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Parl's monsoon session all set to be stormy

Oppn raises Pahalgam attack, Trump's remarks, SIR in session eve meet • Govt says open to discuss all issues as per rules

NEW DELHI, July 20: Government on Sunday indicated its willingness to discuss in Parliament Operation Sindoor, a key opposition demand at an all-party meeting on eve of the Monsoon session, even as the INDIA bloc insisted that Prime Minister Narendra Modi should respond on the matter as well as on the US President's 'ceasefire' claims and SIR in Bihar.

Sources said the prime minister is unlikely to respond in Parliament on these issues. However, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju asserted that the government will reply appropriately whenever a discussion takes place on US President Donald Trump's ceasefire claims on the India-Pakistan conflict.

The session is likely to see a detailed statement on Operation Sindoor by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who held two key meetings on Friday evening with his ministerial colleagues and another with top military brass.

Several leaders, including those from the NDA, also want a discussion to highlight the achievements of the government's foreign outreach through various Parliamentary delegations on Operation Sindoor.

The government may also field External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar to convey its view in Parliament, sources said.

After the customary all-party meeting ahead of the session beginning Monday, Rijiju said that the government has sought the opposition's cooperation in the smooth running of Parliament during the month-long session.

There should be government-opposition coordination in running Parliament smoothly, Rijiju told reporters after the meeting chaired by Union Minister J P Nadda.



He said they heard the opposition and ruling NDA alliance members patiently and hoped the upcoming session would be very productive. As many as 54 leaders of different parties and Independent MPs participated in today's all-party meeting.

"We are very open to a discussion on important issues like Operation Sindoor. These are issues of great national importance. The government is not shying away and will never shy away, but is open to discussions within rules, conventions," Rijiju asserted.

Noting that the government accords importance to 'niyam' (rules) and 'parampara' (conventions), he said the matters raised at the meeting would be taken up at the Business Advisory Committee of both houses, where a final decision would be taken.

"We have noted all the points. We have requested all parties (to ensure) the Parliament functions properly. Have to ensure coordination. It is the responsibility of all to help Parliament function," he said.

Rijiju also said that the government has noted the demand for allocation of more time to parties with fewer MPs to speak in Parliament. "We will try and provide

adequate time to all, including smaller parties," he said.

On the opposition's demand for PM Modi to make a statement on the Pahalgam attack and other issues, Rijiju said, "I want to make it clear that the prime minister remains in Parliament except during foreign travel. The prime minister always remains in Parliament, but the prime minister does not remain in the House all the time.

"Whenever Parliament functions, cabinet ministers are present to respond to issues concerning their departments."

Rijiju said the government is bringing 17 key bills, details of which would be provided soon.

After the meeting, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi told reporters that his party sought Prime Minister Modi's statement on Trump's claims, "lapses" which led to the Pahalgam attack and Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of poll rolls in Bihar. He said it was incumbent and moral responsibility of PM Modi to give a statement in Parliament on key issues raised by his party.

"We hope that the PM will fulfil his moral duty," he said.

Gogoi said questions have been raised on SIR and EC, and not giving answers (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

State BJP holds two-day meet to prepare roadmap for Assembly polls

Some new faces to be put up in polls: Himanta

GUWAHATI, July 20: With an eye on next year's assembly elections, leaders of the ruling BJP in Assam brainstormed over two days, drawing up organisational strategies and a roadmap.

The discussions held in the meeting will be the basis for the party leadership to take forward its preparations for the polls, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"A two-day @BJP4Assam organisational meeting was held in the esteemed presence of Hon'ble CM Dr. @himantabiswa & BJP National General Secretary (Org) Shri @bisanthosh ji," state BJP president Dilip Saikia posted on X on Sunday after the end of the meeting, which was held at a resort in Sonapur on the outskirts of Guwahati.

Key discussions included the



state's political scenario, organisational strategies and roadmap for the 2026 assembly polls, he added.

Sarma, talking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme later, said, "The meeting focused on preparation for the assembly polls,

manifesto preparation, candidate selection, campaign strategy, and various other aspects."

He said 51 senior BJP members took part in the meeting.

Asked if all incumbent MLAs will get renominations, Sarma said,

"It is not possible for all the MLAs to get tickets. Some will themselves not want to contest. Some will be dropped. Again, due to delimitation, some would lose their constituencies while some seats will be now reserved for SCs and STs."

He maintained that new faces will be there in the party's candidate list, but it would be premature to speculate on numbers.

On the performance evaluation of the sitting MLAs, the CM said that whether they get a ticket or not will depend to a large extent on how successfully government schemes have been implemented by them. "With several schemes to be rolled out from August 15, which we had only announced so far, the BJP's prospects are going to improve by 100 per cent," he added. (PTI)

Parties criticizing new Waqf law want to keep Muslims as vote bank: Rijiju

NEW DELHI, July 20: Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has alleged that the basic purpose of the Congress and some other parties criticizing the Waqf (Amendment) Act is to keep Muslims as their vote bank, and asserted that the Modi government believes in "appeasement to none, justice to all".

With the Supreme Court in May reserving interim orders on three key issues after hearing both sides in the Waqf case, Rijiju said he will not make any pre-emptive statement right now with regard to the matter which is pending in the apex court.

"But let us make one thing very clear. The job of Parliament is to make laws. The Supreme Court can definitely interpret it in the right way," Rijiju told PTI Videos in an interview.

"We are very confident that whatever we have done is as per law and as per the provisions and spirit of the Constitution. I am very confident that the role of Parliament will not be taken away," he said.

On AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi's criticism of the new Waqf law, Rijiju said he doesn't want to criticize Owaisi for his opposition to the Waqf (Amend-

ment) Act because he made the remarks against the legislation out of compulsion.

"The main problem is what I tell you. Some of these leaders, including the Congress party, have treated the Muslims as a vote bank. When you start taking and making a community as a vote bank, then you become irrational. "Then you put them into one bracket, that good or bad doesn't matter, they will all be rhetorical," the minister said.

So, those who criticized the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, are only trying to keep the Muslims poor and ensure that they remain as their vote bank.

"Our thinking is opposite to that. Ours is appeasement to none, justice to all," Rijiju said.

There are many within the Muslim community, lots of groups, women, children and backward communities who have not gotten any benefit out of the Waqf properties, the minister told PTI on Friday.

"So, India's Waqf properties you know very well are the highest number of Waqf properties in the world. More than 9,70,000 Waqf properties are there which must be put into use (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Leopard caged in Bhelaguri Tea Estate

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 20: A female leopard that had been terrorising workers at the Bhelaguri Tea Estate, located under the Mariani Range of the Jorhat Forest Division, was successfully trapped in a cage in the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, putting an end to days of anxiety among tea garden residents.

According to information provided by sources in the area, frequent sightings of the big cat had been reported by the labour community of the tea estate over the past several days.

Workers expressed concern not only for their safety but also for their livestock, which had reportedly come under attack by the leopard.

The situation reached a point where the garden authorities, acting on complaints from their workers, approached the Forest Department seeking immediate intervention.

Responding to the request, the Forest personnel placed a cage in the Natun Line area of the estate.

Their efforts paid off when the animal was found trapped inside the cage early on Sunday morning.

The successful capture of the leopard quickly attracted large crowds from the tea garden and nearby villages, with curious residents flocking to the site for a glimpse of the animal.

Later, a Forest Department team arrived at the location, inspected the captured animal, and subsequently transported it away from the garden premises.

Officials have not disclosed the immediate destination of the leopard, but it is expected to be relocated in accordance with standard wildlife management protocols.

It may be noted that leopard intrusions into human-inhabited areas, particularly in village and tea garden regions, are not uncommon in Jorhat district and other parts of Upper Assam.

With forest cover increasingly fragmented and wild prey becoming scarce, these animals often stray into populated zones, resulting in conflict with humans.

While many such encounters end with the loss of livestock, some have also led to injuries or fatalities—on both sides.

In certain cases, agitated residents have retaliated, leading to the death of the animal.

In recent years, the Forest Department has resorted to caging operations as a preventive and non-lethal response to such wildlife conflict situations.

Heroin seized, 2 arrested

GUWAHATI, July 20: Two persons have been arrested and heroin worth over ₹ 6 crore has been seized from their possession in Assam's Cachar district, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"Based on credible intelligence, an anti-narcotics operation was carried out by @cacharpolice at Saptagram area under Dholai police station," Sarma said in an X post late on Saturday evening.

He said 1.22 kg of heroin worth ₹ 6.22 crore was seized in the operation.

"Two were arrested in this regard. Kudos to @assampolice," Sarma added. (PTI)

Project step toward a self-reliant Assam in dairy sector: CM

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 20: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday performed the Bhoomi Poojan for the expansion of the Purabi Dairy processing plant at Panjabari, Guwahati, marking a major milestone in the state's efforts to boost its dairy sector.

The foundation-laying ceremony, organised by the West Assam Milk Producers' Co-operative Union Ltd (WAMUL), signals the beginning of a Rs 104 crore expansion project that aims to double the plant's processing capacity—from 1.5 lakh litres per day (LLPD) to 3 LLPD.

