

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. II Issue No. 142 RNI-ASSEN/2023/86488 GUWAHATI, WEDNESDAY, JULY 23, 2025 PAGES 12 PRICE ₹ 8

Day of 'surprise' events capped by Dhankhar's abrupt resignation

NEW DELHI, July 22: Jagdeep Dhankhar's decision to resign as Vice President on Monday night has triggered a firestorm of speculation on whether there was more to it than "to prioritise health care", as his sudden move had capped a day of events in Rajya Sabha on his watch which took the government by surprise and put it in a damage-control mode.

The usual effusive praise that is showered on an occupant of a high office on his departure was missing from the ruling alliance's side, an indication that the government was probably happy to see him go. It was the Opposition, which had signed a notice to impeach him last year for his alleged biases, that had nice words for him.

Dhankhar had informed the House on Monday that he had received a notice for a motion to remove Justice Yashwant Varma, who is embroiled in a suspected corruption case, from 63 opposition MPs. The Vice President is ex-officio chairman of the Rajya Sabha.

That the notice went against the gov-

ernment's plan to marshal a bipartisan motion for Justice Varma's removal in the Lok Sabha and not in the Upper House was made more embarrassing for the ruling alliance by the fact that it was an entirely opposition-sponsored exercise.

Senior government ministers swung into action by getting many Rajya Sabha MPs of the BJP and its allies to put their signatures on a document which some members said was for a similar notice to ensure that opposition members alone were not behind the exercise in the Upper House.

Many other signatories kept mum, while a few stated that they were not aware of the details as they signed a paper that did not carry details of the matter, drawing the conjecture that it was related to Dhankhar. A couple of senior leaders, however, insisted that it was all aimed at ensuring that National Democratic Alliance MPs were also part of the notice for Varma's removal.

Some observers noted that Dhankhar, who wore the hat of a senior lawyer be-



fore becoming West Bengal governor in 2019, had taken lead in taking on the judiciary over a host of issues, the latest one involving Varma, and might have felt left out when it appeared that the motion to remove the high court judge was to be piloted in the Lok Sabha.

Another development that suggested the government's unhappiness with Dhankhar was the absence of the Leader of House in Rajya Sabha, J P Nadda, and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju from the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee, which includes

members of different parties and decides on the House agenda, at 4.30 PM on Monday.

The meeting, which was chaired by Dhankhar, was held as an earlier meeting, which Nadda and Rijiju had attended, could not arrive at a decision on the House's final agenda.

Congress leader and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh speculated in a post on X that something serious clearly occurred between 1 PM and 4.30 PM, which prompted Nadda and Rijiju to skip the BAC "deliberately". This naturally did not go well with Dhankhar, he claimed.

Nadda told reporters that both of them were busy in official work and had informed the Rajya Sabha Chairman's office about it.

A few BJP members were also critical of Dhankhar's decision to allow the Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha, Mallikarjun Kharge, to launch a sharp attack on the government over Operation Sindoor during the Zero Hour when the ruling alliance had already expressed

its willingness for a discussion on the issue.

At 9.25 PM on Monday, Dhankhar (74) announced his resignation "to prioritise health care and abide by medical advice".

Barring Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who put out a brief post, most of the leading government figures refrained from offering any comment.

Modi said on X, "Shri Jagdeep Dhankhar Ji has got many opportunities to serve our country in various capacities, including as the Vice President of India. Wishing him good health."

Opposition MP Kapil Sibal, long a bitter critic of Dhankhar, lauded him as a nationalist and patriot.

He wanted the opposition and the government to work together to enhance India's standing in the world, the senior lawyer said.

Many leaders are of the view that the ties between Dhankhar and the government might have got strained over a period of time, but there is little clarity on the reasons for these differences. (PTI)

Draft poll rolls for BTC election released 2,669,396 voters enrolled in 40 constituencies

HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, July 22: The Draft Electoral Roll for the upcoming Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Election 2025 was officially released across the five districts of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) on Tuesday.

The publication marks a key step in the run-up to the elections for the 40 constituencies under the BTC.

According to an official statement from the Assam State Election Commission, the draft roll includes a total of 2,669,396 voters, comprising 13,29,742 male and 13,39,657 female voters.

The roll will cover 3,277 polling stations across the region.

In Kokrajhar district, the draft electoral roll was unveiled by Dis-



trict Commissioner Masanda Magdalin Pertin at the DC office conference hall in the presence of representatives from various political parties. The district has a total of 700,610 voters across 12 BTC constituencies, including 3,50,325 male and 3,50,280 female voters.

In Tamulpur district, the draft roll was released during a coordination meeting held at the DC office conference hall.

The meeting was chaired by District Commissioner-cum-Retiring Officer for BTC Election 2025, Pankaj Chakravarty, and was attended by Assistant Returning Officers (AROs), political party representatives, and media personnel.

The Tamulpur meeting focused on ensuring transparency in the electoral process, encouraging public participation, and providing unhindered access to the draft rolls for verification and corrections.

Emphasis was laid on awareness campaigns to promote voter engagement and ensure the smooth conduct (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Naga organisations in Manipur urge PM, HM to halt fencing of India-Myanmar border

IMPHAL, July 22: Several Naga organisations in Manipur on Tuesday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah to immediately halt the fencing of India-Myanmar border and to restore the Free Movement Regime (FMR) within 20 days.

The Naga organisations, which included the United Naga Council, All Naga Students' Association, Manipur Naga Women's Union and Naga Peoples Movement for Human Rights South submitted the petition through Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla.

The Raj Bhavan in an official statement said that representatives of UNC, ANSAM, NWU, and NPMHR-S met Governor Bhalla on Tuesday.

"During the meeting, the representatives expressed concerns over



ongoing developments impacting the hill areas, particularly in relation to the Free Movement Regime and border fencing," it said, adding that the "governor acknowledged the grievances raised and said that the matter would be looked into."

Expressing strong resentment against abrogation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) and the accelerated ongoing border fencing construction along the India-Myanmar border, the Naga civil organisations said (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

Grounded British fighter jet flies back

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 22: The British F-35B fighter jet flew back on Tuesday after completing maintenance, more than a month after it made an emergency landing at the international airport here, and remained parked since then.

The jet, which took off at 10.50 am, flew to Darwin in Australia, air-port sources said.

"A UK F-35B aircraft, which landed following an emergency diversion on June 14, departed today from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. A UK engineering team, deployed since July 06 completed the repairs and safety checks, allowing the aircraft to resume active service," a British High Commission spokesperson said.

In a statement, the spokesperson said the UK remains very grateful for the support and collaboration of the Indian authorities and airport teams throughout the repair and recovery process.

"We look forward to continuing to strengthen our defence partnership with India," the statement said.

The jet was brought out of the hangar and kept at the airport bay on Monday.

Sources said a 14-member team of engineers from the UK, who carried out repairs on the fighter jet, will depart on Wednesday aboard a special aircraft, the Globemaster.

They said the British jet was kept at the Air India hangar throughout its stay.

While the airport sources confirmed that landing charges, daily rent, and parking fees amounting to ₹ 5 - ₹ 6 lakh had been paid, there was no confirmation regarding any payment made to Air India.

The British Royal Navy F-35B Lightning fighter jet is part of the UK's most advanced stealth fleet.

Known to be one of the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world and worth over USD 110 million, the jet (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

'Aadhaar, voter, ration cards considered only for identification': EC justifies SIR in Bihar

NEW DELHI, July 22: The Election Commission of India has justified its ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar saying it adds to the purity of the election by "weeding out ineligible persons" from the electoral rolls.

The affidavit filed by the poll panel in a plea challenging June 24 order directing SIR of electoral roll pan-India starting from Bihar said despite legal concerns, Aadhaar, voter card and ration card were already being considered by the commission for the limited purpose of identity during the SIR-2025 exercise.

"The SIR exercise adds to the purity of elections by weeding out ineligible persons from the electoral roll. The entitlement to vote flows from Article 326 read with Sections 16 and 19 of the RP Act 1950 and Section 62 of the RP Act 1951 which contains certain qualifications with respect to citizenship, age, and ordinary residency. An ineligible person has no right to vote, and thus, cannot claim a violation of Articles 19 and 21 in this regard," the poll panel said in a detailed affidavit.

It referred to the July 17 order of the top court asking the ECI to consider Aadhaar, voter and ration cards for the purpose of SIR-2025.

"In addition to the legal concerns already articulated hereinabove, these documents are, in fact, already

being considered by the Commission for the limited purpose of identity, during the SIR process," it said.

The ECI continued, "A bare perusal of the enumeration form issued under the SIR Order reveals that the Aadhaar number may be voluntarily furnished by a person furnishing the enumeration form. Such information is utilised for the purpose of identification, in accordance with Section 23(4) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and Section 9 of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016."

Section 23(4) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 stipulates the "electoral registration officer may for the purpose of establishing the identity of any person require that such person may furnish the Aadhaar number given by the Unique Identification Authority of India as per the provisions of the Aadhaar (Targeted Delivery of Financial and Other Subsidies, Benefits and Services) Act, 2016."

On the other hand, Section 9 of the 2016 Act says Aadhaar number is not evidence of citizenship or domicile, etc.

The poll panel said each and every existing elector, other than migrants who are temporarily absent from Bihar, are provided with their pre-filled enumeration forms at their homes, by Booth Level Officers (BLO), in person. "That each and (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

One dead, 12 injured in two separate road accidents

KAJALGAON/TEZPUR, July 22: One person was killed and 12 others were injured in two separate road accidents in Assam on Tuesday, officials said.

In a chain accident involving six vehicles in Chirang district, one person was killed and five others were injured, while seven more people sustained injuries in Sonitpur district in a head-on collision between an oil tanker and an SUV.

A senior official of the Chirang district administration told PTI that multiple vehicles collided on National Highway-27 at Kashikotra, resulting in massive road blockage that affected traffic for several hours on Tuesday.

"A car stopped seeing a big snake crossing the highway. Several other vehicles also stopped. However, a speeding gas tanker could not stop and rammed all the vehicles in front of it," she added.

The impact was so huge that a passenger tempo van flew and fell

in the nearby bushes, while one car was transformed into a mangled heap of metal, the officer said.

"One person died on the spot and five were critically injured. All have been taken to nearby hospital for treatment," she added.

Besides the gas tanker, the accident involved another truck, two hatchbacks, one sedan and one tempo.

In the other accident, seven people were injured in a head-on collision between an oil tanker and an SUV in Assam's Sonitpur district on Tuesday, officials said.

The accident took place at Depota Na-Ali in Tezpur in the morning, they said.

"The oil tanker was heading towards Tezpur from Dhekiajuli direction on NH-15. The SUV-cum-pickup van was coming from the opposite direction, carrying vegetables and fish," an official said. Seven people, including the driver of (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

India records nearly fourfold rise in annual organ transplants since 2013: Govt

NEW DELHI, July 22: The total number of organ transplants performed annually in the country has increased from 4,990 in 2013 to 18,910 in 2024 due to consistent efforts over the years, Minister of State for Health Prataprao Jadhav informed the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

In a written reply, Jadhav said the number of deceased donor organ transplants has risen from 837 in 2013 to 3,403 in 2024, while the organ donation rate (deceased donors per million population) has improved from 0.27 to 0.81 during the same period.

The number of deceased organ donors has grown from 340 in 2013 to 1,128 in 2024, he said.

"India currently ranks third globally in total organ transplants and stands first in living donor organ transplants," Jadhav stated.

To strengthen the organ trans-



plantation ecosystem, states are encouraged to identify gaps and take proactive measures. They can seek assistance from the Centre through the National Organ Transplant Programme (NOTP), he said.

Under NOTP, financial grants are provided to states based on proposals received for establishing Regional Organ and Tissue Transplant

Organisations (ROTOs) and State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisations (SOTTOs). The programme also supports infrastructure development in public sector facilities for setting up transplant or retrieval centres and tissue banks.

Funding is also extended for hiring transplant coordinators in government (CONTD.ON PAGE-2)

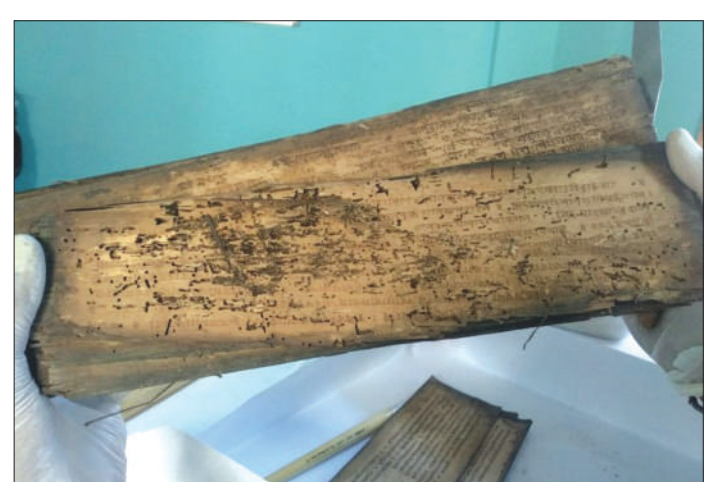
Manuscripts presented include the 'Kirtan Ghosha', 'Adi Dasham', 'Nam Ghoxa' 'Sanchipat' manuscripts gifted to Rashtrapati Bhavan for preservation

GUWAHATI, July 22: The Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Society on Tuesday handed over a collection of five ancient 'sanchipat' manuscripts to the Rashtrapati Bhavan library for preservation and display, officials said.

During a ceremony, Kalakshetra Secretary Sudarshan Thakur handed over the manuscripts to Rashtrapati Bhavan Secretary Dipti Umashankar, they said.

The Guwahati-based Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra Society co-ordinated with various 'Satras' (Vaishnavite monasteries) across Assam to collect the 'sanchipat' manuscripts, an official release said.

The manuscripts presented include the 'Kirtan Ghosha', composed by Mahapurush Srimanta



Sankardeva. 'Adi Dasham' - Srimanta Sankardeva's poetic translation based on the 10th skandha of the Bhagavata Purana - has also

been donated.

"Nam Ghoxa" by Mahapurush Shri Shri Madhavdeva, and 'Bhakti Ratnavali' by the Vishnupuri monks and translated into Assamese by Mahapurush Shri Shri Madhavdeva, are also part of the manuscripts donated.

Moreover, a 'sanchipat' manuscript of 'Geet Govinda', originally composed in Sanskrit by Jayadeva and translated into Assamese by poet Kabiraj Chakravarti in the royal court of Swargadeo Rudra Singha, has also been presented to Rashtrapati Bhavan library for its preservation and display.

"It is hoped that through this significant step, the rich heritage of the Assamese language will gain a new momentum," Thakur said. (PTI)

Stock markets close flat in volatile trade; Eternal jumps nearly 11 pc

MUMBAI, July 22: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty closed almost unchanged in a volatile trade on Tuesday as gains in quick commerce and private banking shares were offset by losses in oil & gas and IT shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex ended 13.53 points or 0.02 per cent down at 82,186.81. During the morning trade, it climbed 337.83 points or 0.41 per cent to 82,538.17 but lost momentum later.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 29.80 points or 0.12 per cent to settle at 25,060.90.

Lack of clarity over the US-India trade deal ahead of the August 1 deadline and profit booking by FIIs hit the market sentiment, experts said.

Among Sensex firms, Eternal jumped the most by 10.56 per cent in a post-result rally. Food delivery and quick commerce firm Eternal, which owns the Zomato and Blinkit brands, on Monday reported a consolidated net profit of ₹ 25 crore for the June quarter, as continuing investments in quick commerce and going-out businesses weighed on its bottom line.

Titan rose by over 1 per cent while HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank extended gains after their quarterly results.



Hindustan Unilever, Bharat Electronics, Maruti, ICICI Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were also among the gainers.

However, Tata Motors, Adani Ports, State Bank of India and Reliance Industries were among the laggards.

"The market's attention is on quarterly earnings, which slowed lately after some traction from banking stocks. Positivity noticed on Friday and Monday tapered ahead of the critical August 1st deadline of US trade agreement."

"Upside in Q1 earnings will be the

critical point to sustain the current premium valuations. Continued profit-booking by FIIs exerts downward pressure, while steady inflows from DIIs could support for a range-bound movement with a positive bias towards Q1 results and trade deal," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.62 per cent and smallcap index dipped 0.17 per cent.

Among BSE sectoral indices, realty dropped 1.01 per cent, followed by telecommunication (0.87 per cent),

auto (0.78 per cent), IT (0.53 per cent) and tech (0.53 per cent).

Consumer discretionary emerged as the only gainer.

Markets remained range-bound and ended almost flat, indicating a pause amid mixed signals. The market continues to lack clear direction amid mixed earnings announcements and muted global cues, Ajit Mishra SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

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

European markets were trading mostly lower. The US markets ended mostly higher on Monday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,681.23 crore on Monday, while Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs) bought stocks worth ₹ 3,578.43 crore, according to exchange data.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude dropped 0.97 per cent to USD 68.54 a barrel. On Monday, the Sensex climbed 442.61 points or 0.54 per cent to settle at 82,200.34. The Nifty jumped 122.30 points or 0.49 per cent to 25,090.70. (PTI)

'PM Modi's short, focussed visit shows India invested in UK ties'

London, July 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's short but focussed visit to the UK highlights his commitment to this partnership and his willingness to keep it thriving as it is taken to the next level with a Free Trade Agreement, India's High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami said on Tuesday.

Speaking to PTI at India House in London on the eve of the PM's visit, Doraiswami said an extremely "detailed and ambitious" FTA document is in the final legal scrubbing phase to ensure it reflects the substance of what was agreed when negotiations concluded on May 6. All eyes will be on the FTA, which aims to double bilateral trade to USD 120 billion by 2030 and is expected to be formally signed off during Modi's meeting with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Thursday.

"We are working to finalise it; the objective is to have the Free Trade Agreement land," said Doraiswami.

"It is, of course, a detailed and ambitious document, which is probably our most ambitious Free Trade Agreement to date. So, there is effort that is required to make sure it's all accurate and covers everything that the two sides have actually agreed and reflects the substance of what people are expecting, as and when it lands. It will have a very important impact upon both economies and help drive growth in both countries," he said.

The envoy pointed out that the FTA, once signed and ratified by the UK Parliament, will give businesses a more predictable framework and stressed that it is not just about "tariff reductions" but also about improving the terms of trade.

"It includes customs arrangements on rules

of origin. It includes government procurement. And, of course, there is a huge and very important set of areas covered under services, which is a significant segment of both the British and the Indian economy," he shared.

Regarding the extremely truncated UK visit before the Prime Minister heads to the Maldives, Doraiswami admitted that the High Commission and the 1.8-million-strong diaspora would have liked all the "bells and whistles" of a longer tour, but reiterated that it suggests a great willingness to keep the India-UK partnership "thriving".

"The fact that he's so committed to this relationship should give our diaspora friends confidence here that the UK is such an important partner for us that the Prime Minister is willing to fly across all of this distance just to push the relationship forward, for a mere 24 hours. I think that's pretty incredible," said the envoy.

"The Prime Minister has consistently held the view that we must build ties with traditional and important partners. His willingness to travel a considerable distance for a short period of time, even when Parliament is in session... making a short but really focussed trip suggests to us that the Prime Minister places great emphasis on getting this relationship not just to maintain its current trajectory but to lift it to its next level," he said.

The Prime Minister, who will be accompanied by a business delegation, is also scheduled for an audience with King Charles III at one of the royal estates. During his visit to the UK in 2018, Modi and the then Prince of Wales jointly launched an Ayurvedic Centre of Excellence. (PTI)

Paytm posts first-ever profit of ₹ 122.5 crore in Q1 FY26

NEW DELHI, July 22: Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns the Paytm brand, reported its first-ever consolidated net profit at ₹ 122.5 crore in the quarter ended June 2025, mainly on account of cost optimisation and an increase in payment revenue. Paytm had posted a net loss of ₹ 840 crore in the year-ago period.

