that the BJP and the EC "stole" the Maharashtra elections from the Congress and its allies, and they are trying to repeat it in Bihar, Gandhi urged party workers here to be vigilant to thwart any such attempt in the northeastern state.

"The CM thinks he is the 'raja' and is busy 24 hours a day handing over your wealth, land to Adani and Ambani. But if you listen to his voice carefully, look at his face closely on TV, fear is writ large," Gandhi said.

The leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha was addressing a party workers' meet at Chaygaon, around 40 km from Guwahati.

"He (Sarma) knows that the fearless Congress workers will put him in jail," he asserted. Gandhi claimed that the CM and his family will be held accountable for their corruption, and the media will be showing him taken to prison, and not even Narendra Modi or Amit Shah will be able to save him.

"The Congress won't have to do



it. The youth, workers, farmers, people of all communities and religions know how corrupt he is, and they will do it," he claimed.

Ahead of the event at Chaygaon, Sarma said in an X post that Gandhi had made the same assertion in a closed-door party meeting earlier in the day in Guwahati and expressed "best wishes" for the Congress leader.

He, however, did not elaborate on how he came to know Gandhi's comment. "Take it in writing, Himanta Biswa Sarma will definitely be sent to jail!—these were the exact words spoken by the Leader of the Opposition, Shri Rahul Gandhi, during his closed-door

meeting with the Congress Political Affairs Committee in Assam," Sarma said in the post. He also said the Congress leader has "conveniently forgotten" that he himself is out on bail in multiple criminal cases registered across the country.

Alleging that the Election Commission of India and the BJP are working together, Gandhi claimed at the rally that the saffron party won the Maharashtra assembly polls by 'cheating' through voter list revision.

He alleged that one crore voters, all in favour of the BJP and its allies, were added to the electoral roll in the western state within a four-month (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rahul elevated my political stature: Himanta

HT Correspondent GUWAHATI, July 16: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday hit back at Rahul Gandhi after the Congress leader took a swipe at the Chief Minister on corruption.

Sarma responded with sarcasm to Rahul Gandhi's sharp criticism during his visit to the state, suggesting that the Congress leader had inadvertently elevated his political stature.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister remarked that Gandhi seemed to have focused solely on him throughout his visit.

The Assam CM's X post mentioned, "I must say, I am grateful—because today, he has elevated my political stature to a level I might never have reached had I remained in the Congress party."

"He mentioned my name repeatedly in all his meetings," the Chief Minister wrote, adding that such attention from the Leader of the Opposition was a matter of "great satisfaction."

Taking a swipe at his former party, Sarma, who defected from the Congress to join the BJP in 2015, said that the recognition he now enjoys would not have been possible had he remained with the Congress.

"If Rahul Gandhi has chosen to criticise me, it is a clear sign that I must be doing something right for the people of Assam," he stated.

The remark comes amid heightened political rhetoric between the BJP and Congress as both parties gear up for the 2026 Assam Assembly elections.

Sarma also wrote on X targeting Rahul Gandhi, "I heard you are out on bail on charges of massive corruption of over ₹5,000 crore in the National Herald scam. You will be remembered as one of the most corrupt Congress presidents of India. Frankly, I don't care about what you say—because I know, and the country knows, that you are one of the most corrupt leaders in India today."

Four suspected poachers held in Bijni with wildlife body parts and hunting equipment

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 16: In a significant crackdown on illegal wildlife trafficking, four suspected poachers, including a woman, were arrested by police during a late-night raid in Bijni, Chirang district, late night on Tuesday.

The arrests followed a coordinated operation based on specific intelligence inputs, officials said. The raids were conducted at multiple locations under Bijni Police Station—specifically in Kumarshali, No 2 Choto Ladanguri, and Formashali villages.

During the operation, a large cache of wildlife body parts and hunting tools was recovered from the residences of the accused.

The arrested individuals have been identified as Pradip Narzary alias Bhergo (45) of No 2 Choto Ladanguri, Samar Singh Basumatary (52) of Kumarshali, Kancha Daimary alias Budang (40), and Binashri Basumatary (40).

From the house of Pradip Narzary, police seized three iron traps used for hunting wild animals, four large wild boar tusks, a pistol grip, iron pipes suspected to be used in the fabrication of homemade firearms, metal bullets and springs, a broken trigger and barrel, suspected explosives, an electric drilling machine, and 18 toolboxes believed to be used for gun-making.



At Samar Singh Basumatary's residence, police recovered a suspected three-inch piece of elephant tusk, bones of wild animals, five suspected animal teeth, a suspected tiger tongue and fur, pangolin scales, 20 porcupine quills, and several other dried and unidentified animal parts. All four accused have been taken into custody at Bijni Police Station, and the recovered items have been seized for forensic examination and legal proceedings.

Police officials said further investigations are underway to determine the scale of the poaching network and its possible links to organised wildlife trafficking rings.

Two killed in separate tragedies in West Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 16: Two persons lost their lives in separate incidents in West Karbi Anglong district recently, the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) confirmed in an official report.

In the first incident, a woman died on the spot after being struck by lightning at Harlongsora in the Jengkhra area around 3:30 pm.

The victim, identified as Subita Derapi (30), wife of Mahajon Enghi and a resident of Harlongsora village, was engaged in paddy transplantation in a field when the incident occurred.

A detailed report is being prepared and will be submitted to the DDMA following field verification. In a separate incident earlier the same day, a suspected case of accidental drowning was reported at Hongkram (Tharve Abi) around 12:30 pm.

According to information from the local Sarkari Gaon Bura, the victim, Niki Das, son of Narayan Das and a resident of Borbill Goneshpur, had gone to the river with a friend to bathe in the afternoon. He went missing shortly after entering the water.

The SDRF team from Hamren reached the spot to initiate a rescue operation, which had to be temporarily suspended due to darkness. The district administration has expressed grief over the twin tragedies and extended its condolences to the bereaved families.

Multi-hazard mock drill conducted at Arunachal's power project

HT Bureau

ITANAGAR, July 16: A multi-hazard mock drill for a hydroelectric project and its downstream areas in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh was conducted on Wednesday at the Pare Hydroelectric Project.

The large-scale exercise aimed to test and improve emergency response to complex disaster scenarios, including floods and earthquakes, an official statement said. Jointly organised by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), and NEEPCO, the drill saw active coordination with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Fire & Emergency Services, medical teams, and other teams of the Papum Pare district administration.

The simulation involved four simultaneous disaster scenarios at different locations - a combined flood and earthquake situation at Panyor Lower power station in



Hoj, an earthquake at the Pare Dam (Zampa), flooding at the Pare project in Sopo, and urban flooding at the Doimukh Market area along the Pare river.

At each site, live response demonstrations were carried out by NDRF search and rescue teams, showcasing rescue operations, triage, and inter-agency coordination. Specialised operations included the use of sniffer dogs, optical detection cameras, fire-fighting

demonstrations, and river rescue techniques.

Officials and staff of the Pare project, led by Head of Project (HoP) Sania Ngurang, actively took part in the exercise.

Community involvement was notable, with enthusiastic participation from APDA mitras, NSS volunteers, and local residents, emphasising the importance of grassroots engagement in disaster preparedness. To assess the effectiveness of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Proposal to sign a joint action plan between NEHHDC and the Creative Economy Agency (CEA) of Thailand in the offing Thai delegation in Assam to promote cooperation in handicraft, handloom sectors

GUWAHATI, July 16: A high-level delegation from Thailand was in Assam on Wednesday to promote cooperation in the domain of handicraft, handloom, creative industries, and also cultural exchange.

The Thai delegation was led by its Foreign Affairs Minister, attached to its Department of South Asian, Middle East, and African Affairs, Kiran Moongtin, and comprised senior officials from the Creative Economy Agency (CEA), prominent Thai academic institutions, and representatives from tourism, wellness, and cultural promotion bodies, along with diplomats from the Royal Thai Embassy in New Delhi, an official release said.

The delegation visited the Craft Promotion and Experience Centre of the North Eastern Handicrafts and Handlooms Development Corporation (NEHHDC) here during the day.

NEHHDC Managing Director Mara Kocho gave a presentation on the corporation's vision and strengths -- includ-



ing its OEKO-TEX certified Eri Silk spinning mill, NABL-accredited textile testing laboratory, and expansive artisan network supported by government agencies.

The highlight of the visit was the proposal to sign a joint

action plan (JAP) between NEHHDC and the Creative Economy Agency (CEA) of Thailand, and it is expected to be formalised soon, the statement said.

The JAP outlines 10 key pillars of collaboration, including knowledge and expertise exchange, joint product development and design innovation, artisan skill development and cultural residencies, participation in global exhibitions and festivals, sustainable practices and green certification frameworks, co-managed digital platforms and cross-border e-commerce, IPR protection and GI advocacy for traditional crafts and policy dialogues on creative economy cooperation, it added.

As part of the programme, the delegation also toured NEHHDC's state-of-the-art production and testing facilities, including the handloom production unit, textile testing laboratory, Centre of Excellence and the artisan museum.

The NEHHDC is under the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region. (PTI)

CRPF Jawan from Assam martyred in anti-naxal operation in Jharkhand

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 16: A CRPF jawan from Assam's Kokrajhar district was martyred during an anti-Naxal operation in Jharkhand on Wednesday morning, triggering a wave of mourning in his native village.

Praneshwar Koch, a resident of Magurmari village under Kokrajhar police station, was serving with the 209 COBRA Battalion of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). He lost his life in an exchange of fire during a counter-insurgency operation in Bokaro district. Two Naxals were also killed in the encounter. Koch had joined the CRPF in 2018 and was the sole breadwinner of his family. He is survived by his wife, a five-year-old child, his parents, and siblings.

Speaking to this correspondent, Bireswar Koch, father of the deceased jawan, said he received a call from a CRPF official at around 8 a.m. informing him that his son had been seriously injured and admitted to a hospital. A few hours later, the family was informed of his death in action. "My son dedicated his life to protecting the country. His loss is devastating," he said, adding that the mortal remains of the jawan are expected to arrive at their residence on Thursday morning. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stock markets edge up amid weak global market trends, tariff-related uncertainty

MUMBAI, July 16: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed marginally higher in a rangebound trade on Wednesday as investors stayed on the sidelines amid weak global market trends and tariff-related uncertainty.

Rising for the second day in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex edged up 63.57 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at 82,634.48. During the day, it hit a high of 82,784.75 and a low of 82,342.94.

The 50-share NSE Nifty ended 16.25 points or 0.06 per cent higher at 25,212.05.

Among Sensex firms, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tech Mahindra, State Bank of India, Infosys, Adani Ports and ITC were the major gainers.

However, Eternal, Sun Pharma, Tata Steel, Tata Motors, Bajaj Finance and Bharat Electronics were among the major laggards.

"Indian equity markets closed modestly higher on Wednesday, recovering from early losses amid foreign fund inflows, easing market volatility, and renewed buying interest in IT stocks," Gaurav Garg, Analyst, Lemonn Markets Desk, said.

Tech Mahindra rose by 1.94 per cent ahead of its financial results that were announced after market



hours. The company posted a 30 per cent jump in consolidated profit after tax to ₹ 1,128.8 crore in the June quarter of FY26 over the year-ago period.

Infosys rebounded by 1.5 per cent, helping the key indices close in green.

"India's macroeconomic outlook remains strong, supported by easing inflation, lower interest rates, a healthy monsoon, and softer oil prices. A drop in inflation in eight straight months has provided a push to the market. However, investors are showing a mix of optimism and caution in the relief rally to assess the Q1 FY26

corporate earnings, as an upgrade in earnings is essential in the premium valued stock market.

"Additionally, global sentiment is mixed amid tariff concerns—highlighted by the announcement of a 50% duty on copper—and fading hopes of a near-term US Fed rate cut on account of sticky inflation, adding market uncertainty," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth ₹ 120.47 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data.

"The benchmark equity indices exhibited range-bound price action

and ended marginally in the green, marking the second consecutive session of gains. Market participants remained cautious amid prevailing uncertainty around global tariff developments," according to Bajaj Broking Research.

The BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.28 per cent and midcap index went up by 0.10 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, BSE Focused IT climbed 0.67 per cent, followed by IT (0.66 per cent), services (0.55 per cent), realty (0.50 per cent) and teck (0.49 per cent).

Commodities, capital goods, metal and industrials were the laggards.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.26 per cent to USD 68.55 a barrel.

On Tuesday, the Sensex climbed 317.45 points or 0.39 per cent to settle at 82,570.91. The Nifty edged higher by 113.50 points or 0.45 per cent to 25,195.80. (PTI)

Gold declines ₹ 500 to ₹ 98,870/10 g; silver falls ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 1.11 lakh/kg

NEW DELHI, July 16: Falling for the second straight session, gold prices depreciated ₹ 500 to ₹ 98,870 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday due to continuous selling by stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Tuesday, the precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had declined by ₹ 200 to close at ₹99,370 per 10 grams.

Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity slipped Rs 400 to ₹98,400 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes). It had settled at ₹ 98,800 per 10 grams in the previous market session.

Also, silver prices declined by ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 1,11,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday. The white metal had finished at ₹ 1,12,000 per kg on Tuesday.

In contrast, spot gold rose by USD 16.41 or 0.49 per cent to USD 3,341.37 per ounce in the global markets. "Gold edged higher to USD 3,346 per ounce, supported by renewed tariff threats from President Donald Trump, who signalled possible levies on pharmaceuticals by the end of the month, with additional duties on semiconductors also under consideration.

"Risk appetite remains subdued as new tariffs targeting 25 countries, including Canada, Mexico, and the EU, are set to take effect on August 1," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP-Commodity Research, Kotak Secu-

rities, said. On the global front, spot silver went up nearly 1 per cent to trade at USD 38.05 per ounce.

"Gold has been consolidating while silver has been breaking out. Silver prices pushed as high as USD 39 per ounce, first and foremost reflecting renewed investor interest.

"We have seen continued inflows into physically backed silver products during the past few weeks, and the open interest in the futures market has also been expanding, in particular in China. Technical traders further fuelled the rally after prices broke above important resistance levels," Carsten Menke, Head of Economics and Next Generation Research at Julius Baer, said.

Menke further stated that by judging the strength of the recent rally and the decline of the gold/silver ratio to around 85, silver does not appear particularly cheap anymore in comparison to gold.

"When the ratio was at 100, we highlighted silver's catch-up potential, but this seems to be very much exhausted as of now."

According to Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency, LKP Securities, investors will be awaiting key US macroeconomic data, including Producer Price Index (PPI) and jobless claims, which will provide further insights for the trajectory of bullion prices. (PTI)

Rupee falls 18 paise to close at 85.94 against US dollar

MUMBAI, July 16: The rupee declined 18 paise against the US dollar to close at 85.94 (provisional) on Wednesday, tracking a strengthening American currency against major crosses overseas amid uncertainties over the India-US trade pact.

However, renewed foreign capital inflows and sliding global crude prices supported the domestic unit, according to forex traders.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened weak at 86.02 against the dollar. It traded in the range of 85.74-86.05 during the day before closing at 85.94 (provisional), down 18 paise from its previous close.

In the previous session, the rupee appreciated 16 paise to close at 85.76 against the US dollar.

"The Indian Rupee experienced notable volatility today, initially weakening against a robust US Dollar before recovering mid-session due to dollar supply, only to conclude with net losses.

"This movement follows a three-day consolidation phase for the USD/INR pair, ranging from 85.70 to 86.05. The sentiment remains acutely favourable for the dollar, driven by expectations of a hawkish Federal Reserve post-US inflation data and persistent uncertainties regarding India-US trade agreements," Dilip Parmar, Re-

search Analyst, HDFC Securities, said.

An Indian commerce ministry team is in Washington for another round of talks on the proposed bilateral trade agreement. The four-day talks, which started on Monday, will conclude on Thursday.

"We continue to await the outcome of the trade deal as inflows and outflows keep the rupee well entrenched in a range of 85.70 to 86.10. We expect a similar range for the rupee tomorrow (Thursday) as well," Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, said. (PTI)

PS Group to redevelop Nimtalla Ghat in Kolkata

KOLKATA, July 16: Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port, Kolkata (SMPK), and PS Group Realty signed an MoU for the redevelopment and beautification of Nimtalla Immersion Ghat in the city under the group's CSR initiative.

The project aims to enhance the Ghat's cultural and spiritual significance while promoting sustainable urban development, a Kolkata port statement said.

The agreement involves PS Group redeveloping the Ghat with SMPK's support, including utilities and clearances. PS Group highlighted their commitment to preserving Kolkata's heritage.

Post-completion, SMPK will maintain the Ghat, fostering public-private collaboration to enhance community engagement and tourism. A few days ago, a similar MoU was signed by Adani Group for the redevelopment of Kumartoli Ghat. There are over 50 ghats on the banks of Kolkata and Howrah. (PTI)

Fino payments bank launches 'GATI' savings account to boost UPI adoption in Assam's rural heartland

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 16: In a move aimed at accelerating digital banking penetration in Assam, Fino Payments Bank has launched a new savings account product, "GATI," specifically designed to enable instant banking transactions through the Unified Payments Interface (UPI).

GATI, which translates to 'speed' in many Indian languages, promises customers a swift and seamless onboarding experience, with instant account opening and UPI activation.

According to an official statement, issued on Wednesday, the account is now available at over 16,800 Fino Payments Bank merchant outlets across Assam, enabling widespread access to this new digital offering. According to the bank, the GATI account can be opened instantly with eKYC authentication and a one-time account opening fee of ₹100. It is a zero-balance savings account, and account maintenance charges are capped at ₹50 per quarter — a move aimed at

making banking more affordable for new and underserved customers. Once opened, the account comes with an auto-generated UPI ID via the FinoPay mobile app, allowing customers to begin transacting immediately. Speaking about the launch, Darpan Anand, National Head (Channel Sales), Fino Payments Bank, said, "Smartphone usage is increasing among rural customers irrespective of age, including senior citizens. The introduction of the GATI savings account is in line with our strategic intent of bringing digital banking closer to this segment of customers."

Anand further emphasized the role of the bank's merchant network in facilitating access to banking services, stating that the GATI account would especially benefit customers from rural hinterlands by providing them with a secure and instant platform for digital banking. The product targets individuals over the age of 18, particularly those who are 12th pass, salaried, self-employed, or beneficiaries of government welfare schemes.

Contd. from Page 1...

'KMCH to be developed into

MP Rungwra Narzary, Kokrajhar East MLA Lawrence Islary, BTC executive members Arup Kumar Dey and Sajal Singh, deputy commissioner Masanda M Pertin, and Principal of KMCH Atul Boro, among others.

The visit reflects the Assam government's continued emphasis on equitable and accessible public healthcare in remote and underserved areas of the state.

8 new bills to be introduced

Sindoor and US President Donald Trump's claims of having averted a nuclear war between India and Pakistan by mediating a ceasefire.

The four other new bills are the Manipur Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, the Indian Institute of Management (Amendment) Bill and the Taxation Laws (Amendment) Bill.

The government is also expected to present the Income Tax Bill, 2025 during the Monsoon session. The bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha in February and was referred to a Select Committee of the Lower House. The panel adopted its report on Wednesday and is likely to present it in the Lok Sabha on Monday. The government is also set to seek Parliament's nod for an extension of the President's Rule in Manipur and place the Demand for Grants of the state for the approval of the House.

The Readjustment of Representation of Scheduled Tribes in Assembly Constituencies of the State of Goa Bill, 2024, the Merchant Shipping Bill, 2024 and the Indian Ports Bill, 2025 are pending before the Lok Sabha for approval. (PTI)

Cabinet clears PMDDKY with

availability of long-term and short-term credit. The 100 districts will be identified based on three key indicators of low productivity, low cropping intensity, and less credit disbursement. The number of districts in each state/UT will be based on the share of net cropped area and operational holdings. However, a minimum of 1 district will be selected from each state.

The release further said committees will be formed at district, state and national levels for effective planning, implementation and monitoring of the scheme. A District Agriculture and Allied Activities Plan will be finalised by the District Dhan Dhaanya Samiti, which will also have progressive farmers as members.

The district plans will be aligned to the national goals of crop diversification, conservation of water and soil health, self-sufficiency in agriculture and allied sectors as well as expansion of natural and organic farming. Progress of the Scheme in each Dhan-Dhaanya district will be monitored on 117 key Performance Indicators through a dashboard on a monthly basis.

NITI will also review and guide the district plans. Besides, Central Nodal Officers appointed for each district will also review the scheme on a regular basis. "As the targeted outcomes in these 100 districts will improve, the overall average against key performance indicators will rise for the country," the release said. Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana will result in higher productivity, value addition in agriculture and allied sector, local livelihood creation and hence increase domestic production and achieve self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat), it said.

As the indicators of these 100 districts improve, the national indicators will automatically show an upward trajectory. Commenting on the scheme, Anish Shah, Group CEO & MD, Mahindra Group, said, "The Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana is a bold and visionary step toward transforming Indian agriculture at the grassroots level. By focusing on 100 districts with targeted support and convergence across schemes, this initiative has the potential to unlock rural prosperity, drive crop diversification, and accelerate the adoption of sustainable practices." (PTI)

People of Assam will send

gap between the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections last year. It led to Congress and its allies losing the assembly polls even after winning the Lok Sabha elections in the same state four months back, he claimed. "The BJP-EC stole the Maharashtra election from us," he alleged.