The event was attended by a host of senior dignitaries including Assam cooperation minister Jogen Mohan, animal husbandry and veterinary minister Krishnendu Paul, Assam chief secretary Ravi Kota, and chairman of the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) Dr Meenesh Shah, among others.

According to an official release, the expansion is being carried out in accordance with the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between WAMUL and NDDB during the Advantage Assam 2.0 Summit held in February this year.

The initiative is a key component of the Assam Dairy Development Plan (ADDP),

which envisions the processing of 10 lakh litres of milk per day in the state's formal dairy sector.

Addressing the gathering, chief minister Sarma stated that the project was a crucial step toward a self-reliant Assam in dairy production, noting that the expanded facility would enhance market access for dairy farmers, particularly in rural areas, while ensuring greater nutritional security for consumers across the state.

"The expansion of the Purabi Dairy plant is a crucial step towards realising our vision of a self-reliant Assam in the dairy sector. By doubling the processing capacity of this plant, we are not only ensuring better market access for a larger number of dairy farmers in the state but also enhancing nutritional security for our people," the Chief Minister said.

He lauded NDDB and WAMUL for their sustained efforts in strengthening Assam's dairy ecosystem and supporting rural livelihoods. Dr Meenesh Shah, chairman of NDDB and WAMUL, said that the expansion reflects the success of the cooperative model in dairy development. "This is a momentous occasion for Purabi Dairy and the cooperative families we represent. With this expansion, we are building the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India will address concerns of private sector on investments in civil nuclear segment: Minister

NEW DELHI, July 20: India will be able to address the apprehensions of the private sector globally about investments in the civil nuclear sector, which was opened up to achieve the ambitious target of producing 100 GW atomic power by 2047, Union Minister Jitendra Singh has asserted.

Singh, who oversees the Department of Atomic Energy, said changes in relevant rules and legislations will have to be made to facilitate the entry of the private sector in the field of nuclear energy, which currently is under tight control of the government.

"The announcement has already been made in the Union Budget, but we will have to frame rules, also possible legislation to actually move on, which will take a lot of consideration, a lot of introspection," Singh told PTI in an exclusive video interview.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her budget speech in February, announced the government's intention to amend key legislation, including the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, to facilitate private sector involvement.



Currently, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL), Bharatiya Nabhiyaya Vidyut Nigam Limited (BHAVINI) and NPCIL-NTPC joint venture company Anushakti Vidyut Nigam Limited (ASHVINI) can build nuclear power plants in the country. Scientists at the DAE are also developing the Bharat Small Modular Reactors ranging from 50 MW to 300 MW each for installation in thermal plants which have completed their operational life.

Singh said the legislative changes to the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act are aimed at addressing the concerns of the private sector that has been reluctant to invest in the nuclear power segment.

"It is just that the suppliers, most of

them private and most of them from the other countries, had their own apprehensions from a business point of view. I am sure in the course of time, we will be able to address that also, able to satisfy them and reassure them to venture in," Singh, the Minister of State in the Prime Minister's Office, said.

Singh said the decision to open up the nuclear sector for private participation was more difficult than unleashing space sector reforms.

"It has been possible only because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personal indulgence. Even the nuclear sector stakeholders are conditioned to work behind a veil of secrecy. They feel now this is the norm," he said.

The minister said opening up the nuclear sector was crucial to realise the aim of India becoming a developed nation by 2047 and emerging as the top ranking economy globally.

"If we have to realise this goal, our strategy has to be global. Because we are going to meet the global benchmarks. So global strategies require us to move in an integrated fashion, devoid of silos. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Children exposed to heat wave worldwide may lose up to 1.5 years of schooling: Report

'Climate related stressors affect education outcomes'

NEW DELHI, July 20: Children exposed early to extreme heat may lose up to 1.5 years of schooling with climate change having a direct impact on education and threatening to undo educational gains of recent decades, according to a new global report.

Climate related stressors such as heat, wildfires, storms, floods, droughts, diseases and rising sea levels, affect education outcomes.

Most low and middle-income countries are experiencing climate-related school closures every year, increasing chances of learning loss and dropout, it noted.

The report compiled by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring (GEM) team, Monitoring and Evaluating Climate Communication and Education (MECE) project and University of Saskatchewan in Canada has pointed out over that the past 20 years, schools were closed in at least 75 per cent of the extreme weather events, impacting five million people or more.



Exposure to heat has significant detrimental effects on children's educational outcomes. An analysis linking census and climate data in 29 countries between 1969 and 2012 showed that exposure to higher than average temperatures during the prenatal and early life period is associated with fewer

years of schooling, especially in Southeast Asia.

"A child experiencing temperatures that are two standard deviations above average is predicted to attain 1.5 fewer years of schooling than children experiencing average temperatures. High temperatures reduced high-stakes test

performance in China and led to reductions in both high school graduation and college entrance rates," the report said.

"In the United States, without air conditioning, a school year hotter by 1 degrees Celsius reduced test scores by 1 pc. Very hot school days disproportionately impacted African American and Hispanic students, due to poor infrastructure conditions, accounting for roughly 5 per cent of the racial achievement gap," it added.

The report noted that about half of public school districts need to update or replace multiple heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.

"In the most disadvantaged municipalities in Brazil, which were also amongst those most exposed to heat risk, students lost about 1 per cent of learning per year due to rising temperatures," it said. The global report flagged that climate-induced education vulnerability is worse for marginalised populations. Of the 10 countries most affected by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Railway station master accused of wife's murder arrested

RANGIA, July 20: An absconding railway official, accused in the murder of his wife, has been arrested in Guwahati, police said.

The accused, Rahul Singh, who was the station master of Kendukona railway station near Rangia in Assam's Kamrup district, was apprehended on Saturday, more than a fortnight after his wife was found dead in their residence.

"He was working as a private security guard in a building in Guwahati in disguise. He was brought to Rangia after arrest," police said.

Singh was produced before a local court, which remanded him to four days of police custody.

The Northeast Frontier Railway official had allegedly stabbed his wife to death in front of their children on July 2 and fled, a police officer had said.

"The deceased has been identified as Anjali Singh. The two children told us that their father had stabbed their mother," he said. The Forensic Department and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) had assisted the local police in the investigation.

A few days after the murder, an audio clip purportedly sent by the victim to her relatives had surfaced.

Anjali is heard saying that her husband and mother-in-law had been mentally and physically abusing her.

She had also said that her husband had threatened to kill her and that if anything were to happen to her, he should be held responsible. (PTI)

BCMS Margherita Circle committee formed BCMS holds organisational meet in Margherita

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, July 20: A significant organisational meeting of the Assam Tea Committee of the Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Sangha (BCMS) was held on Sunday at the office of the Purvottar Khadan Mazdoor Sangha in Margherita.

The meeting was chaired by BCMS State Committee president A Rama Rao and saw detailed discussions on the pressing issues faced by tea garden workers across Assam. Following deliberations, the committee resolved to submit an 11-point charter of demands to the Assam government.

The demands include payment of the Puja bonus at 20 per cent in a single instalment, issuance of land pattas to tea estate workers, enhancement of the daily wage to



₹351, and prompt clearance of pending Provident Fund dues.

The BCMS also called for provision of firewood or its monetary equivalent, an end to deductions of workers' contributions from their

wages, appointment of doctors in every tea estate, and permission for workers to attend union meetings. Other demands included immediate steps to reopen the Nirmal Tea Estate, arrangements for medical treatment by garden authorities in cases of snake bites or accidents during work, along with ensuring the day's wages for affected workers, and prohibition of charging workers for fuel used by company ambulances during medical emergencies.

During the meeting, a new Margherita Circle Committee of the Bharatiya Chah Mazdoor Sangha was constituted with Baiju Oraon as president and Ganesh Bauri as secretary.

The meeting was attended by BCMS working president Rajiv Bora, Tinsukia District Committee secretary Debojyoti Phukan, Purvottar Khadan Mazdoor Sangha Margherita secretary G. Amru, and union leaders Nipu Kalita and Shankar Gwala, among others.

Jorhat businessman dies in train mishap

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 20: Anand Vaid (Bunt), a businessman from Jorhat and resident of Digam-barchuk locality, died in a train accident at Bardhaman in West Bengal on Saturday morning.

According to sources, Anand, who was in his forties, was travelling to a relative's house in Jharkhand with his daughter when the incident occurred.

He had reportedly alighted at Bardhaman station during the night and slipped while attempting to reboard the train, falling onto the tracks.

He sustained grievous injuries and was rushed to a hospital in Bardhaman, where he succumbed to his injuries.

Before his death, he was able to provide details about his family and his daughter, who was travelling with him.

PGPR seeks CM's urgent intervention in Dibrugarh waterlogging crisis

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, July 20: The Policy Group for Peoples Rights (PGPR), a leading NGO based in Upper Assam, has called upon chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to personally intervene in the persistent waterlogging crisis in Jibon Phukan Nagar, a densely populated locality in Dibrugarh.