"EBITDA and PAT turned profitable at ₹ 72 crore and ₹ 123 crore respectively, demonstrating AI-led operating leverage, disciplined cost structure and higher other income," Paytm said in a statement.

The company slashed marketing and promotional expenses by more than half to ₹ 99.8 crore during the reported quarter from ₹ 221.4 crore a year ago and ₹ 142.7 crore in the March 2025 quarter.

Paytm reduced employee benefits by about ₹ 300 crore or one-third to about ₹ 643 crore from ₹ 952.5 crore on a year-over-year basis.

While the company increased sales employee cost by 19 per cent on a YoY basis to ₹ 266 crore, it recorded a reduction in non-sales employee cost by 28 per cent YoY to ₹ 346 crore due to the use of artificial intelligence in various processes across its business.

Paytm's average number of sales employees increased by 23 per cent YoY basis to 38,945.

The consolidated revenue from operations in the reporting quarter increased by about 28 per cent to ₹ 1,917.5 crore from ₹ 1,501.6 crore in the June 2024 quarter mainly on account of an increase in payment processing margins.

"In the first quarter of FY'25, payment services revenue

(including other operating revenue) was up 23 per cent YoY at ₹ 1,110 crore. Net payment revenue was up 38 per cent YoY at ₹ 529 crore due to an increase in payment processing margin and device," the company said.

Paytm reported 27 per cent YoY increase in gross merchandise value to ₹ 5.39 lakh crore in the reported quarter.

The company said that merchant subscriptions were at an all-time high of 1.3 crore, an increase of 21 lakh YoY, on the back of high-quality devices and superior service network as of June 2025.

"To further strengthen tier-1 market position and expand in tier-2 and tier-3 cities, we are investing in expanding our sales network (sales people costs are up 19 per cent YoY)," the statement said.

During the reported quarter, Paytm said that average monthly transacting users (MTU) base reached 7.4 crore.

The company said that distribution of financial services revenue grew 100 per cent YoY to ₹ 561 crore, driven by continued expansion in merchant loans, trail revenue from Default Loss Guarantee (DLG) portfolio, and improvement in asset quality.

Paytm reported an 88 per cent decline in ESOP (employee stock ownership plan) costs to ₹ 30 crore from ₹ 169 crore in the March quarter and ₹ 247 crore a year ago. The company had made ESOP cost related adjustments in the March quarter when its CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma voluntarily surrendered his ESOPs. (PTI)

Rupee falls 7 paise to close at 86.38 against US dollar

MUMBAI, July 22: The rupee pared initial gains and settled for the day down 7 paise at 86.38 against the US dollar on Tuesday, amid uncertainty over the US-India trade deal ahead of the August 1 deadline.

Forex traders said, all eyes are now on the outcome of India-US trade talks, especially as the August 1 deadline for potential tariffs on Indian exports draws near.

The weakness in the American currency and softening of crude oil prices supported the rupee at lower levels, while foreign fund outflows and a negative trend in domestic equities weighed on the local unit and restricted the upside.

At the interbank foreign exchange, the domestic unit opened at 86.26 against the greenback and touched an intra-day high of 86.22 and a low of 86.41 against the greenback.

At the end of Tuesday's trading session, the local unit settled at 86.38, down 7 paise over its previous closing price. This was rupee's fifth straight session of decline since July 16 when the unit had lost 16 paise and ended at 85.92 against the dollar.

On Monday, the rupee depreciated 15 paise to close at 86.31 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on trade deal talks. However, weakness in the American currency and softening of crude oil prices may support the rupee at lower levels," Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Mirae Asset Sharekhan, said.

Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst, HDFC Securities said the rupee depreciated for the fifth consecutive day, driven by risk-averse market sentiment and consistent dollar demand.

"Regional currencies remain range-bound as the dollar consolidates amid geopolitical uncertainties. Near-term, spot USD-INR has support at 85.95 and resistance at 86.70," he added.

Meanwhile, the US team will visit India in August for the next round of negotiations for the proposed bilateral trade agreement between the two countries, an official said on Monday.

India and the US teams concluded the fifth round of talks for the agreement last week in Washington.

These deliberations are important as both sides are looking at finalising an interim trade deal before August 1, which marks the end of the suspension period of Trump tariffs imposed on dozens of countries, including India (26 per cent).

If the discussions fail or get delayed, Indian exporters could face fresh pressure -- adding to the rupee's challenges. However, if a deal is reached, it could offer a much-needed breather. Until then, the uncertainty is likely to keep market participants cautious.

"Traders may remain cautious ahead of PMI and durable goods orders data from the US this week," Choudhary said, adding that USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of 86.10 to 86.65.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, fell 0.03 per cent to 97.82.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, fell 0.94 per cent to USD 68.56 per barrel in futures trade.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 13.53 points, or 0.02 per cent, to close at 82,186.81, while the Nifty fell 29.80 points, or 0.12 per cent, to settle at 25,060.90.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 3,548.92 crore on a net basis on Tuesday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

Berger Paints prioritises sustainable growth, focuses on core segments

KOLKATA, July 22: Berger Paints India Ltd, the country's second-largest paint company, has reaffirmed its resilience amid intensifying competition and economic headwinds.

Chairman Rishma Kaur outlined a growth strategy centred on deeper customer alignment, technological transformation and innovation. The paint industry is witnessing intensified competition with new players entering the estimated Rs 1 lakh crore market alongside ongoing consolidation.

Addressing shareholders in the company's latest annual report, Rishma Kaur said, "At the heart of Berger Paints' enduring success lies a single-minded commitment: to deliver a differentiated and superior experience to our customers. This is not a one-time exercise but a continuous endeavour grounded in research, innovation, and execution."

She stressed that Berger has never chased market share through "unsustainable discounts or gimmicks," adding, "Our focus has always been on long-term value creation, building structures of confidence, systems of reliability, and a reputation grounded in integrity." (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

2,669,396 voters enrolled

of the elections. The electoral roll publication process in the remaining three districts—Baksa, Chirang, and Udalguri—also commenced on the same day, as part of the region-wide rollout.

Naga organisations in Manipur

several forms of protests, including "picketing of government offices in Naga inhabited areas have been undertaken along with protest rallies in Naga inhabited hill districts."

Serving a twenty-day ultimatum, the Naga organisations said "the government of India must revoke the notification/order related to the abrogation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) immediately."

The government's revised border guidelines issued in December 2024 limit cross-border movement under FMR to just 10 km from the border and impose a "border pass" system. Under the earlier FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar and who is resident of any area within 16 km on either side of the border, can cross over on production of a border pass with one year's validity and can stay up to two weeks per visit. (PTI)

Grounded British fighter jet

remained grounded at the international airport here since June 14 after it developed a technical snag. The aircraft, which took off from HMS Prince of Wales on June 14, was unable to return to the carrier due to adverse weather conditions.

Prioritising safety, it diverted to Thiruvananthapuram International Airport, where it landed safely.

Subsequently, the aircraft developed an engineering issue whilst on the ground, which temporarily delayed its return to the Carrier Strike Group. Engineers from HMS Prince of Wales assessed the aircraft and determined that the support of a UK-based engineering team was required.

The UK accepted India's offer to move the aircraft to the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility. To ensure minimal disruption to regular airport operations, it was decided that the aircraft would be moved once the UK engineering teams arrived with specialist equipment.

The emergency landing by the British Royal Navy fighter jet at Thiruvananthapuram International Airport became the subject of countless memes, and even turned into a marketing opportunity for Kerala Tourism.

A poster shared by Kerala Tourism on its official 'X' handle went viral on social media. It featured a stylised image of the fighter jet parked against a dreamy Kerala backdrop -- coconut trees and lush greenery. A playful caption read: "Kerala is such an amazing place, I don't want to leave. Definitely recommend." The quote was humorously attributed to "UK F-35B." (PTI)

'Aadhaar, voter, ration cards

every existing elector has the same opportunity to provide all documents including proof of eligibility to the BLO at their place of residence. No elector is put through any hardship in comparison to the persons mentioned above. The same methodology has been utilised for all past SIRs as well. Moreover, the BLOs, BLAs (booth level agents), and volunteers are actively facilitating the obtaining of eligibility documents for all genuine electors who require assistance..." it said.

The poll panel further informed the court that as on July 18, of the 7,89,69,844 existing electors in Bihar, enumeration forms from 7,11,72,660 electors, constituting 90.12 per cent, had already been collected. "Accounting for deceased individuals, permanently shifted electors, and those enrolled in more than one place, the Form collection phase of the SIR has effectively covered 94.68 per cent of the nearly 7.9 crore-strong electorate in Bihar. The electorate who are untraceable despite multiple visits by the BLOs constitute a mere 0.01% of the total electors. As on July 18, 2025, only 5.2 percent electors remain to submit their filled EFs before the July 25 deadline," it said. (PTI)

One dead, 12 injured

the pickup van, were seriously injured and have been taken to the Tezpur Medical College and Hospital, he said. "Eye witnesses said the accident occurred when the pickup van was speeding and the driver lost control while negotiating a turn," he added. (PTI)

India records nearly fourfold

medical colleges and trauma centres, maintenance of deceased donors, organ transport, post-transplant immunosuppressant medication, and awareness, training, and capacity-building initiatives. Jadhav informed the House that people can avail the Kidney Transplantation Package under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) as part of the Ayushman Bharat programme.

In addition, financial assistance is provided under the Rashtriya Arogya Nidhi (RAN) for kidney, liver, heart, and lung transplants for patients living below the poverty line.

While health is a state subject, it is the responsibility of state governments to ensure the availability of required facilities and services for organ transplantation within their jurisdictions. Jadhav said. As per the Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissues Act, 1994 (THOTA), the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has set up a three-tier national network comprising the National Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation (NOTTO), ROTTOS, and SOTTOS.

NOTTO functions as the apex body for coordination, networking, and maintenance of the national registry for organ and tissue donation and transplantation. The NOTP, a Central Sector Scheme, aims to improve access to organ transplants through increased public awareness on deceased organ donation, streamlined organ procurement and distribution systems, public infrastructure development, and specialised manpower training, the minister added. (PTI)

Lloyds Metals to invest ₹ 40k cr more in Gadchiroli

MUMBAI, July 22: Lloyds Metals and Steel is targeting to invest over ₹ 40,000 crore to develop a steel plant and other units in Vidarbha's Gadchiroli district over the next five years, a top official said on Tuesday.

The law and order situation in the eastern Maharashtra district impacted by Left Wing Extremism (LWE) is improving, and attempts are essential to mainstream the youth, its managing director B Prabhakaran told PTI over the phone.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, who is also the guardian minister of the district, inaugurated a 90-km pipeline and a pellet plant built by the company in Gadchiroli earlier in the day.

"We have a ₹ 45,000 crore investment plan for the district, of which ₹ 5,000 crore has already been invested," Prabhakaran, who calls himself the 'managing director in residence,' he said.

When asked how it will fund the capital expenditure in Gadchiroli, Prabhakaran said it will depend on internal accruals and also raise fresh funds if need be.

He reminded that last year, it had raised over ₹ 4,000 crore from a qualified institutional placement of shares.

"At present, the company's as-

sets in the district include an iron ore mine in Surjagad, and the upcoming investments include a ₹ 15,000 crore 'beneficiation plant', having a capacity of 45 million tonnes per annum and ₹ 22,000 crore for a steel plant with a 4.5 million tonnes capacity," he added.

Prabhakaran said the company will be investing up to ₹ 5,000 crore per annum from here on, he said, adding that the overall employment generated by Lloyds will triple to 30,000 by the end of the investment cycle.

"Things are 'slowly changing' in the district, he said, adding that an already existing iron ore mine has been secured, using equipment of the kind used by the US in Afghanistan.

With a history of protests like the ones in Surjagad, Prabhakaran said the company is focusing on taking the local community, which explains investments in hospitals and schools locally.

He said nearly all the staff of the company have an equity stake in the company.

The concession for the mine was signed over 15 years ago, but operations began only after 2021, he said, blaming the Naxalite problem in the intervening time. (PTI)

Gold climbs to over ₹ 1 lakh/10 g, silver rallies ₹ 3,000 in Delhi

NEW DELHI, July 22: Gold prices climbed ₹ 1,000 to regain the ₹ 1 lakh per 10 grams level in the national capital on Tuesday due to strong buying by stockists, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity soared four-week high of ₹ 1,00,020 per 10 grams from the previous close of ₹ 99,020 per 10 grams. Previously, gold traded at ₹ 1 lakh per 10 grams level on June 19. In the national capital, gold of 99.5 per cent purity appreciated by ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 99,550 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) on Tuesday. It had closed at ₹ 98,550 per 10 grams in the previous market close. In line with gold, silver prices too rallied by ₹ 3,000 to ₹ 1,14,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Tuesday. The white metal had ended at ₹ 1,11,000 per kg on Monday.

Meanwhile, spot gold slipped 0.28 per cent to trade at USD 3,387.42 per ounce in the global markets. "Gold traded in a narrow and volatile range between USD 3,395 and USD 3,383 on Comex, reflecting a lack of fresh triggers from trade deals or major global developments," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst - Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said. (PTI)



that this network spans MSRTC's fleet of over 16,000 buses, serving more than 13 crore passengers monthly across urban and rural Maharashtra.

"The newly-awarded National Common Mobility Card (NCMC) programme expands this partnership with a focus on smart and interoperable payments that will revolutionise how millions travel daily," it

said. "Spearheaded by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, the initiative enables passengers to use a single smartcard across multiple transport modes, creating a truly integrated mobility ecosystem," Ebix said.

"With the NCMC rollout, we are not just introducing another payment method. We are fundamentally reimagining how citizens experience everyday travel across Maharashtra," a company spokesperson said.

The project includes mandatory adoption of the NCMC smartcard for all concessional passengers and pass holders on MSRTC buses, with optional availability for regular passengers, a minimum business assurance of 70 lakh NCMC cards to be sold in the first year alone, scaling to over 2 crore cards issued statewide through a network of 3,000 dedicated retail outlets established by Ebix Technologies, among others. (PTI)

New ASRLM training centre inaugurated

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 22: A new community training centre under the Assam State Rural Livelihood Mission (ASRLM) was inaugurated at Desangpar Gaon Pan-chayat recently, under the zonal unit Sanmilita Adarsha Mondal Sangathan—one of the leading ASRLM units in Sivasagar district.

The centre, which will be operated by women members of self-help groups (SHGs), was inaugurated by Thowra MLA Sushant Borgohain.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by Dr Suraj Jyoti Gogoi, District Project Manager, ASRLM, Sivasagar, along with officials from various departments, panchayat representatives, bank officers, and other dignitaries from the social sector.

As part of the event, a range of products made by SHG members was also launched, showcasing the entrepreneurial capabilities of rural women associated with ASRLM.

Bhaskar Sharma dares Akhil Gogoi to contest from Margherita in 2026 polls

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, July 22: Margherita MLA Bhaskar Sharma has publicly challenged Sibsagar MLA and Rajior Dal President Akhil Gogoi to contest the 2026 Assembly election from the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly constituency.

The challenge comes in the wake of Gogoi's speech during an election campaign at Rangamancha in North Margherita on July 13, where he reportedly made inflammatory and derogatory remarks against Sharma.

The remarks have sparked controversy and strong reactions across Assam.

Reacting to Gogoi's comments, Sharma accused the Rajior Dal leader of lacking the basic decorum required of a legislator.

"I do not consider someone who speaks improperly and foolishly, disregarding the dignity of the As-

sembly, as a legislator," Sharma said.

Stakeholders meet to boost Cachar's agrarian economy

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 22: In a key initiative aimed at strengthening the agrarian economy of Cachar ahead of the upcoming Kharif Marketing Season (KMS) 2024-25, Deputy Commissioner Mridul Yadav chaired a high-level meeting with key stakeholders on Tuesday to ensure an organised, transparent, and farmer-friendly paddy procurement process.

The meeting, held at the district headquarters, brought together senior officials from the Food, Public Distribution & Consumer Affairs (FPD&CA) Department, the Agriculture Office, the Food Corporation of India (FCI), as well as representatives from farmers' and millers' associations.

The discussions focused on infrastructure preparedness, timely procurement, quality control, and



improved coordination to avoid procedural delays.

According to an official statement issued by the Regional Office of Information & Public Relations, Barak Valley Zone, Silchar, DC Yadav emphasised the administration's commitment to protecting farmers' interests by ensuring the

smooth implementation of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) mechanism and eliminating hurdles in the procurement and offloading of produce.

The meeting was also attended by Additional District Commissioner (Agriculture) Roktim Baruah, Branch Officer (FPD&CA)

Junali Devi, officials from FPD&CA Cachar and FCI Silchar, and key members of the farmers and millers associations.

DC Yadav called for close coordination between departments to meet procurement targets effectively, while upholding transparency and efficiency in every stage of the process.

He also reaffirmed the administration's resolve to turn this year's procurement drive into a model of responsive governance in support of the farming community.

The session concluded with a collective pledge to work in synergy to ensure that Cachar's farmers receive timely and fair returns for their produce, reinforcing the district administration's sustained efforts to empower the rural economy.

DMHP conducts mental health awareness programme

HT Correspondent

SONARI, July 22: The District Mental Health Programme (DMHP), Charaideo, conducted a mental health awareness programme at Sonari Commerce College on Monday, focusing on student well-being and early intervention in mental health issues. The session addressed a range of concerns including exam stress, anxiety, substance abuse, and internet addiction—issues increasingly affecting young people. Experts from DMHP shared practical strategies for stress management and emotional resilience.

The programme also highlighted the availability of Tele MANAS, a government initiative providing round-the-clock teleconsultation services for mental health support.

Students were encouraged to utilise the service to seek timely assistance. The initiative was well-received by students and faculty, reflecting the growing emphasis on mental health in academic institutions.

ATCCC refutes JDSSM allegations on religious conversion

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 22: The Assam Tribal Christian Coordination Committee (ATCCC) has strongly refuted allegations made by Binud Kumbang, Coordinator of the Janajati Dharma Sanskriti Suraksha Manch (JDSSM), regarding religious conversions among tribal communities in Assam.

In an official press release issued on Tuesday, the ATCCC termed Kumbang's recent statements at a press conference in Guwahati as "baseless and unfounded."

Kumbang had alleged that poor and marginalised communities in the state were being converted to Christianity through deceit, inducements, and purported miracle healings, and claimed the involve-

ment of over 20 foreign religious organisations in orchestrating such conversions under the guise of humanitarian services.

Rejecting these accusations, the ATCCC demanded that Kumbang furnish the names of the alleged 20 foreign religious organisations operating in Assam.

It further stated that missionary-run educational institutions in the state have served students from all religious backgrounds without bias, and rejected claims of any cultural or religious invasion.

"Religion or faith is a spiritual and individual matter, and it does not alter one's cultural, linguistic, or traditional identity," the ATCCC said, adding that tribal Christians in Assam continue to uphold and preserve their indige-

nous culture, customs, and language.

The committee accused Kumbang of attempting to divide tribal communities through his demand for the delisting of converted Scheduled Tribes (STs) from the ST list and proposed amendment to Article 342 of the Constitution.

It described such demands as part of a "deep conspiracy."

The ATCCC also warned that Kumbang's remarks could be punishable under relevant provisions of the IT Act, 2000 and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

It urged him to desist from making such "provocative and unfounded" statements in the future and instead contribute to peace-building and communal harmony in the region.

Students from Nataraj Nritya Sadhana Kendra shine at international dance competition

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 22: Four students from Nataraj Nritya Sadhana Kendra, Puranigudam, have brought laurels to Assam by winning accolades at a recently held international dance and music competition and festival in Sualkuchi.

The event was jointly organised by Nataraj Kala Kendra and Rivi International Organisation.

The students—Parineeta Bora, Binju Devi, Gainashree Bora, and Mananya Sarma—stood out among several participants for their impressive performances. All four were honoured with the 'Nritya Padma Samman' in recognition of their artistic excellence and dedication to Indian classical dance.