Gandhi claimed that the same tactic is being tried in Bihar and "names of poor people, workers, Congress voters, RJD voters are being deleted through the special intensive revision of electoral rolls." "They will try the same tactics in Assam. Our responsibility is to ensure that they cannot do it," he added.

Taking a swipe at the media, Gandhi said, "I used to call the media our 'friend', but they are not our friend anymore. They are not revealing the truth, but only showing Adani, Ambani, CM, Modi and Shah."

Gandhi, however, asserted that this will not help, as the people know the truth and the Congress will sweep the assembly polls in Assam due next year.

He congratulated the new state Congress president Gaurav Gogoi for starting their work already, and said people will start seeing the results soon.

Gandhi alleged that just as in Assam, land is being taken away across the country from people and given to a few industrialists.

Multi-hazard mock drill

the drill, independent observers were deployed at each site to monitor performance and suggest improvements. The exercise was overseen by incident commander Afa Phassang.

The drill was witnessed by several dignitaries and domain experts, including NDMA consultant Maj Gen (Retd) Ajay Kumar Verma, Central Electricity Authority member A Balan, additional deputy commissioner Tame Yajum, SDO Kipa Raja and representatives from hydroelectric projects nationwide, giving the exercise a pan-India significance. The event concluded with a debriefing session where observations were shared and feedback was exchanged to further enhance future disaster response strategies. (PTI)

CRPF Jawan from Assam

Bodoland Territorial Region Chief Executive Member Pramod Boro expressed deep sorrow over the jawan's death and offered condolences to the bereaved family. "It is heartbreaking to learn that Kokrajhar's brave son, CT/GD Praneshwar Koch, has made the supreme sacrifice while battling Naxals in Jharkhand today. His courage and devotion to duty will forever be remembered," Boro said in his condolence message.

The district administration and CRPF officials are coordinating arrangements for the final rites.

KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL
DEPARTMENT OF SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER, (S.E.) WORKS,
KAAC SECRETARIAT
DIPHU-782460

No. KAAC/SE-W-970/2025-26/ 204/A) Dtd. 25/06/2025

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tender affixing non refundable KAAC court fee stamp (receipt) Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only eventually to be drawn up in form are hereby invited from KAAC registered contractor/reputed firms of works department and will be received by the undersigned up to 4 P.M. on 18/07/2025. and will be opened on the same date, place and the hours in presence of the tenderer or their authorized agent if any.

If the day of the opening of tender happens to be a holiday/non-working days, the tender will be opened in the next day. The undersigned has the right to accept, reject any tender without any assigning reason thereof and will not be bound to accept the lowest tender quoted rate

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Tender Amount (Rs.)	A/A Amount (Rs.)	Earnest Money	Time allowed for completion
1	Installation of Fire Prevention and Safety Measures at Multi Purpose Sports Complex (Sarsing Teron Langlounng Habe)	Rs. 84,56,600.00	Rs.84,56,000.00	ST/SC/OBC=1% General 2%	60 days

Terms & Condition
N.B

1. The rate to be quoted as % (Percent) above/below/as per schedule rate for building/sanitary works for all division under CPWD-2020-21.
2. Earnest money should be deposited in favour of the undersigned in the form of call deposit bank draft & should be attached with the tender without which no tender will be accepted.
3. The Contractor shall repair/re-Construction if the works executed failed due inferior quality of works, The KAAC Authority will take legal action if the contractor refuse to repair re-construction the works.
4. The work must be carried on as directed by the E.E (W), KAAC Diphu Authority.
5. The following up to date documents should be enclosed with the tender.
 - a. Professional Tax Clearance Certificate.
 - b. Sale Tax Clearance Certificate/GST
 - c. Council Registration.
 - d. Call Deposit
 - e. Council receipt
 - f. Caste Certificate
 - g. Pan Card/Aadhaar Card
 - h. Account number
 - i. Payment will be made subject to availabilities of fund
 - j. The undersigned is not bound to accept the lowest quoted rate.

Sd/-
Superintending Engineer, (Works)
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council
DIPHU

Centuries-old rice preserved in Jorhat farmer's seed library draws state support amid climate change concerns

Minister Atul Bora assures Government support to farmer's indigenous Paddy Seed Library

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 16: Agriculture Minister Atul Bora has announced that the state government will extend all necessary assistance to progressive farmer Mahan Chandra Bora, who has preserved over 500 indigenous rice varieties in a unique seed library initiative at Meleng Kathgaon in Jorhat district.

Bora made the announcement after visiting the Annapurna Seed Library.

Set up by Mahan Chandra Bora, the library is considered the first indigenous seed lending library in Northeast India.

It houses hundreds of traditional and wild paddy varieties, many of which are climate-resilient—capable of withstanding floods, droughts, and pest attacks.

Speaking to reporters after the visit, the Minister lauded Bora's remarkable efforts, describing them as a "significant contribution" to the development of the agriculture sector in Assam.

"It was thrilling to witness varieties dating back to the 15th century and others resistant to pests and adverse weather," he said.

Sivasagar BJP holds march supporting eviction drive

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 16: The Sivasagar district unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Tuesday evening organised a thanksgiving march in support of Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's ongoing eviction drive aimed at clearing thousands of bighas of land from alleged illegal encroachers. Led by party leader Bitapan Raidongia, BJP workers took out a procession from Boarding Field to the historic Sivadoul premises, raising slogans in favour of the state government's land reclamation initiative.

Addressing the gathering, Raidongia launched a sharp attack on Sivasagar MLA and Rajiour Dal president Akhil Gogoi, accusing him of siding with illegal encroachers. Referring to Gogoi derisively as "Chuma Mia" Gogoi, he called for stricter action against those unlawfully occupying government land. He appealed to the people of Assam to stand behind the government's efforts to reclaim land, stating that the eviction drive was essential for safeguarding the state's resources and ensuring justice for rightful landholders.



Bora added that he first met the farmer during a felicitation ceremony in Guwahati, and was inspired to learn more about the initiative.

The Minister encouraged farmers across the state to visit the library and learn from the progressive practices being adopted there.

He also expressed happiness that students and researchers from Assam Agricultural University

(AAU) have been engaging with the seed library as part of their academic pursuits.

Highlighting the broader relevance of such efforts, Bora said the impact of climate change on agriculture was becoming increasingly evident, with parts of Assam currently facing either drought-like conditions or floods.

"While a dry spell is affecting several regions, six districts are simultaneously dealing with floods

that have damaged large crop areas," he said, adding that the government is monitoring the situation closely to mitigate the impact on farmers.

The Minister noted with satisfaction that a growing number of educated youth were now entering the agriculture sector and contributing meaningfully to the state's agri-based economy.

He said Assam's agricultural produce was finding markets outside the state as well, indicating promising export potential.

Earlier in the day, Bora—who is also the president of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP)—held an internal meeting with party leaders from Jorhat and Majuli district units and its allied organisations at the district AGP office.

Party sources said the discussions focused on grassroots-level concerns and dissatisfaction among workers.

The AGP leadership, including Working President and Minister Keshab Mahanta, is expected to undertake a tour of Upper Assam and other parts of the state to strengthen party organisation and address workers' grievances.

Peerless Hospital saves young woman in critical condition

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: In a dramatic medical rescue, Peerless Hospital in Kolkata successfully saved the life of a 25-year-old woman who was brought to its emergency department in a critical condition due to a ruptured ectopic pregnancy.

According to an official statement, the woman had an alarmingly low haemoglobin level of 2.5 gm% and was in hypovolemic shock at the time of admission. The patient, referred from another facility after her condition deteriorated, was experiencing severe respiratory distress and acute physiological stress.

She arrived at Peerless with a pulse rate over 150 beats per minute, a respiratory rate above 35, and blood pressure maintained at 100/60 only through intravenous support.

Clinical signs included extreme pallor, restlessness, and generalised swelling.

Doctors at Peerless initiated emergency resuscitation and oxygen therapy while conducting urgent investigations.

A history provided by the pa-

tient's family revealed that she had taken over-the-counter abortifacient medication after a positive home pregnancy test.

Though initial bleeding had stopped, her health worsened rapidly over three days, prompting her referral.

An emergency ultrasound confirmed a ruptured ectopic pregnancy with hemoperitoneum—internal bleeding in the abdomen.

A surgical team led by Dr Soumitra Kumar, Senior Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, conducted a life-saving operation under general anaesthesia.

Approximately one litre of blood was evacuated from the abdominal cavity.

The team performed a right salpingectomy, removed a haemorrhagic corpus luteal cyst, and conducted extensive peritoneal cleaning to arrest further bleeding.

Following surgery, the patient was shifted to the Intensive Therapy Unit, where she received multiple transfusions—five units of Packed Red Blood Cells, four units of Fresh Frozen Plasma, and

four units of platelets.

She was extubated the next day and gradually recovered. By the time of discharge, her haemoglobin had risen to 10.4 gm/dl and her condition was declared stable.

Dr Kumar described the case as one of the most critical the hospital had seen in recent times.

"The swift diagnosis, readiness of our surgical and ICU teams, and the patient's willpower were key to saving her life," he said.

He also issued a strong caution against unsupervised use of abortion pills.

"Self-medication with abortifacients can be life-threatening," he added, "Such drugs must be used only under qualified medical supervision, especially since complications like ectopic pregnancies can go unnoticed without proper diagnosis."

The hospital stated that the case underscored the importance of timely intervention and the dangers of unregulated medication use.

Peerless Hospital reiterated its commitment to high-quality emergency care, clinical expertise, and patient safety.

Mysterious death at Margherita Rehab Centre sparks outrage, owner absconding

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, July 16: A 35-year-old man undergoing treatment at the New Life Foundation Rehabilitation Centre in Bargolai, Margherita, died under mysterious circumstances on Monday night, triggering widespread public outrage and renewed scrutiny of the controversial facility.

The deceased, David Phukan of Lahowal in Dibrugarh district, had been admitted to the centre for nearly a year for de-addiction treatment.

His sudden and unexplained death has alarmed family members, who have accused the rehabilitation facility—reportedly owned by Rupam Gogoi—of negligence and abuse.

According to Phukan's family, the centre's staff transported his body to their residence without informing authorities or arranging for any medical attention.

They have further alleged that inmates at the facility are routinely subjected to physical and mental abuse.

Following the incident, Margherita Police launched an investigation and sent the body for post-mortem to determine the exact cause of death.

Meanwhile, Rupam Gogoi, the owner of the facility, has gone missing and is currently absconding.

This is not the first time the New Life Foundation has faced serious allegations.

BJP planning to sideline AGP, UPPL, BPL in Assam: Akhil Gogoi



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 16: Over 200 youths from diverse backgrounds formally joined the Rajiour Dal at a party induction event held in Rudrasagar on Tuesday in the presence of party president and Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi.

Speaking to the media, Gogoi said the people of Sivasagar constituency had elected him in 2021 despite facing opposition from both the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Congress, and expressed confidence that voters would once again support him in the 2026 Assembly elections.

He alleged that the BJP, which had come to power in Assam riding on the support of the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), now plans to make the regional ally politically irrelevant.

Gogoi claimed that AGP MLAs Bhaban Bharali (Dergaon), Punakan Baruah (Chabua), and Pradip Hazarika

(Anguri) would not be given tickets in the next elections as the BJP aims to weaken AGP, similar to what it is attempting with the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) and the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in the Bodoland region.

He further stated that the BJP would offer AGP seats only in constituencies where it lacks a significant voter base.

On the issue of opposition unity, Gogoi said the Congress was yet to commit to a joint alliance of anti-BJP parties.

However, he expressed hope that senior Congress leader Gau-rav Gogoi would reconsider his position as the 2026 elections approach.

Gogoi added that if the AGP were to exit the BJP-led alliance, the opposition front would be further strengthened, posing a formidable challenge to the ruling coalition in the state.

NFR GM inspects stations and infrastructure projects in Rangiya division



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, conducted an extensive inspection on July 15 across key railway stations and infrastructure sites in Rangiya Division, including Baihata, Changsari, Kendukona, Aghori, and Rangiya.

The visit was aimed at reviewing safety measures, signalling systems, and the progress of major development projects aligned with NFR's strategic priorities.

According to an official state-

ment, Shrivastava's visit focused on operational safety, infrastructure modernisation, and staff welfare.

At Rangiya Railway Station, he closely reviewed the ongoing extension of the Rangiya Railway Hospital, which is being upgraded to enhance healthcare services for railway personnel and nearby residents.

He also inspected the expansion of the Divisional Training Centre (MDDTI), where improved training infrastructure is being developed for Signal and Telecommunication (S&T) staff.

The upgraded facility will in-

clude modern classrooms and workshops to support technical upskilling.

At Baihata, the General Manager reviewed the near-complete Gati-Shakti Cargo Terminal (GCT), which is poised to boost freight handling capacity in the region.

The upcoming terminal will feature three dedicated goods lines, an electronic in-motion weighbridge, double goods platforms, high-mast lighting for round-the-clock operations, and a special ramp for automobile loading.

It is expected to handle over 25 freight rakes per month once operational.

The inspection also included ongoing station enhancement works and a review of nearby railway colonies.

Shrivastava emphasised the importance of staff housing and amenities in maintaining workforce morale and productivity, especially for frontline personnel.

The visit underscored NFR's commitment to infrastructural growth, operational safety, and employee welfare across its divisions.

Rajdhani Express to halt at Diphu from today following MP Amarsing Tisso's initiative

A Correspondent

KHERONI, July 16: In a major boost to rail connectivity in Assam's hill districts, the Dibrugarh Town-New Delhi Rajdhani Express (Train Nos. 12423/12424) will begin halting at Diphu Railway Station from July 17, 2025. The new stoppage, approved by the competent railway authority, comes in response to a request made by Lok Sabha MP Amarsing Tisso and fulfils a longstanding public demand for improved railway access in the region.

The Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) of the Northeast Frontier Railway's Lumding Division has invited MP Tisso to attend the official flagging-off ceremony at Diphu Railway Station on July 17 at 11:00 PM. The inaugural halt of the DOWN Rajdhani Ex-

press (12423) is scheduled for 11:21 PM the same night.

The UP Rajdhani Express (12424), departing from Dibrugarh Town, will reach Diphu at 2:24 AM on July 18. Both trains will stop at the station for two minutes.

The inclusion of Diphu as a stoppage point on the prestigious Rajdhani route is expected to significantly benefit residents of Diphu and adjoining areas by providing direct rail connectivity to the national capital on a premium express service.

Operating daily, the Rajdhani Express is known for its speed, onboard comfort, and extensive amenities, covering a distance of approximately 2,421 km between Dibrugarh Town and New Delhi in about 37 hours and 35 minutes.

Cairn Oil & Gas pushes youth empowerment in assam with digital and tea industry skill training

HT Correspondent

GOLAGHAT, July 16: Cairn Oil & Gas, a unit of the Vedanta Group and India's largest private oil and gas producer, has intensified its focus on grassroots-level youth empowerment in Assam through digital literacy and vocational skill development programmes.

The company is driving multiple interventions across its operational areas to promote entrepreneurship, digital access, and economic self-reliance among young people in under-served communities.

According to an official statement, one of the flagship initiatives has taken root in Golaghat district's Sarupathar College, where more than 3,900 students are now actively participating in digital learning programmes.

The digital classroom initiative, which began as a modest effort by Cairn, has evolved into a

full-fledged skill development centre.

The programme has bridged a significant digital divide, enabling students—many of whom had limited exposure to technology—to attend online lectures, engage in webinars, and even host virtual events.

"Youth are the future of the nation, and it is our responsibility to provide them with an opportunity to build a meaningful life," said a spokesperson of Cairn Oil & Gas. "We are proud to see these young individuals, trained in our centres, succeed independently and with confidence. Our skill-building efforts in Assam are shaping a future-ready workforce. Investing in youth capabilities is not just socially imperative—it's a catalyst for sustained regional and national progress."

Marking World Youth Skills Day 2025, themed 'Youth Empowerment through AI and

Digital Skills,' Cairn reaffirmed its commitment to self-reliance and nation building.

The company stated that it is investing in scalable, inclusive, and technology-driven programmes that equip the next generation for the evolving demands of the workforce.

Further strengthening its grassroots outreach, Cairn has partnered with the Department of Agriculture and Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, to launch a region-specific Tea Management and Certification course at Sarupathar College. The two-month programme, designed to align with the region's economic backbone—tea cultivation—trains up to 120 students per batch.

The course offers a blend of classroom instruction and field training in sustainable tea production, aimed at improving employment prospects in a sector that remains vital to Upper Assam's economy.

World Youth Skills Day 2025 observed in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Assam Skill University (ASU), in association with the Pentapolis Foundation, celebrated World Youth Skills Day 2025 at Hotel Radisson Blu in Guwahati, bringing together academicians, industry representatives, and policymakers to deliberate on strengthening youth-centric skill development with a particular focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI), STEM, and digital technologies.

According to an official statement, ASU Vice Chancellor Subhash Chandra Das, in his welcome address, recalled the United Nations General Assembly's decision in 2014 to mark July 15 as World Youth Skills Day, and emphasised the increasing global urgency to integrate industry-relevant skills into mainstream education. He said that while several countries have made progress, Assam must accelerate efforts to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application.

Das underlined the University's commitment to preparing youth to compete in the global workforce by promoting skill-based education, particularly in emerging sectors like AI.

Delivering the keynote address, chief guest Abhishek Chakroborty spoke about the transformative impact of AI and urged for more focused training and academic exposure in this field. He pointed out the shortage of AI-specific courses and institutions, expressing optimism that Assam Skill University could take a lead role in filling the void.

Guest of honour Gyanendra Dev Tripathi, Principal Secretary of the SEED Department, stressed the need for a stronger STEM foundation across the education system in Assam.

He said that a concerted push was needed to build an ecosystem that would enable the state's youth to attain global competitiveness.

R Sathishkumar, Director General of the Pentapolis Foundation, highlighted the Foundation's ongoing efforts in grassroots skill development and community empowerment.

Miles Bronson Residential School hosts IPSC Literary Festival in Guwahati



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: The Miles Bronson Residential School (MBRS), Borjhar, Guwahati, hosted the Indian Public Schools' Conference (IPSC) Literary Festival from July 14 to 16, bringing together students from leading IPSC member schools across the country.

The three-day festival was held at the school's AnuChandra Auditorium and Multi-Sports Complex.

According to an official statement, the festival commenced with an inaugural ceremony on July 14, where Dr Nripen Kumar Dutta, Founder and Principal of MBRS, formally opened the event and welcomed the participating teams.

In his keynote address, Dr Dutta paid tribute to literary and cultural luminaries including Rupkonwar Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Kalaguru Bishnu Prasad Rabha, Padma

Bhushan Syed Abdul Malik, Nabakanta Barua, and Dr. Bhupen Hazarika.

He also acknowledged the contributions of missionary and lexicographer Miles Bronson, after whom the school is named.

Highlighting the importance of creativity in education, Dr Dutta urged schools to nurture students as culturally grounded and socially conscious individuals capable of shaping positive change.

The festival featured a wide range of literary and performing arts events including multi-format English debates, 'Living Newspaper' enactments, quiz competitions, creative text writing, spoken word performances, Hindi debates, Sanskrit and Hindi Shlok Gaayan, and a heritage walk.

The festival concluded on July 16 with a Closing and Award-Giving Ceremony, where senior journalist Digjyoti Lahkar presented prizes to the winning participants and teams.

Among the schools that earned accolades were Mayo College Girls' School (Ajmer, Rajasthan), Daly College and The Emerald Heights (Indore, Madhya Pradesh), Scindia Kanya Vidyalaya (Gwalior), L K Singhania Education Centre (Gotan, Rajasthan), The Assam Valley School (Balipara), and host institution Miles Bronson Residential School (Borjhar, Guwahati).

The event was marked by vibrant participation, showcasing talent, cultural pride, and academic excellence across diverse platforms.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

History is a vast early warning system.
-Norman Cousins

BRICS 2025 declaration

Several important developments have emerged from the recently concluded BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on July 6 and 7. Although U.S. President Donald Trump expressed strong displeasure over the summit — even calling it a conspiracy to end the dominance of the U.S. dollar. He also suggested imposing a 10% tariff on BRICS member countries. In this context, the BRICS meeting becomes extremely significant, as today's global issues are no longer limited to trade alone — but extend to using military power and pressure to control trade, particularly as done by the United States. The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine shows no signs of ending. The U.S., which once talked of peace, is now offering more weapons to Ukraine, such as the Patriot air missile defense systems, and urging Germany to provide arms as well. The U.S. arms industry is more interested in prolonging the war to earn profit by selling the arms. NATO countries have decided to increase their defense spending from 2% to 5% of their GDP. While Russia's invasion of Ukraine is condemnable, NATO's expansionist policies have played a key role in this. President Putin announced the invasion after repeated warnings against Ukraine joining NATO were ignored. Instead, Sweden and Norway were also inducted into NATO. On the other hand, the massacre being carried out by Israel's Zionist government in Gaza is among the most inhuman acts of the modern era. Despite the rulings of the United Nations and International Court of Justice (ICJ) and International Criminal Court (ICC), Israel continues its aggression with impunity. The U.S. not only supports it but also is supplying Israel with deadly bombs. Israel is even carrying out attacks in other parts of the Middle East. The U.S. and European nations are now seen cooperating with groups in Syria that they once labelled as terrorists.