In a memorandum emailed to the chief minister on July 16, PGPR President Dr Aradhana Kataki described the situation as "deeply distressing," attributing it to dysfunctional concrete drains constructed under the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR) scheme.

According to the organisation, the drains have failed to facilitate continuous water flow during rainfall, leading to sudden and widespread flooding during the monsoon season.

In a press statement issued after the submission, Dr Kataki said the recurring inundation has caused not only property damage but also mental distress and serious health hazards for residents.

She added that the crisis is no longer just a matter of inconvenience but one of public safety and human dignity.

The memorandum also drew attention to the condition of the Rajabhatta drain, a major outflow channel in the locality, which remains choked and frequently overflows during heavy rains, further aggravating the situation.

PGPR expressed concern over what it described as administrative indifference, alleging that several attempts to contact the Dibrugarh District Commissioner have gone unanswered.

The memorandum stated that phone calls from residents have been ignored and that the local administration's silence in the face of repeated appeals is both disappointing and alarming.

In its appeal to the chief minister, the NGO sought immediate assessment and repair of the NLCPR-constructed concrete drains.

It urged the government to ensure timely and regular cleaning and de-silting of the Rajabhatta and other associated drains.

The memorandum further requested the deployment of the Town and Country Planning Department to devise a scientific and long-term solution to the area's drainage and water management problems.

PGPR also called for the immediate installation of high-capacity water pumps at the Lila Gogoi Road and Mancotta Road junctions.

The NGO noted that although the pumps had already been procured under the NLCPR scheme, they had not been installed to date for reasons unknown.

Dr Kataki, on behalf of the affected residents, appealed to the Chief Minister to take personal cognisance of the matter and ensure timely execution of the required infrastructure measures to prevent further hardship.

The memorandum underscores the growing frustration among citizens of Dibrugarh, many of whom feel neglected despite repeated efforts to engage the administration through official channels.

PGPR reiterated its commitment to standing with the affected communities and continuing to advocate for responsive and accountable governance.

Gauhati University conducts B.Ed entrance 2025



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 20: Gauhati University successfully conducted the B.Ed Common Entrance Test (GUBEDCET-2025) on Sunday, registering a high attendance rate of 96.58 percent and reaffirming its position as a trusted academic institution in the region.

Out of 15,282 registered candidates, 14,760 appeared for the examination, which was held in 18 centres across 16 cities of Assam.

At the Gauhati University centre alone, 3,332 candidates sat for the test.

The University reported that the entire process was completed without any disruptions.

Vice Chancellor Professor Nani Gopal Mahanta described the turnout as a reflection of the growing trust and aspirations associated with Gauhati University.

"The overwhelming participation in GUBEDCET-2025 is an affirmation of the growing trust and aspiration students associate with Gauhati University. Our mission has always been to inspire, enable and empower students, and this response encourages us to keep raising the bar," he said.

Registrar Dr Upal Sarma noted that the smooth conduct of the entrance test was the result of meticulous planning and effective coordination.

He thanked all stakeholders involved and extended his best wishes to the candidates.

The University, which recently received A+ accreditation from NAAC and global recognition in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2025, has also completed its postgraduate entrance process this month.

Over 42,000 applications were received for approximately 4,500 PG seats.

With its growing academic footprint and continued student engagement, Gauhati University reiterated its commitment to nurturing future educators and scholars through accessible and quality education.

KCS hosts writers' meet to preserve and promote Karbi cultural legacy

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 20: In a significant initiative aimed at cultural preservation and creative engagement, the Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) convened a special meeting of lyricists and scriptwriters at Singmirjeng, Karbi People's Hall (KPH), Taralango on Saturday.

The event, held on July 19, brought together veteran and emerging voices in the field of Karbi music, literature, and cultural documentation to deliberate on ways to safeguard the community's rich artistic and historical legacy.

The meeting was chaired by KCS president Humsing Bey, while general secretary Sunil Tokbi outlined the objectives of the session.

The primary focus was on reinforcing the cultural identity of the Karbi people by harnessing the power of songs, scripts, and written records, all of which were acknowledged as vital carriers of community memory.

The event drew a distinguished gathering of contributors to Karbi culture, including former KCS general secretary, songwriter and singer Chandra Kanta Terang; former KCS president, lyricist and writer Bidyasing Rongpi; writer Chandrasing Kro; Kangther Bey, Boleswar Hanse, Karbi folk-fusion singer Deuri Rongpi,

Biresing Hanse, Sarat Bey, KCS vice president and writer Kamsing Ingti, Dhansing Terang, John Engti, Mohori Rongphar, Nogen Terang, Joysing Tokbi, and songwriter-composer-singer Sarthe Rongpi, among others.

Discussions during the meeting revolved around the growing need to document historical milestones, folklore, and the evolution of Karbi cultural movements.

The gathering unanimously recognised that these intangible aspects of the community's identity must not be allowed to fade with time.

Delivering a key address, Rang Kamar Teron, Secretary of Drama & Cinema, KCS, made an emotional appeal to all writers and cultural workers present.

He underscored the lack of comprehensive written documentation regarding the Karbi Youth Festival and the founding of the Karbi Cultural Society, despite their centrality to the community's collective cultural life.

"Time is passing, and our memories may fade, but the history of the Karbi Youth Festival and the founding of the Karbi Cultural Society must be written and preserved. This is the demand of the present and the need of the future," said Teron, urging fellow cultural custodians to

act without further delay.

Participants expressed deep concern that without active documentation, invaluable knowledge and traditions may be lost to future generations.

They stressed that oral narratives, while powerful, must be complemented by written records to strengthen the continuity of the community's cultural heritage.

The meeting further encouraged artists and writers to integrate historical themes into their creative work, thereby ensuring that cultural storytelling remains both relevant and accessible to younger generations.

Through this gathering, the Karbi Cultural Society reaffirmed its commitment to both cultural revival and innovation.

The event served as a clarion call for all stakeholders in Karbi literature and the arts to engage in collective authorship of the community's story—one that can be referenced, studied, and celebrated for years to come.

According to the official release, the KCS will continue to organise such interactive platforms to encourage a culture of documentation, scholarship, and creative expression rooted in the traditions of the Karbi people.

UG Brahma Distributes Welfare Benefits in Chirang



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 20: Cabinet Minister for Handloom & Textiles, Sericulture, Soil Conservation, and Welfare of Bodoland Development Department, Urkhao Gwra Brahma, who also serves as the Guardian Minister for Chirang district, on Sunday ceremonially distributed an Ayushman Bharat Gold Card to Padmashri awardee Sarbeswar Basumatary. The event was held at the conference hall of the Deputy Commissioner's office in Kajalgaon.

As part of the government's ongoing welfare efforts, cheques under the Chief Minister's Relief Fund were also handed over to four beneficiaries. In addition, 40 Anganwadi workers received smartphones under a district-wide initiative covering a total of 1,029 workers.

In a major step towards forest rights recognition, Certificates of Title for Forest Land under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, were distributed to 14 beneficiaries. These 14 are among 5,131 eligible individuals identified across Chirang district.

The programme was attended by Bijni MLA Ajoy Kumar Roy, Sidli MLA Nirmal Kumar Brahma, BTC executive member Dhananjay Basumatary, Chirang Deputy Commissioner Jatin Bora, and several senior officials and dignitaries.

Addressing the gathering, minister Brahma reiterated the government's commitment to inclusive development, digital empowerment of frontline workers, and recognition of land rights.

He said both the state government and the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) administration are working jointly to ensure comprehensive welfare for all sections of society.

KKHSOU holds 11th Krishna Kanta Handiqui Memorial Lecture

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 20: The 11th Krishna Kanta Handiqui Memorial Lecture was organised on Sunday at the City Campus of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), Khanapara, to commemorate the birth anniversary of the renowned scholar, linguist and Indologist, Prof Krishna Kanta Handiqui.

The event began with a floral tribute to Prof. Handiqui's statue within the university premises.

This was followed by the University Anthem and the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, marking the formal commencement of the programme. Prof Prasenjit Das, director of the Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities and chairperson of the organising committee, delivered the welcome address.

In his remarks, Prof Das underscored the enduring relevance of Prof Handiqui's intellectual legacy and its influence on contemporary

higher education.

The memorial lecture was delivered by Prof Pradipt Jyoti Mahanta, a noted academician and scholar, on the theme "Krishna Kanta Handiqui, Cultural History and Heritage: A Few Perspectives."

Prof Mahanta, in his address, spoke on Prof Handiqui's engagement with classical traditions, his contributions to comparative literature and cultural historiography, and the importance of preserving indigenous intellectual heritage in present-day discourse.

Prof Rajendra Prasad Das, vice-chancellor of KKHSOU, delivered the presidential address, paying tribute to Prof Handiqui's scholarly achievements and commitment to knowledge.

He reaffirmed the university's resolve to carry forward his legacy by promoting academic excellence, cultural rootedness and meaningful public engagement.