In addition, Prachurya Baruah, another student of the institute, secured first place in the classical dance

segment by performing Sattriya, one of the eight classical dance forms of India originating from Assam. His performance was widely appreciated by the judges and audience alike.

In a special recognition, Prachurya Baruah also presented the International Dance Guru Award to his mentor and instructor, Kankana Sarma, in acknowledgment of her contributions to promoting classical dance and nurturing young talent.

The achievements of the students have been hailed as a moment of pride not only for Puranigudam and Nagaon, but for the entire state of Assam.

Cultural enthusiasts and locals have extended congratulations to the students and their instructor for bringing honour to the region on an international platform.

Children's summer drama workshop concludes

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 22: A twenty-day summer drama workshop for children and adolescents, organised for the first time by Tezpur Kalibari Suriyodaya Sangha in association with residents of Kalibari Da Gaon, concluded with a vibrant cultural evening titled 'Natakhar Esondhya' at Kalibari Bor Namghar. The concluding programme featured the staging of 'Nadir Akukh' (The River's Illness), a play focusing on rural life and the urgent issue of river pollution and conservation.

Written and directed by noted dramatist Manas Pratim Bora, with Moon Deka as associate director, the production was performed by over thirty children trained during the workshop.

The play delivered a compelling message on the importance of protecting rivers, which serve as lifelines for human civilisation. In addition to the play, the evening included performances of dance, music, and poetry recitations by the participants, which were well received by the audience.

Tezpur MLA and acclaimed actor Prithiraj Rabha, who attended the event as a guest, lauded the children's performances, praising their dedication and talent despite the brief training period. He described the programme as "a promising start for a new theatrical journey in Tezpur." Other distinguished attendees included social worker Rishiraj Kaundinya, veteran actor Mrigen Chandra Bora, writer Santanu Baruah, children's playwrights Dwijen Nath and Hemadhar Das, and dramatists Ashwini Bora and Gautam Pathak.

All participants were awarded certificates of merit and saplings as tokens of appreciation and encouragement.

In his concluding remarks, Suriyodaya Sangha Secretary Manas Pratim Bora thanked the guests and supporters of the initiative and emphasised the importance of nurturing regular theatrical activities in the Kalibari area.

Tezpur MLA and acclaimed actor Prithiraj Rabha, who attended the event as a guest, lauded the children's performances, praising their dedication and talent despite the brief training period. He described the programme as "a promising start for a new theatrical journey in Tezpur." Other distinguished attendees included social worker Rishiraj Kaundinya, veteran actor Mrigen Chandra Bora, writer Santanu Baruah, children's playwrights Dwijen Nath and Hemadhar Das, and dramatists Ashwini Bora and Gautam Pathak.

All participants were awarded certificates of merit and saplings as tokens of appreciation and encouragement.

In his concluding remarks, Suriyodaya Sangha Secretary Manas Pratim Bora thanked the guests and supporters of the initiative and emphasised the importance of nurturing regular theatrical activities in the Kalibari area.

Fire breaks out at stationery shop in Demow Central Market

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, July 22: A fire broke out at a stationery store in Demow Central Market on Tuesday afternoon, causing damage to goods estimated to be worth ₹70,000.

The incident occurred at SD WOV INTERIOR, a shop dealing in stationery and related items.

According to information received, the fire is suspected to have been caused by a short circuit.

Local traders and passers-by noticed smoke coming from the shop and immediately attempted to bring the flames under control. A fire tender was promptly alerted and reached the spot shortly thereafter. Firefighters managed to douse the flames before they could spread to adjoining shops in the busy commercial area.

While no casualties were reported, several items inside the store were destroyed in the blaze.

Shop owner and local residents have urged the authorities to investigate the cause thoroughly and take necessary steps to ensure safety compliance in the market area.

The incident has once again raised concerns over electrical safety standards and fire preparedness in commercial establishments across the region.

KAAC launches Pension & Grievance Cell

HT correspondent

KHERONI, July 22: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) has inaugurated a dedicated Pension & Grievance Cell at its secretariat premises in Diphu to address pension-related issues and grievances of employees in a structured and transparent manner. The cell was formally launched in a brief ceremony led by Mukul Kumar Saikia, IAS, Principal Secretary of KAAC. Sonasing Terang, Deputy Secretary, has been appointed as the in-charge of the new facility. Speaking at the event, Principal Secretary Saikia expressed gratitude to Dilip Terang, ACS, Secretary of the P(A) Department, for his guidance in setting up the

cell. He also acknowledged the contribution of various officials, including Joint Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, the Under Secretary, District Public Education Officers of Diphu and Hamren, Senior Financial Officer, FAO (C), Additional Chief Engineer (Water), Executive Engineers of Water Resources and Mechanical divisions, Transport officials, and others involved in the initiative.

Special thanks were also extended to the President, Vice President, Secretary, Chief Advisor, and members of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Employees' Association (KAACEA) for their support and cooperation in operationalising the cell.

'Vedic Resonance' offers a meditative cultural experience beyond academia

Rare evening of Vedic poetry and Sanskrit music captivates Tezpur audience

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 22: Tezpur was treated to a unique and spiritually enriching cultural experience on Sunday evening with 'Vedic Resonance', a rare presentation of Vedic poetry recitation and Sanskrit music held at Baliram Lahkar Hall of the Asomiya Club.

Organised under the banner of 'Manan', the programme, titled 'Naad-Ninaad-Anunaad: Noisha Kabitar Mantradhani' (Nocturnal Poetic Chanting of Mantras), marked the first such event to be staged outside academic settings in Assam.

Renowned elocutionist Bhupen Chakraborty and acclaimed Sanskrit vocalist Ranjan Kumar Bezbaruah headlined the evening, offering the audience a deeply contemplative blend of ancient verse, music, and spiritual rhythm.

The event commenced with ceremonial lamp lighting by Dr Biren Das, Controller of Examinations at



Tezpur University, and social worker Anjali Kalita.

The programme was introduced by All India Radio Tezpur presenter Mallika Dutta.

In his performance, Chakraborty explored the intricate meters and cadences of Vedic poetry, characterising the verses as "a vibrant expression of the substance of reality."

Drawing from shruti, sloka, samhita, and mantra, he presented

a compelling recitation that positioned the Vedas as the "tree of knowledge," deeply rooted in India's spiritual and intellectual tradition.

Bezbaruah's segment featured evocative chanting from the Rigveda and Atharvaveda, along with verses from Kalidasa's Meghaduta.

Accompanied by musician Mukul Bora and singer Mayukhi Bezbaruah, he also performed San-

skrit renditions of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's Snehai Amar Xata Xrawanor and Rupkonwar Jyotiprasad Agarwala's Jano Jano Jano, seamlessly bridging classical heritage with modern Assamese culture.

The event was made possible through the collective efforts of Hemanta Lahkar, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha President Dhruvajyoti Das, Bikram Kalita, Jayshree Bhuyan, and others.

The evening concluded with reflections by poet Pranab Kumar Barman, who stressed the continuing relevance of Sanskrit.

He cited the example of a village in Karnataka where Sanskrit remains the spoken language in daily life, underlining the language's status as a living heritage.

Vedic Resonance left the Tezpur audience spellbound, offering a rare synthesis of poetry, music, and meditative depth—an experience that transcended performance and invited introspection.

KSU demands capital punishment in Nagaon murder case

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 22: The Nagaon Karbi Students' Union staged a protest in front of the Nagaon Police Station on Tuesday, demanding capital punishment for Saddam Hussain, the prime accused in the alleged murder of a Karbi girl whose body was recovered in the Diphlu area near a Shiva temple on June 16.

In an official statement, the students' body urged the Chief Minister to intervene and ensure justice in the case, which has sparked widespread outrage among the Karbi community.

The case initially caused confusion after the family of one Pinky Das, reported missing from her residence

under Raha Police Station, claimed the recovered body to be hers.

However, police investigations revealed that Pinky Das was alive and the deceased was a young woman from Langking village in Karbi Anglong district.

The police later identified the victim as the younger daughter of Pranab Ingli, a resident of Langking village.

The key accused, Saddam Hussain, a married man from Marangial in Nagaon, was arrested a week ago in connection with the case.

According to police sources, some of the victim's jewellery was handed over to her mother on Monday. The investigation into the murder is ongoing.

Deficient rainfall triggers drought-like situation



HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, July 22: A drought-like situation has gripped several districts of Assam, including Morigaon, due to deficient rainfall this monsoon season, severely affecting agricultural activities and raising concerns among farmers.

Districts such as Kokrajhar, Barpeta, Dhubri, Baksa, and Bongaigaon have reported similar conditions, with vast stretches of farmland turning dry and unproductive.

In Morigaon district, the worst-affected areas include Silsaku and Baghara, where farmers are struggling to sustain their crops.

"The situation is grim. The fields have cracked, and there's no water to irrigate. We are very worried," said Tulsu Deka, a farmer from Silsaku.

He added that the irrigation department had introduced a few schemes several years ago, but these are now defunct due to government apathy.

Farmers across multiple villages in Morigaon have echoed similar concerns, stating that the ongoing dry spell could lead to a major agricultural setback if adequate measures are not taken urgently.

Death of a Communist stalwart

The life of VS Achuthanandan who passed away at the age of 101 on Monday is a remarkable chapter in the history of Kerala in general and the revolutionary movement here in particular. VS Achuthanandan was a symbol of a brilliant tradition of struggle, extraordinary determination and uncompromising fighting stance. His century-long life, which took on the problems of the people and stood with the people, is inextricably intertwined with the modern history of Kerala. VS's contributions, which led the Kerala government, the CPI(M), the Left Democratic Front and the opposition at various stages, are unparalleled. History will record that they are part of Kerala's political legacy. The demise of VS marks the end of an era. This has caused a heavy loss to the party, the revolutionary movement and the entire democratic progressive movement. The party can only make up for that loss through collective leadership. This is a time when many memories of working together for a long time come flooding back. VS had an eventful life marked by extraordinary energy and survival power in the revolutionary movement. The life of VS is a struggle-filled chapter in the history of Kerala and the Communist Party.

When the Communist Party split in 1964, the last remaining link among the 32 people who left the National Council was severed with the demise of VS. A valuable political presence that had kept the national freedom struggle in sync with contemporary politics had disappeared. As a communist leader, as a member of the Legislative Assembly, as the Leader of the Opposition and as the Chief Minister, VS has made many contributions. From a worker, VS rose very quickly to become a powerful leader of the working class movement. The party developed VS and the VS Party. In 1940, at the age of 17, he became a member of the Communist Party and remained a member of the party for a long time, 85 years. Comrade VS, who went to Kuttanad, led the struggle to end the wage slavery and caste slavery faced by the agricultural workers. He walked around the villages of Kuttanad and convened meetings of agricultural workers and developed them into an organized force. He did this by challenging the landlords and the police.

VS played an irreplaceable role in the formation of the 'Travancore Agricultural Workers Union' and later in its development into one of the largest labour movements in Kerala, the 'Kerala State Agricultural Workers Union'. The countless struggles led by VS changed the social history of Kuttanad. He was at the forefront of the struggles for better wages, the abolition of the chappa system, job stability, and the seizure of surplus land. His efforts to instill confidence and team spirit in the workers, walking for kilometers along the ridges of the fields and visiting their huts, attracted them all to the movement. The demise of VS has created an irreparable loss for the party and the country.

Unexpected Exit: Jagdeep Dhankhar resigns as Vice President of India

In a surprising move, Jagdeep Dhankhar resigned from the post of Vice President of India on July 21, 2025. He submitted his resignation to President Droupadi Murmu, stating health reasons as the cause. The announcement came as a shock to political circles and the general public, as Dhankhar's term was set to run until August 2027. His resignation took effect immediately after the President accepted it.

Dhankhar, who also served as the ex-officio Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, cited medical advice for his decision to step down. He is 74 years old and had been undergoing treatment in recent months. While his official reason was health-related, the timing of the resignation—just as the Monsoon Session of Parliament began—sparked speculation about possible political tensions behind the scenes.

Reports indicate that Dhankhar accepted an Opposition-backed motion in the Rajya Sabha related to the removal of a judge. This decision, said to be controversial within the ruling alliance, may have led to friction. According to some sources, there was a heated exchange between Dhankhar and central leadership officials following the acceptance of the motion. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh openly questioned the timing, suggesting that more had happened behind closed doors. He pointed to a critical time window on the day of resignation and linked it to the absence of key ministers from a meeting chaired by Dhankhar.

With his resignation, the office of the Vice President is now vacant. According to the Indian Constitution, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha will perform the Vice President's duties until a new election is held. A fresh election must be conducted within six months. All Members of Parliament, from both the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, will vote to elect the next Vice President. The government, led by the NDA, has already started internal discussions about potential candidates for the role. Names such as Harivansh, the current Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, and Haribhau Bagade, a senior BJP leader



from Maharashtra, are among those reportedly being considered.

Jagdeep Dhankhar had a long and eventful career in public service. Born in 1951 in Rajasthan, he studied science and law and began his professional life as a lawyer. He was elected as a Member of Parliament in 1989 and served as Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs. Later, he became a Member of the Rajya Sabha. His political journey took a major turn in 2019 when he was appointed Governor of West Bengal. During his tenure as Governor, he was known for his frequent disagreements with the state government.

In August 2022, Dhankhar was elected as the Vice President of India, defeating Opposition candidate Margaret Alva with a strong majority. He assumed office on August 11, 2022. As Chairman of the Rajya Sabha, he was known for his firm conduct of proceedings. He often urged members to uphold decorum and made headlines for his no-nonsense approach. He also took a proactive role during key legislative moments, including the Nari Shakti Vandan Bill debates, during which he reorganized the panel of Vice-Chairpersons to include more women parliamentarians.

However, his decision to accept a motion seeking the removal of a sitting

judge—an unusual step—appears to have led to discomfort in some quarters of the government. This incident, coupled with his resignation just hours later, has led many observers to wonder whether there was pressure or disagreement behind his departure. While BJP leaders have reiterated that Dhankhar resigned purely for health reasons, Opposition voices continue to point toward political friction.

With the Vice President's seat now vacant, the focus shifts to the upcoming election. According to constitutional provisions, a new Vice President must be elected within six months. Until then, the Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha will take charge of proceedings in the Upper House. Political observers believe that the government may choose a consensus candidate to avoid further controversy.

Dhankhar's resignation is one of the rare instances of a Vice President stepping down before completing the full five-year term. Despite the abrupt end, his time in office was marked by active participation in parliamentary affairs, assertive decisions, and a legal background that influenced his approach to legislative conduct. As India waits for the election of a new Vice President, Dhankhar's departure marks the end of a notable chapter in Indian politics—one that blended law, discipline, and sharp constitutional awareness with moments of tension and unpredictability.

VP Jagdeep Dhankhar's resignation has a political context

By: Dr Gyan Pathak

Health issue is the officially stated reason for the Vice President of India Jagdeep Dhankhar's resignation, but it has a political context. It was only in December 2024, Dhankhar had rebuked its own government led by PM Narendra Modi over not talking to agitating farmers of Punjab. He had said that a nation that tested the patience of farmers paid a "heavy price". Now his resignation is seen as the "heavy price" he had to pay for going against his own government.

The Vice President Dhankhar had sought to know on stage in a Mumbai event from the Union Minister of Agriculture Shivraj Singh Chouhan present there as the why the Centre was not holding a dialogue with the protesting farmers. Dhankhar had said "every moment is critical for you. I urge you, and as the person holding the second-highest constitutional position in India, I request you to please tell me, was any promise made to the farmer, and why has it not been fulfilled? What are we doing to fulfil the promise? There was an agitation last year, and there is one this year as well, and time is passing, but we are doing nothing." It was a direct indictment of the PM Narendra Modi led Centre, that has not yet accepted the farmers' demand for the legal guarantee for MSP for their crops.

Dhankhar took over as Vice President of India on August 11, 2022 and resigned on July 21, 2025. He is the third Vice President of India after VV Giri and R Venkataraman to resign before completing his term, with only difference that Giri and Venkataraman had stepped down to contest presidential election, but Dhankhar has resigned stating "health concerns and the need to follow medical advice" and his intent to "prioritise health care".

In the power corridor in New Delhi, people believe that "health issues" may be only one of the reasons, that too a superficial one, behind his resignation. He was seen in good health and vigour on the first day of the Monsoon session of the Parliament. He presided over the proceedings of the Rajya Sabha and addressed the issues relating to the opposition motions and opposition's demand for a statement of Prime Minister and discussion on Pahalgam terror attack, Operation Sindoor, and ensuing events including Trump's claims.

Dhankhar had convened the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Rajya Sabha at 12:30 PM, which was also attended by Union Ministers J P Nadda and Kiren Rijiju. However, discussions remained incomplete which made him reconvene the meeting at 4:30 PM. Nadda and Rijiju were absent, and the government was represented by the Union Minister L Murugan. It was the first time Dhankhar was seen visibly unhappy, and then he rescheduled the meeting for July 22 at 1 PM.

Within hours in the late evening the sudden and most unexpected move of resignation came, which surprised most of the leaders including from the BJP, perhaps excepting the political leadership of the ruling establishment in the help of affair. What upset Dhankhar so much prompting him to resign? It remains the matter of speculation. Health was not immediate concern, but has been a long-term concern for him since March 2025, when he was hospitalized for certain heart problem and was discharged after a few days with advice for rest.

Opposition has linked Dhankhar's resignation to his being humiliated by the BJP leaders, on at least two occasions in the day. Congress leader Jairam Ramesh has said that at 4:30 PM BAC awaited Nadda and Rijiju, who never came. Dhankhar was not personally informed that the two senior Ministers were not attending. He said that something very serious happened yesterday between 1 PM and 4:30 PM to account for the deliberate absence of the ministers. Jairam Ramesh also recalled how Dhankhar fearlessly referred to "ahankara" in public life.

It has been noted by many and highlighted by Congress that JP Nadda had said during the opposition's protest in the Rajya Sabha, "Nothing will go on record, only what I say will go on record". There is a speculation that this might have hurt Dhankhar and he was presiding over the Rajya Sabha at that time.

JP Nadda has defended himself and said, "As for what I said in the Rajya Sabha, that whatever I say will go on record, it was directed at the interrupting Opposition MPs, not at the Chair". On his and Rijiju's absence, he said, "Kiren Rijiju and I did not attend the meeting called by the Vice President at 4:30 PM because we were occupied with other important parliamentary work, and prior intimation was given to the office of the Honourable Vice President."

There is another speculation which is related to the opposition's impeachment motion against Justice Yashwant Varma. There are reports suggesting that there the government was not happy with the way Dhankhar was handling the impeachment motion. Another speculation is about disagreement on the issue of justice S K Yadav's impeachment whose pro-Hindutva statement made in a VHP event had created great controversy in the past.

The political context, timing, and the way Dhankhar's resignation has come, are suggestive of some serious differences between the Vice President and the Union government on various issues, and the absolute political control of PM Narendra Modi. Criticising or differing with him will have to be paid by a "heavy price" though officially stated reasons may be different. (IPA Service)

After first six months of Trump 2.0, Americans are still confused on gains or losses

By: T N Ashok

US President Donald J Trump completed 180 days in his 2nd presidency on Sunday that was marked by a high-octane governance full of confrontations, chaos, and calculated populism. Trump is barreling into his seventh month in office with the throttle wide open—and the brakes seemingly off.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick's Sunday remarks promised a "record-breaking" fortnight ahead as Trump's White House pushes for last-minute tariff deals with over two dozen trade partners. But beneath the noise of impending mega-deals and tariff threats lies a swirling mix of global tensions, unfinished diplomacy, immigration crackdowns, citizenship upheavals, and a crypto-fuelled shadow economy that increasingly defines the Trump Doctrine 2.0.