Several African countries are engulfed in internal wars, which are encouraged by imperialist nations. In Sudan alone, more than 150,000 people have died. President Trump has said that African nations should buy arms from the U.S. Much of this aggression is driven by the global demand for rare earth elements needed for modern technology, which are believed to be abundant in Africa. In South America, the U.S. has attempted to take control of the Panama Canal, proposed changing the name of the Gulf of Mexico. It has also expressed interest in taking over Greenland. Several developed nations are also intentionally creating instability in developing and underdeveloped countries for geopolitical advantage. As a result, global military expenditure has increased for the ninth consecutive year, reaching \$2,443 billion in 2023, a 6.8% rise from the previous year. There was a time when developing nations, under the banner of the Non-Aligned Movement, resisted these imperialist designs.

At the BRICS Summit in Brazil, the focus was on world peace, increasing mutual trade, promoting South-South cooperation, and condemning Israel's assault on Gaza, end to the Russia-Ukraine war. Terrorism of any kind too was condemned. Proposals were made for a common BRICS currency, and for conducting trade in local currencies.

On the voter list revision in Bihar, has the ECI forgotten its duty?

By: Prakruthi Jain

Bihar is gearing up for the State Assembly elections to be held in November 2025. The Election Commission of India's (ECI) move to revise the voter list at the eleventh hour raises serious concerns about the accessibility of participation in the upcoming polls for the ordinary person in Bihar. Many arguments have been advanced about the real purpose behind this exercise and the political interests served in the garb of ensuring the "integrity of the electoral roll" and the "conduct of free and fair elections".

At a more profound level, the ECI's move reveals an utter disregard for due process and natural justice, stemming from an obliteration of its role as a fourth branch institution. The unavoidable consequence of wrongful disenfranchisement of persons without any legal redress and resultant effacement of the democratic process in the state is implicit.

It is imperative that state action be prescribed by law, pursue a legitimate aim, and be proportionate to the aim sought to be achieved. Failure to adhere to these standards risks infringement of rights through undue restrictions. In the garb of ensuring "integrity of the electoral roll" and the "conduct of free and fair elections," the ECI inadvertently pursues illegitimate political interests. Further, it imposes a disproportionate burden on the proposed voters to demonstrate that they deserve to be on the electoral rolls, or take a chance of being disenfranchised.

The basis on which proposed voters will (or will not) be able to secure a place on the electoral rolls is unclear, as there is no policy underpinning the decision-making powers of the ECI. There is complete disarray coupled with an indecisive ECI, changing the entire process every now and then. What is most unsettling is that there is no appeal mechanism to address the concerns of those whose application forms are rejected for whatever reason. Additionally, there is no guarantee that reasons will be given for any such rejection. It is not reasonable to expect the aggrieved persons to approach a court of law to avail remedies for wrongful disenfranchisement within a short timeline. The obvious corollary to this situation is risking disenfranchisement of numerous citizens, without a real remedy. If subsequently it is found that the rejection ought to be reversed, depriving such persons of the right to vote in the upcoming election would cause stark injustice. In the absence of an adequate remedy, the risk remains unjustified.

The tripartite separation of powers in India ensures a self-enforcing mechanism for a democratic polity. Nevertheless, certain norms cannot be self-enforced, but play a key role in guaranteeing stability in governance structures and commitment to democratic values. These cannot be achieved by competition alone, and are best taken care of by specialised institutions, known for their independence from the other three branches. The importance of ECI to prevent partisan interference with the administration of elections and to ensure the realisation of the right to vote is well established. The ECI's constitutional design is not enough to protect its independence from other political branches. The current appointment process, contrary to what was followed earlier, gives a 2:1 veto to the ruling party to appoint the members of the ECI, completely sidelining the Leader of Opposition, making the ECI susceptible to capture by partisan interest groups.

Even the constitutional status of the ECI has not helped in preventing the other branches of the government from impeding its functioning by filling it up with partisan appointees. The failure of the Constitution to spell out the details regarding the appointment process has made way for the Legislature to fill the gaps with partisan rules regarding the appointment of members of the ECI. As per Article 324, the authority to nominate members to the ECI is held by the President, who makes this decision based on the "aid and advice" of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. This essentially means that the Prime Minister has the authority to directly nominate individuals to the ECI. This flaw in constitutional design has allowed the ECI to be captured during the appointment procedure itself.

This weakness is made worse by the President's power to nominate extra members. If the government of the day disapproves of the Chief Election Commissioner's approach, they have the power to appoint pliant Commissioners to the ECI. This is precisely how the ECI went from being a single-member body from 1950 to a three-member body in 1990. Once the institution has been captured at the stage of appointment itself, there is very little hope that it will discharge its functions in a non-partisan manner throughout the conduct of elections.

Further, the ECI lacks both operational accountability as well as structural accountability. The extra-legal means employed by the ECI to regulate political actors make it extremely powerful and consequential for the democratic process. (IPA Service)

India, the US, and the race to unlock defence modernisation

India's quest for military modernisation and strategic autonomy has entered a decisive phase, marked by unprecedented urgency and quiet but high-stakes diplomacy. At the heart of this evolving story lies a \$5 billion backlog in pending defence deals with the United States — a seemingly bureaucratic hurdle that, if cleared, could become the most significant milestone yet in India's march toward self-reliance in defence. More than a logistical logjam, the backlog symbolises the promise and unfinished agenda of one of the 21st century's most consequential strategic partnerships: the India-US defence axis.

Among the most high-profile cases that has come to define the frustration — and the opportunity — of this stalled partnership is the long-delayed delivery of GE F404 jet engines. These engines were ordered by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) in February 2021 to power India's indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas Mk-1A. The Tejas programme is not just a matter of aeronautical engineering; it is a cornerstone of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's flagship Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) vision in defence. Yet, despite the urgency, only one engine has arrived in India four years after the agreement, threatening to derail production timelines and pushing squadron inductions for the Indian Air Force well into the 2030s.

This delay is not an isolated incident but a symptom of deeper challenges that continue to affect India-US defence trade — a partnership that has expanded significantly since the early 2000s but still struggles with execution. Alongside the F404s, a much more ambitious agreement for the joint production of the more advanced F414 engine also remains in limbo. Valued at approximately \$1 billion, this deal includes a crucial clause — the transfer of up to 80 percent of technology to Indian firms. For India, which has long been dependent on foreign-made engines for its fighter jets, the F414 deal represents not just another acquisition, but a game-changer. If realised, it would pave the way for greater indigenous aerospace capabilities and eventually power the upcoming Tejas Mk-2 aircraft, a more sophisticated version designed for deeper strike roles and enhanced combat versatility.

High-level engagement has intensified in recent weeks. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's meetings with US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth at the Pentagon sent strong signals that both sides understand what's at stake. Carefully worded statements from Washington now suggest "guarded optimism" about resolving the engine impasse in the coming months, ideally ahead of the signing of a new 10-year defence partnership framework. The current roadmap, due to expire in 2025, is set to be replaced with a broader vision for defence co-production, logistics cooperation, resilient supply chains, and joint research — a foundation both governments are pitching as vital to 21st-century security architecture



in the Indo-Pacific.

Yet the list of pending items goes beyond fighter engines. The Indian Navy's longstanding request for six additional P-8I Poseidon maritime surveillance aircraft has also been caught in the same bureaucratic web. These aircraft have been instrumental in patrolling the Indian Ocean Region — a maritime space of increasing strategic concern given the expanding presence of Chinese naval forces. Pricing and offset negotiations have dragged on for years, frustrating the Navy's efforts to modernise and maintain a credible deterrent at sea.

The Indian Army, for its part, is also watching with keen interest. Proposals to co-produce Javelin anti-tank guided missiles and possibly collaborate on the development of Stryker armoured vehicles are also in the pipeline. Both systems could fill critical gaps in India's mechanised forces, particularly as the country navigates a volatile neighbourhood that demands agility, mobility, and indigenous innovation.

Lurking behind these military hardware debates is a much larger geopolitical calculation. The United States views India as a pivotal partner in its Indo-Pacific strategy — a counterweight to China's increasingly assertive military and territorial posture. That urgency has been compounded by reports that China has tested "blackout bombs" — electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapons capable of disabling enemy electronics without physical destruction. Such asymmetric technologies pose existential risks to command centres, communication infrastructure, and radar systems, making it all the more urgent for India to secure advanced avionics, electronic warfare systems, and resilient command networks. In this light, clearing the backlog with the US becomes not just an exercise in paperwork, but a strategic imperative for India to build credible deterrence and operational readiness.

While successive US administrations — from Bush to Obama, Trump, and now Biden — have lauded India as a "natural partner" in defence, the reality has not always matched the rhetoric. Though the US

has granted India special status, allowing for high-end technology transfers outside NATO norms, actual deliveries have often been bogged down by cumbersome export controls and lengthy congressional processes. The Trump administration even hinted at selling F-35 stealth fighters to India, a move that generated both excitement and political backlash. Critics in India questioned whether such a move aligned with the nation's indigenous fighter development ambitions, especially given the progress on India's Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) stealth fighter programme.

What distinguishes the current moment is the Modi Government's unequivocal commitment to break out of this dependency cycle. Unlike previous governments that often left indigenous defence initiatives underfunded and adrift, the present administration has poured political capital, resources, and institutional clarity into ensuring that India's domestic defence ecosystem not only survives but thrives. Programmes like the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), Defence Corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, and aggressive target-setting for procurement from Indian firms are testimony to this commitment. Under Modi's leadership, India is not merely seeking to substitute imports, but to reimagine itself as a net exporter of defence hardware in the years to come.

Nonetheless, the road ahead remains complex. India still imports more than 60% of its defence requirements, and traditional partners like Russia — long the backbone of India's defence procurement — are increasingly entangled in their own strategic challenges. The Ukraine war has strained Russia's ability to fulfil spares and maintenance obligations to India, underlining the dangers of excessive reliance on any one supplier. Meanwhile, China's tightening defence cooperation with Russia and its expanding influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean have added new layers of threat to India's security calculus.

Against this backdrop, resolving the \$5 billion backlog with the US is not just about meeting delivery timelines. It is about sending a message to both allies and

adversaries that India is ready to act decisively, modernise swiftly, and build the industrial base required for long-term security autonomy. Defence experts argue that successful closure of the F414 deal in particular could become a 'test case' — a precedent that encourages future engine co-development, including for sixth-generation fighter platforms and indigenous UAV propulsion systems.

In Washington, too, the stakes are clear. At a time when US strategic focus is pivoting decisively towards the Indo-Pacific, India's role as a stabilising regional power is being recalibrated. Pentagon insiders acknowledge the limitations of the US bureaucracy in keeping pace with fast-moving geopolitical realities. The Biden administration, like its predecessor, is aware that India's ability to assume a greater burden-sharing role in the Indo-Pacific hinges on quick, credible, and mutually beneficial defence cooperation.

India, on the other hand, is demonstrating that it is no longer content with transactional deals or symbolic purchases. The emphasis is now firmly on joint production, knowledge transfer, and long-term industrial linkages that creates jobs at home while contributing to regional security. Senior Indian officials highlight new procurement policies that cut red tape, prioritise indigenous firms, and streamline acquisition timelines. Under the Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020, clauses for strategic partnerships, foreign direct investment, and technology tie-ups have been strengthened, aligning perfectly with the government's 'Make in India, Make for the World' philosophy.

As both nations prepare to unveil a new 10-year defence partnership framework before the end of 2025, expectations are high. If it delivers on its promise, the agreement will offer a stable foundation for integrated supply chains, greater intelligence sharing, and enhanced interoperability — critical elements in deterring future threats. More than just a diplomatic formality, this framework is expected to align India's defence reforms with America's strategic outlook, creating a partnership where co-development replaces dependency and vision replaces vagueness.

In the end, the significance of clearing the defence deal backlog goes far beyond jets, radars, or missiles. It is about setting the trajectory for the next decade of India's defence posture — a trajectory that must be self-reliant, globally integrated, and strategically sovereign. It is about proving that press statements and handshake diplomacy can translate into humming assembly lines, local manufacturing ecosystems, and battlefield readiness. Most of all, it is about securing the dream of Aatmanirbhar Bharat not just as a slogan, but as the lived reality of India's defence future.

If successful, this moment will not merely mark the revival of a few contracts. It will mark the beginning of India's rise as a true defence manufacturing power — one built on trust, resilience, and the unshakable resolve to stand its ground in an uncertain world. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

The role of youth in political reformation

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

Youth play a very important role in changing society. They have fresh ideas, energy, and a strong desire to make things better. In politics, young people have always helped bring change when systems become old, corrupt, or unfair. They ask questions, challenge wrong practices, and try to make their country a better place. Their role in political reformation is necessary because they are the future of the nation. If they do not take part in shaping the rules and policies of their country, the problems of today will continue into the future.

Young people see the world differently from older generations. They do not accept things just because they have been done in a certain way for many years. Instead, they want to know if something is right or wrong. If they see injustice or corruption, they do not remain silent. This questioning nature is very important for political change. Without it, bad leaders and unfair systems continue to exist. The youth have the courage to speak up, take action, and demand fairness in society.

One of the biggest problems in politics is corruption. In many countries, politicians make promises during elections but do not fulfill them. They misuse government money and do not work for the welfare of the people. Young people see this and realize that if they do not act, their future will be affected. They organize protests, use social media to spread awareness, and demand honest leadership. Their voices are strong because they speak with hope and sincerity. Unlike many older politicians, they are not involved in selfish interests or power struggles.

Education helps young people understand politics better. When they learn about history, law, and governance, they realize how systems work and how they can be improved. They start seeing the difference between good and

bad leaders. They learn to think critically and do not believe false promises easily. Educated youth can also explain important issues to others. They can help people understand their rights and the responsibilities of a government. In this way, they play a key role in spreading awareness and creating an informed society.

Voting is one of the easiest ways for young people to bring change. In a democracy, leaders are chosen by the people. If young voters take elections seriously, they can select leaders who are honest and hardworking. However, in many countries, a large number of young people do not vote. They think their vote will not make a difference. This attitude is harmful because it allows bad leaders to stay in power. If all young people vote wisely, they can shape the future of their nation.

Apart from voting, many young people are joining politics directly. In some countries, they are becoming politicians, starting new parties, and making policies that focus on real issues. This is a good sign because it shows that young people are taking responsibility instead of just complaining. They are entering the system to change it from within. When young leaders come forward, they bring new ideas and fresh energy into politics. They are more connected to modern problems like climate change, unemployment, and digital development.

Social media has given young people a powerful tool to express their opinions. Unlike in the past, where only newspapers and television controlled political discussions, today's youth can use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to share their views. They can organize online campaigns, expose corruption, and raise awareness about important issues. A simple post or video can reach millions of people in a short time. However, social media also has dangers. False news spreads quickly, and sometimes, political discussions become hateful. Young people



must be careful and use these platforms responsibly. Many youth movements around the world have shown how powerful young people can be in bringing political change. History has many examples of students and young activists leading protests and demanding justice. They have fought against unfair laws, dictatorships, and human rights violations. Even today, young people are leading movements for climate action, gender equality, and social justice. Their energy and determination often force governments to listen and act. When youth stand together for a cause, they become a strong force that cannot be ignored.

However, young people also face many challenges when they try to bring political change. In many countries, older leaders do not take them seriously. They think that youth lack experience and do not understand politics. This mindset discourages many young people from participating in political discussions. In some places, youth activists are even threatened or arrested for speaking against the government. This makes political reformation difficult, but it also shows why youth involvement is important. If young people do not stand up for their rights, bad leaders will continue to exploit the system.

Another challenge is that poli-

tics often seems complicated and difficult to understand. Many young people feel disconnected from political discussions because they think it is not relevant to their daily lives. They believe that politicians only care about power and do not listen to ordinary people. This belief makes them uninterested in politics. However, the truth is that every decision made by politicians affects people's lives, from education policies to job opportunities. If youth do not take an interest in politics, they will have no say in decisions that shape their future.

Despite these challenges, youth participation in politics is increasing. Many organizations are working to educate young people about governance and leadership. Schools and universities are encouraging students to engage in debates and discussions on political topics. Civic education programs are teaching young people about their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Leadership training initiatives are helping them develop the skills needed to become effective politicians and activists.

Youth involvement in politics is not just about protests and elections. Many young people are working on projects that improve society in different ways. Some are helping to improve education in rural areas, while oth-

ers are working on solutions for unemployment. Some are creating awareness about environmental issues, while others are fighting against discrimination. All these efforts contribute to political reformation because they address real problems and create positive change.

The future of any country depends on its youth. If young people are active in politics and social issues, the country will move forward in a positive direction. If they remain silent and ignore politics, problems like corruption, poverty, and injustice will continue. Youth have the power to create a better world by being responsible citizens, choosing good leaders, and even becoming leaders themselves.

The role of youth in political reformation is very important. Their energy, creativity, and passion for change make them the driving force of progress. While there are many obstacles, history has shown that when young people unite, they can bring great change. Whether through voting, activism, education, or leadership, their involvement in politics is necessary for a just and fair society. Every young person must realize that they have a voice, and that voice can shape the future. Their participation in politics today will decide the kind of world they live in tomorrow.

Northeast India's Unequivocal Right to Climate Justice

By: Rituraj Phukan

India's Northeast ranks among the most vulnerable and early climate change-impacted regions of the world. The area has experienced conflicts, frequent floods, erosion, landslides, loss of livelihoods, displaced populations, and biodiversity reduction for several decades. In the past, not many would have associated these as manifestations of anthropogenic warming of the planet, but modern understanding of the climate crisis has evolved. The frequency and intensity of floods have increased due to climate change, with worse projections for the future.

Perhaps the first study to reveal the warming impact in Northeast India was the 2019 "Climate Vulnerability Assessment for the Indian Himalayan Region Using a Common Framework," which placed four Northeast states among the top five most vulnerable to climate change in the Himalayan region. The assessment analysed several broad categories of indicators, including socio-economy, demographic status and health, the sensitivity of agricultural production, forest-dependent livelihoods, and access to information, services, and infrastructure. The Indian delegation at the 24th UN Climate Change Conference (COP24) identified Assam and Mizoram as the most vulnerable regions to climate change based on these findings.

A data-based index of 'hydro-political' issues in areas with a history of transboundary water resources, where conflicts are likely to be exacerbated by climate change and population growth, forecasts "water wars" in the Ganges-Brahmaputra basin.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment Report of 2019 corroborated the projections of the 2014 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report regarding glacial loss in the Himalayas, besides providing fresh insights into impacts in the Eastern Himalayan region. Even if warming is limited to 1.5°C, over one-third of Eastern Himalayan glaciers could be lost by 2100, with average regional temperatures already up by 1.3°C. As much as 40 percent of Tibetan plateau glaciers may disappear by 2050, threatening water, energy, and food security in Northeast India, including Assam. A data-based index of 'hydro-political' issues in areas with a

history of transboundary water resources, where conflicts are likely to be exacerbated by climate change and population growth, forecasts "water wars" in the Ganges-Brahmaputra basin.

Recent trends indicate increasing manifestations of warming in the Northeast. In September 2024, most states in the region experienced an unusual heatwave with temperatures reaching 40°C and anomalies up to 10°C above normal amid high humidity; many places in the region were close to experiencing "heat-dome" conditions with temperatures that felt like 50 degrees Celsius. A few months earlier in May, another prolonged heatwave had killed scores of people. Schools were shut down due to excessive heat, with some places recording temperatures 8 degrees above normal. The intense heat across Northeast India was unprecedented, and several districts registered new temperature records.

Impact of Natural Calamities
To aggravate matters, Assam experienced devastating floods in between the two heatwaves, with over a hundred reported deaths and more than 1.2 million people affected across 23 districts of the Brahmaputra valley. Widespread erosion by the rampaging rivers caused extensive damage to properties, crop fields, farms, and livestock, impoverishing the affected populace. The floods inevitably bring health and sanitation challenges, disease outbreaks, and food scarcity. But their long-term impacts, such as on children's mental health, due to the disruption of educational and occupational opportunities, increased stigma, discrimination, and social marginalisation, need to be better understood. Some studies have revealed that natural disasters have long-lasting effects on mental health, often causing post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and general anxiety.

Temperature rise, vegetation change, and degraded and fragmented habitats across the Northeast have led to increasing instances of human-wildlife conflicts.

It is also important to note that temperature rise, vegetation change, and degraded and fragmented habitats across the Northeast have led to increasing instances of human-wildlife conflicts. Studies have linked the proliferation of invasive vegetation to warming and precipitation change, as is evident across the region. Visuals of tigers, leopards, bears, and elephants in conflict with



people have flooded social and mainstream media in recent years. The Northeast has some of the highest casualty rates from such conflicts among all Indian states, yet the correlations with warming impacts are not well established.

Assam has consistently topped the states most affected or vulnerable to climate change in India in studies published during the last decade. The largest of the northeastern states by population was listed among the 8 most vulnerable states by the "Climate Vulnerability Assessment for Adaptation Planning in India Using a Common Framework," a few years back. More recently, the national climate vulnerability assessment report from the Department of Science and Technology placed 60 percent of districts in Assam under the highly vulnerable category. Another study by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water found that six of India's eight most flood-prone districts during the last decade are in Assam.

The 2023 "Gross Domestic Climate Risk" report by the Cross Dependency Initiative ranked

nine Indian states, including Assam, among the top 50 global regions most at risk of climate-related damage to the built environment by 2050. Assam placed 28th, with a projected climate risk increase of over 33 percent from 1990 levels. The report highlights vulnerability where residential, industrial, and commercial areas intersect with rising extreme weather events.