Dharmeswar Konwar, MLA of

Sonari and a member of the board of management of KKHSOU, was also present on the occasion.

His attendance added to the importance of the event and signified the shared commitment of the academic and public spheres to cultural and educational advancement.

Prof Pranjit Bora, registrar (i/c), KKHSOU, delivered the vote of thanks and expressed gratitude to the invited speaker, dignitaries, faculty members, students and staff for their active participation and support in making the event a success.

The programme was conducted by Dr Trisha Dowerah Baruah, assistant professor in the Discipline of Mass Communication, who anchored the event.

The memorial lecture reaffirmed KKHSOU's ongoing commitment to honouring the intellectual legacy of Prof Krishna Kanta Handiqui and upholding the values of academic inquiry, cultural awareness and the pursuit of knowledge.

Hindi translation of 'Yatra' launched at Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 20: "Translation is a difficult but essential craft," said eminent author Padma Shri Yeshu Dorje Thongchi, speaking at a book launch event held at Tezpur Sahitya Sabha Bhawan on Saturday. Emphasising the importance of high-quality translations to expand the reach of Assamese literature, he urged fellow writers to set aside ego and strive for improvement in every new work.

Thongchi added that he personally felt little need for ceremonial book launches.

The event marked the release of Yatra, a Hindi translation of fifteen of Thongchi's acclaimed short stories.

The volume, translated by his wife and writer-cultural activist Inumoni Das Thongchi, has been published by Lokranjan Prakashan, Prayagraj.

The book was formally released by Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author and Tezpur University academician Dr Juri Dutta, who praised Thongchi's ability to capture subtle, unspoken emotions of life in his stories.

Girl felicitated by Prajanmya Unmesh for academic excellence

HT Correspondent

JAMUGURIHAT, July 20: Prajanmya Unmesh, a noted socio-cultural organisation of Assam, continues to extend its contributions beyond the realm of culture by recognising and supporting individuals who exemplify merit and determination.

In a heartwarming gesture, the organisation on Sunday felicitated Miss Rituparna Nath, a girl student from a financially disadvantaged background, for her outstanding academic performance. Rituparna Nath, a resident of Jamugurihat, has secured the highest marks—86.3 percent—in the Electrical Engineering department at Jorhat Engineering College.

Her achievement has brought immense pride to the local community, with congratulatory messages pouring in from various quarters.

Her father, Montu Kumar Nath, a petty electrician, is being widely praised for his tireless efforts and sacrifices in ensuring his daughter's education.

Despite limited means, he supported her aspirations with unwavering commitment. Rituparna now wishes to pursue higher studies and continue her academic journey. Led by internationally acclaimed Bhaona artist and Chief Executive of Prajanmya Unmesh, Arup Saikia, members of the organisation visited Rituparna's home to felicitate her personally.

Speaking to the press, Saikia said that the organisation often selects meritorious students who are also culturally inclined for performances in India and abroad. It may be noted that Prajanmya Unmesh has carved a niche for itself by performing traditional Assamese drama, Bhaona, in the English language under the directorship of Arup Saikia. Their efforts have earned appreciation both at home and internationally.

The local citizens of Jamugurihat have expressed joy and satisfaction over the organisation's socially conscious initiatives and lauded its continued commitment to promoting education and cultural values in tandem.

Railway families shine in vibrant performances; closing ceremony held at Rang Bhawan, Maligaon NFR summer cultural workshop concludes

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 20: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) Cultural Association, Maligaon, reaffirmed its commitment to cultural preservation and creative excellence by successfully concluding its annual Summer Cultural Workshop 2025 with a grand closing ceremony at Rang Bhawan, NFR Headquarters, Maligaon, on July 18.

The event marked the culmination of weeks of intensive training and enthusiastic participation from the railway community, particularly employees and their family members.

According to an official release, the Summer Cultural Workshop was conceived as a platform for promoting the rich folk traditions of Northeast India while also nurturing emerging talent in modern artistic disciplines.

The workshop witnessed wide participation from children, youth and adults from across the railway fraternity, who underwent training in a variety of cultural forms.

The cultural programme held during the closing ceremony showcased a series of captivating performances that reflected both the



traditional heritage and contemporary creativity of the participants.

Traditional dances such as Bihu, Bagumbar, and Jhumur were performed with remarkable finesse, drawing applause from the audience.

These were complemented by soulful renditions of folk songs, vibrant modern dances, drama presentations and displays of fine arts—each piece reflecting the depth of talent within the NFR community.

Senior railway officials and dignitaries attended the event and praised the initiative as an important step towards community engagement and cultural continuity.

Officers, staff and their family members filled the Rang Bhawan auditorium, adding warmth and camaraderie to the festive atmosphere.

The performances, prepared over weeks of rehearsal and training, were widely appreciated for their quality and cultural depth.

This year's workshop was especially focused on blending regional pride with creative expression.

Participants were provided training in both classical and modern art forms, encouraging them to explore and express their identities through multiple mediums.

The Association noted that such initiatives not only help younger generations stay rooted in tradition but also equip them to reinterpret cultural narratives for the modern era.

The official statement also highlighted that the NFR Cultural Association has been a pioneer in such initiatives, serving as a bridge between heritage and contemporary expression.

Over the years, it has emerged as a vital forum for artistic growth, drawing on the diverse cultural wealth of the Northeast and encouraging inclusivity across linguistic and ethnic lines.

As the curtains came down on this year's workshop, the applause and admiration from the audience served as a fitting tribute to the performers' dedication and the Association's role in sustaining and evolving cultural life within the railway fraternity.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance.
-Confucius

Democratic Party regrouping again

Why are democrats in USA still sulking in the shadows whining and not gotten over the shock defeat of Ms. Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential elections when her rival Trump stole the democrats' voter bases and not satiated them yet on their demands in the middle east or on the economy. Time for ruminating over whether Joe Biden should have quit the race early in order to give time to Kamala Harris undertake a proper campaign is over – people are not interested or were ever interested in messages like Democracy is in Danger, but more earthly bread and butter issues. Bread and Eggs on the table and Trump seized it and changed his tack to win over democratic blocks – Arab voters, Palestinians, Indians, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans, Japanese, Vietnamese, Phillipinos and most importantly the Latino Voters, who constitute the biggest chunk of the non-white voter's base in the country. It's projected to be substantially higher in 2026 despite the government's efforts at denaturalization of citizens, largely targeted at Mexicans and South Americas. Its history that Ms. Kamala Harris had only three months for her campaign to win in 2024, too short and too little, but not standing up to the demand firmly to stop arms supplies to Israel, perceived as a genocidal nation causing collateral damage to tens of thousands of innocent civilians in the Gaza, caused Arab voters to shift without thinking how Trump could stop the war on day one. Election rhetoric often sells even if it's bereft of truth or logic or any rationale or simple common sense on the impossibility of certain statements being carried out. So that applied to Trump's statements on stopping the War in Ukraine and Gaza. War still rages.

Democrats should be out there and fighting for people's rights more forcefully as the Republicans did when Trump was blindsided with court cases and bombarded with stays, keep your mouth shut orders from courts. Yet he campaigned vigorously to vote banks of the democrats which made him win – not enough having right wingers or whites on your side, the nation is predominantly getting more populated with an huge ethnic population, harnessing your strength is the mantra. Gavin Newsom, the California governor, showed he had some steel when he opposed the ICE's hunt and capture methods of collaring immigrants at workplaces and there was a massive upsurge on logical and concrete legal grounds when latinos poured out in the streets to protest. So, who is the democratic alternative? Former transport secretary Pete Buttigieg, who served from February 3, 2021, until January 20, 2025. He was succeeded by Sean Duffy from the Republicans. He campaigned vigorously and was seen at lectures talking anywhere now, when the country is rocked by moves like ending birthright citizenship and denaturalisation of legitimate citizens on specious grounds.

At a closed-door fundraiser in New Jersey, former U.S. President Barack Obama delivered a forceful call to action for Democrats, urging them to move beyond disappointment and self-pity, and instead stand up for democratic values, free speech, and institutional integrity amid growing concerns of authoritarianism under Donald Trump's second term. He criticized the party's tendency to seek quick fixes or messianic figures and called on members to support existing candidates like Mikie Sherrill in New Jersey and Abigail Spanberger in Virginia, emphasizing the need to focus on pragmatic solutions, build Democratic National Committee resources, and push back against intimidation. Stressing the urgency of the political moment, Obama said Democrats must be willing to get uncomfortable to defend the country, cautioning that America is "dangerously close" to authoritarianism if they fail to act.

BJP's next decade- staying strong or facing new foes

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has undeniably reshaped the landscape of Indian politics over the past few decades. Since its formation in 1980, the party has grown from a modest outfit with limited influence to a dominant force that has governed India at the national level and in numerous states, including Assam. Its remarkable victories in the 2014 and 2019 general elections, coupled with its ability to forge alliances and expand its footprint, have made it a central player in the country's political arena. Yet, as we look toward the future, questions arise: What lies ahead for the BJP? Will it maintain its dominance over the next decade? Who might emerge as its new rivals? These are complex questions, and to answer them, we must delve into the BJP's strengths, vulnerabilities, and the evolving political dynamics of India, with a particular lens on Assam, where the party has made significant inroads.