Trump has fired off formal tariff threats to 25 countries marking this week, including top trading allies like Canada, Mexico, and the European Union. Come August 1, steep new tariffs—ranging from 10% for smaller economies to a punishing 35% for larger players—will take effect unless they capitulate to U.S. demands.

The 27-nation EU block which accounts for near \$ one trillion trade is defying solution and a mega beautiful trade deal with India is still elusive as that country is driving a hard bargain on agricultural imports from U.S., while willing to concede lower tariffs on a variety of goods from America including automobiles, whiskey and some manufactured goods on a lower tariff base.

"The next two weeks will be for the record books," Commerce Secretary Lutnick declared on Face the Nation, echoing the administration's belief that pressure equals progress. The message? Comply or pay.

At the heart of this strategy lies a high-stakes standoff with the EU. Last year alone, trade between the U.S. and the 27-nation bloc crossed \$975 billion. Trump has now threatened to slap a 30% tariff on European exports if a deal isn't struck, escalating from April's already controversial 20% hike. That means a whopping 50% tariffs totally unacceptable to EU.

Brussels has responded in kind, warning of retaliatory tariffs targeting American agriculture, tech, and autos—effectively reviving fears of a 21st-century transatlantic trade war.

Meanwhile, Mexico and Canada—still reeling from the fantentary crisis accusations and Trump's immigration-linked tariff policies—face their own ultimatums. Starting next month, tariffs on their exports to the U.S. will spike to 30% and 35%, respectively, from the 1st batch of 25% announced, unless new agreements are finalized. Trump has tied their compliance not just to trade, but to drug interdiction and border enforcement—an audacious linkage of commerce to crime fighting.

Despite skepticism from the international press and even within U.S. industry, Lutnick insists the Trump approach is paying off. "They're coming to the table," he said Sunday. "They'll open their markets, or they'll pay."

India, one of Trump's marquee trade targets



Mexico and Canada—still reeling from the fantentary crisis accusations and Trump's immigration-linked tariff policies—face their own ultimatums. Starting next month, tariffs on their exports to the U.S. will spike to 30% and 35%, respectively, from the 1st batch of 25% announced, unless new agreements are finalized. Trump has tied their compliance not just to trade, but to drug interdiction and border enforcement—an audacious linkage of commerce to crime fighting

during his campaign, remains a diplomatic Rubik's Cube. While Trump announced in April the framework for what he called a "big beautiful trade deal" with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, little has been finalized. Behind the scenes, thorny issues remain: tariffs on U.S. dairy and medical devices, e-commerce restrictions, digital data localization, and disputes over defence offsets.

Trump famously called his 2nd buddy Modi "tough but fair," but, White House sources suggest frustration is growing. With some states elections looming in India in 2026, New Delhi is wary of appearing overly compliant to Washington's muscle-flexing. That said, backdoor crypto cooperation—especially regarding American blockchain firms operating in India—has seen quiet progress.

Arguably the most bizarre yet effective fundraising mechanism in modern American politics, Trump's re-election campaign and MAGA media empire have been boosted by the unofficial "TrumpCoin"—a meme-based cryptocurrency surging among his supporters and alt-finance fans.

While not formally endorsed, TrumpCoin has become de facto campaign cash, accepted at MAGA rallies, stores, and even some conservative media paywalls. More controversially, insiders allege that Trump's sons, Don Jr. and Eric, are leveraging offshore partnerships—particularly through Dubai-based World Liberty Financial and its Abu Dhabi-linked promoters—to float crypto assets with limited oversight.

A \$2 billion deal has been clinched with Abu Dhabi financiers that endorses Trumps meme USD1 in an exchange called binance for trading.

Critics cry foul, accusing the administration of blurring public service with profit. Supporters shrug it off as just smart branding. Either way, crypto is now a central pillar of the Trump ecosystem—and a potential ethics minefield.

In one of the most dramatic shifts since January, Trump has launched what civil rights advocates call the "citizenship purge."

Executive orders have curtailed birthright cit-

izenship for children of undocumented immigrants—an initiative first teased in 2019 but now in full effect. Simultaneously, a new Denaturalization Task Force under DHS has begun reviewing over 150,000 naturalization cases for potential fraud. On record some 700,000 immigration files leading to citizenship are being reviewed under a magnifying lens with an intent to denaturalise as many as possible.

This has made some 20 million naturalised citizens in recent years edgy, nervous and fearing the axe with threats of deportation even if they had made clerical errors such as spellings in names or hid their past with regard to even minor offences at the time of their application.

Already, hundreds of cases have been filed in federal courts, triggering panic among immigrant communities, especially in swing states like Arizona, Georgia, and Nevada.

ICE raids have returned to their early-Trump-era intensity, with televised deportation operations in Chicago, Houston, and Los Angeles gaining MAGA approval but sparking nationwide protests. In one viral video, a Chicago father of three—naturalized in 2008—was detained over a decade-old tax discrepancy flagged by DHS's revamped citizenship review algorithm.

Little bothered about the Chicago's father predicament, Trump, posted on Truth Social: "If you lied to get here, you don't get to stay. Simple."

While Trump presses forward with trade deals and nationalistic policy triumphs, the re-emergence of the Jeffrey Epstein files has darkened the media landscape. A federal judge is reviewing a DOJ motion to unseal grand jury transcripts—potentially revealing names, travel logs, and communications between Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell, and elite figures, including ex-presidents and billionaires.

Trump, whose name appears in several sealed documents (including a now-leaked birthday message allegedly sent to Epstein), denies all wrongdoing and has filed a \$10 billion libel lawsuit against the Wall Street Journal. The lawsuit accuses the paper of "malicious fabrication" and demands the court block future reporting related to Epstein unless cleared by a federal review board—an unprecedented ask.

"This is the Deep State's last gasp," Trump said at a rally in Tampa, waving a manila folder labelled THE BIG, BEAUTIFUL FILE. "They tried Russia. They tried impeachment. Now it's this."

Despite a loyal MAGA base that roars at every rally, signs of fatigue are emerging. Crypto scams, rising grocery prices from tariff fallout, and the unrelenting focus on vengeance politics are beginning to alienate suburban independents.

In private polling shared with CBS, 37% of Trump 2020 voters say they are "less likely" to vote for him in 2026 midterm unless economic conditions improve. Some cite deportation overreach. Others point to the messy fallout from the EU trade brinkmanship, which has hurt mid-western exporters and wine importers alike. American farmers in the south and mid west sit on wire hoping for a fruitful and successful outcome that is beneficial to them.

Yet Trump thrives in chaos—and may even be counting on it.

In the coming two weeks, the world will watch whether Trump can seal headline-grabbing trade wins or whether the retaliatory spiral deepens. Canada and Mexico remain tentative. Europe is furious. India plays chess while Trump punches.

At home, expect more denaturalization cases, intensified deportations, and further cryptic leaks about the Epstein files. And with Trump promising to unveil "the most important executive order in American history" by August 15—rumored to involve AI surveillance and election security—the chaos of the presidency is far from cooling.

Six months in, Trump isn't just rewriting the playbook. He's tearing it up, line by line—and daring the world to blink. (IPA Service)

Middle East joint statement sparks debate

Australia's Parliament resumes with pro-Palestinian protests, calls for Israel sanctions

MELBOURNE, July 22: Australia's Parliament resumed Tuesday for the first time since the centre-left Labour Party won one of the nation's largest-ever majorities in the May elections. The day was largely ceremonial, with reminders of conflict in the Middle East.

Hundreds of pro-Palestinian demonstrators gathered outside Parliament House on Tuesday, calling for the government to impose sanctions on Israel after Australia joined another 27 countries in issuing a joint statement, saying the war in Gaza "must end now."

Security guards prevented 15 demonstrators from entering the public gallery of the Senate while Attorney-General Sam Mostyn, who represents Australia's head of state King Charles III, was giving a speech to lawmakers on Tuesday afternoon, Australian Broadcasting Corp reported.

But Sen Mehreen Faruqi, deputy leader of the minor party Australian Greens, made a silent protest by holding up a sign in the chamber during Mostyn's speech that said: "Gaza is starving, words won't feed them, sanction Israel."

Australia has imposed financial and travel sanctions on individual Israelis, including government ministers Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich. But the Australian government has not imposed wider sanctions on the state.

Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke described the joint statement as the strongest



words his government had used on the Middle East conflict.

"When you can make a statement together with so many other significant powers, then we're all hoping that there'll be something that will break this," Burke told ABC.

"What we are watching on the other side of the world is indefensible. The hostages still need to be released, but the war needs to end," Burke added. But senior opposition lawmaker Jonathon Duniam described Australia joining 27 other nations in signing the statement as "alarming."

"There is more to this issue than this letter betrays and I think it is a sad turn of events

for our government to have joined with other countries in signing this letter," Duniam said. Australia's 48th Parliament was opened with Indigenous ceremonies in Parliament House on a day that was otherwise steeped in centuries of British Westminster political tradition.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese thanked the traditional owners of the national capital, Canberra, at a Welcome to Country ceremony. He noted that such ceremonies performed by Indigenous people to welcome visitors to their traditional land at the start of a new parliament had been introduced by a Labor government in 2007.

"In the 48th Parliament, we write the next chapter. Let us do it with the same sense of grace and courage that First Nations people show us with their leadership," Albanese said.

Biggest Australian government majority since 1996

Labour won 94 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives, where governments are formed. Labour's majority is the largest since Prime Minister John Howard's conservative coalition won 94 seats in 1996, when the lower chamber had only 148 seats.

Howard stayed in power for almost 12 years, and Albanese is the first prime minister since then to lead a party to consecutive election victories, following an extraordinary era of political instability.

The main opposition Liberal Party has elected its first woman leader, Sussan Ley, after one of the party's worst election results on record.

Her conservative coalition holds 43 seats in the House, while independent lawmakers and minor parties that are not aligned with either the government or opposition hold 13.

No party holds a majority in the 76-seat Senate. Labour holds 29 seats and the conservatives 27 seats. The Australian Greens hold 10 seats, which is the next largest bloc.

The government will likely prefer to negotiate with the conservatives or Greens to get legislation through the Senate, rather than deal with multiple minor parties and independents. (AP)

Zelenskyy renews offer to meet with Putin as officials say Russian attacks kill child in Ukraine

KYIV, July 22: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Tuesday renewed his offer to meet with Russian leader Vladimir Putin and negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine, as delegations from both governments prepared to hold a third round of direct talks.

Russian forces, meanwhile, pounded three Ukrainian cities in nighttime attacks that officials said killed a child.

Putin has spurned Zelenskyy's previous offers of a face-to-face meeting to end Europe's biggest conflict since World War II.

But the Ukrainian leader insists that lower-level delegations like

cities.

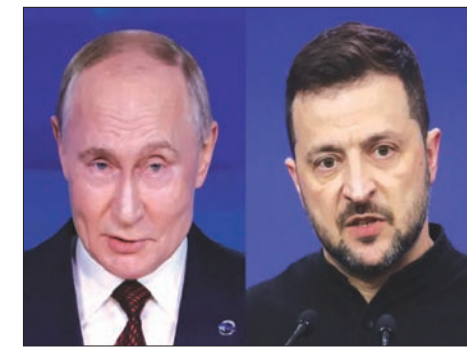
Zelenskyy said that at the next Istanbul talks, Ukraine wants to secure the release of more prisoners from Russian captivity and the return of children Ukraine says were abducted.

The Ukrainian delegation will be headed by former Defence Minister Rustem Umerov, who is now the secretary of the National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine. It will include representatives of Ukrainian intelligence, the Foreign Affairs Ministry, and the president's office, Zelenskyy said.

Russian forces struck four Ukrainian cities in three regions

in overnight attacks, killing a child and wounding at least 24 other people, officials said Tuesday, a day before a planned third round of direct peace talks between delegations from Moscow and Kyiv.

From dusk on Monday evening, Russia struck the Ukrainian regions of Sumy in the northeast, Odesa in the



the ones expected for talks in Istanbul on Wednesday don't have the political heft to stop the fighting, when each side's demands on ending Russia's full-scale invasion, launched on Feb. 24, 2022, of its neighbor remain so far apart.

"Ukraine never wanted this war, and it is Russia that must end the war that it itself started," Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post.

Zelenskyy's announcement late Monday that the negotiations would take place generated little hope that they would deliver any progress on ending the war. That is despite the Trump administration's efforts to push forward peace efforts, which have stalled because Putin is reluctant to budge from his demands.

The previous two rounds were held in Istanbul, and Russian media reports said that the Turkish city likely would also host the meeting this time. The talks in May and June led to a series of exchanges of prisoners of war and the bodies of fallen soldiers, but produced no other agreements.

The war has continued unabated, meanwhile. Russia is driving hard to break through at eastern and northeastern points on the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line. It is also firing upwards of 700 drones a night at Ukrainian

south and eastern Kramatorsk.

In Kramatorsk, a glide bomb hit an apartment building, starting a fire, according to the head of the city's military administration, Oleksandr Honcharenko. A boy born in 2015 was killed, local officials said, without giving his exact age. Five other people were reported wounded.

The Sumy region came under multiple waves of attacks, the regional military administration reported. A drone hit a gas station in the town of Putyvl, wounding four people, including a 5-year-old boy, it said. A second drone strike hit the same location less than two hours later, wounding seven other people.

After dark, two powerful Russian glide bombs were dropped on Sumy city, wounding 13 people, including a 6-year-old boy. According to regional authorities, five apartment buildings, two private homes and a shopping mall were damaged in the attack. The blasts shattered windows and destroyed balconies in residential buildings, acting Mayor Artem Kobzar said.

Russia's Defence Ministry, meanwhile, said Tuesday that air defences downed 35 Ukrainian long-range drones over several regions overnight, including three over the Moscow region. (AP)

Australian Parliament resumes after Labor's landslide election victory

MELBOURNE, July 22: Australia's Parliament resumed Tuesday for the first time since the centre-left Labor Party won one of the nation's largest-ever majorities in the May elections.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese thanked the traditional owners of the national capital Canberra at a Welcome to Country ceremony in Parliament House. He noted that such ceremonies performed by Indigenous people to welcome visitors to their traditional land at the start of a new parliament had been introduced by a Labor government in 2007. "In the 48th Parliament, we write the next chapter. Let us do it with the same sense of grace and courage that First Nations people show us with their leadership," Albanese said.

The government has said the first legislation will be a bill to reduce student loan debt by 20 per cent. The measure to be introduced Wednesday will benefit 3 million Australians with student loan debts and cost the government 16 billion Australian dollars (\$10 billion).

The government also plans to introduce laws that would cut funding to child care providers who fail to meet quality standards and that would provide legal protections for some wage rates.

Labour won 94 seats in the 150-seat House of Representatives where governments are formed. Labour's majority is the largest since Prime Minister John Howard's conservative coalition won 94 seats in 1996, when the lower chamber had only 148 seats.

Howard stayed in power almost 12 years, and Albanese is the first prime minister since then to lead a party to consecutive election victories, following an extraordinary era of political instability.

The main opposition Liberal Party has elected its first woman leader, Sussan Ley, after one of the party's worst election results on record. (AP)

Looming over two cases threatening Musk's car company is a single question: Can he be trusted?

MIAMI, July 22: Elon Musk fought court cases on opposite coasts Monday, raising a question about the billionaire that could either speed his plan to put self-driving Teslas on US roads or throw up a major roadblock: Can this wildly successful man who tends to exaggerate really be trusted?

In Miami, a Tesla driver who has admitted he was wrong to reach for a dropped cell phone moments before a deadly accident, spoke of the danger of putting too much faith in Musk's technology — in this case his Autopilot programme.

"I trusted the technology too much," said George McGee, who ran off the road and killed a woman out stargazing with her boyfriend. "I believed that if the car saw something in front of it, it would provide a warning and apply the brakes."

In unusual coincidence, regulators arguing an Oakland, California, case tried to pin exaggerated talk about the same Tesla technology at the centre of a request to suspend the carmaker from being

last week to a Florida family of a Tesla driver. That said, Tesla was victorious in two other jury cases, both in California, that also sought to lay blame on its technology for crashes.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs in the Miami case argue that Tesla's driver-assistance feature, called Autopilot, should have warned the driver and braked when his Model S sedan blew through flashing lights, a stop sign and a T-intersection at 62 miles-an-hour in an April 2019 crash. Tesla said that drivers are warned not to rely on Autopilot, or its more advanced Full Self-Driving system. It says the fault entirely lies with the "distracted driver" just like so many other "accidents since cellphones were invented."

Driver McGee settled a separate suit brought by the family of Benavides and her severely injured boyfriend, Dillon Angulo.

McGee was clearly shaken when shown a dashcam video Monday of his car jumping a Key West, Florida, road and hitting a parked Chevrolet Tahoe which then slammed into Benavides and sent her 75 feet through the air to her death. Asked if he had seen those images before, McGee pinched his lips, shook his head, then squeaked out a response, "No."

Tesla's attorney sought to show that McGee was fully to blame, asking if he had ever contacted Tesla for additional instructions about

how Autopilot or any other safety features worked. McGee said he had not, though he was heavy user of the features. He said he had driven the same road home from work 30 or 40 times. Under questioning he also acknowledged he alone was responsible for watching the road and hitting the brakes.

But lawyers for the Benavides family had another chance to parry that line of argument and asked McGee if he would have taken his eyes off the road and reached for his phone had he been driving any car other than a Tesla on Autopilot.

McGee responded, "I don't believe so."

The case is expected to continue for two more weeks.

In the California case, the state's Department of Motor Vehicles is arguing before an administrative judge that Tesla has misled drivers by exaggerating the capabilities of its Autopilot and Full Self-Driving features. A court filing claims even those feature names are misleading because they offer just partial self-driving.

Musk has been warned by federal regulators to stop making public comments suggesting Full Self-Driving allows his cars to drive themselves because it could lead to overreliance on the system, resulting in possible crashes and deaths. He also has run into trouble with regulators for Autopilot. In 2023, the company had to recall 2.3 million vehicles for problems with the technology and is now under investigation for saying it fixed the issue though it's unclear it has, according to regulatory documents. (AP)

Trump, Philippine leader plan to talk tariffs, China at White House

WASHINGTON, July 22: President Donald Trump plans to host Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr on Tuesday at the White House, as the two countries are seeking closer security and economic ties in the face of shifting geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region. Marcos, who met Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth on Monday, is set to become the first Southeast Asian leader to hold talks with Trump in his second term.

Marcos' three-day visit shows the importance of the alliance between the treaty partners at a time when China is increasingly assertive in the South China Sea, where Manila and Beijing have clashed over the hotly contested Scarborough Shoal.

Washington sees Beijing, the world's No 2 economy, as its biggest competitor, and consecutive presidential administrations have sought to shift US military and economic focus to the Asia-Pacific in a bid to counter China. Trump, like others before him, has



been distracted by efforts to broker peace in a range of conflicts, from Ukraine to Gaza.

Tariffs also are expected to be on the agenda. Trump has threatened to impose 20% tariffs on Filipino goods on Aug 1 unless the two sides can strike a deal.

"I intend to convey to President Trump and his Cabinet officials that the Philippines is ready to negotiate a bilateral trade deal that will ensure strong, mutually beneficial and future-oriented collaborations that only the United States and the Philippines will be able to take advantage of," Marcos said Sunday when he was departing for

Washington, according to his office.

Manila is open to offering zero tariffs on some US goods to strike a deal with Trump, finance chief Ralph Recto told local journalists.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt hinted that a trade agreement with the Philippines was in the works. "Perhaps this will be a topic of discussion," she told reporters Monday when asked about tariff negotiations.

The White House said Trump will discuss with Marcos the shared commitment to upholding a free, open, prosperous and secure Indo-Pacific. (AP)

White House says Donald Trump is serious about wanting the Commanders to revert to Redskins

WASHINGTON, July 22: A day after Donald Trump threatened to hold up a deal for a new football stadium in the nation's capital if the Washington Commanders did not go back to the name Redskins, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said the president's comments were not a joke.