Response of Northeastern States
The northeastern states have taken innovative, ambitious steps to address climate change impacts. The Arunachal Pradesh government's landmark Pakke Declaration initiative, with time-bound short-, medium- and long-term targets encompassing all departments, aims to reach Net Zero by 2047, preceding the national target of 2070.

In Tripura, the government and civil society collaboration Bio-village 2.0 uses a holistic bottom-up approach for developing model villages focused on socio-economic growth, sustainable development, and biodiversity conservation. Meghalaya's "Environment state" concept aims

to integrate nature into economic planning and create climate action zones around ecological regions with incentives for climate-sensitive products and organisations.

Assam has established "climate cells" in colleges and initiated research projects to evaluate sectoral climate change impacts. The government has also implemented a retirement policy for vehicles over 15 years and introduced a fleet of CNG and electric buses.

The indigenous people and local communities of Northeast India are victims of the climate crisis. Although their contribution to greenhouse gas accumulation is minimal, they are often among the earliest to experience the direct effects of warming and have limited resources for adaptation.

Communities at the Forefront
The indigenous people and local communities of Northeast India are victims of the climate crisis. Although their contribution to greenhouse gas accumulation is minimal, they are often among the earliest to experience the direct effects of warming and have limited resources for adaptation. At the same time, they have the knowledge and wisdom oriented toward nature that have helped them cope with weather anomalies.

Across the region, the loss of forest cover, invasive vegetation, and the disappearance of native biodiversity have emerged as direct threats to the food security of millions. The impact of warming on native biodiversity used as food and medicine by indigenous communities is a less-studied but expected consequence. The lives, livelihoods, and food security of the Misings, Karbis, and other indigenous people and local communities across the Eastern Himalayan region are undermined by the unfolding climate and biodiversity crises.

Northeast India's indigenous traditions and knowledge can greatly strengthen resilience, positioning the region as a key player in global climate justice. To amplify the region's voice, it is essential to increase representation from Northeast India in official delegations, empower civil society activists to share the region's wisdom, and support informed and passionate youth to attend global conferences, ensuring that Northeast India's valuable insights and experiences are included in climate justice conversations. (Courtesy: ORF)

Govt decision to exempt 80% power plants from installing sulphur emission-limiting tech draws ire

By: Aathira Perincher

The Union environment ministry's recent move to exempt a large number of thermal power units from installing a cleaning technology to limit sulphur emissions has come under scrutiny. In a notification on July 11, the ministry had announced that nearly 80% of thermal power units across the country would be exempted from installing technology to limit sulphur emissions.

However, this move undoes the ministry's earlier notification in 2015 that mandated all thermal power plants to implement the technology — Flue Gas Desulfurization systems (FDGs), specifically — in their units.

An air pollution scientist told *The Wire* that the environment ministry's decision takes India back 10 years, stressing that FDGs are the only way to control sulphur emissions from power plants and thus, reduce pollution at the source. The rationale such as India witnessing a lack of technology to implement FDG systems was "absurd", they said.

Additionally, studies such as this one in 2022 have even recommended that the technology be implemented effectively in India so as to reduce sulphur emissions further.

Meanwhile, on Monday, July 14, the ministry defended its move. Facing severe criticism, the ministry released a statement, claiming that media reports have "grossly misinterpreted" its notification and that the rationale was based on "detailed scientific studies" and "extensive consultations with stakeholders and research institutions".

However, many justifications given by the ministry in its defence do not hold, experts told *The Wire*. For instance, if sulphur emission levels were not a public health concern, why was the first mandate in 2015 introduced at all in the country, a researcher asked.

Extensions and exemptions
Thermal power plants (which can have multiple units) that run on coal emit numerous pollutants. Sulphur dioxide, a gas, is one of them. Once released, sulphur dioxide also interacts with air, forming small particles called sulphates. This is considered a major air pollutant.

Studies, such as this 2022 literature review, show that sulphur emissions can cause several health impacts including adverse ones on the human respiratory, cardiovascular and nervous systems.

But this is where FDGs help: they filter out as much as 90-95% of sulphur from thermal power plant emissions. This is technology that many countries, includ-

ing the United States and China have adopted, according to air pollution researcher Sunil Dahiya, Founder and Lead Analyst at Delhi-based think tank *EnviroCatalysts*.

A 2017 study in the journal *Scientific Reports* found that while sulphur emissions in China had declined by 75% since 2007, thanks to sulphur-limiting mechanisms in place, emissions in India increased by 50% in the same time.

"This finding...suggests effective SO₂ [sulphur dioxide] control in China and lack thereof in India...In India, ~33 million people now live in areas with substantial SO₂ pollution," it stated.

With most of India's power plants running on coal, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change had come out with a crucial notification in 2015, called the Environment (Protection) Amendment Rules, 2015: it mandated that all thermal power plants units install FDGs to limit sulphur emissions in two years.

However, following murmurs of dissent from stakeholders including the Ministry of Power, the environment ministry extended the deadline. Thermal power plant units operating in the National Capital Region of Delhi were to install FDGs by December 2019, while all others across the country were mandated to do so by December 2022.

Goalsposts shifted again
A notification from the ministry in March 2021 categorised thermal power plant units into three categories, setting different deadlines for each of them.

Category A units (those within a 10 km radius of the National Capital Region or cities having a population of more than one million) had to install FDGs by December 2022. Category B units (those within a 10 km radius of Critically Polluted Areas such as Vapi in Gujarat, or Non-Attainment Cities such as Bengaluru in Karnataka which have not met national standards for specific air pollutants for at least five years) were to install FDGs by December 2023.

All other thermal power plant units fell in Category C, and were to install FDGs by December 2024. Another notification in September 2022 changed deadlines, again. Timelines now extended to December 2024, December 2025 and December 2026 for Category A, B and C units, respectively. Again, in December 2024, a notification announced new deadlines, December 2027, December 2028 and December 2029 for Category A, B and C units, respectively.

Currently, 537 thermal power plant units (that generate 2,04,160 megawatts of thermal

coal-based power) have been identified for installation of FDGs as of December 2024, per a reply given in parliament by the Minister for Power. Of these, FDGs have been installed in 44 units (22,590 MW), while contracts have been awarded or are under implementation in 233 units (1,02,040 MW). Meanwhile, 138 units (43,987 MW) are under various stages of tendering processes and 122 units (35,543 MW) are in the pre-tendering process for installing FDGs.

However, as if the delays were not enough, the government has now done away with the deadline for nearly 80% of thermal power plant units.

In its latest notification published in the Gazette of India, the environment ministry announced that Category C units (which amount to nearly 400 in number across the country) would be completely exempted from installing FDGs and Category B units would need to install FDGs as per the recommendations of an Expert Appraisal Committee in charge of thermal power projects. Category A units, meanwhile, have to comply with sulphur emission limiting norms by December 2027.

In its notification, the ministry said that it had received "representations" from stakeholders regarding exemption or relaxation in timelines of sulphur emission standards due to several reasons: limited availability of technology providers, techno-economic feasibility, the negative impact on the supply chain that lockdowns and other events had caused during the COVID-19 pandemic, price escalation due to high demand and low supplies, a low sulphur dioxide concentration in ambient air and "heavy burden on consumer due to increase in electricity prices".

The ministry had also received the "explicit recommendation of the Ministry of Power" about this, the notification said.

This comes right after a high-powered committee chaired by principal scientific advisor Ajay Sood recommended that India exempt all coal-fired thermal power plants from installing FDGs, per a report by *The Hindu* in June.

'Absurd' rationale
Meanwhile, India has overtaken China to become the world's highest emitter of sulphur dioxide, contributing to more than 15% of global anthropogenic emissions, according to a report published by *Greenpeace* in 2019. Nearly 70% of India's sulphur emissions come from coal-fired power plants.

A study by scientists at the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur in 2022 found that

while there were monthly and seasonal changes in sulphur dioxide emission concentrations across the country from 1980 to 2020, high-capacity thermal power plants in the lower Indo-Gangetic Plains and Central India had caused "high" sulphur dioxide pollution in these areas.

Meanwhile, it also found that sulphur emissions in India in the last decade (2010-2020) had decreased. "It is achieved primarily due to the strict control measures, adaptation of new technology, and shift towards renewable energy sources during the period. Therefore, both economic growth and air pollution control can be performed hand-in-hand by adopting new technology that helps to reduce SO₂ emissions," the study said.

The study also recommended that coal-fired power plants be subjected to pollution standards, "similar to those in emerging (such as China) and developed (e.g., EU, Australia, and USA) economies", citing FDGs as an example. Per the study, "mandating existing coal-fired power plants to install FDG and scrubber systems can reduce SO₂ pollution". The science is clear: FDGs help cut sulphur emissions drastically.

The environment ministry's move to exempt all Category C thermal power units from installing FDGs "takes us back ten years" in terms of controlling sulphur emissions, Dahiya told *The Wire*. Emissions from power plants do not just impact cities nearby, but can be felt for up to 200 kilometres away, depending on the geography of the area and meteorological conditions, he said. Villages or small towns in this radius can also be affected by such pollution.

Moreover, the notification to exempt Category C units from installing FDGs takes away the opportunity to reduce fine particulate matter or PM_{2.5} levels as well, because sulphates also contribute to fine particulate matter which is another major pollutant in the country, Dahiya added. "It is always more efficient and faster to control pollution at the source of emission, at the point source," he said.

On the environment ministry's reasoning on lack of technology, Dahiya said, it was "a very absurd argument".

"If this was supposed to be true then no power plants in India should have been able to install this technology. On the contrary, the NTPC [National Thermal Power Corporation], the biggest power producer in India and run by the government, has installed FDGs in many of their capacities, and has awarded tenders for several others. So the question of lack of technology does not

arise," he said. "It was purely a question of intent — or lack of it — in the power sector to install this technology which would have increased the cost of electricity generation," he added.

However, Dahiya also pointed out that the government had clarified in 2019 that this increase in cost can be passed on to the consumer. The increment in cost would have possibly been from 35 to 50 paise per unit, not more, depending on the size of the power plant. That is not a huge increase in cost; every few years, discoms have to increase electricity rates by this much due to inflation and other cost increments, Dahiya noted.

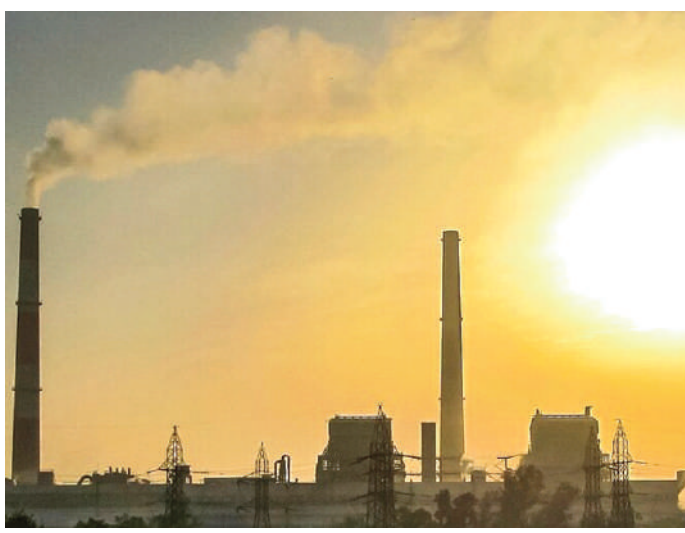
What will now happen to plants that have installed FDGs? "It is a question that the government has to answer," Dahiya said. "Does this mean that power plants that have installed it operate the FDGs and risk a higher cost in terms of electricity produced per unit and possibly going down the merit order dispatch, while others that have not installed FDGs benefit financially from not doing so by supplying electricity before plants with FDGs due to lower cost?" If FDG units are not used, the investments on them would be a waste of public funds, Dahiya pointed out.

Senior Congress leader and former Union environment minister Jairam Ramesh has also slammed the government for its July 11 notification.

"Sulphur dioxide is a direct threat to public health and has also been known to impact cloud formation, disrupting the monsoon that is the lifeline of the Indian economy," Ramesh said in a post on social media platform X on July 13.

"More damagingly, research has increasingly shown that a large part of India's ambient PM_{2.5} (fine particulate matter of diameter less than 2.5 mm) is attributable to secondary particulate matter formed when sulphur dioxide reacts with other components. Estimates suggest that anywhere between 12% to 30% of PM_{2.5} is attributable to such sulphur dioxide compounds."

Ministry on back foot
Following criticism, on July 14, the environment ministry claimed in a post on X that media reports have "grossly misinterpreted" its notification. The ministry said that the decision was based on "extensive consultations with stakeholders and research institutions" such as the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research's National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS) and IIT Delhi, and that norms were decided based on detailed



studies undertaken by these institutes.

However, the statement does not specify what these studies are, or the methods the studies used to arrive at their findings. Yet, it claims anyway that media reports misrepresented "both the scientific evidence and the environmental policy rationale" behind the notification.

"Contrary to claims of regulatory dilution, the ministry's decision represents a rational, evidence-based recalibration anchored in current ambient air quality data, sectoral emission trends, and broader sustainability imperatives," it said.

Arguing that Indian coal is low-sulphur (containing less than 1% of sulphur), the statement added that sulfate aerosols formed from sulphur dioxide "constitute a relatively small fraction of PM_{2.5}". The revised sulphur dioxide emission policy was "not a rollback of environmental safeguards, but a pragmatic, scientifically justified shift toward more targeted, cost-effective, and climate-coherent regulation", the statement read.

"It reflects declining ambient sulphur dioxide levels, recognizes the limited role of sulphur dioxide in driving PM_{2.5} health impacts, and weighs the disproportionate resource and environmental costs of indiscriminate FGD mandates. The media report is not aligned with empirical evidence, exaggerates the health and air quality impacts of sulphur dioxide, and underestimates the trade-offs of large-scale FGD implementation," the ministry stated.

It added that the "assertion that sulfur compounds contribute 12-30% of PM_{2.5} is an unsubstantiated claim and not supported by any rigorous scientific studies conducted in major Indian cities, and it significantly overstates the contribution of SO₂ in India's particulate pollution burden".

The statement also went so far as to say that there is no "credible evidence" to suggest that sulphur

dioxide emissions at the current exposure levels is a major public health concern. Science, meanwhile, clearly shows that sulphur emissions are a health hazard.

"If sulphur emission levels were not a public health concern, why was the first mandate in 2015 introduced at all in the country," Dahiya asked *The Wire*.

Contradictions and excuses
A statement by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) on June 13 this year highlighted how institutional reports that the ministry has cited actually "undercut FGD policy with contradictions".

CREA stated that FDGs are "proven" technology that remove sulphur dioxide but studies by institutions like NEERI, NIAS, and IIT Delhi (2022 and 2024) were now "being selectively used" to justify not installing FDGs, by citing low levels of sulphur dioxide or small increases in carbon dioxide.

"These arguments simply don't hold up," the statement said.

"The claim made by the NEERI that ambient SO₂ levels are already low is highly misleading. The air quality monitoring stations (CAAQMS) don't capture the real impact of power plant pollution because they don't track whether emissions drift upwind or downwind, and they certainly don't account for chemical reactions that convert SO₂ into other pollutants like PM_{2.5}. Just because the station reading is low ambient SO₂ doesn't mean the plant is not polluting."

"It is clear that by contradicting their own earlier reports and relying on misleading scientific arguments, much of the power sector barring NTPC appears intent on delaying FGD installation. This approach prioritises profit over public health, placing the burden of inaction on the very people it is meant to serve: Indian citizens," CREA's statement read. (Courtesy: *The Wire*)

AUSDSU submits 12-point charter of educational demands to Arunachal Education Minister

HT Correspondent

YINGKIONG, July 16: In a move reflecting growing concerns over educational infrastructure and staffing shortages in Upper Siang district, the All Upper Siang District Students' Union (AUSDSU) submitted a 12-point memorandum to the Education Minister of Arunachal Pradesh through the office of the Deputy Commissioner at Yingkiang on Tuesday.

The memorandum, which outlines a series of long-pending demands concerning institutions across the district, was presented by AUSDSU Social Service Secretary and Issue Chairman Kamin Ejing and Secretary (Law & Justice) cum Issue Secretary Makyem Tagi.

According to an official statement, AUSDSU highlighted the deteriorating conditions of educational infrastructure, shortage of subject teachers, and delayed operationalisation of critical academic institutions, stressing that the issues raised represent the collective voice of students across the district.

Among the key demands is the early completion and operationalization of the



Government Polytechnic College at Yingkiang, which remains incomplete despite repeated assurances.

The Union also urged the government to make VKV Ramsing functional at the earliest, along with the immediate completion of boundary and security fencing

at Government Model College (GMC), Geku.

The memorandum called for the introduction of a Sociology department and construction of a library building at GMC, Geku, as well as the re-operationalisation of the science stream at Government

Higher Secondary School (GHSS), Tuting, and its introduction at GHSS, Mariyang.

Infrastructural demands also included renovation of the playground and auditorium at GHSS, Mariyang.

AUSDSU pressed for the appointment of a full-fledged principal at GHSS, Tuting, and the long-pending affiliation of Government Secondary School (GSS), Katan.

The final section of the memorandum focused on critical teaching vacancies.

The Union called for the immediate posting of PGT-level subject teachers in History, English, Commerce, and Business Studies, along with an IT Resource Person at GHSS, Yingkiang, and similar appointments at GHSS, Jengging, including teachers for Political Science and Economics.

The student body expressed optimism that the government would act on the long-standing issues and take urgent steps to strengthen the educational landscape of Upper Siang.

In their statement, AUSDSU reiterated their commitment to safeguarding the academic interests of students and improving the standard of education in the district.

APSCW chairperson urges public support for women's commission's mission



HT Correspondent
NAHARLAGUN, July 16: Chairperson of the Arunachal Pradesh State Commission for Women (APSCW), Yalem Taga Burang, has called upon all sections of society to extend their support and cooperation for the smooth functioning of the commission and the betterment of women in the state.

Burang made the appeal while interacting with a delegation of women leaders, including executive members of the Adi Bane Kebang (ABK), who called on her and her team at the APSCW office in Papu Hill on Wednesday.

The interaction focused on various issues affecting women and the wider community.

Addressing the media, Burang said that the newly constituted 7th APSCW has officially taken charge and started its work.

"The commission is committed to safeguarding the rights of women and empowering them in every sphere of life," she stated. "Women play a vital role in shaping families, communities, and society. The commission, too, has a responsibility to shape a better future for our women."

She informed that the APSCW office has been shifted from C Sector in Itanagar to Papu Hill, and requested citizens to visit the new office directly for any grievances or assistance related to the commission's work.

Highlighting the commission's broader vision, Burang said, "We want to see fewer incidents of violence against women. For this, the commission has been organising awareness programmes across the state. Women should be able to perform their roles and responsibilities with dignity—whether as mothers, daughters, sisters, wives, or professionals."

On the growing issue of drug abuse among the youth, Burang expressed serious concern.

She urged parents and community members to be vigilant and proactive.

"We cannot eliminate the drug menace unless everyone understands its devastating impact on individuals, families, and the economy. Parents must be attentive to their children. If we want to secure our future, we must protect our present."

She appealed to the youth of Arunachal Pradesh to dedicate themselves to building a better future and a healthier society.

The 7th APSCW comprises Chairperson Yalem Taga Burang, Vice Chairperson Tsering Dolma, and members Kipa Kaya Rughu, Kotu Bui, Aben Mize, and Techhi Nikhi Yab.

According to an official statement, the commission will continue working in accordance with its legal mandate to protect women's rights and promote gender equality in the state.

Arunachal plans two-year tribute for Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, July 16: As part of the Government of India's initiative to mark the 125th Birth Anniversary of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee as a national tribute to his enduring contributions to the country, the State Level Implementation Committee (SLIC) in Arunachal Pradesh held a meeting to chart out a detailed roadmap for the commemoration. The meeting was convened on July 15 at Itanagar under the chairmanship of Shri Amjad Tak, IAS, Commissioner (Education) and Divisional Commissioner, Central Zone. According to an official statement, the meeting was held in pursuance of the Ministry of Culture's directive to organise a two-year-long celebration across states, culminating in July 2027.

The committee finalised a calendar of events that includes a series of literary activities, commemorative exhibitions, and sports events across educational institutions in the state to honour the life and legacy

of Dr Mookerjee.

The committee also discussed the formation of District Level Implementation Committees (DLICs), which will operate under the guidance of the SLIC to ensure the smooth rollout of planned activities throughout the commemoration period. The meeting was attended by designated committee members including Secretary Sports and Youth Affairs, Abu Tayeng; Secretary General Administration and District Administration, Komkar Dulom; Secretary Art and Culture, Mamata Riba; and Director Art and Culture, Ibom Tao. The commemorative activities are expected to engage a wide range of stakeholders, particularly the student community, through educational and cultural outreach aimed at highlighting Dr Mookerjee's role in shaping modern India.

The state government, in coordination with the central Ministry of Culture, will oversee the execution of the initiatives over the next two years.

National training for BLOs and supervisors held in Tawang

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, July 16: A National Training Programme for Supervisors and Booth Level Officers (BLOs) of the 2-Tawang (ST) Assembly Constituency was held recently at the Conference Hall of the Deputy Commissioner's Office in Tawang, with a focus on strengthening election infrastructure and enhancing BLOs' capacity in line with updated guidelines and digital tools issued by the Election Commission of India.

According to an official statement, Deputy Commissioner Namgyal Angmo, IAS, chaired the inaugural session, which was attended by Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) Tsering Choden, Assistant Electoral Registration Officer (AERO) Sangey Norbu, and other election officials alongside the full cohort of participating Supervisors and BLOs.