The BJP's rise is a story of strategic brilliance, ideological clarity, and organizational prowess. Rooted in the ideology of Hindutva and backed by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the party has built a robust network that spans from rural hamlets to urban centers. This grassroots machinery has allowed the BJP to connect with diverse sections of society, from farmers to urban professionals. At the heart of its success has been Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose charisma, oratory, and development-focused narrative have struck a chord with millions. His leadership has not only unified the party but also given it a larger-than-life image. In Assam, the BJP's victories in the 2016 and 2021 state assembly elections under leaders like Himanta Biswa Sarma have solidified its position in a region historically dominated by the Congress and regional players. The party's promises of development, curbing illegal immigration, and implementing the Assam Accord have resonated with many in the state, though not without controversy.

Looking ahead, the BJP's future over the next decade hinges on several factors. Its organizational strength is one of its greatest assets. The RSS's cadre-based structure ensures a steady supply of dedicated workers who can mobilize voters and spread the party's message. The BJP's focus on development encapsulated in slogans like "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" (Together with All, Development for All) has broadened its appeal beyond its traditional

voter base. In Assam, for instance, infrastructure projects like new highways, bridges, and schemes for tea garden workers have been highlighted as achievements. However, not all promises have been fulfilled. A 2019 report from an Assam-based news portal noted that the BJP's decision to release a "vision document" instead of a detailed election manifesto disappointed some voters who expected concrete commitments. This suggests that while the party has mastered the art of narrative-building, delivering on promises remains a critical challenge.

Another key factor in the BJP's future is its reliance on Narendra Modi's leadership. Modi's personal popularity has been a game-changer, but what happens after his tenure? At 75 years old in 2025, questions about succession loom large. Leaders like Amit Shah have demonstrated organizational acumen, but whether they can replicate Modi's mass appeal is uncertain. In Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma has emerged as a dynamic leader, steering the party to consecutive victories. Yet, murmurs of discontent exist, particularly among tribal communities who feel that promises of greater autonomy and development have not been fully realized. For the BJP to sustain its dominance, it must cultivate a new generation of leaders who can connect with voters on both ideological and developmental fronts. Without this, the party risks losing its momentum.

The BJP's ideological stance, centered on Hindutva, is both a strength and a potential vulnerability. It has galvanized a significant portion of the population, particularly in northern and western India, but it has also alienated others, especially in regions with diverse religious and ethnic identities. In Assam, the party's focus on issues like illegal immigration and the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) has polarized opinions. While some see these as necessary for protecting indigenous interests, others view them as divisive. A 2025 X post by a user from Assam expressed frustration over the CAA, claiming it fueled mistrust among communities. If the BJP leans too heavily on divisive issues, it could lose support among moderates and minorities, paving the way for rivals to capitalize on this discontent.

So, who might challenge the BJP in the coming decade? The Indian National Congress, despite its weakened state, remains the most prominent national alternative. In Assam, Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi

has been vocal about his party's plans to challenge the BJP in the 2026 state elections. In a July 2025 statement, he accused the BJP of relying on "fear, violence, and division" and predicted a Congress resurgence. However, the Congress faces significant hurdles. Its organizational structure is weaker than the BJP's, and it struggles to present a cohesive narrative. Rahul Gandhi's leadership has shown signs of improvement, particularly after the 2024 elections where Congress made modest gains, but it still lacks the charisma and organizational depth to match the BJP's juggernaut. For Congress to emerge as a serious contender, it must rebuild its grassroots presence and offer a compelling alternative vision.

Beyond Congress, regional parties could pose a challenge, particularly in states like Assam where local issues dominate. The Asom Gana Parishad (AGP), a BJP ally, and the All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) have influence but lack the organizational strength to rival the BJP independently. The AGP, rooted in the Assam Movement, has seen its influence wane, while the AIUDF's appeal is largely confined to minority communities. However, regional parties can disrupt the BJP's dominance if they unite around local issues like land rights, flood management, and tribal welfare. For instance, the failure to fully implement the Assam Accord remains a sore point, and a regional force that effectively champions this cause could gain traction.

Nationally, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) is an intriguing wildcard. Its success in Delhi and Punjab shows that a new party with a focus on governance and anti-corruption can disrupt the status quo. AAP's emphasis on education and healthcare could appeal to younger voters, a demographic that will play a crucial role in the next decade. However, AAP's presence in Assam remains negligible, and scaling up nationally will require overcoming significant logistical and financial challenges. A 2025 X post by a political analyst suggested that AAP could emerge as a "third force" if it expands its footprint in states like Gujarat and Haryana, but its ability to challenge the BJP in the North-east is uncertain.

The BJP's future will also be shaped by broader socio-economic trends. India's youth, who make up a significant portion of the electorate, are increasingly focused on jobs, education, and environmental issues. Rising unemployment and inflation, highlighted in several 2025 news reports,

could erode the BJP's support if not addressed. In Assam, the tea garden workers and rural communities face persistent economic challenges, and the BJP's ability to deliver tangible benefits will be critical. A 2025 X post from an Assamese user lamented the lack of job opportunities for local youth, reflecting a sentiment that could fuel discontent if ignored. The party's digital savviness, evident in its mastery of social media, will help it stay connected with younger voters, but rhetoric alone won't suffice.

In Assam, the BJP's future hinges on its ability to balance regional aspirations with its national agenda. Issues like flood management, illegal immigration, and tribal rights are deeply emotive. The party's efforts to resolve these through initiatives like the Clause 6 committee of the Assam Accord or infrastructure development have been partially successful but face criticism for slow progress. If the BJP fails to deliver, regional forces or a revitalized Congress could exploit these gaps. Conversely, if it addresses these issues effectively, it could cement its dominance in the state for years to come.

Nationally, the BJP's ability to adapt to changing voter priorities will be key. The next decade will see a more urbanized, tech-savvy, and aspirational India. The party's focus on digital governance and initiatives like "Digital India" aligns with this shift, but it must also tackle pressing issues like climate change and economic inequality. The rise of new political voices whether from within the BJP, opposition parties, or entirely new movements will depend on who best captures the imagination of this evolving electorate.

The BJP's future over the next decade looks promising but not guaranteed. Its organizational strength, ideological clarity, and development narrative give it an edge, but challenges like succession, regional discontent, and economic pressures could test its resilience. Rivals like Congress, regional parties, and emerging players like AAP have opportunities to challenge the BJP, but they must overcome their own limitations. In Assam, the BJP's success will depend on addressing local issues while maintaining its national appeal. Politics is a dynamic game, and the BJP's ability to evolve with the times will determine whether it remains a juggernaut or faces an unexpected reckoning. For the people of Assam and India, the hope is that all parties prioritize progress over polarization, ensuring a future that reflects the aspirations of a diverse and vibrant nation.

Battle for Babies: Russia's another war alongside Ukraine

By: Aditya Vashisht

Recently a demographer working for the Russian government has suggested that the number of years spent by a Russian person on education should be lessened. Taking cue from the fall in the national birth rate, the rationale behind this proposal is that it will allow a Russian individual to start a family at an early age, have more children and thus aid in increasing the population.

Though its just a proposal, this forms a part of the efforts which the Russian government under President Putin is making to arrest the decline of the population growth of Russia. Official Russian government data stipulates that the population which stands currently at 14.6 cr or 146 million is expected to fall further below 14cr (140 million) within the next decade. This is a cause of alarm for the Russian leadership which considers a large population as essential to ensure that Russia remains an influential and a strong world power.

Russia suffers from a paradox in terms of its population. It has the world's largest territory but with a population which is small in proportion to the size of its territory. Picture this, Bangladesh has a population of about 17cr (170 million) which is larger than Russia. But the difference between the size of the territories of both the nations is as glaring as night and day. In comparison Russia's rivals and competitors are surely ahead of it in terms of population. The US has a population around 33cr (330 million) which is adequate in proportion of the size of its territory while China, Russia's current ally, has a population which is quite in excess.

A large population does bring with it its benefits, despite its disadvantages being popular. It provides more human resources, which if given the right infrastructure and environment gives the state the benefits of the services of a large pool of talented citizens in all sectors, be it economy, defence, culture etc. Moreover, if a state's population constitutes a significant proportion of the humankind, that state's and its culture influence would undoubtedly be strong and bring to it several advantages. When one aligns these advantages with President Putin's leadership and his vision for Russia, it is not very difficult to understand the reason why his



administration is focusing so much on increasing the Russian birth rate.