"The president was serious," Leavitt told reporters Monday while answering questions on the White House driveway. "Sports is one of the many passions of this president and he wants to see the name of that team changed."

Asked why he's getting involved, Leavitt called Trump a "nontraditional president" and said sports fans are behind him on this.

"I think you've seen the president gets involved in a lot of things that most presidents have not," Leavitt said. "He's a nontraditional president. He likes to see results on behalf of the American people and, if you actually poll this issue with sports fans across the country, and even in this city, people actually do support the president's position on this and the name change."

After former President Joe Biden signed a bill passed by Congress late last year to transfer land from the federal government to the District of Columbia, DC Mayor Muriel Bowser and the team reached an agreement in April to build on the site of the old RFK Stadium. That is still pending approval by the Council of the District of Columbia.

"I think the thing that we should focus on in DC is doing our part," Bowser said. "I have worked for the better part of 10 years to get our part completed, including getting control of the land, coming to an agreement with the team and advancing a fantastic agreement to the council, so we need to do our part."

Dan Snyder, who had said multiple times as owner since 1999 that he would never change the name, did so in July 2020 after facing mounting pressure from sponsors and critics. Washington Football Team was used for two seasons before Commanders was unveiled as the permanent name in early 2022.

Josh Harris, whose group bought the team from Snyder in 2023, said earlier this year the Commanders name was here to stay.

4 killed in flash floods in Gilgit-Baltistan

ISLAMABAD, July 22: At least four tourists were killed, two injured, and 15 reported missing after flash floods triggered by a cloudburst hit Gilgit-Baltistan region in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The incident occurred on Monday in Diamer district, sweeping away eight tourist vehicles, Faizullah Farag, a spokesperson for the regional government, said.

Four bodies, including that of a woman from Lodhran in Pakistan's Punjab province, have been recovered so far, while the injured and deceased were shifted to a local hospital.

The flash floods also blocked the Babusar Highway and disrupted communication and electricity in the area. Hundreds of stranded tourists were rescued, with local residents providing temporary shelter. Farag added. (PTI)

PoK migrants using fake documents to get UK visa

LONDON, July 22: Migrants from the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) region have been using fake documents to gain an entry visa into the UK, and then many going on to file for asylum in the country, a UK media investigation has claimed.

"The Daily Telegraph" newspaper said an undercover probe revealed that migrants are paying up to 50,000 pounds for visa applications packed with false information, identifying one such consultant based in Mirpur who facilitates the process.

One application to the UK Home Office obtained by the newspaper included a job reference from a "fake hospital" in PoK.

Pakistanis top the chart of nationalities claiming asylum in the UK, followed by Afghanistan, Iran and Bangladesh. However, they are not among the top nationalities arriving in the UK illegally via small boats.



"They don't need to come on small boats because they come on visas. They are one of the biggest groups that come on visas, and don't go back," immigration lawyer Harjap Bhargava was quoted as saying.

As part of the newspaper's undercover investigation, someone posing as an applicant used a fake CV and letter attesting to employment history to be submitted in a

UK work visa application that was "ultimately successful".

The UK Home Office reacted to the revelations to say that it is investigating the claims thrown up by the investigation as it continues to revoke licences from those who abuse the Skilled Worker visa route.

"Illegal activity will not be tolerated and we will stop at nothing to ensure our immigration rules are

respected and enforced. That is why we are investigating these claims and already taking firm action to disrupt illegal activity when it is found, including suspending licences, pursuing enforcement, and strengthening safeguards to protect the integrity of the immigration system," a Home Office spokesperson said.

"Over the last year, there have been 40 per cent fewer visa applications, we have removed nearly 30,000 people with no right to be here and arrests from illegal working raids are up 51 per cent. We are also introducing new powers to immediately suspend registered advisers and organisations suspected of carrying out the most flagrant abuse of the system," the spokesperson said.

Under UK law, anyone providing fake visas overseas can be reported to Action Fraud and the intelligence is analysed by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau. (PTI)

Arunachal to get India's first fully indigenous 50-kw geothermal power plant

'Project is expected to be completed in three years'



ITANAGAR, July 22: India's first fully indigenous geothermal power plant will be developed in Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Tuesday.

The 50-kw plant will be developed at a record low of 68 degrees Celsius, they said.

In this regard, the Centre for Earth Sciences and Himalayan Studies (CESHS) and Shiram In-

stitute for Industrial Research have inked a memorandum of understanding.

CESHS geoscience chief Runkar Rajkhowa said the project will come up in Tawang district.

"We have already identified three places -- Mago, Thingbu and Damteng, and the research and structural mapping has been done," he said, adding that the

project will cater to a population of over 5,000.

Rajkhowa said the project is expected to be completed in three years.

Maintaining that it's a first-of-its-kind in the Himalayan region, he said the project will be completed at a cost of over Rs 10 crore, funded by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

A team of scientists from CESHS, led by its director Tana Tage, recently visited the demonstration site of an indigenously developed 20-kw geothermal power plant at SIIR.

SIIR's geothermal project manager Bhupesh Sharma said multiple trials have been conducted using a smaller 5-kw lab-scale model to better understand the operational challenges of indigenous bipolar process technology, particularly at a lower temperature of just 68 degrees Celsius.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu said, "Arunachal Pradesh & CESHS take a visionary step by signing an MoU to develop India's first fully indigenous 50kw geothermal power plant at a record low of 68 degrees C. Harnessing Earth's energy, driving innovation, and leading India's clean energy revolution from the Himalayas!"

"It will be a milestone in clean energy and geothermal research," he added.

Established in 2021 under the Department of Science and Technology, CESHS is dedicated to research in climatology, geoscience, hydrology, and renewable energy. (PTI)

APYO demands immediate action against substandard flyover work in Naharlagun



HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, July 22: The Arunachal Pradesh Youth Organisation (APYO) has demanded immediate corrective action against alleged substandard construction work being carried out on the under-construction flyovers under Package-B of National Highway 415 in Naharlagun.

The organisation has also threatened to launch a democratic movement if the authorities fail to address the issue within a stipulated time.

In an official statement issued following a press conference at the Arunachal Press Club on Tuesday afternoon, APYO president Kipa Kanam expressed serious concern over the quality of work being executed by the construction firm M/S Woodhill Shivam and supervised by the monitoring agency AECOM JV.

He alleged that materials not conforming to the prescribed guidelines of flyover construction were being used, raising fears of structural instability and potential loss of life and property.

"We are not against the development work being undertaken. However, we are deeply concerned that if the flyovers are not constructed in strict adherence to na-

tional standards, they could pose a serious threat in the future. In case of a structural collapse, who will be held responsible?" Kanam questioned.

The youth body specifically pointed out that 18 pillars in the middle of Naharlagun township have allegedly been constructed in violation of laid down specifications, raising doubts over their structural integrity.

"The presence of these 18 pillars, which appear to be poorly constructed, has led us to question the overall durability and quality of the entire Package-B stretch," the APYO statement read.

The organisation confirmed that it has submitted formal complaints regarding the matter to the Chief Minister, the Chief Engineer of Highways, and other concerned authorities.

The APYO has demanded an immediate halt to any ongoing work on these 18 pillars and their complete removal, citing public safety concerns.

The APYO has also met with the Capital Deputy Commissioner Toko Babu and submitted a detailed memorandum outlining their concerns.

Following this, the Deputy Commissioner reportedly consti-

tuted a committee to examine the allegations.

The organisation has now urged the committee to expedite its investigation and submit its findings at the earliest.

"We demand that strict action be taken against all erring officials involved in the supervision and execution of the Package-B flyover work. Those not complying with the construction norms must be suspended immediately," said Kanam.

The APYO further criticised the monitoring agency AECOM JV for allegedly failing in its responsibility to ensure proper oversight.

"While AECOM JV had undertaken the responsibility for quality control, the present state of the flyover construction is unacceptable. We insist that the 18 pillars be reconstructed using proper materials within 15 days. If this demand is not fulfilled, we will be compelled to launch a democratic agitation," the organisation stated.

The press release concluded with a call for transparency, accountability, and strict adherence to construction norms to prevent any future mishaps and to ensure public trust in large-scale infrastructure projects within the Capital region.

Er Toko Onuj appointed to Governing Council of National Power Training Institute



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, July 22: The Ministry of Power, Government of India, has appointed Er Toko Onuj, Chairman-cum-Managing Director of the Hydro Power Development Corporation of Arunachal Pradesh Ltd. (HPDCAPL), as a Member of the Governing Council of the National Power Training Institute (NPTI) for a period of three years, with effect from July 1, 2025.

According to an official statement, Er Onuj has been inducted into the apex training body under the Ministry as a representative from the power sector of Northeast India.

His appointment is expected to provide the Governing Council with valuable regional insight and technical expertise from the region.

The Governing Council of NPTI is chaired by the Secretary, Ministry of Power, Government of India, and comprises representatives from State Electricity Boards or Departments and other eminent individuals from fields such as technical education, power equipment manufacturing, renewable energy, energy conservation, and rural electrification.

Members are selected on a rotational basis to provide strategic guidance and policy inputs for the institute's functioning.

NPTI, an ISO 9001 and ISO 14001 certified autonomous organisation headquartered in Faridabad, Haryana, functions as the national apex body for human resource development in the power sector.

With over five decades of legacy, it has trained more than 4.7 lakh professionals and is recognised internationally for its integrated training approach across thermal, hydro, renewable energy, transmission, distribution, and regulatory domains.

The institute also offers an MBA in Power Management and operates 11 centres across India.

Its training programmes are bolstered by generation simulators to improve operational efficiency in power plants.

NPTI also conducts international training programmes under the ITEC initiative of the Ministry of External Affairs and has partnerships with over 160 countries.

The appointment of Er Toko Onuj is seen as a recognition of his leadership and contributions to the power sector in Arunachal Pradesh and the Northeast region.

The official statement added that his inclusion in the Governing Council is expected to strengthen the regional representation in national-level policy and training initiatives.

200 got new lease of life by kidney transplant under state-run scheme in 7 yrs: Arunachal CM



ITANAGAR, July 22: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday said more than 200 patients got a fresh lease of life by kidney transplants under a state-run scheme in the last seven years.

He highlighted the ongoing implementation of the Chief Minister Organ Transplant Scheme (CMOTS), reinforcing the state's commitment to saving lives through critical support.

The chief minister, in a social media post, advocated a fundamental shift in the state's healthcare approach towards prevention and wellness.

"Over the last 7 years, we've helped more than 200 patients receive a second chance at life through kidney transplants. Now, we're building on that progress. Under the new Chief Minister Organ Transplant Scheme (CMOTS), we're expanding support of ₹ 10 lakh for kidney transplants, ₹ 15 lakh for bone marrow transplants, ₹ 20 lakh for liver transplants," he said in a post on X.

However, Khandu emphasised that treatment alone is not enough to build a healthy society.

"Real progress is when people don't fall sick in the first place. We've got to change how we think about healthcare. Because a healthy society doesn't start in the operating room. It starts at home, in our communities, in how we live," he said.

The chief minister urged the health department to prioritise prevention through real investment in

awareness, education, and lifestyle change.

The state government has allocated an amount of ₹ 369 crore for the health sector in the 2025-26 fiscal.

CMOTS is currently in effect and is part of the government's broader health sector roadmap.

A key component of the scheme involves strengthening the state's capability in kidney transplants through a dedicated programme at the Tomo Riba Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (TRIHS) at Naharlagun, near here.

TRIHS is collaborating with the Chandigarh-based Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), India's leading centre for transplant medicine and research.

State Health and Family Welfare Minister Biyuram Wahge recently visited PGIMER, where he met Director Prof Vivek Lal and a team of specialists to discuss a phased implementation plan tailored to Arunachal's unique healthcare needs.

Wahge later shared that PGIMER has agreed to provide comprehensive technical and logistical support to Arunachal Pradesh, which will include capacity building, training, infrastructure development, and long-term institutional collaboration.

The state government is also partnering with various other organisations to increase awareness about organ donation and to scale up transplant-related services. (PTI)

Arunachal Pradesh State-Level Shooting Championship to be held on August 9-10

HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, July 22: The Arunachal Pradesh Rifle Association (APRA) has announced that the State-Level Shooting Championship 2025 will be held on August 9 and 10 at the shooting range located within the campus of Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU), Doimukh in Papum Pare district.

Apa, who is also a senior police officer in the Arunachal Pradesh Police, informed that all preparations for the two-day championship are currently in full swing.

According to an official statement, the Police Headquarters has confirmed that key logistical and technical arrangements are being finalised at the shooting venue in RGU, which has been selected for its accessibility and adequate infrastructure.

The APRA president stated that members of the association have been working rigorously to ensure the smooth organisation of the championship.

"The team members of the Arunachal Pradesh Rifle Association are actively engaged in various activities, including range preparation, coordination with technical officials, and overseeing registration logistics," he said.

As per the official statement, the registration process for participants will open on August 2 and continue until August 7.

All registered shooters from across the state have been urged to enrol within the registration window to

confirm their participation.

Shooters affiliated with recognised clubs and institutions are eligible to register and compete in the championship, which is expected to witness participation from aspiring marksmen and seasoned shooters alike.

The championship is part of APRA's continued efforts to promote the sport of shooting in Arunachal Pradesh and provide a platform for local talents to showcase and refine their skills.

"This championship is not just a competition, but an opportunity for shooters from the state to come together, learn, and prepare themselves for higher levels of competition," Apa added.

For updates or clarification related to registration or participation, interested shooters and clubs may contact any of the APRA executive members.

General Secretary Jackey Teli Camdir has been designated as one of the key contact persons for queries.

Apa appealed to all eligible shooters in the state to take part in the championship and make the most of the opportunity.

"I urge all shooters of Arunachal Pradesh to participate in the upcoming championship and help us in our mission to build a strong sporting culture in the state," he said, while also expressing confidence that the event would be a grand success with the collective efforts of participants, organisers, and supporting agencies.

10 villages in Namsai get drinking water from Integrated Water Treatment Plant

'I have come from Dibrugarh with my family. This place is beautiful and well maintained,' said Manob Mahanta, a visitor from Assam



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, July 22: An Integrated Water Treatment Plant at Medo in Arunachal Pradesh's Namsai district is providing free drinking water to 10 villages under the Chongkham block, benefiting a population of around 22,000.

Implemented by the Public Health and Engineering Department (PHED), Namsai Division, the facility is supplying water to 1,285 households across 10 habitations.

Built with an outlay of ₹32 crore, the plant has a treatment capacity of 2.70 million litres per day (MLD). It sources water from a jack well constructed in a riverbed and is powered by both solar energy and conventional supply, with generator backup during outages.

"The project was established about five years ago. Now, around 22,000 residents are receiving clean water daily," said an official of the water treatment plant.

Local residents had donated ap-

proximately 3.3 acres of land to facilitate the construction of the plant.

The facility has also emerged as a tourist destination, with visitors from Assam and neighbouring regions frequenting the site to enjoy the scenic beauty and beat the summer heat.

"The revenue generated from tourism is used for the plant's maintenance," said Haage Guro, Junior Engineer, PHED.

He added that the plant has become a popular summer retreat, attracting tourists from Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar and other parts of Assam.

"I have come from Dibrugarh with my family. This place is beautiful and well maintained," said Manob Mahanta, a visitor from Assam.

The water treatment plant stands as a rare example of a government welfare project successfully meeting its twin objectives of public service and local economic activity.

3 arrested for sexually assaulting minor in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, July 22: Three persons have been arrested for sexually assaulting a minor in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district, police said on Tuesday.

The incident happened near Manabum Nala on July 18, Changlang Superintendent of Police Kirli Padu said.

Acting swiftly on a report by a relative of the victim, a police team led by Inspector Ongsa Romrang arrested the three accused on Tuesday. The SP said cases under Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, and POCSO Act, 2012, have been registered at Diyun police station against the accused.

All accused are in judicial custody, he said.

The SP added that the survivor was medically examined and sent to a child care institute for counselling and protection. (PTI)

Grounded British fighter jet flies back

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 22: The British F-35B fighter jet flew back on Tuesday after completing maintenance, more than a month after it made an emergency landing at the international airport here, and remained parked since then.

The jet, which took off at 10.50 am, flew to Darwin in Australia, airport sources said.

"A UK F-35B aircraft, which landed following an emergency diversion on June 14, departed today from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. A UK engineering team, deployed since July 06 completed the repairs and safety checks, allowing the aircraft to resume active service," a British High Commission spokesperson said.

In a statement, the spokesperson said the UK remains very grateful for the support and collaboration of the Indian authorities and airport teams throughout the repair and recovery process.

"We look forward to continuing to strengthen our defence partnership with India," the statement said.

The jet was brought out of the hangar and kept at the airport bay on Monday.

Sources said a 14-member team of engineers from the UK, who carried out repairs on the fighter jet, will depart on Wednesday aboard a special aircraft, the Globemaster.

They said the British jet was kept at the Air India hangar throughout its stay.

While the airport sources confirmed that landing charges, daily rent, and parking fees amounting to Rs 5 - Rs 6 lakh had been paid, there was no confirmation regarding any payment made to

Air India.

The British Royal Navy F-35B Lightning fighter jet is part of the UK's most advanced stealth fleet.

Known to be one of the most advanced fighter aircraft in the world and worth over USD 110 million, the jet remained grounded at the international airport here since June 14 after it developed a technical snag.

The aircraft, which took off from HMS Prince of Wales on June 14, was unable to return to the carrier due to adverse weather conditions.

Prioritising safety, it diverted to Thiruvananthapuram International Airport, where it landed safely. Subsequently, the aircraft developed an engineering issue whilst on the ground, which temporarily delayed its return to the Carrier Strike Group.

Engineers from HMS Prince of Wales assessed the aircraft and determined that the support of a UK-based engineering team was required.

The UK accepted India's offer to move the aircraft to the Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility.

To ensure minimal disruption to regular airport operations, it was decided that the aircraft would be moved once the UK engineering teams arrived with specialist equipment.

The emergency landing by the British Royal Navy fighter jet at Thiruvananthapuram International Airport became the subject of countless memes, and even turned into a marketing opportunity for Kerala Tourism.

A poster shared by Kerala Tourism on its official 'X' handle went viral on social media.



It featured a stylised image of the fighter jet parked against a dreamy Kerala backdrop -- coconut trees and lush greenery.

A playful caption read: "Kerala is such an amazing place, I don't want to leave. Definitely recommend." The quote was humorously attributed to "UK F-35B." (PTI)

Govt slams 'double standards'

LS adjourned for day as opposition protests demanding debate on SIR

NEW DELHI, July 22: The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day on Tuesday due to protests by the opposition demanding a discussion on the ongoing voter roll revision in Bihar, even as the government accused them of practising "double standards" by asking for a debate on one hand and disrupting the House on the other.

Opposition members trooped to the Well of the Lok Sabha when the House reconvened at 2 pm after two earlier adjournments on the second day of the Monsoon session of Parliament demanding a discussion and roll back of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise initiated by the Election Commission in Bihar ahead of assembly polls scheduled for later this year.

Dilip Saikia, who was on the chair, made repeated requests to opposition MPs to go back to their places and allow the House to function.

As the protests continued, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju got up and condemned the opposition behaviour.

He said it was agreed at the Business Advisory Committee meeting on Monday that first Operation Sindoor will be taken up for discussion and the time for it had also been fixed.

"Only the rule under which discussion will take place will be decided. They come here carrying placards and violate the rules. I condemn this," Rijiju said.

"They are asking for a debate and we are ready for a debate but they are not allowing the House to function," he said, slamming the opposition.

These "double standards are wrong, on one hand they ask for debate and then create a ruckus like this," he said.

Rijiju said the government is ready but the opposition was wasting the time of Parliament.

He condemned the behaviour of the Congress and other parties.



Earlier, when the House re-convened at 12 noon, BJP member Jagdambika Pal, who was in the chair, urged the floor leaders of the opposition parties to ask their members to return to their seats and allow the House to function.