In her address, DC Angmo underscored the critical role played by BLOs in the democratic process.

Calling them the "frontline workers" of the election system, she stressed the importance of maintaining an accurate and error-free electoral roll.

"This training must not be treated as a formality," she urged, "but as an opportunity to build

competence and serve the democratic process with commitment and accuracy."

The programme began with a welcome address by ERO-cum-Assistant Commissioner Tsering Choden, who thanked participants for their active involvement and noted that similar training sessions had already been conducted for BLOs from 1-Lungla (ST) and 3-Mukto (ST) Assembly Constituencies on July 9 and 11 respectively.

The technical session was conducted by Dr Honjon Perme, State Level Master Trainer (SLMT) and Assistant Commissioner, who presented a detailed PowerPoint presentation covering the responsibilities of BLOs through real-world case studies and scenario-based learning.

Adding value to the session, three BLOs recently recognised for their performance at a national-level programme hosted by the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIIDEM) shared their insights and field experiences.

The training concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session, equipping participants with the necessary tools and clarity to perform their roles more effectively in the upcoming electoral exercises.

Governor, CM attend CII presentation on skilling Arunachal's youth for Viksit Bharat

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, July 16: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parneik (Retd), PVSM, UYSM, YSM, and chief minister Pema Khandu attended a detailed presentation by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) on 'Leveraging Skill Development and Entrepreneurship Potential in Arunachal Pradesh' at the Chief Minister's Conference Hall in Itanagar recently.

According to an official statement, the Governor reaffirmed his commitment to aligning Arunachal Pradesh with the national vision of Viksit Bharat, stressing that empowering the youth through targeted training, industry-aligned skilling, and entrepreneurship was essential for building a self-reliant and prosperous future for the State.

He underlined the need to create structured opportunities, extend financial and technical support, and provide institutional handholding to ensure that youth can fully benefit from Central and State Government initiatives.

Collaborations with reputed organisations such as CII, he said, would ensure Arunachali youth are equipped not just with skills, but with the confidence and competence to lead in emerging sectors.

Calling for the establishment of



a dedicated institute for skilling and entrepreneurship within the State, the Governor said Arunachal's youth possessed both talent and determination and only required the right exposure and support. He urged the Chief Minister to consider bold and transformative initiatives that, though demanding investment, would generate lasting returns for the State's development.

The Governor also stressed the need for technology-driven, sector-specific skilling—particularly in areas such as hydropower, agro-based industries, rare earth minerals, floriculture, and tourism—to build a workforce ready to manage and lead critical development projects.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu, echoing the Governor's vision, said that the State Government remained committed to green and sustainable development.

He noted that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra

Modi, Arunachal Pradesh had made major strides in infrastructure, connectivity, and socio-economic indicators.

Emphasising the evolving role of the younger generation, he said that today's youth must be nurtured as job creators and entrepreneurs, not merely job seekers.

Earlier in the session, Brig. Ashish Bhattacharyya, Principal Advisor to the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM), affiliated with CII, presented key insights and proposals.

The presentation focused on industry-linked training models, entrepreneurship opportunities, and capacity-building strategies tailored for Arunachal Pradesh.

Senior officials including commissioners and secretaries from the departments of Planning, Investment, Health, Skill Development, Labour and Employment, Information Technology, and Science and Technology were also present at the meeting.

Tawang DC holds key meeting with tourism stakeholders to boost sustainable tourism

HT Correspondent

TAWANG, July 16: In a significant move aimed at enhancing the visitor experience while promoting sustainable tourism, Deputy Commissioner of Tawang, Namgyal Angmo, IAS, held a preliminary meeting with key tourism stakeholders at her office chamber recently. According to an official statement, the meeting brought together representatives from the Department of Tourism, Tawang Monastery, village heads, members of the local tourism

industry, and the Hoteliers Association of Tawang.

The primary focus was to deliberate strategies for improving tourist services while safeguarding the ecological and cultural integrity of Tawang's most visited destinations.

Among the proposals discussed was the introduction of a regulated ticketing system for popular tourist sites including Tawang Monastery, Bumla Pass, Jhongtaser Lake, Chumig Gytatse (Holy Waterfall), and Chagzam.

The initiative, the Deputy Commissioner said, is being developed in consultation with local communities to ensure transparency and participation. DC Angmo emphasised that the proposed system aims to strike a balance between tourism and sustainability.

"With the growing number of visitors to Tawang, it is vital for us to develop a system that supports maintenance and generates modest revenue, while protecting our natural and cultural heritage," she said.

Under the proposed model, funds collected through ticketing would be primarily used by the respective local communities for maintenance of the sites. A portion would also go towards supporting district-level waste management efforts to keep tourist locations clean and well-served.

Representatives from several villages, including Rho, Jangda, Mogto, Gomkylang, and Mirba, as well as Secretaries of Tawang Monastery, attended the meeting.

NIIT Foundation, ArSRLM sign MoU to launch cyber security plus initiative in Arunachal Pradesh

HT Bureau

NAMSAL, July 16: In a significant push towards digital safety and rural empowerment, the NIIT Foundation and Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ArSRLM) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the implementation of the Cyber Security Plus initiative across Arunachal Pradesh.

The agreement was formalised on the sidelines of the two-day Performance Review Committee (PRC) meeting hosted by the Ministry of Rural Development at Sushma Swaraj Bhawan in New Delhi.

According to an official statement, the initiative aims to bolster cyber literacy and resilience among rural youth and women by targeting Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana (DDU-GKY) and Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) centres. In addition to rural training centres, NIIT Foundation will also implement the programme in schools, colleges, and among members of women's Self Help Groups (SHGs) throughout the state.

The Cyber Suraksha Plus project is part of a broader national



mission to build a digitally secure India, and seeks to empower 2.7 million individuals with the skills needed to identify, prevent, and respond to cyber threats.

"India, as the world's second-largest internet user base with over 1.1 billion users, is vulnerable to increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks," the NIIT Foundation said in

a statement. "With each cyber incident causing an average financial loss of ₹5 lakh, even preventing one million incidents annually could save the country over ₹50,000 crore."

Over the past three years, NIIT Foundation has trained more than 1 million individuals through awareness and educa-

tion programs.

However, with industry estimates suggesting a shortfall of 1.5 million skilled cybersecurity professionals by 2026, the need for urgent and scaled-up intervention remains high.

The initiative will also explore the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address cyber threats, with plans to introduce AI-based fraud detection systems, intelligent transaction monitoring tools, and regional-language AI chatbots to spread digital awareness among underserved and marginalised populations.

Through grassroots partnerships and targeted awareness sessions, the NIIT Foundation and ArSRLM intend to build cyber resilience across Arunachal Pradesh.

Cyber Security Awareness sessions will be conducted at Kaushal Panjee training centres and RSETIs under the Ministry of Rural Development's DDU-GKY program.

The collaboration underscores a shared vision for secure and inclusive digital empowerment, and marks a key step in Arunachal Pradesh's journey toward a cyber-literate and economically self-reliant society.

Dispensing pump managers sensitised on legal metrology standards in Naharlagun



HT Correspondent
NAHARLAGUN, July 16: The Department of Legal Metrology & Consumer Affairs, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, conducted a one-day sensitisation programme on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for dispensing pumps under the Itanagar Capital Region (ICR) and Papum Pare district.

The programme, organised by the department's Publicity and Propaganda branch, was held at the Conference Hall of the Controller's Office in C-Sector, Naharlagun.

According to an official statement, over 45 managers and Power of Attorney (PoA) holders of petrol depots operating in the region participated in the session.

The programme aimed to familiarise stakeholders with key legal

provisions under the Legal Metrology Act, 2009 and its associated rules, to ensure fair practices and protect consumer interests.

In his keynote address, Deputy Controller of Legal Metrology & Consumer Affairs, Tasso Gurro, urged all participants to maintain compliance with prescribed norms.

Emphasising the importance of accuracy and transparency, he appealed to fuel pump managers to uphold the standards laid down by law and ensure that consumers are not subjected to malpractice or short delivery.

The technical session featured Gamkhong Singpho, Assistant Controller (Headquarters), who elaborated on the Legal Metrology Act's provisions regarding the operation of dispensing pumps.

He detailed the requirements for

verification and stamping, the proper display of verification certificates and price boards, and the mandatory availability of 5-litre and 10-litre conical measures for consumer checks.

Debia Tana, Assistant Controller (Yupia), highlighted common malpractices observed across fuel stations in the ICR, including short delivery, adulteration, incorrect billing, and electronic or mechanical manipulation.

He cautioned participants that such violations would attract strict penal provisions under the Legal Metrology Act, including possible cancellation of licences.

He also advised strict adherence to operational guidelines issued by Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and other oil companies, in addition to the legal requirements.

Sources say accused's family lives abroad and had he returned to his native place recently Driver of SUV that ran over veteran marathoner Fauja Singh arrested

CHANDIGARH, July 16: The driver of the SUV that ran over and killed Fauja Singh, the world's oldest marathoner, has been arrested, a senior police official said on Wednesday.

According to the official, Amritpal Singh Dhillon (26), a resident of Dasapur in Kartarpur in Jalandhar district, was arrested on Tuesday night, and his vehicle has also been seized.

He was driving from Bhogpur to Kishahgarh on Monday when he allegedly hit Singh (114) on the highway in the veteran runner's native village of Bias in Punjab's Jalandhar district.

The marathon runner was walking down the Jalandhar-Pathankot highway when the incident occurred, and he succumbed to injuries on Monday evening.

According to villagers, Singh was tossed 5-7 feet in the air after being hit by the vehicle.

Sources said the accused's family lives abroad and had he returned to his native place recently. However, an official said that the accused was being questioned and more details would come out soon.

Following the incident, an FIR was registered against the driver under sections 281 (rash driving or riding on a public way) and 105 (culpable homicide not amounting



to murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, police said.

A police official on Tuesday evening said the vehicle, which fatally hit Fauja Singh, has been identified and its driver would be arrested soon.

Senior Superintendent of Police, Jalandhar Rural, Harvinder Singh, told PTI on Tuesday that they identified the vehicle, a Punjab-registered Toyota Fortuner, from CCTV footage and with fragments of the vehicle's headlight recovered from the accident spot.

"The vehicle's owners have changed more than once (probably resale)," he said over the phone.

Leaders cutting across party lines condoled the marathoner's death, with Prime Minister Naren-

dra Modi saying he was extraordinary because of his unique persona and the manner in which he inspired the youth of India on fitness.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Tuesday said the veteran marathon runner made the Sikh community around the world proud with his long-distance running. His Haryana counterpart, Nayab Singh Saini, said the news of Fauja Singh's demise was deeply saddening.

The Punjab Assembly on Tuesday paid tributes to Fauja Singh. On the concluding day of the special session of the assembly, Parliament Affairs Minister Ravjot Singh moved a proposal for paying tributes to Singh in the House.

The widely-admired 114-year-

old's career as a marathon runner began when he was 89 and propelled him to the status of a global icon, gaining the nickname "Turbanned Tornado" for his endurance and athleticism.

Born in 1911 into a family of farmers, Fauja Singh was the youngest of four siblings. He became the first centenarian to complete a marathon, earning multiple records while participating in international events.

He went on to run marathons, including the famed ones in London, New York and Hong Kong, and inspire awe for clocking some brilliant timings for a 90-plus man born with weak legs.

Among the most memorable of his runs was in 2011 when he turned 100. The invitational meet in Toronto was named in his honour, and he broke several world records for his age group.

The frail man, who weathered many personal storms with his resilience and "nonchalance", had spent a better part of his running career in Britain and returned to his roots just about three years ago after retiring.

Last year, Singh, in a symbolic gesture, joined Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria in a walkathon to spread awareness against drug abuse. (PTI)

Kharge, Rahul write to PM Modi; urge govt to bring legislation restore J&K statehood



NEW DELHI, July 16: Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to press for a legislation in Parliament's upcoming Monsoon session to grant full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir.

The leaders of opposition in the two houses of Parliament -- Kharge is the LoP in the Rajya Sabha and Gandhi is the LoP in the Lok Sabha -- also called on the government to bring a legislation to include the Union Territory of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

In their joint letter to Modi, Kharge and Gandhi said that for the past five years, the people of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir have consistently called for the restoration of full statehood.

This demand is both legitimate

and firmly grounded in their constitutional and democratic rights, they said.

"It is important to recognise that while there have been instances of Union Territories being granted statehood in the past, the case of Jammu and Kashmir is without precedent in independent India. This is the first time a full-fledged state has been downgraded to a Union Territory following its bifurcation," the letter said.

"Your goodness has, on multiple occasions, personally reiterated the government's commitment to restoring statehood. In your interview in Bhubaneswar on 19 May 2024, you stated: 'The restoration of statehood is a solemn promise we have made and we stand by it'. Again, while addressing a rally in Srinagar on 19 September 2024, you reaffirmed: 'We have said in Parliament that we will restore the

region's statehood'," the two leaders said.

The Union government has also made similar assurances before the Supreme Court in the Article 370 matter, submitting that statehood would be restored "at the earliest and as soon as possible", they pointed out.

"In view of the foregoing and aforementioned, we urge upon the government to bring forward a legislation in the upcoming Monsoon session of Parliament to grant full statehood to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir," Kharge and Gandhi said.

"Additionally, we request that the government bring forward legislation to include the Union Territory of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution," they said.

This would be a significant step towards addressing the cultural, developmental, and political aspirations of the people of Ladakh, while safeguarding their rights, land, and identity, Kharge and Gandhi said.

The letter comes a day after the top Congress leadership decide to raise issues such as the Pahalgam terror attack, the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in Bihar, the restoration of full statehood to Jammu and Kashmir and rising atrocities against women in the country during the Monsoon session starting July 21. (PTI)

2 Maoists, 1 CRPF jawan killed in gunfight in Jharkhand's Bokaro



BOKARO, July 16: Two Maoists and a CRPF jawan were killed in a gunfight in Jharkhand's Bokaro district on Wednesday morning, police said. The gunfight broke out between the security forces and the Maoists in the Birhordera forest in the Gomia police station area around 5.30 am, they said.

"The security forces gunned down two Maoists during the encounter. A jawan of the CPRF's CoBRA battalion was also killed in the exchange of fire," IG (Bokaro Zone) Kranthi Kumar Gaidestid told PTI. Bokaro's SP Harvinder Singh told PTI that a search was underway in the area following the encounter. (PTI)

BESCOM employee dies by suicide after falling prey to 'digital arrest' scam

BENGALURU, July 16: A 48-year-old Bangalore Electricity Supply Company (BESCOM) employee died by suicide after he allegedly fell prey to a "digital arrest" scam, losing ₹ 11 lakh, police said on Wednesday. Kumar K, who was employed on a contractual basis with BESCOM, hailed from Kelagere village in Channanapata taluk in Bengaluru South district, they said.

He was found hanging from a tree in his village on Tuesday, police said.

In the purported suicide note recovered from the spot, he has cited his health issues and harassment by cyber fraudster in the name of digital arrest as the reason behind him taking the extreme step.

Digital arrest is a term used in cyber frauds where victims are falsely told they are under

surveillance or legal custody through digital means. They are often isolated via continuous video or call surveillance by fraudsters posing as officials, and manipulated into following instructions without alerting others - often leading to extortion or fraud.

According to the police, in the death note, Kumar stated that he received a call from a man named Vikram Goswami who claimed to be a CBI officer and threatened him of digital arrest. The fraudster claimed he had an arrest warrant against Kumar and demanded money to evade digital arrest. Owing to alleged harassment and fear of being arrested, Kumar initially deposited ₹ 1.95 lakh as per the demands of the fraudster. However, he kept demanding more money, a senior police officer said, citing the note. (PTI)

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta issued notice to the state asking for its response.

It tagged the plea for hearing with other pending petitions raising similar issues.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by academican Roop Rekha Verma, who hails from Lucknow, and others against the amended law. The petitioners have called certain provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act amended in 2024 "vague and overly broad", arguing their ambiguity infringed upon free speech and religious propagation.

The state's counsel on Wednesday said similar pleas challenging the law were pending before the bench headed by the Chief Justice of India.

The counsel for the petitioners pointed out the plea was only challenging the law's amendments in 2024.

SC seeks UP govt response on plea against amended law on religious conversion

The top court had agreed to examine the plea on May 2.

The plea, filed through advocate Purnima Krishna, argues the law infringes upon Articles 14 (equality before the law), 19 (freedom of speech and expression), 21 (right to life and personal liberty), and 25 (freedom of religion) of the Constitution.

Sections 2 and 3 of the Act, it claimed, were "vague, overly broad, and lack clear standards" which made it difficult to determine what constituted an offense.

"This ambiguity infringes upon free speech and religious propagation, enabling arbitrary enforcement and discriminatory application. Penal laws must be precise; vague provisions violate constitutional principles by granting excessive discretion to authorities, failing to provide reasonable notice, and risking wrongful prosecution of innocent individuals," the plea said.

This ambiguity opens the door to arbitrary enforcement and discriminatory practices, especially against individuals seeking to practice or propagate their faith, it added.

The plea said penal laws must be defined

with precision to prevent misuse by authorities and avoid the wrongful prosecution of innocent citizens.

The amendment's "key concern" was said to be the expansion of the category of persons authorised to file complaints without incorporating procedural safeguard.

"The law presumes mal-intent behind all religious conversions and views adult individuals with suspicion, thereby reducing them to subjects whose personal decisions must be validated by the state," it said.

Challenging the proportionality of the prescribed punishment which it said were "excessive", the plea said, "The government, by assuming the role of protector of religious identities, encroaches on the individual's right to choose their faith."

Referring to Section 5 of the law, the plea said, it is wrongly assumed all women, regardless of their background, are vulnerable to illegal conversions, reinforcing harmful stereotypes undermining their autonomy.

The top court is seized of various petitions challenging the validity of various state laws on religious conversions. (PTI)

Rahul does not know 'F' of foreign policy but keeps raising questions: BJP

NEW DELHI, July 16: The BJP on Wednesday accused Rahul Gandhi of being a "habitual liar and offender" when it comes to disrespecting the armed forces.

BJP national spokesperson Ajay Alok also hit back at the Congress leader for his "circus" jibe at the government's handling of the China issue after External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Chinese President Xi Jinping, saying he does not know "F of foreign policy" but keeps raising questions.

Alok said, "When our foreign minister goes to China for the SCO meeting and if he does not meet his Chinese counterpart

and the country's president, then who will he meet? Italy's prime minister?"

Tagging a media report on Jaishankar calling on Xi and apprising him of the recent development in India-China ties, Gandhi said on Tuesday the external affairs minister was "running a full-blown circus aimed at destroying India's foreign policy".

"I guess the Chinese foreign minister will come and apprise Modi about recent developments in China-India ties. The EAM is now running a full-blown circus aimed at destroying India's foreign policy," Gandhi had said. (PTI)

Terrorist killed recently in Basantgarh was top JeM commander Haider: J&K DGP



JAMMU, July 16: Jammu and Kashmir Director General of Police Nalin Prabhakar on Wednesday said the terrorist eliminated in an encounter in Dudu-Basantgarh forest in Udhampur district was a top most commander of Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) outfit who was active in the area for the last four years.

Asserting that the security forces are continuing their operations to neutralise terrorists, he highlighted the good relations between police and public and said the police cannot be successful without the support of the people.

"The anti-terror operations are taking place continuously, and recently, we got a very big success in Dudu-Basantgarh, where a senior and top JeM commander, who was active in that area for the last

four years, was killed. The operations are taking place and all the terrorists will be eliminated one by one," the police chief told reporters at the Akhnoor police station near here.

On June 26, JeM terrorist Haider, code-named Maulvi, from Pakistan, was killed in a gunfight while three of his associates managed to escape, taking advantage of inclement weather, challenging topography and dense forest in the Basantgarh area.

However, the DGP declined to give the exact number of terrorists active in the forest areas of the Jammu region and said "that number cannot be given in the public domain".

The DGP, along with Inspector General of CRPF Gopal Sharma; Inspector General of Police, Jammu Zone, Bhim Sen Tuti; and Deputy Inspector General of Police, Jammu-Samba-Kathua range, Shiv Kumar, visited Akhnoor police station to felicitate the personnel for receiving the prestigious 'Award of Excellence' from the Ministry of Home Affairs in the annual ranking of police stations in J-K for 2024. (PTI)

Akbar brutal but tolerant, Babur ruthless: New NCERT textbook's description of Mughal era

NEW DELHI, July 16: Akbar's regime was a blend of "brutality" and "tolerance", Babur a "ruthless conqueror" while Aurangzeb was a "military ruler" who reimposed taxes on non-Muslims, says the NCERT's new Class 8 textbook while describing the reign of Mughal emperors.

The book, "Exploring Society: India and Beyond", released this week, is the first in the new NCERT curriculum to introduce students to the Delhi Sultanate, Mughals, Marathas and the colonial era.

While earlier versions covered some of these topics in Class 7, the NCERT says the timeline has now been shifted entirely to Class 8, in line with the recommendations of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) 2023. At the beginning of the book is a section titled "Note on Some Darker Periods in History", where the NCERT offers context for the inclusion of sensitive and violent events, primarily war and bloodshed.

The note urges students to understand "the historical origin of cruel violence, abusive misuse or mis-



placed ambitions of power" dispassionately and states, "No one should be held responsible today for events of the past."