Measures of the Russian government have been several. The year 2017 was declared as the start of a 'Decade of Childhood' in order to bolster efforts at increasing population. Further in Russia, a law has been passed which penalizes the promotion of 'child-free' ideologies and values i.e. those ideologies which influence or motivate people to have lesser children. Violation invites a fine of considerable amount. President Putin has also restored the Soviet-era 'Mother Heroine' medal which honoured mothers who have ten children. This involves the bestowing of the title of Mother Heroine and a reward of 1 million rubles (around 11 lakh INR). Regional governments in Russia are also following the same policy and are making efforts to reverse the trend of decline in birth rate.

Looking at constant exhortations of President Putin and other Russian politicians, it seems that apart from the war in Ukraine, Russia is also fighting another battle. Though efforts for increasing population have been ongoing since the past decades, the Ukraine war has accelerated the urgency of the problem. The war in Ukraine has brought a significant shift in Russia's foreign policy as it finds itself to some extent isolated. Its ties with European nations and the West has deteriorated and it has had to enter into an uncomfortable alliance with China, which is not a traditional ally and is superior to Russia in terms of its capabilities. The Russian economy, though it has managed to weather the effects of stringent sanctions, is not invulnerable and will be affected by a declining population. Russia's military capability will also suffer if the population rate continues to decline since it would not allow

President Putin to execute his strategic objectives. A large pool of men is required for him to maintain the strength and aura of Russian military. The Ukraine war has just shown the importance of numbers, as many news reports suggest that Russia has sustained big casualties in terms of its number of soldiers during the current war.

Another concern attached with the fall in birth rate is the demographic makeup of the country. Russia is home to many cultural and religious minorities such as Bashkirs, Tatars, Chechens etc. which are different from ethnic Russians in their culture and religion. Traditionally Russian identity rests on the pillars of Russian language, Orthodox Christianity and Russian ethnicity. The fall in birth rate is more pronounced among Orthodox Christian Russians, which suggests that if these trends continue, the Russia of the future might be quite different from the one that we know today. Though that's only a possibility for population growth in Russia are also subtly focused towards ensuring the dominance of the ethnic Russian population. It is evident from the emphasis on traditional Russian family values and the exhortation to give up the liberal, anti-child ideologies which are obviously the imports of the West which adds another dimension to the rivalry between Russia and the West.

The year 2024 was declared by the Russian government as god semya which in the Russian language means the 'Year of the Family'. It would be thus, interesting to see that how the Russian leadership is able to tackle this problem and tries to achieve the status of a 'super-strong country', as the Russia's official spokesperson has stated. Population numbers it seems, may decide the destiny of Russia and its people.

Whither Indian bureaucracy: Problems to tackle

By: Diganta Barooah

Every great institution is the lengthened shadow of a single man. His character determines the character of the organization. Only then can fair administration and democracy go hand in hand"

- Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Despite over seven decades of independence, India's bureaucracy often appears trapped in the shadows of colonial legacy, red tape, and systemic rigidity. While new policies and digital innovations surface regularly, the bureaucratic structure still reflects outdated mindsets, sluggish decision-making and opaque procedures. These persistent issues are often described as the "ghosts" haunting India's bureaucracy. India's civil services were shaped during British rule as an instrument of colonial control. This legacy persists in the form of: * Authoritarian decision-making * Excessive procedural formalism * Centralization of power From a conflict perspective, this structure serves elite interests more than the common people. The hierarchical model discourages innovation and reinforces social distance between administrators and citizens. Example: A district magistrate still holds powers reminiscent of colonial collectors — combining judicial, administrative, and revenue functions, creating power without adequate accountability. The bureaucratic system often operates with complex layers of approval and procedural compliance, known as red-tapism. Sociologist Max Weber's ideal-type bureaucracy emphasized rule-based functioning, hierarchy, and impersonal relationships. While this model ensured discipline and order, in India, it has mutated into bureaucratic inertia, where: * Decision-making is excessively delayed * Fear of audit or blame leads to non-action * Citizens suffer due to lack of responsiveness This reflects structural-functional theory in dysfunction — where a once-functional system becomes maladaptive over time. In India's democratic framework, the bureaucracy — particularly the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) — is often envisioned as the steel frame that supports the state's functioning. Yet beneath this imagery lies a story of stagnation, status-quoism, and unchecked privilege. While political interference is often blamed for administrative inefficiency, deeper structural issues remain

underexplored. The bureaucratic system in India often mirrors a feudal structure, where power is centralized and decision-making is opaque. In 2012, a Hong Kong-based consultancy ranked Indian bureaucracy the worst in Asia. This perception persists, with bureaucrats rarely held accountable for their actions, fostering negligence and irresponsibility. The system rewards political loyalty over competence, discouraging meritocracy and promoting inefficiency. Political interference undermines impartial decision-making, favoring certain groups and persecuting opponents. The Indian bureaucracy faces several significant flaws, including indecision and risk aversion, leading to delays and inefficiency. Political interference and a lack of specialization also hinder its effectiveness. Furthermore, red tape, or complex procedures, and conflict between different bureaucratic agencies contribute to problems like slow processes, duplication of efforts, and a general lack of coordination.

• Indecision and Risk Aversion:

Bureaucrats often delay decisions due to fear of potential negative consequences, both legal and reputational, leading to stalled projects and slow service delivery.

• Political Interference:

Political influence in transfers, promotions, and suspensions can undermine merit-based systems and demoralize officers.

• Lack of Specialization:

Frequent transfers across different departments prevent officers from developing deep expertise in specific areas, hindering effective policymaking.

• Red Tape and Bureaucratic Procedures:

Complex and lengthy procedures slow down processes, creating unnecessary delays and frustration for citizens and businesses.

• Conflict and Duplication:

Misaligned goals and overlapping functions between different bureaucratic agencies lead to inefficiencies and a waste of resources.

• Motivational Issues:

A lack of proper incentives and recognition for good work can lead to decreased motivation and a decline in the quality of service.

• Outdated Personnel Practices:

Inadequate training and a lack of focus on modernizing bureaucratic practices further contribute to the problems.

Colonial Inheritance and the Myth of Neutrality:

• Hangover from the Past:

The Indian bureaucracy was born from the colonial state and carries forward its legacy of hierarchy, aloofness, and control. Designed to enforce law and collect revenue, British-era administrators functioned with regal distance from the public — a trait that persists today.

• Changed Cause:

The colonial "rule of difference" saw administrators acting on behalf of imperial interests, rather than those of the people. Post-independence the same apparatus was tasked with implementing developmental policies — an entirely different moral and functional terrain it was ill-equipped to handle. • Instead of transforming to suit democratic governance, the bureaucracy retained its orientation towards maintaining order and status quo, hindering progressive policy shifts such as land reforms. • The Weberian ideal of bureaucracy — rational, merit-based, neutral — is often uncritically applied to Indian conditions. Yet, in a country marked by caste hierarchies and regional inequalities, neutrality cannot be assumed. Instead, bureaucracy becomes yet another stakeholder in the power struggles of society.

Cultural Glorification:

• Swagger Over Service:

The IAS continues to hold immense symbolic power in Indian society. The desire to join the civil services is less about public service and more about the allure of authority, prestige, higher standards of living, and discretionary control — remember "Lal Batti". • Social prestige is deeply intertwined with the perceived clout of bureaucratic positions. Clearing the UPSC Exam is publicly celebrated in ways that obscure the service's declining ethical and performance standards. Today, nobody sits in the UPSC Exam for serving the nation genuinely. Rather the very motive behind sitting and succeeding in UPSC Exams is to have a higher standard of living and enjoying the privileges associated with such Services.

• Archaic Mindset:

In practice, IAS Officers often function with a feudal mindset. From the use of titles like 'huzur' and 'mai-baap' to the normalisation of privilege (such as clearing stadiums for dog-walking), the bureaucracy's performance often reflects impunity rather than integrity. Only a very few hardly serves the nation with integrity and accountability.

• Corruption and Caste Patronage:

Corruption and caste patronage further corrode its democratic potential. Promotions and postings are influenced by social networks, reducing the system's meritocratic claim to facade. • Instead of promoting equitable administration, these practices deepen existing social fissures. • High profile scandals and public outcries rarely lead to institutional accountability. On the contrary, bureaucratic associations have at times defended officers involved in misconduct, reinforcing the idea that elite state agents operate above reproach.

Strengths of Indian Bureaucracy:

• Provide continuity in governance and administration —

It ensures that policies and programs initiated by one government are carried forward by the next.

• Deliver efficient governance —

It provides a professional and experienced cadre of administrators who are well-trained in various aspects of governance, such as policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

• Check on the power of elected officials —

It ensures that decisions are made based on merit and not political considerations.

• Ethical bureaucracy —

Ethical leaders are considered honest, caring, and principled individuals who make balanced and fair decisions. Such ethical and conscious leadership can promote integrity within institutions.

• Prioritise public welfare —

In the Covid times when everyone feared death, these brave officers set aside their personal lives, responsibilities and fears to serve the nation, with some even laying down their lives.

Weakness of Indian Bureaucracy:

• Lack of accountability & transparency —

Opacity in governance and lack of accountability leads to culture of impunity where civil servants can get away with poor performance or even corruption without fear of consequences.