"The government is ready to discuss any issue which the Speaker allows as per the rules. I appeal to you to go back to your seats," Arjun Ram Meghwal, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, said.

Pal also urged opposition members not to show placards and instead give in writing their demands at the meetings of the Business Advisory Committee.

As ruckus continued, Pal adjourned proceedings till 2 PM.

When the House met at 11 am, opposition MPs, including Congress, were on their feet, demanding discussion on the revision of electoral rolls in Bihar and Operation Sindoor.

Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan appealed to the opposition members to go back to their seats so that the House can take up questions related to farmers during the designated time of Question Hour.

Speaker Om Birla intervened and told the opposition MPs that sloganeering and showing placards lowered the dignity of the House. He later adjourned the House till 12 noon.

The House could not function on the first day of the session on Monday due to repeated adjournments following opposition protests over the demand of discussion on Operation Sindoor.

Under Operation Sindoor, armed forces attacked Pakistani terror sites and defence installations for three days beginning May 7 following the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22 in which 26 people were killed. (PTI)

Pahalgam massacre: With attackers at large, security concerns rise

Demand to fix accountability gains traction

PAHALGAM, July 22: Three months after the brutal terror attack in Pahalgam that left many tourists dead, the perpetrators are still at large, raising concerns over security lapses in the region and sparking growing calls for fixing accountability.

While the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has made two arrests in connection with the April 22 incident, those nabbed are believed to be the ones who provided logistical support, while the actual terrorists responsible for the ghastly crime have evaded security agencies.

The security vacuum has prompted Lt Governor Manoj Sinha, who will complete his five-year term next month, to take full responsibility for what he acknowledged as a "security failure".

This admission was appreciated by Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who nonetheless called for accountability. "I appreciate the statement of the Lt Governor but an admission of failure must be followed by action," he had told PTI here recently.

"Heads must roll when such a grave mistake leads to the loss of precious lives. The people of Kashmir deserve to know what went wrong and who will be held accountable," the chief minister had said.

On April 22, a meticulously planned terror strike hit holiday-makers in Pahalgam meadows, killing 26 people -- 25 tourists and one local pony rider -- a huge setback for the counter-insurgency campaign of the government.

The strike was characteristic of careful planning and the terrorists' successful escape indicated a high level of training and local support.

The officials said that intelligence agencies had been alerted about the possibility of a terror attack, but the inputs were utilised at another place, some 90 kilometres away from the site where the attack took place, resulting in a key security lapse.

The NIA has been mandated to conduct the investigation and, so far, it has arrested two suspects who were suspected to have given shelter and food to the attackers.

The two men - Parvaiz Ahmad Jothar from Batkote, Pahalgam and Bashir Ahmad Jothar of Hill Park, Pahalgam -- were arrested by NIA on June 22.

The NIA had said the arrested accused, who are presently on remand, have disclosed the identities of the three armed terrorists involved in the attack, and have also confirmed that they were Pakistani nationals affiliated to the proscribed The Resistance Front (TRF), a proxy of Pakistan-based terror outfit Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT).

Parvaiz and Bashir had knowingly harboured the three armed terrorists at a seasonal dhok (hut) at Hill Park before the attack, according to NIA investigations.

The two men had provided food, shelter and logistical support to the terrorists, who had, on the fateful afternoon, selectively killed the tourists on the basis of their religious identity, making it one of the most gruesome terrorist attacks ever, the agency said.

CM Abdullah's demand for accountability of top officials is symptomatic of the public pressure building up to fix responsibility for security failure.

The incident has highlighted doubts over the efficiency of the security system in Kashmir and will probably be at the centre of public debate in the months ahead.

Security officials said the terrorists, members of a TRF unit known as the "Falcon Squad," breached the Pahalgam area wearing military camouflage and equipped with military-grade firearms and modern communication equipment, including a camera-fitted helmet.

The attack was reportedly planned by Saifullah Kasuri alias Khalid, a top LeT commander and personal assistant of internationally designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed, they added. They indicated that the online trail of the attackers originated from safe houses along the border in Karachi and Muzaffarabad, which implied extensive logistical integration with the LeT network in Pakistan.

They said that targeting tourists in Pahalgam represents a possible change in the operational policy of Kashmiri terror groups, indicating that the group is ready to target not only government staff and settlers but also civilian visitors under an overall strategy to destabilise the region, discourage tourists, and polarise communities. (PTI)

'Prima facie' case of money laundering in Chanda Kochhar-Videocon case; ED order upheld

NEW DELHI, July 22: An appellate tribunal has said there was a "prima facie" case of money laundering against former ICICI Bank CEO and MD Chanda Kochhar and her husband in a corruption case involving the Videocon Group, as it upheld a 2020 ED order attaching a Mumbai flat of the couple worth crores of rupees. The tribunal, in an order issued on July 3, said it finds "substance" in the "quid pro quo" allegation made by the Enforcement Directorate against Chanda Kochhar for sanction of a loan of Rs 300 crore to Videocon International Electronics Ltd (VIEL), as post this disbursement, a sum of Rs 64 crore was transferred by the Videocon Group to NRPL, a company of her husband Deepak Kochhar.

The said loan was approved by a sanctioning committee of the ICICI Bank between June 2009 and October 2011, and Chanda Kochhar was a member of this panel, apart from being the MD and CEO of the private lending company.

The ED case, based on a CBI FIR, claimed that Chanda Kochhar hatched a "criminal conspiracy" to cheat ICICI Bank by "abusing" her official position while sanctioning this amount.

Chanda Kochhar, as per the probe agencies, got illegal gratification/undue benefit through her husband from VIL or Videocon Group promoter V N Dhoot.

The ED had in January 2020 provisionally attached Kochhar's flat no 45, located in CCI Chambers at

Churchgate in Mumbai, a property of NRPL, apart from Rs 10.5 lakh in cash, seized by the agency during searches on another company of Deepak Kochhar.

The Adjudicating Authority of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) had in November 2020 refused to confirm the ED attachment, and consequently, the federal probe agency appealed before the appellate tribunal.

"It may be true that the issue will be determined by the Trial Court but we find a prima facie case against the respondents for commission of the offence of money laundering and, therefore, the Provisional Attachment Order (of the ED) is justified," the Tribunal said. It said there was "total inter-fixing of the work of the industries floated by Deepak Kochhar and even by the Videocon Group of Industries."

The tribunal rejected Chanda Kochhar's argument that she was "not knowing the business affairs of her husband" and had pleaded ignorance in her submission. The respondent (Chanda Kochhar) was expected to conduct herself as per the rules and policy of the bank and could not have pleaded ignorance about the association and affairs of the husband, it said in an 82-page order. "...the sanction of a loan of ₹ 300 crore by ICICI Bank to the Videocon Group of Industries, where Chanda Kochhar remained part of the committee, was against the rules and policy of the bank," it said. (PTI)

Pahalgam's soul yearns for return of tourists as town grapples with April 22 aftermath

PAHALGAM, July 22: As the annual Amarnath Yatra enters its final leg, people in this tourist township of Kashmir Valley, reeling in the aftermath of the April 22 terror attack, are anxiously waiting for revival of tourism with a firm belief that the soul of Pahalgam will not be held hostage to terrorism.

The hotels that were near empty post the terror strike have now been witnessing some tourists who have been braving the odds to choose Pahalgam as their destination to spend their vacation.

"I came here in 1988 and after that I decided to come now with my family to spend our holiday. The locals here are more careful about our security and guide us properly," says Sachin Waghmare, a resident of Thane district.

He said he hoped to see other nearby destinations, but they remain closed as a precautionary measure.

"I have been able to only visit Betab valley," he said, adding that the decision to visit this place was taken after he saw pictures of Chief Minister Omar Abdullah cycling on the roads of this town.

Pahalgam MLA Altaf Kaloo has been holding daily meetings with delegations associated with the tourism industry. "Rates have been brought down to ensure more tourists come back," he said.

"The government and the people, they're still trying to come out of the big shock. People are still wondering how and why it happened. Locals are in deep

shock. How it happened..." the MLA said on the April 22 massacre.

Terrorists had attacked holiday-makers in Pahalgam meadows, killing 26 people -- 25 tourists and one local pony rider. The horrific incident left the country shocked and outraged and triggered an India-Pakistan military conflict.

The collective trauma of the people was still felt in Kaloo's voice, but he quickly regained his composure and added, "All these delegations came to us. Tourists are very comfortable. We are keeping a bird's eye on the security of our guests and ensuring no stone is left unturned to keep them safe." He said this year, after a meeting with the Lt Governor Manoj Sinha and the chief minister, locals and tourists were allowed to come to Pahalgam. "This has helped a lot."

Asif Burza, Managing Director of Ahad Hotels and Resorts, says the revival has already started and visitors have started arriving. "There has been a big push from the government, and also the chief minister leading from the front has played a major role in the revival story." "There has also been a push from the Government of India with Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Shekhawat's help, and they are planning big events in the near future," Burza said.

Umesh Talashi, a minority community member staying in this area, said the April 22 attack left a scar on the heart of every peace loving citizen. (PTI)

NFR commissions Automatic Block Signalling between Aluabari and Panjipara

HT Bureau GUWAHATI, July 22: In a significant step towards digital modernisation, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has commissioned Automatic Block Signalling (ABS) across a 22.9-km stretch between Aluabari, Gaisal, and Panjipara on July 21.

This move is aimed at improving operational efficiency, reducing headway, and enhancing line capacity.

According to an official statement from NFR, the newly commissioned section comprises three stations—Aluabari Road, Gaisal, and Panjipara—along with three Auto Huts and 14 level crossing gates.

As part of the upgrade, seven existing engineering level crossing gates have been interlocked with automatic signals, thereby boosting safety at crossings.

With this commissioning, NFR has now completed 87.57 route kilometres of ABS coverage from Ambari Falakata to Panjipara under its ongoing signalling modernisation programme.

The total sanctioned ABS project spans 702 km from Old Malda to Guwahati.

Earlier, the Aluabari–Ambari Falakata section (66 km) had been completed.

Upcoming phases include Panjipara–Old Malda, Ambari Falakata–Jalpaiguri, and New Coochbehar–Jorai, all targeted for execution during the 2025–26 fiscal.

Other segments are under active implementation.

The first train to operate on the newly signalled section was the 22301 UP Howrah–New Jalpaiguri Vande Bharat Express, which passed Panjipara at 13:40 hrs and Gaisal at 13:53 hrs.

This was followed by the 20503 DN Rajdhani Express, which crossed Aluabari at 14:05 hrs under the new signalling system.

NFR officials stated that the automation marks a major leap toward creating a safer, more efficient, and technologically advanced railway network across the region.

Modi extends birthday wishes to Fadnavis and Ajit Pawar

MUMBAI, July 22: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday greeted Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and his deputy Ajit Pawar on their birthday.

"Best wishes to Maharashtra Chief Minister Shri Devendra Fadnavis ji on his birthday. He is working tirelessly for Maharashtra's progress and empowering the poor and the downtrodden. May he lead a long and healthy life in service of the people," Modi posted on X handle.

He appreciated Ajit Pawar, who heads the NCP, for "making a valuable contribution to strengthening the NDA's good governance agenda in Maharashtra".

Reacting to the PM's message, Fadnavis, who is celebrating his 55th birthday, said, "It is very encouraging to work even harder under your guidance and leadership. Will keep trying best to serve the people."

Pawar, 66, echoed Fadnavis, saying, "We shall continue to work hard for the welfare of our people under your leadership". Pawar's wife and Rajya Sabha MP Sunetra Pawar and his cousin Supriya Sule also wished him on X. Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde of Shiv Sena hailed Fadnavis as a top friend of the Mahayuti, an able administrator, and a visionary leader who is well-versed in law and economics.

In a post on X, Shinde dubbed Fadnavis an epitome with various qualities. He said Fadnavis is an important leader on the state's path to development.

Shinde stated that Ajit Pawar has an extraordinary hold on economics. Pawar is an excellent administrator and a sensitive leader who has only the motto of Maharashtra's progress, Shinde posted on X.

Maharashtra Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan released a coffee table book titled 'Maharashtra Nayak' on Fadnavis at Raj Bhavan.

The book was conceived by BJP leader and state cabinet minister Girish Mahajan. (PTI)

Artists find inspiration in S H Raza to turn scrap into sculptures

MANDLA (MP), July 22: All creation begins from a dot, a "bindu", a philosophy that is reflected in artist S H Raza's most famous artworks and has now become an inspiration for sculptor Narendra Kumar Dewangan who works with scrap metal to create sculptures.

"When you put a tack to connect two metal parts it is a point only that starts the creation of something new. So in a way, all our works are inspired by Raza," Dewangan told PTI as he welded another piece of metal to his work, titled "Environment Balancer".

The metallic sculpture, made with scrap of cars, bikes, and construction material, is one of the four being made here as part of Raza Smriti, a five-day multidisciplinary art camp organised by the Raza Foundation.

Raza, who died on July 23, 2016, was born in Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh in 1922. After spending his initial years in Mandla, he moved to different parts of the state with his father, a deputy forest ranger. Dewangan, a sculptor from Chhattisgarh, has created a city of metal that has at its centre a large tree to physically balance the tilted sculpture.

"I am showing a city that is both inside and outside the earth and there is a tree at the centre of it to balance it out. The tree is a symbol of how to balance the environment and at the same time how to find a way to coexist with nature," he said. Another artist from Chhattisgarh, Jee-



tendra Sahu, has also looked to nature for inspiration. His vision has come to reality in the shape of MP's state bird Dudhraj, or Indian paradise flycatcher.

With the petrol tank of a bike as the bird's body and metal sheets for its long tail, the sculpture is a tribute to the state that is known for its natural beauty and the many forest reserves.

"I like to do realistic works more. I saw Dudhraj here and found it to be too attractive, so I felt that with this I can represent the whole state," Sahu said. To match the bird's form, Sahu has used rebars, chain sprockets, paddings, chains, and different types of gears.

Speaking about the sculptors finding their expression through scrap material, Ashok Vajpeyi, poet and managing trustee of the Raza Foundation, said the objective of the camp is to intro-

duce local artists to new ways of creating art.

"They have all collected these pieces which are picked up from shops here and they have been given the freedom to imagine what they would like to do so there are different kinds of things all of them are doing," Vajpeyi said.

"And what is interesting is in a manner of speaking the function of art is gathering up what is also broken down. The things here are broken down and not useful in the conventional sense but they can still be used in creating art, so there is this excitement of imagination getting embodied in material which never had been used for that purpose and was not intended to be used for that purpose," he added.

Amit Kumar Sinha, a sculptor from Jabalpur, has followed the inspiration of J Swaminathan and Raza in his work, combining elements of both the stalwarts - bindu from Raza, bird and mountain from Swaminathan.

"Swaminathan worked a lot with Gond artists to promote their art. And even though Raza spent very little time here, as he was settled in France, his journey of art in India is internationally renowned," he said. He added that since every art starts from a dot, the five circles in his work represent five dots.

The five-day event, which started on July 19, will come to an end on Wednesday. The completed sculptures will be placed at the Raza Art Gallery in Mandla. (PTI)

Eviction drive carried out in Shillong in compliance with Meghalaya HC orders

Vendors with valid COVs can operate



SHILLONG, July 22: Shillong Municipal Board authorities on Tuesday carried out an eviction drive in the Khyndailad area here in compliance with the Meghalaya High Court's orders.

During the drive, the authorities confiscated goods and dismantled stalls of street vendors who were operating without valid certificates of vending (COV).

Acting on a state government directive that set a deadline (July 22) for all unauthorised vendors to vacate the area, the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) officials had been verifying vending permits for the past few days.

"Only those vendors who were able to produce valid COVs were allowed to continue operating. The rest had their stalls removed and materials seized," an SMB official at the site told PTI.

The action follows directions from the Meghalaya High Court, which had pulled up the state government and municipal authorities for failing to regulate street vending, especially in congested commercial zones such as the Khyndailad area, the city centre.

As part of its continuing oversight, the high court also appointed a special officer to monitor compliance and implementation of vending regulations.

The officer has been tasked with overseeing the identification and development of designated vending zones, ensuring transparency in the issuance of certificates of vending, and submitting periodic reports on the progress of implementation to the court.

In line with the court's order and the provisions of the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014, the state government has identified three designated vending zones in the city.

These are located at the MUDA Complex, the parking lot opposite the SBI Main Branch at Khyndailad, and at the old Meghalaya Transport Corporation (MTC) building.

The vending zone at MUDA Complex will cater to a large section of central Shillong vendors, while the space opposite SBI is being redesigned to accommodate walk-in customers and maintain smooth traffic flow.

The old MTC building is being repurposed to create structured vending spaces with basic amenities for relocated vendors.

Officials said work is underway to operationalise these zones, with plans for phased relocation of authorised vendors in the coming weeks. (PTI)

Captain Williamson Sangma State University (CWSSU) invites applications for PG programmes

Meghalaya's first state-run university begins PG admissions

SHILLONG, July 22: Meghalaya's first state-run university, Captain Williamson Sangma State University (CWSSU), has invited applications for postgraduate programmes for the academic session 2025-26, officials said on Tuesday. Various courses are being offered in the varsity's Tura and Shillong campuses, the University's Registrar, A Ch Marak, told PTI.

In the Tura campus, postgraduate programmes are available in Anthropology, Economics, Education, Environmental Science, Garo, Geography, History, Philosophy, Political Science and Sociology.

"The Shillong campus will offer postgraduate (PG) courses in Commerce, English, Khasi and Social Work, which are also simultaneously available at the Tura campus," he said.

Established in 2011 through an Act of the state government, CWSSU operates from its permanent campus in Tura.

The campus was constructed under Special Plan Assistance with an allocation of ₹



16.96 crore and completed in December 2022. With academic blocks, hostels, and administrative facilities, the campus has an area of more than 90 acres.

The university is recognised under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act, 1956, and is empowered to award degrees independently. The University Grants Commission

(UGC) formally approved its degree-awarding status in December 2024. The institution began academic operations this year, with the Shillong campus set to open shortly.

Admissions to CWSSU's PG programmes do not require the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), making the university an attractive option for students across the state.

At least 11 colleges from across the state have been granted affiliation with the University. These colleges also admit students without CUET, unlike those under NEHU, which are bound by the CUET requirement as per NEP 2020.

According to official sources, admissions to the PG courses will remain open for at least two to three weeks, and the application procedures and course details are available on the university's website.

CWSSU's launch is seen as a significant milestone in Meghalaya's higher education sector, enhancing access and offering flexible admission pathways for students. (PTI)

MNF MLA Lalrintluanga Sailo's body brought to Aizawl from Delhi, last rites tomorrow

AIZAWL, July 22: The mortal remains of Mizo National Front (MNF) MLA Lalrintluanga Sailo, who died at a hospital in Delhi, were brought to Aizawl on Tuesday afternoon.

"The body of the two-time legislator from Dampa arrived at the Lengpui airport around 1.30 pm, and will reach his home at Luangmual neighbourhood in the western part of Aizawl in the evening," they said.

His funeral will be held on Wednesday, leaders of the Luangmual unit of Young Mizo Association (YMA) said.

Sailo, whose performance as opposition member in the assembly was praised by many, died at Max Superspecialty Hospital in Delhi around 9 pm on Monday after battling with complicated ailments, including scrub typhus and pneumonia, for nearly a month. The 65-year-old MNF leader was flown to Delhi on June 29 following a fever.

Although he initially showed signs of improvement, his condition deteriorated a few days ago and became worse on Sunday, following which he was put on ventilator support, family sources said. Born in 1960, Sailo joined MNF and went underground when he was only 16.

He actively took part in the secessionist movement, spearheaded by the MNF led by late Laldenga, for 20 years till the underground group signed the historic Mizo peace accord with the Centre in June 1986.

He contested the assembly polls in 2018 and got elected from Dampa in Mamit district, defeating his nearest opponent, Congress nominee Lalrobiaka, by a margin of 1,657 votes.