In the new book, the chapter covering Indian history from the 13th to the 17th century -- "Reshaping India's Political Map" -- spans the rise and fall of the Delhi Sultanate and resistance to it, the Vijayanagara Empire, the Mughals and the resistance to them, and the rise of the Sikhs.

Describing Babur as a "brutal and ruthless conqueror, slaughtering entire populations of cities", and Aurangzeb as a military ruler who destroyed temples and gur-

lim subjects to grant them protection and exemption from military service, the book says that the tax was a source of public humiliation and formed a financial and social incentive for subjects to convert to Islam. In the old Class 7 book, "jizya" was described as a tax paid by non-Muslims initially along with land tax, but later as a separate one.

The chapter also notes that despite this, "Indian society showed adaptability and resilience in rebuilding towns, cities, temples and other aspects of the economy" during this period under both the Mughals and the Delhi Sultanate.

While the Sultanate and Mughal sections deal with dark themes, the textbook also celebrates resistance and resilience. Chapters on the Marathas, Ahoms, Rajputs and Sikhs highlight figures like Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, Tarabai and Ahilyabai Holkar, portraying them as visionary leaders who contributed to cultural and political developments.

Shivaji is described as a master strategist in the textbook, who upheld Hindu values while respecting other religions. The book notes his

efforts in rebuilding desecrated temples.

Michel Danino, Head, NCERT's Curricular Area Group for Social Science, defended the textbook, asserting there is no attempt to demonise Mughal rulers.

Union Minister of State BL Verma also echoed his views, saying the next generation should learn about them.

"Mughals ruled us for long. The next generation should learn about it. We should accept the truth. The next generation should study what all happened," Verma told reporters in Lucknow.

The new Class 8 textbook also has a section on heroic resistance to the Mughals, including by the Jat peasants who managed to kill a Mughal officer, and the Bhil, Gond, Santal and Koch tribal communities, which fought to protect their territories.

It provides information on Rani Durgavati of one of the Gond kingdoms, who fought against Akbar's army. Sections have also been added on the escape of Mewar ruler Maharana Pratap, and the resistance of the Ahoms to Aurangzeb's army in northeastern India. (PTI)

KOLKATA, July 16: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee lashed out at the BJP-led Centre on Wednesday for what, she called, its policy of harassing and mistreating Bengali-speaking people across the country and warned the saffron party of dire political consequences if it did not put an immediate stop to such actions.

Banerjee also alleged that the ruling dispensation at the Centre was "influencing the Election Commission of India" to achieve its political ambitions across states.

She was speaking at a public meeting after holding a protest march in rain-drenched Kolkata against the alleged torture of Bengali-speaking people in BJP-ruled states.

"I will challenge the central government notices which were surreptitiously sent to BJP-ruled states to harass Bengali-speaking people and detain them at the slightest suspicion," the Trinamool Congress supreme alleged at the rally, which terminated at the Dorina Crossing in central Kolkata.

"I am ashamed and disheartened at the Centre and the BJP's attitude towards Bengalis," Banerjee claimed. Expressing her resolve to fight the BJP "inch by inch" if it tried to "persecute" Bengali-speaking people, she said that the saffron camp should remain prepared for a fresh round of "Khela Hobey" (the game-is-on slogan coined ahead of the 2021 state polls) during the assembly elections in 2026.

"I have decided to speak more in Bangla from now on, hold me in detention camps if you can," she said while attacking the BJP. Asserting that there are nearly 22 lakh migrant workers from Bengal working in other parts of the country, who have valid identity documents like Aadhar, EPIC and PAN cards, Banerjee said she would not tolerate any disrespect meted out to them on flimsy grounds.

"What right does the BJP have in harassing Bengalis like this, even arresting them and forcefully pushing them back to Bangladesh? Is West Bengal not part of India?" she asked.

Stating that "extreme situations call for extreme counter measures", Banerjee said, "I will say this in the simplest of words. We will not fight you physically. But if the BJP doesn't put an end to its persecution policies immediately, then the Trinamool Congress knows how to make them stop." (PTI)



CM says state recruitment drive reflects commitment to transparency, youth welfare, and administrative strengthening

BJP-led govt in Tripura has appointed nearly 20,000 regular employees in last 7 yrs: CM

AGARTALA, July 16: The BJP-led government in Tripura has appointed 19,742 regular employees in the last seven years, Chief Minister Manik Saha said on Wednesday.

The CM's statement came a day after his cabinet cleared proposals for recruiting 1,615 school teachers.

"Altogether 19,742 regular posts in different government departments have been filled up since the BJP-led government was formed in Tripura. Despite this, the oppositions are alleging that there has been a lack of recruitment by the government," he said.

Saha made the statement while addressing a programme where he handed appointment letters to 184 newly hired junior engineers. He said, additionally, contractual and outsourcing appointments were made, and that figure could be around 8,000.



Asserting that government jobs were not the only solution, he said his government is also focusing

on making the youth self-reliant. "The number of Self Help Groups (SHGs) has been increased from 4,000 in 2018 to 56,000 at present, providing livelihood opportunities to lakhs of women," he said. Saha said the government is also working to develop the state's infrastructure to boost its GSDP, and ₹ 7,000 crore has been earmarked in this year's budget for the purpose.

He exhorted the newly-recruited engineers to bring innovation to their work.

"Days have changed since the introduction of AI. If you use the latest technologies, like AI and 5G, the quality of your work or plan should be different. It will help the state in building innovative infrastructure," he said.

He said engineers must complete all paperwork in eight months, as construction agencies get only four months to execute construction works because of prolonged monsoons in the state. (PTI)

Manipur MP to raise issues of displaced people, buffer zones in Parliament

IMPHAL, July 16: Manipur MP Angomcha Bimol Akojiam on Wednesday said he would raise in Parliament the issues of internally displaced people, the existence of buffer zones and instances of alleged misgovernance in the state.

Addressing a press conference here, he claimed that even after two years, the conditions in which displaced people are staying are 'horrible', and the education of their children has been 'affected'.

Akojiam also expressed reservations on the recent announcement by Chief Secretary PK Singh that relief camps would be closed by December in three phases.

The Congress MP said, "There is a lack of clarity in the announcement of resettling internally displaced persons (IDPs) in their native places. IDPs from Moreh and Churachandpur will not return immediately. Why is that? Has the government consulted IDPs before making the announcement? I fear that if relief camps are closed, no one will visit such temporary settlements. And people would gradually forget the plight of displaced



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

The Inner Manipur MP also said authorities and security forces claim that there is no buffer zone, but the fact is that 'free movement is not allowed'.

"This is against the Constitution and should not be seen as a Kuki-Meitei issue. There have been a lot of governance issues in the state.

For instance, in water-related schemes, thousands of beneficiaries have been listed, but a few have received water connections. This is a scam. I will raise all these issues during the next session of Parliament," Akojiam added.

The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned in the wake of the ethnic violence.

The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

Over 1700 kg of single-use plastic seized in Meghalaya district



KHLEHRIAT (MEGHALAYA), July 16: Authorities in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district on Wednesday said they have seized over 1700 kg of single-use plastics in a major crackdown on plastic pollution, officials said. The Meghalaya High Court has banned the sale, production and storage of single-use plastic items across the state.

Acting on the directions of the High Court, a team comprising Executive Magistrates, police personnel, and representatives from the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board conducted inspections across several market areas in the district recently.

The team inspected markets such as Ladrymbai Market, Khleehriat Market, Sookilo Market, and Umleng (Cement Market) area, they said.

"During the drive, officials seized approximately 1705.451 kilograms of single-use plastics that were below the permitted thickness of 120 microns," according to a senior district administrative officer.

The officials confirmed that the items confiscated mainly included plastic carry bags and packaging materials that violate the notified environmental norms.

"This action is part of a sustained effort to enforce the ban on single-use plastics and ensure environmental safety in the region," a district official said.

The use and sale of plastic items below the specified micron level were banned nationwide in 2022 under the Plastic Waste Management (Amendment) Rules, 2021. The Meghalaya government had further issued localised restrictions through its State Environment Impact Assessment Authority and district authorities.

The seized materials will be processed for safe disposal in accordance with environmental regulations.

Officials have also issued warnings to vendors and shopkeepers found in possession of banned plastic items and indicated that repeat offenders may face legal action, including fines and business closures.

The district administration has urged the public and traders to shift towards eco-friendly alternatives and contribute to building a cleaner Meghalaya. (PTI)

New chief secretary of Manipur appointed

IMPHAL, July 16: Senior IAS officer Puneet Kumar Goel was appointed the new chief secretary of Manipur, according to a notification. Goel, a 1991-batch officer of the AGMUT cadre, will replace Prashant Kumar Singh, who has been appointed the secretary of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes.

"The Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the proposal of Department of Personnel and Training for inter cadre deputation of Puneet Kumar Goel from AGMUT to Manipur cadre, on curtailment of central deputation tenure, for a period up to 31.08.2025 i.e. till the date of his superannuation," said the notification dated July 15. Singh, an IAS officer of the 1993 batch, had taken charge as the chief secretary of the restive state in January 2025. (PTI)

Sikkim govt asks employers to provide accommodation to migrant workers

GANGTOK, July 16: The Sikkim government on Wednesday asked all companies operating in the Himalayan state to provide proper accommodation and related facilities to migrant workers.

In a directive to all companies operating in Sikkim, Labour Secretary Bhim Thatal asked the employers to abide by mandates under section 16 (d) of Inter-State Migrant Workmen (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Rules, 1983, to provide for accommodation to all migrant workers on their rolls.

"There is a need to ensure suitable residential accommodation to migrant workers in order to facilitate their wellbeing and to uphold their rights for safe, healthy and hygienic living conditions during employment, giving

importance to their mental health," he said. The directives have been issued to all plant heads/project managers/general managers/HR managers/contractors/service providers, pharmaceutical companies, distilleries and other commercial establishments operating in Sikkim.

Stating that Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang had recently stressed on the need for accommodation to migrant workers who otherwise live in congested rooms due to financial issues which adversely affect their mental health, the Labour secretary asked the employers to provide regular payment of wages, besides accommodation to migrant employees who are required to work in another state with different socio-economic situation from their native state. (PTI)

2 BSF personnel injured in attack by suspected cattle smugglers

SHILLONG, July 16: Two BSF personnel were injured in an attack by suspected cattle smugglers along the India-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya's East Jaintia Hills district, officials said on Wednesday. The incident took place in the early hours of July 12, they said.

The BSF personnel spotted movements of 30 to 40 cattle heads along with around 20 people on the Bangladeshi side of the border, according to an FIR lodged with the Meghalaya Police. "On being challenged, the miscreants, assisted by another group of 40 to 50 individuals from across the border in Bangladesh, attempted to cross into Indian territory and began pelting stones at the BSF personnel," it said.

In the attack, two BSF jawans sustained injuries, it said.

"In self-defence, BSF troops fired several warning shots and blank rounds to disperse the attackers," the border-guarding force said in a statement. Following the incident, the miscreants fled the area, and BSF personnel recovered 13 cattle heads, it said. Further investigation is underway, it added. (PTI)

School teacher, two others arrested

GANGTOK, July 16: A school teacher and two others were arrested by police for allegedly sexually assaulting a minor student in Sikkim's Gyalshing district, an officer said on Wednesday.

The minor, a class 7 student, had complained that the teacher and the two others had sexually abused her.

On July 14, the headmistress of the school filed an official complaint with the Gyalshing police against the accused.

The police arrested all three accused and charged them under relevant sections of POCSO Act, the officer added. (PTI)

Security forces stop nearly 100 displaced people in Manipur from returning homes



IMPHAL, July 16: Security forces on Wednesday stopped nearly 100 internally displaced people in Manipur from returning to their villages in Dolaithabi in Imphal East district, police said. As a precautionary measure to prevent any untoward incident, they were stopped from going back to their native places, a senior officer said.

The IDPs, who were staying in a relief camp near Sajiwa in Imphal East district, moved towards

Dolaithabi to return to their native villages, he said.

"They were stopped near Pukhao Tezpur, around 2.5 km from Dolaithabi, to prevent any untoward incident," the police officer said.

Dolaithabi lies in a "sensitive fringe zone" and had witnessed several attacks from neighbouring hill areas of Kangpokpi district when ethnic violence broke out in May 2023.

The police also said that adequate

security measures have been put in place, and one company of CRPF women personnel has also been deployed.

The district administration and senior police officers are presently engaging in dialogue with local leaders to find an amicable solution to the issue. The situation remains peaceful and is under control, the officer said.

The overall law and order situation is being closely monitored by senior officers to ensure continued stability, he said.

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

The Centre had on February 13 imposed the President's rule in Manipur after Chief Minister N Biren Singh resigned in the wake of the ethnic violence.

The state assembly, which has a tenure till 2027, has been put under suspended animation. (PTI)

From tea stall to Mt Everest: Meghalaya's Rifiness Warjri aims for seven summits

SHILLONG, July 16: From serving tea and noodles at a roadside stall to dreaming of summiting the highest peaks across all seven continents, Meghalaya's Rifiness Warjri is charting a path of grit and grace.

The 20-year-old mountaineer recently etched her name in history as the youngest person from the state to conquer Mount Everest. But even with this extraordinary feat, Rifiness remains deeply rooted in her humble beginnings. In an interview with PTL, Rifiness stood proud, yet grounded, as she shared her dreams of scaling the tallest mountains on every continent.

Her journey has captured the hearts of many -- not just for her physical endurance and mental strength but also for the humility and warmth she continues to carry.

Eying the prestigious seven summits challenge, Rifiness hopes her path will inspire countless other women from struggling working-class families in small towns and marginalised communities to chase big dreams.

Born in Nongthymmai but now residing in Laitkor area of East Khasi Hills district on the outskirts of Shillong, Rifiness comes from a modest, hardworking family.

Her mother runs a small roadside tea stall while her father sells chicken to support the family.

Despite the national and international recognition she now receives, Rifiness is still often seen helping out at the family stall, wiping tables, serving tea, and chatting with customers, just as she always did.

"It's my home. My roots keep me grounded... the mountains teach us humility. When I stood atop Everest, I realised how small and insignificant we are. That was one lesson I brought back and I am sharing with everyone," she said. Despite being a man of few words, her father Shlurbor Kharmyndai could not hide his pride.



"It's a proud moment for us. I wish that she secures a government job as soon as possible so that she can support the family as well, but I also do not want her to stop dreaming. She is free to fly big," he said.

Her elder sister, Noury, who co-manages the family stall, also spoke with emotion. "God has been kind to our family," she said, smiling as she handed a cup of tea to a customer.

"Seeing my sister reach the top of the world is like a dream come true. She worked so hard and deserves all this love and respect," she added.

The Warjri family maintains a strong and loving bond. After the day's work, they gather at home to share simple meals and talk about their day.

Their evenings are often filled with laughter and music, with Rifiness and her sister strumming their ukuleles, singing soft melodies that echo through their home.

Rifiness's journey to Everest was anything but easy. Meghalaya, though rich in natural beauty, lacks mountaineering infra-

structure and organised support for adventure sports.

Sponsorship and funding are limited, especially for athletes, and mountaineering is not a popular sport in the state. But with unshakable determination, intense training, and the emotional strength drawn from her family, Rifiness overcame every obstacle placed in her path.

"I want to show young people, especially girls, that we can dream big and make it happen -- even if we start small," she said.

For children from disadvantaged families, she gave a message: "Your background should never limit your ambition. Believe in yourself and keep going."

Her climb has earned her recognition from across the nation. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma felicitated her with cash rewards and acknowledged the significance of her journey for the state's youth. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh called her a shining example of India's resilient young generation. The Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) also honoured her after she symbolically handed over a piece of rock she carried back from Everest, connecting her triumph with the land and people she represents.

Beyond the symbolic moments and celebratory ceremonies, Rifiness's aspirations are only just beginning. She dreams of continuing her mountaineering journey, aiming to conquer the seven summits, climbing the highest peaks on every continent, including Denali in North America, Kilimanjaro in Africa, and Vinson Massif in Antarctica.

Each climb will come with its own set of challenges, but Rifiness is no stranger to hardships. "I hope someday I will summit all these peaks, but right now I want to complete my BSc, which was stalled due to the training and travelling last year," she added. (PTI)

Union Minister George Kurian lays foundation stone for 2 projects under PMKVY in Mizoram

AIZAWL, July 16: Union minister George Kurian on Wednesday virtually laid the foundation stone for two projects under Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJKV) scheme in Mara Autonomous District Council (MADC) area in Mizoram's Siaha district. The foundation stone laying function was held at the MADC's hall in Siaha town and was attended by two BJP MLAs from Siaha district, K Beichhua and K Hrahmo, officials said.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister of State for Minority Affairs and Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, said that the Northeastern states and Mizoram in particular have witnessed a robust transformation under dynamic leaders of the central government. He said that various developmental works have been carried out across the country in line with the Centre's vision to make India a developed nation by 2047. Kurian expressed hope that the two projects -- public market cum multipurpose centre and women facilitation centre at Tipa V, and multipurpose community hall in Siaha district under the PMJKV scheme may bring ground-breaking advancement for the people of Siaha. (PTI)

AUCTION NOTICE FOR 13 NOS. SHOPS' PLOTS
AUCTION NOTICE FOR 13 NOS. SHOPS' PLOTS WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF SSEW/Pandu EAST under DEN/Guwahati, LUMDING DIVISION, N.E. RAILWAY

Auction Notice No. E-Office-122211. Sealed quotations are invited from the interested person(s) against Auction for the 13 Nos. plots of Railway land within the jurisdiction of SSEW/Pandu EAST under DEN/Guwahati, for a period of 05 (five) years as per Fly. Board's Letter No. 2021/ML/25/5 dtd. 04.10.2022 subject to condition with the existing licensee/owner will have the right of first refusal. The auction will be closed at 15:00 Hrs on 11-08-2025 and opened on the same day at 15:30 Hrs. in the office of the DEN/Guwahati (Dy.CE/Estate/Maligaon), Maligaon, N.F.Railway. Quotations received beyond the time limit will not be entertained.

Auction documents can be obtained from the office of the DEN/Guwahati (Dy.CE/Estate/Maligaon) during the office working hours. (Except Saturday, Sunday/Holiday) w.e.f. 21-07-2025 to 11-08-2025 up to 11:00 hrs on submission of application along with Receipt of the deposition in Station earning for this purpose or DD in favour of FA&CAON, F.Railway/Maligaon payable at Maligaon amount of Rs.1000/- (Cost of tender Documents) Total Rs. 1000/- (One thousand only) which is non-refundable.

The complete information along with details of terms & conditions are mentioned in the Auction document which is available at the above mentioned office.

Divisional Engineer/Guwahati

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

No.KMB-4/15th FC (2nd Inst.)/2025-26/Pt.-12439 Date 14/07/2025

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

The Executive Officer, on behalf of Kokrajhar Municipal Board, Kokrajhar invites bids from eligible contractors/firms/registered under Kokrajhar Municipal Board or APWD/BTCPWD building Class-I (A/B/C)/ Class-II for the following work. Details may be seen at the office of the Kokrajhar Municipal Board, Kokrajhar during office hours.

Sl. No.	Name of works	EMD (In Rupees)	Cost of work (In Rupees)	Completion period	Cost of tender (In Rupees)
1	Cleaning and De-Siltation of drain	Rs. 18,877.00 (Rupees eighteen thousand eight hundred seventy seven) only for ST, SC and OBC category or Rs. 37,754.00 (Rupees thirty seven thousand seven hundred fifty four) only for General category.	Rs. 18,87,749.00 (Rupees eighteen lakhs eighty seven thousand seven hundred fifty nine) only	60 Days	566.00 (Rupees five hundred sixty six) only

Both (Technical & Financial) are to be submitted to the office of the Kokrajhar Municipal Board, Kokrajhar. Bids will be accepted up to 02:30 PM on 29/07/2025 and will be opened on 29/07/2025 at 3:00 PM in the office of the Kokrajhar Municipal Board, Kokrajhar. Cost of bid documents and earnest money deposit must be submitted offline. Cost of bid documents (Non-Refundable) must be in the form of demand draft/ Bankers Cheques of any nationalized bank draw in favour of the Executive Officer, Kokrajhar Municipal Board payable at Kokrajhar for amount as mentioned above. Bids must be accompanied by security of an amount specified for the work as EMD in the above table in the form of Bank Guarantee or fixed deposit receipt from any nationalized bank pledged in favour of the Executive Officer, Kokrajhar Municipal Board payable at Kokrajhar. The Bid security should be valid for a period of 365 days.

Sd/-
Executive Officer,
Kokrajhar Municipal Board, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2025-26/1684

WE WERE SURE IT WILL COME OUT AT RIGHT TIME, SAY SIDDHANT CHATURVEDI-TRIPTII DIMRI ON 'DHADAK 2'

MUMBAI, July 16: Actors Siddhant Chaturvedi and Triptii Dimri say they were confident that their latest film "Dhadak 2" will find its way to the theatres, even though its release was held up for a while due to censor troubles.

The upcoming movie, a romance-drama that tackles the issue of casteism, was previously slated to release in November 2024.

However, the movie reportedly ran into hurdles with the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC), which were resolved only recently after the makers agreed to significant cuts and modifications to the film.

Chaturvedi said he wanted the movie to come out in theatres as it is the first feature film of filmmaker Shazia Iqbal.

"It's a process. It feels like the film should come soon since we have already shot it. But it took 3-4 months extra (to get released). This is my director's first movie, so for her, I would feel the film should be released soon, as she has made it with a lot of love," Chaturvedi told PTI in an interview.