• Sluggish administration —

It includes delays in justice and bureaucratic red tape, with high-profile cases dragging on for years due to inefficiencies.

• Abuse of power —

Incidents such as extrajudicial killings, custodial deaths, and police inaction in politically sensitive cases raise serious concerns about fairness in administration.

(To be Contd...)

How mobile screens shape young brains

By: Satyabrata Borah

Nowadays toddlers swipe screens before they utter their first words. The quiet influence of mobile devices on young minds is reshaping childhood in ways we're only beginning to understand. It's not just about what's on the screen like cartoons, games or endless streams of videos but about what childhood is losing in the process. The question isn't whether screens belong in a child's life; they're already there, woven into the fabric of modern existence. The real question is: how much is too much and what are we sacrificing when screens dominate the early years?

Childhood is a fleeting, precious time. Childhood is a period when the brain is a sponge, soaking up experiences that shape a person's emotional, social, and cognitive foundation. It's when imagination runs wild, when running through fields or building forts out of blankets sparks creativity and joy. It's when children learn to read faces, navigate friendships, and feel the warmth of human connection. But today, for many kids, these experiences are being replaced by the glow of a screen. A child clutching a tablet at the dinner table, eyes glued to a game while the world around them fades, is no longer an unusual sight. It's become the norm. And while technology offers undeniable benefits, the cost of its unchecked presence in young lives is becoming harder to ignore.

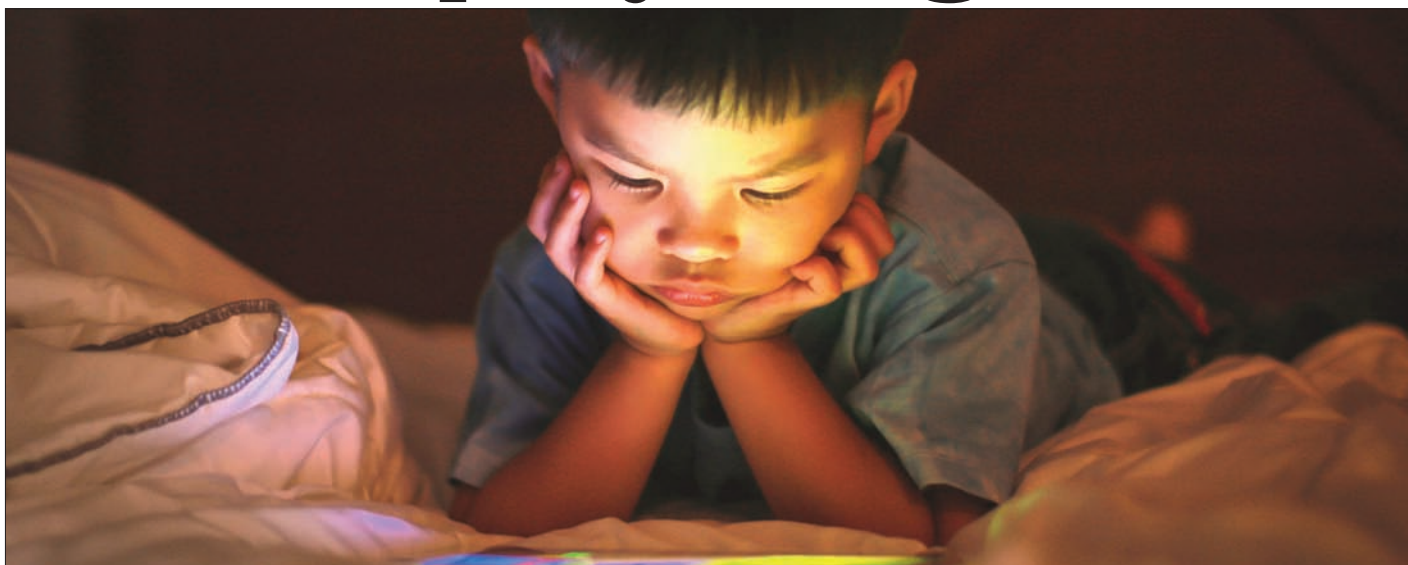
The human brain, especially in early childhood, is wired to learn through interaction with people, with nature, with the tangible world. When a child spends hours on a device, they're often missing out on these real-world experiences that are critical for development. Playing in the dirt, chasing friends in a game of tag, or even arguing over who gets the last cookie teaches lessons no app can replicate. These moments build problem-solving skills, emotional resilience, and the ability to connect with others. Screens, on the other hand, offer

a curated, often solitary experience. A game might teach a child to solve a puzzle, but it doesn't teach them how to negotiate with a friend or cope with losing in real life. The vibrant, fast-paced world of a screen can feel more engaging than the slower, messier reality of human interaction, but it's the latter that shapes a well-rounded person.

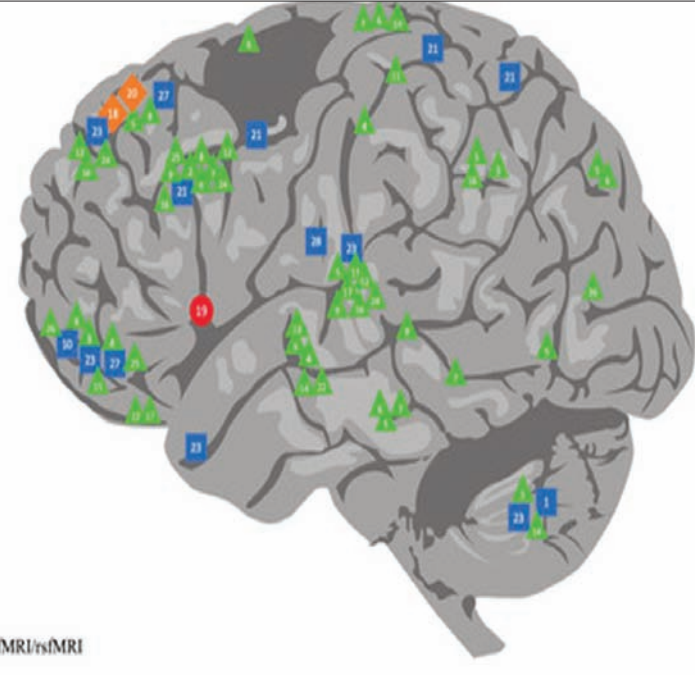
Research paints a sobering picture of what excessive screen time does to young minds. Studies have shown that prolonged exposure to screens can lead to issues like anxiety, depression, and attention deficits in children. The bright lights and rapid-fire stimuli of mobile devices overstimulate developing brains, making it harder for kids to focus

aren't just short-term; they can alter the brain's wiring in ways that impact learning and behavior for years to come.

Social skills, like reading body language or understanding tone, are honed through face-to-face interaction. When a child spends more time chatting through a screen or battling virtual enemies than talking to friends or family, those skills can atrophy. Instead of learning to share, empathize, or resolve conflicts in real-time, they're navigating a digital world where interactions are often one-dimensional. Online games and social media might feel like a connection, but they lack the depth of a real conversation where you see someone's eyes light up or notice



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| ● Li et al., 2020 | ▲ Feng et al., 2013 |
| ● Li et al., 2021 | ▲ Han et al., 2018 |
| ● Luo et al., 2021 | ▲ Hong et al., 2013 |
| ● Cho et al., 2021 | ▲ Hong et al., 2015 |
| ● Hong et al., 2013 | ▲ Hwang et al., 2020 |
| ● Pan et al., 2018 | ▲ Kim et al., 2014 |
| ● Takeuchi et al., 2018 | ▲ Ko et al., 2023 |
| ● Weng et al., 2013 | ▲ Kwak et al., 2020 |
| ● Yoo et al., 2021 | ▲ Lee et al., 2020 |
| ● Choi et al., 2018 | ▲ Li et al., 2014 |
| ● Chun et al., 2015 | ▲ Pyeon et al., 2021 |
| ● Chun et al., 2018 | ▲ Wang et al., 2017 |
| ● Ding et al., 2013 | ▲ Wang et al., 2015 |
| ● Ding et al., 2014 | ▲ Wee et al., 2014 |



on tasks that require patience or sustained effort. For younger children, who are still learning to regulate their emotions, this overstimulation can disrupt their ability to stay calm or process feelings effectively. A 2020 study from the American Academy of Pediatrics found that children under five who spent more than two hours a day on screens were at higher risk for cognitive and language delays. The effects

the quiver in their voice. This can lead to a generation less equipped to build meaningful relationships, both personally and professionally.

Physical health takes a hit too. Hours spent hunched over a screen can strain young eyes, leading to issues like digital eye strain or even early myopia. The blue light emitted by devices disrupts sleep patterns, which is especially harmful for children

whose growing bodies need rest to thrive. Then there's the sedentary nature of screen time. Kids who are glued to their devices aren't running, jumping or climbing. These are the activities that not only keep them physically fit but also boost mental health and creativity. A 2019 study linked excessive screen use in children to higher risks of obesity, as time spent on devices often replaces active play. The outdoors, once a

playground for imagination, is increasingly replaced by the virtual landscapes of games and videos.