He was re-elected from the same constituency in the last assembly polls, held in November 2023.

Sailo held many important posts in the MNF and was a member of the national core committee of the party till his last breath.

The MNF described Sailo's death as 'the collapse of one of the big pillars of the party'.

Governor VK Singh, Chief Minister Lalduhoma and state Congress president Lal Thanzara mourned his death.

"I am deeply saddened by the passing of Pu Lalrintluanga Sailo. His dedicated contributions and tireless service to the state of Mizoram and its people will be fondly remembered," the governor said in a social media post.

Lalduhoma said he was deeply shocked by the sudden demise of Sailo, whom he hailed as a diligent person, orator and good debater. The CM said he had instructed officers and staff of the Mizoram House in Delhi to do whatever is required to assist Sailo's family. (PTI)

Meghalaya minister asks MLAs, MPs to push for school infra upgradation



SHILLONG, July 22: With the Meghalaya government launching a massive drive to upgrade school infrastructure, Education Minister Rakkam A Sangma on Tuesday said that the state-run efforts alone are not enough and urged all 60 MLAs and two MPs to contribute to the endeavour actively.

Leading by example, Sangma claimed he had renovated 45 schools in his Rongara-Siju constituency in South Garo Hills district, using ₹ 2 lakh per school from MLA scheme funds.

"If each MLA takes care of 50 schools per year, we can make real change in infrastructure," he said, urging other public representatives, including members of district councils, to work towards meaningful development.

"Let's not play the blame game. Let us preach what we practice. Instead of pointing fingers, let's come together and build," he added.

Each legislator in Meghalaya receives an annual allocation of ₹ 2.5 crore under the MLA Local Area Development Scheme (MLA-LADS), meant for infrastructure and development work within their constituencies, officials said. "These discretionary funds can be utilised for a wide range of purposes, including school repairs, water supply, rural roads, and health infrastructure," they said.

Notably, the state government, under its Mission Education programme, has launched a large-scale initiative to repair and upgrade over 2,000 government schools within the next two years. This includes lower and upper primary, secondary, and higher secondary institutions.

"In the current year alone, an amount of ₹ 100 crore has been sanctioned for upgrading 200 government lower primary (LP) schools, with an additional 300 such institutes identified for future improvements," the officials said.

"Nearly 90 per cent of these schools have already undergone or are undergoing renovation, with around 100-200 still pending sanction," they said.

In total, 1,608 schools have been taken up under the programme, with most nearing completion, one of the officials said.

"However, there are some schools in Mawsynram, Myllem, and Khliehria areas, which are still awaiting implementation," he said.

Funding sources for the renovations include Samagra Shiksha, state government allocations, and contributions from the development funds of MLAs, MPs, and MDCs.

"Recently, ₹ 33.80 crore was sanctioned for the construction and renovation of 19 upper primary and secondary schools to improve classrooms, sanitation facilities, electrification and quarters," another official said. Sangma's appeal for shared responsibility is being viewed as a push for a collaborative approach to strengthen Meghalaya's school infrastructure and ensure a better learning environment for students across the state. (PTI)

Naga bodies' ultimatum

IMPHAL, July 22: The United Naga Council (UNC), the Naga Women Union (NWU), the All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM) and the Naga People's Movement for Human Rights-South (NPMHR-S) have served a 20-day ultimatum jointly to the central government today in connection with the abrogation of Free Movement Regime (FMR) and the ongoing border fencing construction in 'Naga ancestral homeland'.

The ultimatum gave 20 days' time to the central government to address the issues. These Naga organisations have been stiffly opposing the scrapping of the FMR and the border fencing construction in 'Naga homeland'.

"Should the demands remain unaddressed from the date of this ultimatum, we shall be compelled to resume our protest movement in stronger measure across all the Naga hill districts," it cautioned. The joint ultimatum of these Naga bodies addressed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home minister Amit Shah, External Affairs minister S. Jaishankar and Union Defence minister Rajnath Singh was submitted through the Governor of Manipur today.

The joint ultimatum of these Naga organisations said, "We submit this ultimatum with deep concern and anguish, expressing our strong resentment against abrogation of the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the imaginary Indo-Myanmar border and the accelerated ongoing border fencing construction across the ancestral Naga homeland without due consultation with the affected indigenous

communities and violating the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) particularly Articles 8, 26, and 36 thereof, endorsed by India".

They also placed on record that considerable numbers of press statements have been issued, picketing of government offices in 'Naga areas' have been undertaken, public demonstration of protest and rallies were held in Naga hill districts and memoranda submitted to register our stiff opposition to the abrogation of the FMR and construction of the border fencing across the Naga ancestral homeland. One of the references includes a memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister, Government of India, on January 19, 2024 through the Deputy Commissioner, Senapati district by the UNC. Another reference is a memorandum submitted to the Union Home Minister of India through the Governor of Manipur on February 1, 2025 by the ANSAM. A rally at Chandel district was held and a memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on February 12, 2025 through the Deputy Commissioner by Chandel Naga People's Organization (CNPO), NSUC and Naga Chief Association, Chandel.

A rally at Kamjong was also held and a memorandum submitted to the Governor of Manipur on February 21, 2025 by the Tangkhul Naga Zingsho Longphang.

Another notable reference is a mass rally at Ukhrul organized by the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL) under the aegis of UNC and submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister of India

on April 2, 2025 through the Deputy Commissioner, Ukhrul by TNL, TNAL, TSL, TKS, TMNL, TNZL, Tangkhul Naga Azo Longphang, Tangkhul Naga Aze Longphang and Tangkhul Naga Zingtung Longphang. A memorandum was also submitted to the Governor of Manipur on May 2, 2025 by the UNC. A memorandum was also submitted to the Governor of Manipur on February 26, 2025 by the ANSAM. Another memorandum was also submitted to the Ministry of External Affairs, the Prime Minister of India, the Home Minister of India through the Governor of Manipur on June 20, 2025 by the ANSAM.

It can also be mentioned that a memorandum was also submitted to the Prime Minister of India, the Union Home Minister of India and the Governor of Manipur through the Deputy Commissioner, Senapati on June 20, 2025 by the Senapati District Students' Association (SDSA). Another memorandum was also submitted to the Prime Minister of India, the Union Home Minister of India and the Governor of Manipur through the Deputy Commissioner, Ukhrul on June 20, 2025 by the Tangkhul Katamnoo Saklong (TKS).

A memorandum was also submitted to the Prime Minister of India, the Union Home Minister of India and the Governor of Manipur through the Deputy Commissioner, Chandel on June 20, 2025 by the Naga Students' Union, Chandel (NSUC). A memorandum was also submitted to the Governor on July 12, 2025 by the Tangkhul Naga Long (TNL). (NNN)

Barak River Basin management plan in Nagaland

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, July 22: A consultative meeting on Barak River Basin management plan & collaboration between Indian-EU initiative and Brahmaputra Board was held at Nagaland civil secretariat in Kohima today. Laura Sustersic, director, GIZ, while giving introductory remarks, said the strategic partnership between the EU and India aims to share best practices, adapt European experiences to the Indian context, and develop sustainable solutions for managing water resources.

Sustersic added that water management is a critical area for cooperation, supporting economic development, peace, security, agriculture, fisheries, energy, and the environment. She also highlighted GIZ's role in implementing projects

to support India in water management, focusing on the Ganges Brahmaputra hydrological system and the Barak river basin.

Sustersic said Nagaland must prioritise environment-friendly sustainable development options and find ways to protect its beautiful natural environment while still pursuing development goals.

Chairman, Brahmaputra Board, Dr Ranbir Singh said water shortage is a very serious issue faced by Nagaland and highlighted the urgency of addressing the issue to ensure water security in the state. Singh said since Nagaland also falls under water basins it was important to understand the issues, challenges and problems in this part of the basin in Nagaland and the potential areas that should be developed.

Mizoram's civil society groups urge NHIDCL to repair dilapidated highway

AIZAWL, July 22: Mizoram's civil society organisations and transporters' associations wrote to the NHIDCL, urging it to immediately repair the dilapidated section of NH-6/306 to ensure uninterrupted supply of essential commodities to the state.

NH-306 is the lifeline of Mizoram, linking the state with the rest of the country via Assam's Silchar town. A portion of it is demarcated as NH-6.

The Joint Civil Society of Mizoram (JCSM), a coalition of civil society groups and commercial vehicle operators' associations, said potholes and mud patches on the Sairang-Kawnpu stretch have made the national highway nearly impassable.

It said representatives of the group visited the dilapidated sections on Saturday and discovered that nu-

merous vehicles were overturned and stranded.

"There was a complete absence of sufficient repair efforts, with only three earth excavators, one JCB excavator, and five labourers being present at the site," it said.

The letter said that hundreds of truck drivers have been stranded for several days without food, sanitation, or medical assistance, and residents of nearby villages are facing hardship in accessing daily necessities, healthcare, and banking services.

The groups urged the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) to immediately undertake repairs on at least six critical patches, to ensure that the road is passable for vehicles transporting essential items. (PTI)

Handloom, handicraft sector potential driver of economic growth for NE: Lalduhoma

AIZAWL, July 22: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday said the handloom and handicraft sector has the potential to be a powerful driver of economic growth for the Northeast region.

He expressed hope that Northeast could be transformed into a vibrant and globally recognised textile hub.

"Speaking at a virtual meeting of a high-level task force on handloom and handicraft, Lalduhoma said that 60 per cent of the national workforce engaged in the handloom and handicraft sector is based in the Northeastern states, reflecting the region's immense contribution and potential in the field," an official statement said.

The meeting, chaired by Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, was attended by DoNER minister Jyoti Raditya Scindia, Union Textile minister Giriraj Singh, and chief ministers and ministers from vari-



ous handloom-rich states.

Lalduhoma said that the handloom and handicraft sector, which is deeply rooted in traditional skills and local identities, can be a powerful driver of economic growth for the Northeast.

To harness its full potential, he

proposed the creation of a clear and actionable roadmap and suggested common facility centres to promote and develop handloom and handicraft.

The Mizoram chief minister also suggested providing structured training for artisans, developing in-

terstate collaboration and networking, standardising product quality and branding, and encouraging innovation in skill development and design.

He expressed confidence that, with coordinated efforts and appropriate investment, the Northeast could be transformed into a vibrant and globally recognised textile hub.

Lalduhoma was accompanied by state chief secretary Khilli Ram Meena, commissioner and secretary to the chief minister Vanlalldina Fanai, commerce and industry secretary Lalzirmawia Chhangte, and officials from the state planning department during the virtual meeting.

The high-level task force was set up by the DoNER ministry comprising representatives from eight states to chart a practical course for strengthening the handloom and handicraft sector across the country, according to officials. (PTI)

Tripura University to introduce biometric attendance for staffers

AGARTALA, July 22: The Tripura University is set to introduce biometric attendance for a section of officers, teaching staff, except a few professors, and contractual employees in a phased manner to ensure discipline at the institute, officials said on Tuesday.

Earlier, biometric attendance was implemented only for Group B and C staff of the central varsity.

"This is to notify that the Executive Council of Tripura University, in its 45th meeting held on June 1, 2025, has taken decision to start biometric attendance of all assistant professors, all associate professors, Group A officers, all contractual teachers, faculty, guest faculty members and other contractual staff," said Muneendra Mishra, the deputy registrar in a notification.

Group A officers include registrar, deputy registrar, assistant registrar and librarians.

The biometric attendance system will be implemented in a phased manner from July 31.

"All associate professors and statutory posts officers will be brought under the biometric attendance system from October 31, while the professors will be included later," it said.

"All concerned are requested to register their personal details, including mobile number and Aadhaar, on the portal by themselves or to contact the nodal officer, Tripura University, for onboarding," it reads.

"The biometric attendance for non-teaching staff (Group B&C) was introduced earlier, and now this will be done for teaching staff and other workforce," an official said.

"It will bring more discipline in the varsity," he said. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/49 of 2025, Dated: 18-07-2025. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Brief Description of Item:** Repairs to leaky roof including replacement of old and damaged CGI & AC sheet roofing by precast Galvanised Iron Profile sheet at Railway colonies under the jurisdiction of ADEN/JID/Lumding. **Tender Value:** ₹ 13,85,951.21/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹ 4,56,900/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 13-08-2025 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 14-08-2025. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 13-08-2025 in the website www.irops.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

CULTURE, LIFE AND FOOTBALL ED SHEERAN SAYS SHILLONG IS HIS FAVOURITE INDIAN CITY

SHILLONG, July 22: International pop icon Ed Sheeran said Shillong is his favourite Indian city, months after performing here as part of his global '+' = Å · x (Mathematics) Tour. "Shillong just felt very different," the Grammy-winning singer-songwriter said during a candid segment titled 'Spin the Wheel with Ed Sheeran' hosted by content creator Shabaz Says.

When asked to name his favourite place in India, Sheeran responded without hesitation: "Shillong".

On February 12, Sheeran had performed to a crowd of over 30,000 at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here.

"You guys are the loudest," he had told the audience that night, but it now appears that the sentiment was more than a polite compliment.

The British artist's affection for the city did not end with the performance.

Shillong featured prominently in his music video for the chart-topping single 'Sapphire', with 27 scenes filmed in and around the hill

station.

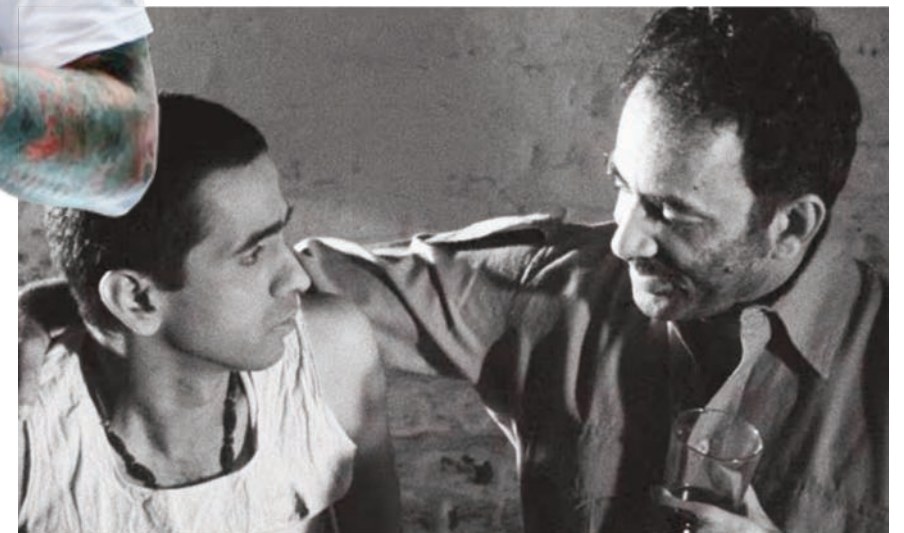
In the video, Sheeran is seen sipping local 'sha' (tea), buying fruit from roadside vendors, relaxing on a swing in Matti-lang Park, and playing football with local children.

One of the most talked-about sequences shows him riding the iconic 'Bus Smit', a symbol of the city's public transport heritage. Released earlier this year, the 'Sapphire' video has already garnered over 12 crore views on YouTube.

In the same interview, the singer spoke of India's diversity, noting how every place offered a different language, cuisine, and rhythm. "Shillong just felt very different," he reiterated. (PTI)



INDIA'S FIRST LGBTQ FILM 'BADNAAM BASTI' TO BE SCREENED AT INDIAN FILM FEST OF MELBOURNE



NEW DELHI, July 22: Indian Film Festival of Melbourne will feature the restored version of India's first LGBTQ film "Badnaam Basti" for its special Pride Celebratory Night next month.

The film released in 1971 and was directed by Prem Kapoor.

The Nitin Sethi, Amar Kakkad, and Nandita Thakur starrer follows a driver bandit named Samra who rescues Bansuri from assault. He later hires temple worker Shivraj, creating an interconnected relationship between the three.

The film was believed to be lost after its brief appearance in festival circuits but a 35mm print was accidentally discovered in the archives at the Arsenal Institute for Film and Video Art in Berlin by two US curators - Simran Bhalla and Michael Metzger - in 2019.

They were searching for work by a different director with the same surname and chanced upon the prints of "Badnaam Basti", according to an article in The Guardian in December 2024.

The legacy of the film, which was quite forward for its times for its

homo-erotic undertones, will be honoured by this rare showcase, followed by the Australian premiere of "We Are Faheem and Karun", a tender queer love story by acclaimed filmmaker Onir, according to a release here.

This year, IFFM will screen nearly 75 films that reflect themes of inclusivity spanning gender, race, sexuality, disability, and women's representation.

Speaking about the festival's commitment to representation, IFFM Director Mitu Bhowmik Lange said, "At IFFM, we believe cinema has the power to connect and create conversations. It is our responsibility to reflect on the world we live in, with all its beautiful diversity. This Pride Night is not just about celebrating queer identity but also reclaiming the space that has long been denied to LGBTQIA+ narratives in Indian cinema. Through films like Badnaam Basti and We Are Faheem and Karun, we honour the past and embrace a future of inclusive storytelling."

The 16th edition of the festival is scheduled to be held from August 14 to 24. The LGBTQ+ Pride Night is scheduled for August 22. (PTI)

Anurag Kashyap's 'Bandar' to premiere at Toronto International Film Festival



NEW DELHI, July 22: Anurag Kashyap's "Bandar" (Monkey In a Cage), starring Bobby Deol in the lead role, will premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival in the special presentations category.

The film is official selection for the 50th edition of the festival set which is going to take place from September 4 to September 14.

Deol unveiled a poster for the film on Instagram with the caption, "The story that should not have been told... but is the official selection at the 50th Toronto International Film Festival 2025. Our film inspired from true events is premiering at #tiff50 #Bandar #MonkeyinaCage."

The film, which is inspired by real-life events, also stars Sanya Malhotra in a key role. The 56-year-old actor most recently appeared in the Telugu film "Daaku Maharaj" and had a cameo in "Housefull 5". His upcoming films include "Hari Hara Veera Mallu: Part 1", "Alpha" and "Jana Nayagan".

Kashyap, known for "Gangs of Wasseypur", "Black Friday" and Dev D", was previously invited for TIFF in 2020 as an ambassador.

Other Indian films screening at the festival are Neeraj Ghaywan's "Homebound" and "Sholay", which celebrates 50 years of its release on August 15. (PTI)

'The Chola Tigers' by Amish to release on August 29

NEW DELHI, July 22: Bestselling author Amish's upcoming book "The Chola Tigers", the second installment in his Indic Chronicles, will hit the stands on August 29, announced publishing house Harper Collins India on Tuesday.

The historical fiction, which builds on the world introduced in the author's 2020 bestseller "Legend of Suheldev", is touted to be a "thrilling historical saga of defiance, honour and redemption it celebrates the indomitable spirit of India".

The book's cover was released by Tamil superstar Rajinikanth.

"The Chola Tigers" is an exhilarating story in which Emperor Rajendra Chola, the mightiest man of his era, orders a daring surgical strike on Ghazni in response to Sultan Mahmud's attack on the Somnath temple.

"This work of historical fiction is linked to my 2020 release 'Legend of Suheldev'. It is about a mission ordered by one of the greatest Tamilians ever, Emperor Rajendra Chola," Amish, author of 'Shiva Trilogy' and 'Ram Chandra Series', said in a statement.