"Dhadak 2", a sequel to 2018's "Dhadak", is a story about two star-crossed lovers, played by Chaturvedi and Dimri, hailing from different caste backgrounds. It will now

be released in cinema halls on August 1.

"For our producers, it's a special and different movie. The stakeholders who are senior to us were handling it (the censor board issue). We were constantly tracking things. We were sure that it would come out at the right time. We made this movie with a lot of love and honesty, and that there will be no obstacles in releasing it," Chaturvedi added.

Dimri echoed Chaturvedi, saying, "Every movie has a time to get released, and it comes at the right time." The actor said the whole team treated the story and the issues it tackles with honesty and respect.

"It is a huge responsibility... A lot of the credit goes to our director, who from day one was very sure of what she wanted and how she wanted to tell the story, how the characters should be, she didn't want to over-dramatise any-

thing or oversimplify anything. She just wanted things to be as they are in reality.

"Most of the time, we were not focusing on the subject, but on the themes and how you are supposed to feel. These are real people because there are people who face these realities, so you have to handle it with care, sensitivity and utmost honesty because that's the least they deserve," she added.

Chaturvedi said the movie intends to send a message to the audiences but won't come across as preachy.

"It should reach the maximum audience because it's entertaining and also leaves a little note, so that is something which we are constantly looking for. We found that equilibrium..."

"There is something real and sensitive about it ('Dhadak 2'). All of these guys have more responsibility, and they are very well aware of that. That's why they have been very quiet about

everything, like while we were shooting for the film, even the censor board issues, we never spoke about anything."

In "Dhadak 2", Chaturvedi plays the role of Neelesh, while "Animal" star Dimri plays Vidhi.

The film marks the first collaboration between the two actors, but Chaturvedi revealed it could have happened earlier -- had he bagged the male lead in Dimri's 2018 breakout film "Laila Majnu".

The "Kho Gaye Hum Kahan" actor said he auditioned for the lead role of Qais Bhatt in the Imtiaz Ali-produced film, which ultimately went to actor Avinash Tiwari. "I was 22 years old, I was a little younger. They needed Majnu to be around 25-26 years old. So, I gave the audition. I got shortlisted, I got a special photoshoot done, we had a camera, so I told my brother to do it. I grew my beard a little, I took a bus to Pune and did a photoshoot in Pune. But that didn't happen."

"I still have that folder (of photo shoot) on my Windows PC. It was very intense. Then Avinash did it. I was selected for 'Inside Edge', in which Avinash was going to be there; he was going to play the captain of the Mumbai Mavericks. Eventually, the role was played by Angad. Avinash had to leave the project midway because he got this one ('Laila Majnu'). So, that's how our paths crossed." (PTI)



VIDYUT JAMMWAL TO MAKE HOLLYWOOD DEBUT WITH 'STREET FIGHTER' MOVIE

LOS ANGELES, July 16: Actor Vidyut Jammwal is set to make his Hollywood debut with "Street Fighter", an adaptation of a popular video game of the same name from studio Legendary.

The 44-year-old actor, best known for headlining action movies such as "Commando" movies, "Khuda Hafiz" and "Baadshaho", will feature alongside a star-studded cast of Andrew Koji, Noah Centineo, Jason Momoa, Callina Liang, Roman Reigns, Orville Peck, Cody Rhodes, Andrew Schulz, Curtis "50 Cent" Jackson and David Dastmalchian, reported entertainment news outlet Deadline.

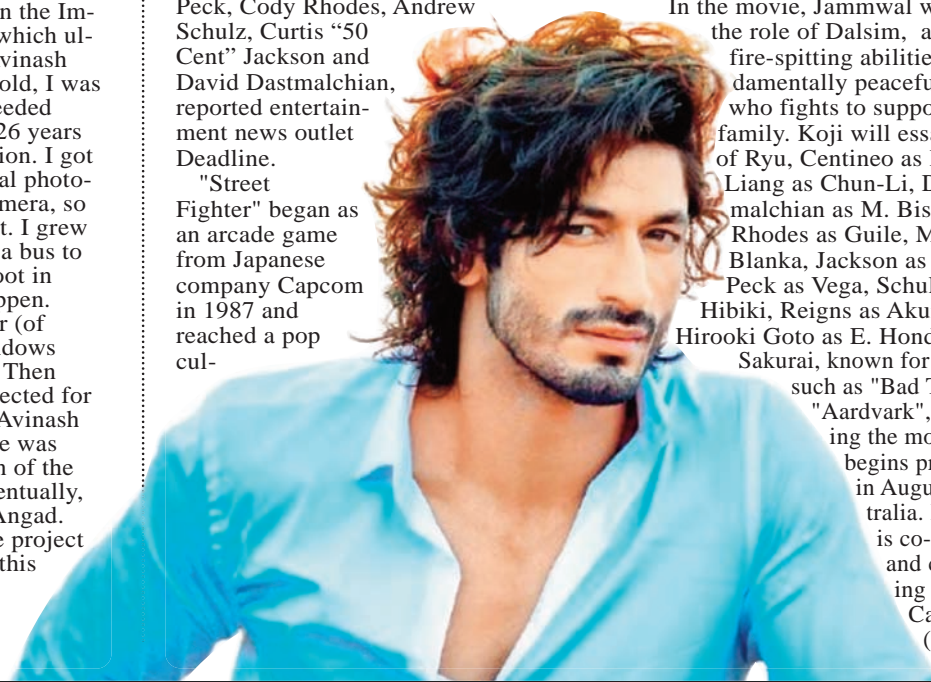
"Street Fighter" began as an arcade game from Japanese company Capcom in 1987 and reached a pop cul-

ture high with 1991's "Street Fighter II", which revolutionised one-on-one playing.

It is a one-on-one fighting game where players select a character, a martial artist or fighter with a unique fighting style and battle opponents using punches, kicks, special moves, and combos.

The most recent edition of the game, "Street Fighter 6", was released in June 2023 and won the award for best fighting game at the 2023 Game Awards.

In the movie, Jammwal will essay the role of Dalsim, a yogi with fire-spitting abilities, a fundamentally peaceful man who fights to support his family. Koji will essay the role of Ryu, Centineo as Ken, Liang as Chun-Li, Dastmalchian as M. Bison, Rhodes as Guile, Momoa as Blanka, Jackson as Balrog, Peck as Vega, Schulz as Dan Hibiki, Reigns as Akuma, and Hirooki Goto as E. Honda. Kitao Sakurai, known for movies such as "Bad Trip" and "Aardvark", is directing the movie, which begins production in August in Australia. Legendary is co-developing and co-producing alongside Capcom. (PTI)



Sidhu Moosewala to perform again as hologram in global tour set to launch in 2026

NEW DELHI, July 16: The family of slain Punjabi musician Sidhu Moosewala has announced a world tour for the singer.

The singer's family shared the news on Moosewala's official social media pages on Monday by posting a video which announced the 'Signed to God World Tour'. It is being organised by Platinum Events. The tour will kick off in 2026 with shows lined up in Punjab as well as global cities

like Toronto, London and Los Angeles. It will be a first-of-its-kind hologram event that will help fans virtually meet the late musician.

In a statement, posted on the official website for 'Signed to God World Tour', the organisers said the tour is a "celebration of a soul who broke boundaries in life and continues to inspire beyond it". "Sidhu Moosewala wasn't just an artist — he was a movement. This first-ever hologram

tour is a groundbreaking tribute that blends technology and emotion. Fans across the world will once again feel his energy, voice, and presence — not as a memory, but as reality." "Every show features 3D holographic projections synced with his original vocals, cinematic visuals, and stage effects — creating a concert that's unforgettable, immersive, and deeply emotional," it added. Sidhu Moosewala, whose real name was Shub-

hdeep Singh Sidhu, was shot dead in Punjab's Mansa district on May 29, 2022. Moosewala was killed when he, along with his friend and cousin, was travelling in a jeep to Jawahar Ke village in Mansa.

The singer-rapper enjoyed a cult following in India and abroad with songs like "So High", "Same Beef", "The Last Ride", "Just Listen" and "295". (PTI)

Designer Rahul Mishra to open India Couture Week 2025

NEW DELHI, July 16: Ace designer Rahul Mishra will open the 18th edition of India Couture Week (HICW) 2025, the Fashion Design Council of India (FDCI) announced on Wednesday.

The prestigious fashion gala is presented by Hyundai India in association with Reliance Brands and will be held from July 23 to July 30 at the Taj Palace hotel, Delhi.

"Known for his intricate craftsmanship and deeply artistic narratives, Mishra will set the tone for the 18th edition with a showcase that reflects his signature design language—where emotion, elegance, and exceptional handwork come together on the

FDCI said in a statement. Mishra, who has previously showcased at major international platforms including Paris Haute Couture Week, said the collection is "especially personal".

"Every time we showcase in India, it fills us with immense pride to present our work on home soil, where the roots of our craft run deepest. Opening Hyundai India Couture Week 2025 with FDCI is an honour, and this collection feels especially personal.

"It explores the idea of love not just as a feeling, but as a transformation and a journey of becoming. Through every ensemble, we attempt to express that quiet surrender, where craft, emotion, and soul dissolve into one," the designer said.

FDCI Chairman Sunil Sethi hailed Mishra as a "true global ambassador of Indian couture".

"His thoughtful design language continues to push boundaries while staying rooted in craft. I am proud of his successful journey and look forward to his show," he added.

The India Couture Week 2025 will bring together some of the most celebrated names in Indian fashion and will feature collections that spotlight heritage, innovation, and contemporary narratives in couture design. (PTI)



I just tell the joke, audience draws the line: Vir Das on stand up and censorship

NEW DELHI, July 16: The things that you think will get you in trouble never do, says Vir Das, who believes that as a comedian his job is to just tell the joke and let the audience decide where the line is. Das is back with his new special "Fool Volume", which comes after his international Emmy win for "Vir Das Landing" and his aim this time is to be "sillier".

"The things you think will get you into trouble never get you into trouble. It's the things that you can never predict that become the trouble," Das told PTI when asked if he ever censors his jokes for the fear of backlash.

"The audience will censor me eventually. I'll just tell the joke, you let me know. The audience controls where the line is. They move the line every year. If you think about it, there's material that we could do 12 years ago that is considered very basic today. We didn't know that 12 years ago but the audience took us there... My job as an artist is to walk up to the line," he added.

Das, one of the top comedians in the country, has often courted controversy, whether it's for his jokes or for his 2021 monologue "I Come From Two Indias", where he spoke about growing disparity between rich and poor as well as the crime against women.

Asked whether he encounters questions like "Who are you to say this?" from people, Das said does not agree with the notion that one has to be "somebody" to say something.

"I think you can say something and maybe then you'll be someone because of what you said. You can have your voice and you can be very silly. And if you keep using it, that's what you need to. Don't lose it, don't shut it down."

The comedian, who has 7.5 million followers on X and 1.7 million on Instagram and is known for razor sharp wit, said his reply to the question "Who are you to say this?" is: "I'm an idiot".

"I'm largely uneducated. I'm not very intelligent. I'm not academically qualified at all. But I'm here to say stupid things. So the question is right. But I



don't think who you are should determine how much you are allowed to say. I believe the idiot and the fool should be allowed to speak as much as the intellectual and the professor."

Das said he just wanted to have some fun and "celebrate the fool in all of us" with his new special.

The idea for the special came after Das lost his voice just after he had sold out shows, won an International Emmy, and was generally going through a great phase in his career.

"My family was like, 'You've been talking too much. You've been sharing too much good news. Nazar lag gayee tumko'. I thought that was a very interesting starting point for a show saying, 'If there's joy in your life, do you tell people? Should you be silent about your joy?'"

"I think the learning of the special is 'You should scream your joy. So that's where the volume came from'. I think it's a sillier show, but about having a voice."

The comedian, also known for starring in movies such as "Badmaash Company", "Go Goa Gone" and OTT series "Call Me Bae", is known

for calling out trolls for their hypocrisy, often with a witty reply.

Has it become easier to balance having a voice and not getting dragged into controversies over the years?

"If anybody can tell you the answer to this, then they are smarter than I am," Das replied.

Das may often speak about systemic issues in politics, religion and society through his stand-up, but in reality he is an optimist who believes that the world is getting better.

"If you consider the amount of people that are lifted out of poverty, have access to education, things that medicines can do and the average human lifespan, the world is largely getting better."

The issue is that "everybody has an equally loud voice now". "It's just that you weren't exposed to that earlier. Now you are exposed to all of the counter opinions. I think our brains have to work harder to figure out what we actually believe in."

"Fool Volume" marks his fifth collaboration with Netflix after "Abroad Understanding" (2017), "Losing It" (2018), "For India" (2020) and "Landing" (2022). (PTI)

Durand Cup trophy flagged off in Kokrajhar amidst enthusiastic celebrations

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 16: The iconic trophies of the 134th edition of the Indian Oil Durand Cup, Asia's oldest and most prestigious football tournament, were ceremonially flagged off in Kokrajhar on Tuesday by Assam Sports and Youth Welfare Minister Nandita Garlosa.

The event, held at the Bodofa Cultural Complex, Chandamari, witnessed a spirited gathering that celebrated the city's growing stature as a hub for football and youth engagement.

The glittering display featured the historic Durand Cup, the Shimla Trophy—first presented by citizens of Shimla in 1904—and the President's Cup, which is retained permanently by the tournament winners. Their arrival in Kokrajhar, known as the "city of peace," marked a symbolic moment for the region as it prepares to host Durand Cup matches for the third consecutive year.

Gracing the occasion as chief guest, Minister Nandita Garlosa



highlighted Kokrajhar's transformation from a conflict-affected district to a centre of sporting excellence. "Kokrajhar has become

a breeding ground for emerging footballers and is setting an example for the entire state," she said. She commended the Bodoland

Territorial Region (BTR) administration, led by Chief Executive Member Pramod Boro, for its efforts in promoting sports across

disciplines including boxing and archery.

Minister Garlosa also noted that the recently held Khel Maharan saw participation from over 45 lakh children in Assam, signalling a surge in youth interest in sports. She termed the 2025 CEM's Cup another significant milestone in Kokrajhar's football journey and reiterated the importance of sports as a viable career path.

Also present at the ceremony were cabinet minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, MPs Joyanta Basumatary and Rungwra Narzary, BTC Speaker Katiram Boro, EM for Sports and Youth Welfare Daobaisa Boro, MLA Lawrence Islay, and footballer Durga Boro. The event was hosted by the Indian Army, with senior dignitaries including Major General H.S. Bajaj, VSM (Chief of Staff, Gajraj Corps), Major General Rajesh Arun Moghe, VSM (GOC, Bengal Sub Area), and Major General Robin Bawa, YSM (GOC, Red Horns Division), reaffirming the military's integral role in the his-

toric tournament and its efforts to foster military-civilian harmony.

This year, the SAI Stadium in Kokrajhar will host six matches of the Durand Cup.

The opening ceremony is scheduled for July 27, promising a vibrant celebration of local culture, military precision, and football passion.

The inaugural match will see the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) Football Team face off against Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC in a much-anticipated showdown.

The 134th edition of the Durand Cup is being played across six venues in five states - West Bengal, Jharkhand, Assam, Meghalaya, and Manipur - underlining football's enduring power to unite and inspire.

With teams like Bodoland FC and Punjab FC in the fray, Kokrajhar is poised to witness a series of electrifying encounters that continue to strengthen its identity as a sporting capital in the making.

Andhra CM meets Mandaviya, seeks ₹ 563 cr to boost sports infra in state

NEW DELHI, July 16: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu met Union Minister of Youth Affairs and Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya here on Wednesday, and sought Rs 538 crore for establishing stadiums and Rs 25 crore for organising the Khelo India Martial Arts Games this year.

The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief -- a key NDA ally -- also sought early completion of infrastructure development projects under Khelo India in Tirupati, Rajahmundry, Kakinada, and Narasaraopeta.

Naidu highlighted steps taken by the state government to develop a sports ecosystem in Andhra Pradesh as part of the 2024-29 sports policy and sought greater support from the Centre.

The chief minister demanded that establishment of an international-standard badminton training centre and a national aquatic sports training hub in Amaravati. He explained the vast opportunities for setting up water sports training centres along the Krishna river banks, according to an official statement.

The CM revealed that the state government has already submitted various proposals for sports infrastructure development. These include proposals for establishing National Centres of Excellence at Nagarjuna University and in Kakinada.

Naidu requested Rs 27 crore for developing Vijayawada's Indra Gandhi Stadium, Rs 170 crore to set up a multi-sport complex at BR Stadium in Guntur, and Rs 341 crore for sports development across various parts of the state.

He suggested sanctioning additional Khelo India centres in districts to identify talented sportspersons and requested consideration for establishing a Sports Authority of India training centre in Tirupati, Rayalaseema region.

The Chief Minister thanked Union Minister Mandaviya for the opportunity to host the Khelo India Martial Arts Games 2025 in Andhra Pradesh. (PTI)

Sindhu bows out of Japan Open; Satwik-Chirag, Lakshya, Anupama enter second round



TOKYO, July 16: Two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu endured yet another first-round exit but Lakshya Sen and the men's doubles pair of Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty moved into the second round with comfortable victories at the Japan Open here on Wednesday.

The 30-year-old Sindhu, who is a former world champion, went down 15-21 14-21 to Korea's Sim Yu Jin in the Super 750 tournament, marking her fifth first-round exit this year.

Satwik-Chirag and Lakshya, on the other hand, registered dominant straight-game wins.

After a slow start, Sindhu, who appeared rusty and error-prone and struggled with judgment of length, showed some fight in the first game but Sim regained control to claim her first career win over the Indian star.

In the second, Sindhu quickly fell behind 1-6. Though she managed to level the score at 11-11, the Korean pulled away with ease to seal the match in straight games.

In men's doubles, Satwik and Chirag, currently ranked 15th in the world, defeated the Korean duo of Kang Min Hyuk and Kim Dong Ju 21-18 21-10 in just 42 minutes.

The former world No. 1 pair took some time to settle down, with the Koreans matching them early in the first game.

But once the Indians found their rhythm, they were unstoppable,

dominating the second game with clinical precision.

Meanwhile, Lakshya who has struggled for form this season, making a string of first-round exits, looked sharp as he dispatched China's Wang Zheng Xing 21-11 21-18.

The world no. 18 Lakshya was in complete control in the opening game, racing to an 11-2 lead before sealing it with minimal fuss.

While Xing mounted a better challenge in the second game, Lakshya capitalised on his early momentum to stay ahead and close out the match in straight games.

He will next face seventh seed and local favourite Kodai Naraoka in the round of 16.

In women's singles, Anupama Upadhyaya prevailed 21-15 18-21 21-18 over Rakshitha Ramraj in a battle between two Indians. Anupama will next face second seeded Chinese Wang Zhi Yi.

Unnati Hooda, a Taipei Open semifinalist earlier this year, however, went down 8-21 12-21 to seventh seed Pompaewee Chochuwong of Thailand in the opening round.

Among other results, men's doubles pair of Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruban Kumar Rethinasabapathi lost 15-21 9-21 to Korea's third seeds Kim Won Ho and Seo Seung Jae, while women's doubles pair of Kavipriya Selvam-Simran Singhvi went down 6-21 15-21 to Hong Kong's Lui Lok Lok and Tsang Hui Yan. (PTI)

Bodoland CEM Cup: Kachugaon team lift trophy

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 16: Kachugaon constituency of Kokrajhar district emerged victorious in the final match of 1st Bodoland CEM Cup Football Tournament held at SAI STC Stadium, Titaguri in Kokrajhar on Tuesday evening by defeating Kajalgaon constituency of Chirang by 2-0 goals.

The final match witnessed huge crowd of spectators and craze football fans.

Assam Chief Minister Dr. Himanta Biswa Sarma kicked off the final match along with BTC Chief executive member Pramod Boro, Minister of Sports, Assam, Nandita Garlosa, Minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, Consul General of Bhutan in Guwahati Jigme Thinley Namgyel and several other dignitaries.

The match ended goalless in full time as both the teams played with equal strength, compelled the Match Commis-



sioner for extra 20 minutes time. In the middle of the extra time, Urkhao Mashahary of Kachugaon scored the first goal while Bipan Brahma scored another goal for the team leading to their victory against Kajalgaon FC.

The Champion trophy to win-

ner Kachugaon FC was given away by- Smt Nandita Garlosa, Minister of Sports and Youth Welfare, Assam while cheque of ₹ 1.5 lakhs was given away by BTC Nominated Member- Madhav Chandra Chetri while Runner- up trophy to Kajalgaon FC was given away by Lok Sabha

Golf in a hangar? DeChambeau's woes at the British Open get 'The Scientist' thinking

PORTRUSH (NORTHERN IRELAND), July 16: As a popular YouTuber and golfing enigma, Bryson DeChambeau is known for coming up with some wacky, radical ideas.

"The Scientist" might have another one in the pipeline.

"This is going to be wild," DeChambeau proffered at the British Open on Tuesday, "but imagine a scenario where you've got a 400-yard tent, and you can just hit any type of shot with any wind with all the fans.

"That's what I imagine, like in a hangar or something like that. A big stadium. That would be cool to test." Don't put it past DeChambeau to go through with it. After all, he's open to anything if it means improving his patchy record at golf's oldest major championship.

The 31-year-old American has

played seven times at the Open Championship, where handling the fickle weather can be the key to success. He missed the cut on three occasions and only finished inside the top 30 once.