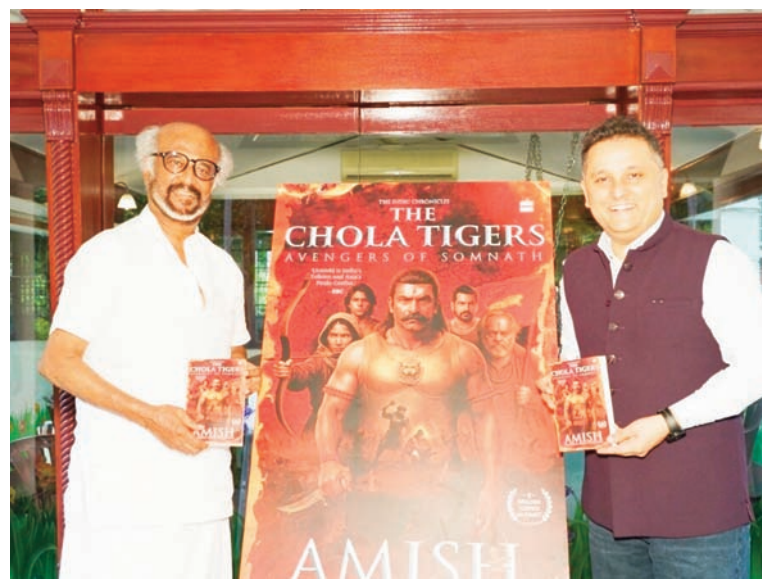
The plot unfolds around Mahmud of Ghazni's devastating attack on the revered Somnath temple, sparking response from the era's most powerful monarch, emperor Rajendra Chola as "he summons a squad of defiant assassins to embark on a perilous quest and bring the fearsome enemy to his knees".

According to the publisher, "The Chola Tigers" explores the profound question: "How far would you go to defend dharma and your country's honour?"

"The new novel is vintage Amish -- a sweeping historical saga that is pacy, dramatic, simmering with political intrigue and personal vendetta, and heart-rendering in its scenes of sacrifice and retribution. At its heart it masterfully explores the depths of human courage and re-

silience, and the indomitable spirit of a nation that refuses to be broken," said Poulomi Chatterjee, executive Publisher at HarperCollins India.

Amish's previous books have sold more than 8 million copies and have been translated into 21 languages. (PTI)



Rakesh Roshan undergoes preventive procedure for carotid arteries blockage

NEW DELHI, July 22: Filmmaker Rakesh Roshan on Tuesday posted that he was in the hospital to get preventative procedures done after he found out that both of his carotid arteries to the brain were "above 75 per cent blocked".

The 75-year-old actor-filmmaker, who shared the health update with a photograph from the hospital, said he is now back home and fully recovered.

"This week has been truly eye opening, during a routine full body health check up the Dr conducting the sonography for the heart suggested I also do one for the neck. By chance we found out that although asymptomatic, both my carotid arteries to the brain were above 75 per cent blocked," Roshan said on Instagram.

The director revealed that if ignored the condition could be extremely dangerous. "I immediately admitted myself into the hospital and got the preventative procedures done. I am back home now fully recovered and hope to get back to my workouts very soon. I hope this inspires others to stay on top of their health especially where the heart and brain is concerned," the director added.

Roshan, who is the father of Bollywood superstar Hrithik Roshan, said above the age of 45, everyone should get regular scans such as a heart CT and a carotid brain artery sonography which are "often ignored completely".

"I think it's important to remember that prevention is always better than cure. I wish a healthy and aware year to you all," Roshan said.

The filmmaker is known for hit films like "Karan Arjun", "Kaho Naa... Pyaar Hai", and "Koi... Mil Gaya" and its sequels. He will be co-producing the upcoming film "Krish 4" which is to be directed by Hrithik. (PTI)

Jafar Panahi honoured as Asian Filmmaker of the Year by Busan International Film Festival

NEW DELHI, July 22: Renowned Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi, known for world cinema classics like "The White Balloon", "Offside", "The Circle" and "3 Faces", has been named the 'Asian Filmmaker of the Year' by the Busan International Film Festival.

The award is presented to an Asian film figure or organization that has made the most significant contribution to the development of the Asian film industry and culture.

Panahi is a revered figure in the international cinema community but in Iran he has consistently faced restric-

tions for his art.

He was imprisoned three years ago and went on a hunger strike. Despite obstacles, Panahi has continued to make films be it "This Is Not a Film", which he made in his living room while under house arrest or "Taxi", which was set in a car. "As a towering figure in Iranian cinema, the director has explored the existence and freedom of individuals living amid censorship and political repression. Capturing the political and social contradictions of Iranian society from a counter-cultural perspective, he has continued to create films in secret, courageously submit-

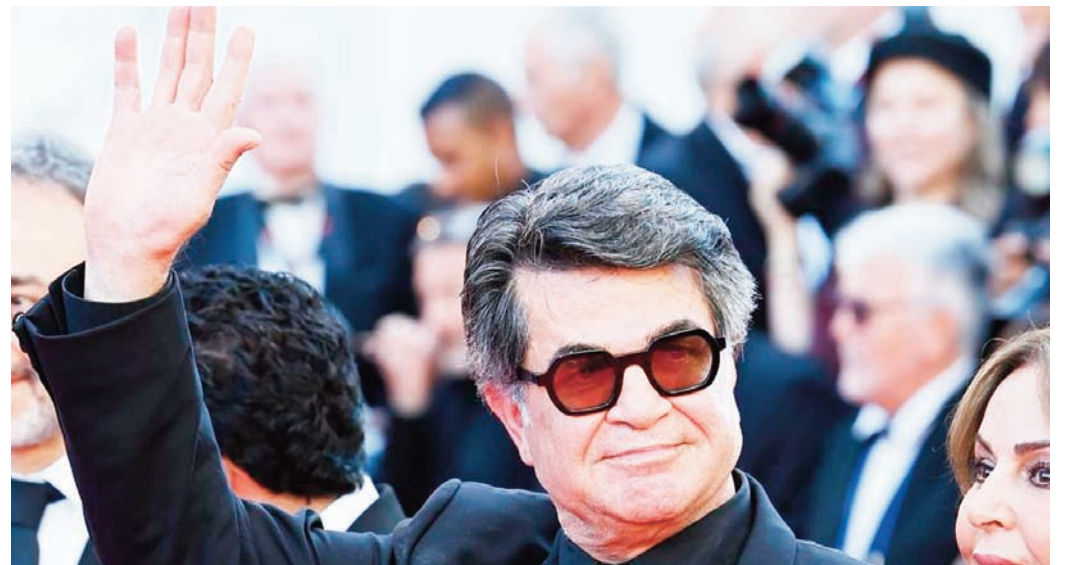
ting them to international film festivals despite repeated arrests, custody, detention, travel bans, and a stated-imposed filmmaking ban," BIFF said in their release.

"At a time when making films in my country becomes more difficult every day, this recognition reminds me that cinema can still connect us beyond borders, languages, and limitations. I not only accept this award in my own name, but also on behalf of all those who, in silence, in exile, or under pressure, continue to create," Panahi said in his statement to the festival.

The filmmaker's "It Was Just an Accident" won the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival in May this year. Panahi won Venice festival's Golden Lion for "The Circle" in 2002 and the Golden Bear at the Berlin film festival for "Taxi" in 2015.

The filmmaker's accomplishments also include Locarno's Golden Leopard for "The Mirror" in 1997 and Cannes' screenplay prize for "3 Faces" in 2018.

Panahi will be receiving the award at the festival's opening ceremony, scheduled on September 17. The festival will run till September 26. (PTI)



DURAND CUP KICKS OFF AMID UNCERTAINTY IN INDIAN FOOTBALL

KOLKATA, July 22: The 134th edition of Durand Cup kicks off here Wednesday with East Bengal facing South United FC amid a cloud of uncertainty surrounding the upcoming top-tier domestic football season. The pre-season action will begin against the backdrop of a stalemate between the All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Football Sports Development Limited (FSDL) over the renewal of the Master Rights Agreement (MRA), which governs the operations and commercial structure of the top-tier Indian Super League. The MRA expires on December 8, and with no breakthrough yet, the very future of India's top-tier league remains in limbo ahead of its scheduled September start.

In the midst of this impasse, the Durand Cup has retained its significance as the traditional curtain-raiser for Indian football.

The competition continues to draw a full roster of 24 teams despite only six ISL clubs confirming participation this year.

The spotlight on Wednesday will



Love to play against India in first game of T20 WC next year: Italy captain Joe Burns



DUBAI, July 22: Having led Italy to their maiden World Cup qualification, the European team's Australia-born captain Joe Burns wants to "jump in at the deep end" during the T20 showcase next year by taking on defending champions India in the opening match itself.

Italy made the cut for the event in India and Sri Lanka next year with a solid showing in the European Qualifiers that concluded earlier this month. The draws for the World Cup are still some time away from being finalised.

"You come to your first World Cup and you want the big stage. I'd love to be playing India in the first game in India," Burns told ICC Digital.

"I'd love to be playing Australia, England or all the top teams, that's the experience that you're after. You want to test yourself, you want to really jump in at the deep end," he added.

Burns said qualifying for the tournament was still a "surreal" feeling for him.

"A lot of planning and preparation went into it (qualifying). So it's satisfying from that aspect from the cricket side as well," he said.

He said the entire process was emotional for him and for the rest of the team.

"We did one week training camp in Rome, one week in the UK, and I said to them the first day in Rome, 'I don't care if we're playing Luxembourg in the first Sub-Regional

game or India in a World Cup Final. I just want us to be the most prepared team in world cricket'..."

A former Australia player with four Test centuries to his credit, Burns made it to the Italian squad due to his mother's heritage. It helped him pull through a personally challenging phase which included dealing with the death of his brother Dominic.

"For me, it was an opportunity to unite family and cricket, and I think for our group, everyone has a really similar story to that."

"We did a great culture piece in Rome (in the build-up to the Qualifier), about who we are, where we come from, understanding each other's families and sacrifices made..." he said.

Former Canada international John Davidson is the head coach of the team, with ex-Scotland international Dougie Brown and Ireland star Kevin O'Brien as his assistants.

"I've seen a group of players who have grown and developed into a really close-knit group," O'Brien said.

"That can be difficult with players coming from different parts of the world but the common joining force with this squad is the Italian heritage."

"I've seen the guys improve, and that is not only with their cricket skills, it's all the other things that you need to be successful in International cricket, like attitude, fitness, awareness, cricket smarts, and work ethic," he added. (PTI)

MANDHANA MAINTAINS TOP SPOT

Deepti jumps 10 places to 23rd in ODI batting ranking

DUBAI, July 22: India's Deepti Sharma made a big jump of 10 places to 23rd among batters on the back of her strong showing in the ongoing ODI series against England while compatriot Smriti Mandhana maintained her top spot in the latest ICC rankings released on Tuesday.

England and India players made significant gains in the latest ICC Women's ODI Player Rankings following strong performances in the first two matches.

Deepti was one of the biggest movers in the batting rankings after her unbeaten 62 in the first ODI, which earned her the player of the match award and guided India to a successful chase of 259. She followed it up with another unbeaten 30 in the second ODI.

Sophia Dunkley's 83 off 92 balls in the first ODI played a key role in taking England to a strong total and earned her a jump of 24 places to No.52. Alice Davidson-



Richards, who contributed with a solid 53, rose 40 spots to No.118.

Mandhana, meanwhile, remained steady at the top of the rankings, registering scores of 28 and 42 in the first two matches while maintaining her rating of 727.

India captain Harmanpreet

be firmly on East Bengal, who have been among the busiest clubs in the transfer market.

Determined to turn around their fortunes after a forgettable 2024-25 campaign, where they finished ninth in the ISL, made an early Super Cup exit, and bowed out of the AFC Challenge League in the quarterfinals, the Kolkata giants have rung in major changes under Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon.

Key signings include Brazilian midfielder Miguel Figueira, Argentine defender Kevin Sibille, and Palestinian international Mohammed Rashid.

They join full-back Jay Gupta, who completed a multi-year move from FC Goa after a successful stint with the Gaurs.

Bruzon has released foreign stars Hijazi Maher, Mahdi Talal, and Messi Bouli in a bid to freshen up his squad and end the club's long trophy drought.

East Bengal's fans will hope the new recruits can help reclaim the Durand Cup, which they last won 21 years back in 2004.

With 16 titles, they remain the second-most successful club in the competition's storied history behind arch-rivals Mohun Bagan, who clinched their record 17th crown in 2023 by defeating East Bengal 1-0 in a nail-biting final.

Reigning ISL champions Mohun Bagan have made headlines with the signing of Abhishek Singh Tekcham from Punjab FC for a reported fee close to Rs 2 crore, as they look to shore up their wing-back options following Ashique Kuruniyan's departure.

Jamshedpur FC, meanwhile, have bolstered their defence by roping in Jestin George, whose breakout season with Gokulam Kerala included a historic Durand Cup win in 2019.

Defending champions, NorthEast United FC are drawn in Group E and will be boosted by the signing of Spanish winger Jairo Samperio, an Europa League winner.

They have also acquired the services of Lalbiakdika Vanlalvunga, Lalrinzuala Lalbiknia and Chema Ndoez for the upcoming season. (PTI)

Prannoy saves five match points to progress, Lakshya Sen exits China Open

CHANGZHOU, July 22: Indian shuttler HS Prannoy saved five match points and clawed his way back from a game down to beat Japan's Koki Watanabe in the opening round of the China Open Super 1000 badminton tournament here on Tuesday.

The world No. 35 Prannoy pulled off a stunning 8-21, 21-16, 23-21 win against the 18th-ranked Watanabe.

It was a tough day for Lakshya Sen, whose poor run continued as he squandered a one-game advantage to suffer a 21-14, 22-24, 11-21 loss to China's fifth seed Li Shi Feng. "This point in my career, every win matters. I'm happy to be back on tour, small breaks happened here and there. The level of playing has gone really high and winning each round is getting tough day by day," Prannoy said after the win.

"The average age has become 22-23 in the men's singles all of a sudden. Lot of fresh faces and you don't really know what their game is. So, it's tough to be a veteran out there," he added.

In the opening game of his match, Prannoy, a former top-10 player and bronze medalist at the 2023 World Championships, was never in the contest as Watanabe closed it out with ease. But he bounced back in the second game, forcing a decider with sharper court coverage and better control.

Prannoy trailed 2-11 in the final game before picking up five points in a row to narrow the gap. Still, he found himself staring at defeat at 15-20, with Watanabe holding five match points.

But the Indian showed nerves of steel, saving five match points before taking a slender 21-20 lead and eventually sealing a memorable win. (PTI)

Erigaisi, Gujrathi to headline Chennai Grand Masters

CHENNAI, July 22: Grandmasters Arjun Erigaisi, Vidit Gujrathi and Anish Giri will headline the third edition of Chennai Grand Masters, starting here on August 6.

India's most prestigious classical chess tournament will feature 20 players from across the Masters and Challengers categories.

The latest edition will have a Rs one crore prize pool as competitors chase FIDE Circuit points, which are vital for qualifying for next year's Candidates Tournament.

Organised by MGD1 and sponsored by Quantbox, the tournament will be split into two categories: Masters and Challengers.

Besides Erigaisi, Gujrathi and Giri, the Masters field will comprise Jorden Van Foreest, Liang Awonder, Vincent Keymer, Ray Robson, Vladimir Fedoseev, and Pranav V, who steps up after winning the Challengers in 2024.

"Playing such a high-stakes tournament at home is always special. As the top-rated player here, I know the expectations are high, but the field this year is extremely competitive, and every game will demand my absolute best," Erigaisi said. (PTI)

Four days to departure, wrestlers yet to get appointment for visas ahead of U17 World C'ship

NEW DELHI, July 22: The Indian cadet wrestling teams risk missing the prestigious U17 World Championship in Athens, beginning on July 28, as the 47-member contingent is scheduled to depart on Saturday but the Greece embassy is yet to respond to their visa appointment request.

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had sought appointment on July 10 but 12 days have passed and it is yet to hear a positive response from the embassy.

When nothing moved even six days after their request, WFI wrote to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on July 16, seeking intervention.

The 47-member Indian contingent has 30 wrestlers, who made the national team after coming through selection trials conducted

by WFI on July 7 and 8 in Delhi and Lucknow respectively.

"The Federation had to seek intervention of the MEA and the Home Ministry after its numerous requests did not receive a positive response from the Greece embassy," WFI President Sanjay Singh told PTI.

"The tickets have been booked and the players are ready. The exposure for young athletes is paramount for their growth. They must not miss the World Championship. It's Tuesday today, let's hope we get a response now," he added.

"In the past we have got visas from the Greece embassy in a matter of four days but this time there is an inexplicable delay."

Recently our wrestler Harshita got a Schengen visa by the Hungary embassy in one day, I don't know

why Greece embassy is delaying it this time," said another WFI official.

The Indian squad has several Asian Championship gold medalists in the squad, including Rachna Parmar (43kg), Moni (57kg), Ashvini Vaishno (65kg), and Manisha (69kg) and they will be strong medal contenders in Athens.

Even the world governing body United World Wrestling (UWW) President Nenad Lalovic has shot a missive to the Hellenic Olympic Committee, requesting urgent intervention in the matter.

"Unfortunately, some of the qualified and registered teams — including the Iranian and Indian delegations — have encountered difficulties and delays in obtaining their Schengen visas," Lalovic wrote on Sunday.

"Despite having followed the application procedures correctly, these teams have not yet received their visas. I would therefore be most grateful for your support in facilitating this process with the relevant authorities, to ensure that all participating athletes and officials are able to obtain their visas in time," the letter read.

A note on the Greece embassy website reads: "Kindly be informed that due to the current situation the processing time of the visa applications is 15 working days, as per instructions of the Greek Embassy in New Delhi, and may be extended."

Explaining the visa procedure further, the website mentions that it may take more than 15 days to process the visa applications. (PTI)

We are not going to take a backward step and let opposition be confrontational: Stokes

MANCHESTER, July 22: England captain Ben Stokes on Tuesday asserted that his team will respond in kind to any aggression from Indian players in the fourth Test starting here from Wednesday, indicating no cessation to the verbal volleys in an intensely fought series.

England lead the five-match series 2-1, but players such as India skipper Shubman Gill, Mohammed Siraj, Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Stokes and Harry Brook were not averse to having some animated conversations with the opposition players.

"I don't think it's one of those things where we're going to necessarily just go out and start at (sledding). I don't think either team's really looked to do that. I think there's always going to be a moment in a Test series where something does heat up. It's a massive series and there's a lot of pres-

sure on both teams to perform," Stokes said on the eve of the match at Old Trafford.

It might have been an organic reaction to a particular situation, but Stokes hinted clearly that aggression from the rival camp will not be taken lightly.

"As I said, it's not something that we're going to purposely go out and look to start because then that will take our focus off what we actually need to do out in the middle. But by no means, we're not going to take a backward step and let any opposition try to be confrontational towards us."

"And not try to give a bit back. I think that goes for most teams, to be honest anyway. So, it's not like we're the only team who does that. But the series has been great to play. It has been great to watch. All five days, all three Tests so far. Quality of cricket has been outstanding," he added.

The proceedings heated up during the third day of the third Test at the Lord's when Crawley and Duckett successfully employed some delaying tactics, inviting angry reactions from Siraj and Gill.

Gill had pointed his fingers at Duckett, which resulted in a similar reaction from the England opener. Stokes vindicated the whole episode.

"Obviously, that night (at the Lord's) when Zak and Ben had to go out just started it off. We had the advantage of bowling last in the Test match to win."

"We just threw everything that we possibly could at India, not only with our skills, but also with their energy in the field as well," he said.

Stokes admitted that the aggression from the Indian players added some adrenalin into his side.

"Harry Brooks said, Brendan McCullum said, you guys have

been too nice. Do you agree? Yeah, I think potentially. I guess it was a really nice moment, I think, as a team when you speak about something like that and everyone buys into that (replying to aggressive tactics by the opposition)," said the premier all-rounder.

While India are in a must-win situation, England are in the driver's seat having taken the series lead at Lord's, and they will be keen to claim the rubber at a venue where the Indian team hasn't played a Test since 2014.

"Good win for us at Lord's. Nice break. Hope we continue the momentum and put in the same effort and energy," Stokes said.

An injury-plagued India could be forced to depart from its preferred template in the penultimate Test, hoping to end a winless record at the storied Old Trafford and draw level in what has been a compelling series so far. (PTI)