It's a record that frustrates one of the sport's deeper thinkers. He remembers playing well at the Walker Cup at Royal Lytham St. Anne's — one of the courses on the British Open rotation — back in 2015, and was quick to point out he coped fine in windy conditions in LIV Golf events in Miami and Valderrama this year.

Place him in the British Open, though, and he can get blown away — like last year at Royal Troon, when he shot 76-75 to miss the cut and said afterward: "I can do it when it's warm and not windy." "The times I've been over here, for some reason, my golf swing hasn't been where it needs to be,"

DeChambeau said Tuesday. "Right now it feels as good as it's ever been. Hitting it far, hitting it straight as I can, and learning how to putt better on these greens in windy conditions and rain and all that.

"It's just figuring it out. It's just going to take time and something that I never really experienced growing up in California."

Lifting the claret jug — as unlikely as it would be, given his Open woes — would deliver the two-time U.S. Open champion a third major title and no doubt boost the already-swelling audience on his YouTube channel that has risen to more than 2 million subscribers.

His popularity is clear over in Northern Ireland, too. Late Monday, dozens of people — mostly kids — were seen waiting outside Portrush to get a photo with, or the autograph of, DeChambeau.

He obliged, happily.

DeChambeau is using YouTube to have some fun and to show the world a different side to him. He even suggested it's just as important as the results he gets.

"I'm not going to be here forever," he said. "What footprint do I want to leave? I think it humbles me and almost makes me more passionate about what I'm doing off the professional golf course.

"Am I going to get frustrated playing bad golf?" he posed. "Yeah. Am I going to want to still sign autographs? Yeah, because I care about the game."

That's not to say he doesn't still have a burning desire to win at Portrush this week — and secure a result that will impress Ryder Cup captain Keegan Bradley in the process, ahead of the match against Europe in September. (AP)

Sensing a return to form, Gaganjeet Bhullar eyes strong second half

GURUGRAM, July 16: After a relatively quiet start to the season, Indian golfer Gaganjeet Bhullar is banking on his improved driving accuracy to translate his solid stats into top-tier finishes in what is going to be a busy second half.

Bhullar, an 11-time Asian Tour champion, said that while the first half of this year featured limited action, his schedule is now ramping up. "Last week I played in Morocco. The next tournament will come after a month and a half. And then from there all the way till December, we have back-to-back events," he told PTI.

Reflecting on his recent form, Bhullar said that after a stronger second half in 2023, he struggled slightly last season despite playing well.

"But I'm kind of trying to sense that my game is coming back in shape. Like when I'm looking at my stats, the driving accuracy, the GIR, which we call Greens and Regulation. So that is definitely improving," he said.

"So if the stats are improving, then the next step is you've got to show a lot of patience, and then the scores will start improving as well," said the Arjuna Award recipient.

Bhullar also emphasised the role of fitness in rejuvenating his long game. He admitted that around two years ago, a perceived dip in swing speed prompted him to lose a couple of kilograms.

"I'm easily flying 295 (yards) with my driver, which gives confidence across par 5s, par 4s and par 3s... that part I figured out probably 24 months ago."

Complementing his physical resurgence is a deep focus on mindset and mental preparation.

Bhullar said he has worked on his mental game intermittently since 2008, and more consistently with sports psychologist Dr Tarun Jain over the last four years.

"Golf is played from a subconscious mind... muscle memory... is all the power of subconscious," he explained.

The 37-year-old from Amritsar stressed on the importance of daily communication during tournaments.

"It's a very, very long process... we try to cover problems a week before, 10 days before. Every week is a different pattern... we try to eradicate mistakes." (PTI)

Have made more money painting than playing cricket: Jack Russell

LONDON, July 16: Busy painting portraits in a posh locality of London, former England wicket-keeper-batter Jack Russell remains as eccentric as he was in his playing days.

Russell does have a presence on social media as he needs to promote his paintings to his followers around the world after all, but he doesn't do phones and is not on whatsapp either.

The only way to reach him is via email and the most likely venue for an in-person meeting is the Chris Beetles Gallery in the heart of London.

The 61-year-old was known for his unconventional batting stance and also had his sunglasses on in the middle. Behind the stumps, he wore a worn out hat as if it was an extension of his body and his lightning quick hands safely put him in the list of England's finest wicketkeepers.

More than 20 years after his retirement from county cricket, Russell remains strongly connected to the game via his paintings. A visit to the gallery on Ryder Street would take a cricket purist to a trip down the memory lane. As a large chunk of his followers are Indians, Russell recently painted a portrait of Ranjitsinhji, the first Indian to play for England.

"Just every year I try and paint somebody from history. Last year I did ex England captain Douglas Jardine, a very controversial character from the Ashes.

"This year I chose Ranjitsinhji, one reason being the rich history of the man. If you study him and look at his career, he's a colourful character, stroke player, a bit of a trailblazer. It is one of my favourites in the exhibition.

"With India and England playing currently, I thought it was the



right time to do it," says Russell in an interview to PTI.

In a detailed conversation with Russell, one gets a feeling that Russell loves cricket but not as much as painting.

"I retired from England cricket in 1998 and I retired from County

cricket in 2004, so over 20 years now, it's gone quickly, but very busy just painting. It's the only skill I've got left, so I just paint every day. That's what I do. That's my job. So I just paint, paint, paint.

"I have been doing it for about

Pant, Karun Nair dismissals opened the door for England at Lord's: Shastri



LONDON, July 16: Former India head coach Ravi Shastri has picked Rishabh Pant's dismissal in the first innings and Karun Nair's wicket in the second essay as the key moments that tilted the third Test at Lord's in England's favour.

England registered a narrow 22-run win to go 2-1 up in the five-match series, bowling India out for 170 in the chase of 193.

"The turning point for me in this Test match was, first of all, Rishabh Pant's dismissal (in the first innings)," Shastri said on "The ICC Review".

Shastri lauded England captain Ben Stokes' "presence of mind" to effect Pant's run out on 74 at the stroke of lunch on Day 3, which gave his side a foothold.

"Ben Stokes... simply outstanding pres-

ence of mind to hit at the right end and pull it off on the stroke of lunch. Because India would have got a lead and they were in the driver's seat," he added.

Karun and KL Rahul had taken India to 41 for one in the second innings on the fourth day, but the former offered no shot to a delivery from pacer Brydon Carse to be adjudged leg before. It gave England an opening and India slumped to 82 for seven from 42 for two to hand the advantage to the hosts. Shastri said Karun suffered from "huge lapse of concentration."

"Having said that, again at 40/1 (in the second innings), I thought that was a huge lapse in concentration from Karun Nair to leave a straight ball, a nothing ball, to leave it and open the door for England. I thought

that the timing of that dismissal turned things around."

The former India skipper also opined that the Indian top-order should have shown a little more prudence in the second innings.

"Because you saw when Siraj batted, when Bumrah batted, when Jadeja was batting, once the ball was 40 overs old, they hardly put a foot wrong."

"They were solid in defence and to bring that target down at lunch, 82 to get, you thought in the next 10 minutes it would be done and dusted. But to bring that 82 or 83 to 22 was a massive achievement."

"So, it just goes to show that (if) the top order had just been a little tougher and mentally stronger on Day 4, towards the end, this game would have been India's," he added.

Shastri said India has the wherewithal to bounce back into the series, but rued the fact that the visitors would have been up 3-0 had the rub of green gone their way.

"It (the Lord's Test) reminded me so much of the Test match in 2021 (at the Lord's when Shastri was the head coach). Only on that occasion, it was India who batted first. Scores were very similar, 300, 300 and then a collapse in the second innings. At that time, India won."

This time it was England. "But a fascinating series and two more to go. Anything can happen. India can bounce back straight away and if that happens, The Oval (final Test) will be a thriller," he noted.

"Fifteen days in the series, it's been riveting stuff. And at times, I think India could have been 3-0 up. A little bit of luck, India could have been 3-0 up."

The fourth Test between the two sides will begin at Manchester on July 23.

However, Shastri was generous in his praise of England and their captain Stokes.

"You have to compliment England. When the going got tough, those moments they seized. And when they saw an opening in the door, they just banged their door down."

"There was hardly anything on that surface, and if you had lost two wickets less the previous day I think India would have chased that down," he said.

Chasing 193, India closed the Day 4 of the third Test at a wobbly 58 for four.

Moving onto the giant-willed Stokes, Shastri said: "Stokes bowling those spells, I knew something was coming at Edgbaston (second Test) because he had something back there."

"He wanted fuel in the tank for Lord's and he showed it on the last day. Eight overs, nine-over spells. At one stage, 10 overs towards the end to clinch it for England," he said.

Stokes bowled 24 overs, more than any other England bowler in the Test, and picked up three wickets including the vital one of Rahul. (PTI)

Root back as No. 1 in Test rankings; Australians dominate bowling charts



DUBAI, July 16: Star England batter Joe Root reclaimed the top position in the ICC men's Test rankings within a week of losing it while India's all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja climbed to the 34th spot in the latest list released here on Wednesday.

Root's scores of 104 and 40 in the third Test of the five-match series against India at Lord's that England won by 22 runs helped him start his eighth stint at the top. At 34, he is the oldest No. 1 Test batter since Kumar Sangakkara in December 2014, when the Sri Lankan was 37. Root had lost his top spot to compatriot Harry Brook, who has slipped behind Kane Williamson to third position.

Among Indian batters, opener Yashasvi Jaiswal and vice-captain Rishabh Pant have dropped down a rung each and are currently placed fifth and eighth respectively, while skipper Shubman Gill has also fallen three places to ninth.

However, Jaeda has risen five places to 34th after scores of 72 and a fighting 61 not out at Lord's. KL Rahul, who made 100 and 39 in the same match, has also climbed five places and

now sits one spot behind Jadeja on 35th.

England captain Ben Stokes' player of the match effort of 77 runs and five wickets at the Lord's have lifted him two places to 42nd among batters and one spot to 45th among bowlers.

Indian pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah continues to dominate the Test bowling rankings, retaining the top spot with a commanding 50-point lead over South Africa's Kagiso Rabada. Australian quick Scott Boland has made a significant jump, rising six spots to a career-best sixth place.

Bolland, whose 62 wickets in Test cricket have come at just 16.53 apiece with only ICC Hall of Famers George Lohmann and Sydney Barnes having taken wickets at a better average, joins his four compatriots already in the top 10 - Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood, Nathan Lyon and Mitchell Starc.

This kind of domination has not been seen since England had six bowlers in the top 12 in 1958.

India all-rounder Washington Sundar has moved from 58th to 46th position. (PTI)

ICC AGM: Two-tier Test system, T20 WC expansion to be discussed

SINGAPORE, July 16: The much-debated idea of a two-tier Test system, expansion of the T20 World Cup and ratification of new members are some of the topics that will be discussed in depth during the four-day AGM of the International Cricket Council (ICC), beginning here from Thursday.

With the new World Test Championship (WTC) cycle (2025-27) in progress, the discussion on the two-tier Test format is set to revolve around fund allocation and clauses surrounding promotion and relegation.

However, it has been generally accepted that the current WTC cycle will not be altered, and a possible implementation of the new system will be done after 2027.

But the upcoming AGM, which will be headed by ICC chairman Jay Shah and newly-appointed CEO Sanjog Gupta, will take a serious note of this method since Cricket Australia and the England and Wales Cricket Board are major advocates of it.



While there is no intention to add more teams to the 50-over World Cup, the ICC may null adding more teams to the T20 version, potentially swelling it to 24 participants. However, any concrete decision is not expected before next year.

At present, 20 teams are competing in the showpiece after the addition of four more sides since the last year's World Cup and the model will be retained until at least the 2026 edition.

But cricket's return to the Olympics through the 2028 Los Angeles Games, and Italy's quali-

fication for next year's T20 World Cup, to be jointly hosted by India and Sri Lanka, have given an impetus to the expansion thoughts.

"Italy's qualification for the World Cup is being viewed as a sign of cricket gaining some traction with new nations, and the governing body is keen to connect with a wider audience," a source privy to the development informed PTI.

Since his elevation to the ICC top position in December 2024, Shah has been holding a series of high-profile engagements such as the one with FIFA president Gianni Infantino during the 144th IOC

Session at Costa Navarino in Greece in March and with former IOC head Thomas Bach in January.

Meanwhile, the ICC is likely to get a final update on the inquiry into the conduct of last year's T20 World Cup. There were charges of a cost blow-out during the tournament.

While it was not officially announced, it is believed that the mishandling of funds during the marquee event held in the USA and the West Indies had a role in the resignation of former CEO Geoff Allardice in late January.

Meanwhile, Zambia is set to return to the ICC fold as an Associate member after its suspension in 2019 and East Timor is also likely to become a first-time member.

Zambia was suspended due to "continued non-compliance" to amend multiple breaches of the ICC's Membership Criteria, relating to general competence and an acceptable detailed governance system. (PTI)

India U19 held to draw by England U19 in first Youth Test

BECKENHAM (ENGLAND), July 16: The India Under 19 team was held to a tense draw after England Under 19 captain Hamza Shaikh led the front with a fighting century on the fourth and final day of the first Youth Test here.

Chasing a stiff target of 350, England ended on 270/7 in 63 overs, frustrating the visitors' push for a win that would have given them a 1-0 lead in the two-match series. Shaikh was the mainstay of England's resistance, scoring a composed 112 off 140 balls with 11 fours and two sixes here on Tuesday.

He received crucial support from Ben Mayes, who struck a steady 51 off 82 balls (3x4s), and wicket-keeper-batter Thomas Rew, who chipped in with a brisk 50 off just 35 balls (8x4s).

India had threatened to force a result when they reduced England to 62/3 in the 14th over but the hosts fought back through Shaikh's partnerships with Mayes and Rew.

With an hour left on the final day, India gave themselves hope by

pulling off two run outs in successive overs -- first removing Shaikh and then sending back Ekansh Singh in the next over.

But Ralphe Albert (9 not out of 37 balls) and Jack Home (7 not out of 36 balls) showed commendable composure under immense pressure as India threw everything at them with an all-out attacking field.

Close-in fielders crowded the batters with two slips, a silly point, and a short leg forming a tight cordon, but the English pair held their nerves to survive the final overs and secure a hard-fought draw for the hosts.

Earlier, India U-19 resumed their second innings on 128 for three and posted 248 in 57.4 overs, setting England a daunting target. Vihaan Malhotra top-scored with a gritty 63 off 85 balls, hitting 10 fours.

He and overnight partner Abhigyan Kundu looked settled before Alex Green (2/67) struck twice in quick succession, removing both while Rahul Kumar (11) also got out cheaply as India slipped from 171/3 to 187/6. (PTI)

Praggnanandhaa leads Indian charge at Las Vegas Freestyle chess; Gukesh opts out

LAS VEGAS (USA), July 16: R Praggnanandhaa found himself clubbed with Magnus Carlsen in the same group, while Arjun Erigaisi and Vidit Gujrathi were bunched together in the other pool of the 16-player Freestyle chess tournament to be held here. World number one Magnus Carlsen will yet again start as the favourite for the title in this edition that saw a lot of pre-event activities including participation of NBA players. The tournament-proper starts late on Wednesday.

The event carries a total prize pool of USD 750,000 with 200,000 reserved for the winner. Each group has eight players in the line up and the top four will advance to the next stage while the bottom half will play against each other. World champion D Gukesh is going to give the event a miss as he will be playing the main event of the Grandmaster tour in about a month's time.

The 19-year-old Praggnanandhaa will start his campaign against Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan, a player who was struggling at the previous edition of Grand Chess tour in Zagreb, Croatia.

Carlsen will play the winner of the first edition, Vincent Keymer of Germany, in his opening round.

American Hans Niemann will make his first appearance in the Freestyle chess tournament and take on Erigaisi in the opener. Gujrathi will take on Fabiano Caruana of United States. For the first time, a woman player, Bibisara Assaubayeva of Kazakhstan, has been included in the lineup to compete against the world elite. (PTI)

Audit finds \$21M financial irregularities in Pakistan Cricket Board

ISLAMABAD, July 16: An audit report has found financial irregularities to the tune of more than rupees 6 billion (\$21 million) and governance issues within the Pakistan Cricket Board dating back two years.

The Auditor General of Pakistan's report for the 2023-24 financial year was published in The News and highlighted the non-recovery of outstanding sponsorship worth rupees 5.3 billion (\$18.6 million) as the major discrepancy identified.

PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi is the third person in four years to lead the sport's national administration, following Ramiz Raja and Zaka Ashraf. He is also a government minister.

The report also questioned the rupees 63.39 million (\$220,000) the PCB spent on meals for police and law enforcement personnel assigned for the security of foreign teams during international matches in Pakistan. The auditors said providing security was the responsibility of governments, and disagreed with the PCB's explanation that visiting international teams were given extra safety guarantees that required heavy police deployment.

The audit report also flagged the hiring of three junior regional coaches who didn't meet the eligibility criteria and the appoint-

ment of a media director outside the proper procedure.

Compensation paid to cover utility charges, fuel and accommodation for the PCB chairman between February and June of last year was also highlighted as unauthorized because Navqi received that as part of his government benefits.

The auditors rejected the cricket board's response that the PCB chairman "is authorized for utility expense as per bylaws"

The PCB is yet to comment on the audit report.

England docked WTC points for slow over-rate in Lord's Test, slip to 3rd in standings

LONDON, July 16 (PTI) The England cricket team slipped a rung to third position in the World Test Championship table on Wednesday after being docked two points for maintaining a slow over rate in the third Test against India at Lord's.

Ben Stokes and Co. were also fined 10 per cent of their match fee after the Test, which they won by 22 runs on Monday.

Match referee Richie Richardson imposed the sanction after England were ruled to be two overs short of the target when time allowances were taken into consideration. India are fourth in the WTC points table right now.

"In accordance with Article

2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined five per cent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time," the ICC said in statement.

"In addition, as per Article 16.11.2 of the ICC World Test Championship playing conditions, a side is penalised one point for each over short. Consequently, two World Test Championship points have been deducted from England's points total," it added.

England's tally in the World Test Championship standings dropped from 24 to 22 out of 36 points, consequently reducing their point percentage (PCT) from 66.67 per cent to 61.11 per cent.

As a result, Sri Lanka, who have a 66.67 PCT, have taken over England to be second.

Australia leads the WTC table with a 100 percentage point having won all three of their games so far, while India have 33.33 PCT England captain Ben Stokes pleaded guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing.

On-field umpires Paul Reiffel and Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid, third umpire Ahsan Raza and fourth umpire Graham Lloyd levelled the charge. (AP)

Striker Deepika wins Magic Skill award

NEW DELHI, July 16: Indian women's hockey team striker Deepika won the Poligras Magic Skill award for her field goal against the Netherlands during the Bhubaneswar-leg of the 2024-25 FIH Pro League. The Poligras Magic Skill Award celebrates the most creative and skillful moments in the Pro League and is voted by fans worldwide. The 21-year-old attacker earned global recognition for her breathtaking run and finish in the 35th minute during India's match against world no.1 the Netherlands which they won in a shootout after a 2-2 draw. With India trailing 0-2,

Deepika, an ace dragflicker as well, cut through the Dutch defence down the left flank, dribbled along the baseline, dinked the ball over a defender's stick, and finished it past the goalkeeper to open the scoring for India. "I am truly honoured to have won this award. Scoring that goal against a challenging opponent like Netherlands was truly a special moment for me and now receiving this recognition means a lot. I thank my teammates, coaches, family and friends who continue to support and inspire me everyday," Deepika said. (PTI)

Indian football mess: New book chronicles AIFF's downward spiral

NEW DELHI, July 16: Indian football has gone from bad to worse in the past 24 months and a new book that has recently hit the stands gives a blow by blow account of how the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and its president Kalyan Chaubey allegedly lost the plot.

Indian men's team's FIFA rankings has plummeted to a lowly 133, the worst in nine years, and the top tier Indian Super League's upcoming season which was supposed to start in a couple of months is still in a limbo as its organisers Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) and the AIFF are yet to renew the Masters Rights Agreement (MRA).

In his book 'Who Stole My Football', renowned journalist Jaydeep Basu has given an insider's account of what he termed as a systemic breakdown of Indian football, including financial mismanagement, under Chaubey's stewardship.

Basu had worked as AIFF's Media Director and has been privy



to the developments in the organization which he has chronicled in detail.

"The entire professional structure of the AIFF secretariat suffered a breakdown since 2024. The laid down process of appointments was not followed in many instances," Basu wrote in his book.

According to Basu, the situation "reached its lowest ebb after Anilkumar took over as the secretary general".

Anilkumar, who became AIFF Secretary General after Shaji Prabhakaran was sacked in November 2023, had to leave his post earlier this year after his appointment was

stayed by the Delhi High Court.

The book also gives detailed account of how ill-prepared Indian football team was when it played in the Asian Games in Hangzhou in 2023.

The Indian football team played its first group match just hours after reaching the Games Village in Hangzhou as the AIFF was able to stitch a second-rung squad in the last minute. The team had failed to advance to the knock-out round.

Chaubey's frosty relations with Croatian legend and former India head coach Igor Stimac also found mention in the book.

"Stimac was bitterly disappointed when Chaubey, without consulting the national coach, finalised India's participation in the Merdeka Cup in 2024 during FIFA international window."

"Stimac's biggest complaint was that he never had a chance to explain his side of the story and his plans with the national team because he was hardly given an audience," he wrote in the book. (PTI)