But it's not all doom and gloom. Screens aren't inherently evil; they're tools, and like any tool, their impact depends on how they're used. Educational apps can teach kids math, reading, or even coding in engaging ways. Videos can spark curiosity about the world, from documentaries about animals to tutorials on drawing. During the pandemic, screens were a lifeline, connecting isolated kids to their teachers and friends. Without balance, the benefits of technology are overshadowed by its risks.

So, where's the line? How do we ensure screens enhance rather than erode childhood? It starts with setting boundaries. The World Health Organization recommends no screen time for children under two and no more than one hour a day for those aged two to five. For older kids, the guidelines are less rigid but emphasize balance. Nowadays screens are everywhere. To limit their use can feel like swimming against the tide. It's even harder when parents themselves are tethered to their devices, modeling the very behavior they're trying to curb. Kids learn from what they see, and if Mom or Dad is always scrolling, it's no surprise when a child wants to do the

same.

Creating a balanced approach means being intentional about how screens fit into a child's life. It's about quality as much as quantity. An hour spent on an app that encourages problem-solving or creativity is different from an hour spent mindlessly watching videos. Parents can guide this by co-viewing with their kids, discussing what they're seeing, or using apps that spark real-world activities, like a drawing game that inspires them to pick up a pencil. It's also about carving out screen-free zones like mealtimes, bedrooms, or family outings where human connection takes precedence. These moments help children learn that life happens beyond the screen.

Encouraging alternative activities is just as important. Kids need time to be kids. They have to run, imagine and get bored. Boredom, often seen as a problem to be solved with a screen, is actually a gift. It pushes children to create their own fun, whether it's building a pillow fort or inventing a game with their siblings. Outdoor play, in particular, is a powerful antidote to the pull of screens. Nature engages all the senses, fostering creativity and calm in ways no device can. Even simple activities like reading together, baking, or telling stories can strengthen family

bonds and give kids the emotional security they need to thrive.

The challenge is to preserve the essence of childhood in a screen-saturated world. It's about ensuring kids grow up with the skills to navigate both the digital and real worlds with confidence. This doesn't mean banning screens. They're part of modern life, and learning to use them wisely is a valuable skill. But it does mean recognizing that childhood is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to build a foundation for a healthy, fulfilling life. Every hour spent on a screen is an hour not spent exploring, connecting, or simply being a kid. The stakes are high, and the choices we make today will shape not just our children's futures but the kind of world they'll create.

As parents, educators and communities, we have a responsibility to strike a balance. We need to ask ourselves: are we giving kids the space to grow into curious, empathetic, resilient people, or are we letting screens rewrite what childhood means? The answer lies in our hands or perhaps, in putting down our phones and picking up a ball, a book, or a moment of connection instead. Childhood is too precious to be lost to a screen's glow, and it's up to us to ensure it shines brighter than ever.

WHO recommends lenacapavir as twice yearly injection to help prevent HIV

By: Corrie Pele

According to UNAIDS, in 2024, about 40.8 million people around the world were living with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) — a virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) if not treated.

The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that in the same year Trusted Source about 1.3 million people received a new diagnosis of HIV, and about 630,000 died from HIV-related causes. While there is currently no approved vaccine for HIV, the WHO has recently issued new guidelines Trusted Source at the 13th International AIDS Society Conference (IAS 2025) on HIV Science recommending the use of injectable lenacapavir Trusted Source to help prevent infection.

What is lenacapavir and how does it work?

Lenacapavir is a medication originally designed to treat HIV infection. It is currently sold under the brand names Sunlenca for HIV treatment, and Yeztugo for HIV prevention.

According to Carolyn Chu, MD, MSc, FFAFP, AAHIVS, chief medical officer of the American Academy of HIV Medicine, lenacapavir is a novel antiviral medication — belonging to the "HIV capsid inhibitor" class — which was initially developed for use as part of a combination treatment regimen for people with HIV. "The initial product (brand name Sunlenca) was approved for treatment in late 2022 based on the CAPELLA Study that examined its safety and efficacy among study participants with HIV who were heavily treatment-experienced and had multidrug-resistant infection," Chu explained to Medical News Today.

"Because of its unique molecular properties, scientists were very interested in determining whether lenacapavir could also be developed for use as an HIV prevention intervention," she added.

"[Lenacapavir] disrupts multiple stages of the HIV life cycle, which makes it an attractive drug to study further — it is also very potent (with effective concentrations at pico-molar ranges) and is active against viruses which may be resistant to HIV medications that have been commonly used over the last decade."

— Carolyn Chu, MD

Chu said that when lenacapavir was studied as a long-acting pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) HIV preventive option in the PURPOSE clinical trials, investigators found an almost 100% reduction in new HIV infections among participants who received it as a twice-yearly injectable. "These findings led to its recent approval under a new indication, i.e., used as a prevention medication, brand name Yeztugo," she added.

What are the new WHO lenacapavir guidelines?

Through its new guidelines, the WHO recommends the use of injectable lenacapavir twice a year as an additional PrEP option to help prevent HIV.

Examples of currently used PrEP options include the oral medications Truvada (emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil fumarate) and Descovy (emtricitabine/tenofovir alafenamide), and the injectable drug Apretude (cabotegravir). The WHO also recommended the dapivirine vaginal ring (DVR) Trusted Source in 2021 as an additional PrEP choice for cisgender women.

The guidelines are based on safety and efficacy findings for lenacapavir from various studies and clinical trials, most notably PURPOSE 1 and PURPOSE 2.

Phase 3 of the PURPOSE 1 trial in cisgender women resulted in no cases of HIV infection among study participants given lenacapavir.

Further, the PURPOSE 2 trial found 99.9% of cisgender men and gender-diverse people did not become infected with HIV after receiving the drug.

In addition to the lenacapavir recommendation, the WHO also recommends a public health approach to HIV testing through the use of HIV rapid tests.

Lenacapavir for people concerned about HIV infection

According to the WHO's new guidelines, offering injectable lenacapavir twice a year may help overcome potential barriers to current PrEP options, such as unwillingness to take a regular oral pill and a wish for lower amounts of clinic visits.

"Lenacapavir represents a major scientific advance — it's the first long-acting injectable HIV prevention strategy that requires dosing just twice a year," according to Paul E. Sax, MD, clinical director of the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Brigham and Women's Hospital, and professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. "For some individuals, especially those who have difficulty adhering to daily or even bimonthly prevention strategies like oral PrEP or cabotegravir, this would be especially welcome," Sax noted.

Edward Liu, MD, MPH, FACP, FIDSA, chief of infectious diseases at Hackensack Meridian Jersey Shore University Medical Center in New Jersey, explained to MNT that:

"Across the world HIV remains a serious disease and preventing new infection is critical. Lenacapavir is an injectable antiviral that lasts 6 months, protecting people for long periods of time. Oral antivirals that are approved for preventing HIV require daily dosing to be effective." "People don't like storing oral HIV antivirals at home, where there is stigma attached to those medications, and people forget to take medications or use condoms," Liu continued. "Large-scale treatment of people with lenacapavir will be the most efficient way yet to prevent HIV infection until an effective vaccine is produced."

The critical need for HIV prevention

HIV and AIDS continue to be a global problem. According to UNAIDS, although the number of new global HIV infections has decreased by about 39% since 2010, there are still areas around the world where numbers are increasing, making the need for HIV prevention critical. "Prevention of HIV is much less expensive than treating people with HIV infection with expensive antivirals for the rest of their lives," said Liu.

That is another reason why prevention is important. "Treatment with antivirals is very difficult to sustain, particularly in poorer countries," said Sax.

"The ideal situation is to have multiple options for preventing HIV among those at risk — this includes not only available PrEP strategies, but also other novel PrEP approaches such as an investigational once-monthly pill for those who don't like or want injections," Sax explained. "Of course, we still hope that the HIV vaccine research will advance to the point of giving us an effective vaccine, but the scientific hurdles have proven very high, so we are not anticipating any major breakthroughs in this area in the near future," Sax added, on a cautionary note.

Finally, Chu noted that: "Right now, a lot of conversations are centered on ensuring that everyone who is interested in (lenacapavir) will have access to it. Multiple studies have confirmed that interest in this new option is high, and so our systems and policymakers need to be forward-thinking and work in close collaboration with community members and other stakeholders to ensure that all the necessary pieces to initiate and continue this new PrEP option (e.g., HIV screening/testing, obtaining the medication from pharmacies, training people on how to administer the doses, relaying medication/appointment reminders, etc.) are identified soon and can be rolled out equitably." (Courtesy: MNT)

Sole Mates - How walking can be your best Medicine

By: Vinod Chandrashekhar Dixit

Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of our Nation, laid great stress on morning walk. He himself used to go out for a morning walk every day. If we see the example of Mahatma Gandhi, he had a sense to understand and build on it. His theory of Satyagraha, the Dandi March are enactments of the drama of walking, of standing for or against something. The body becomes the icon of the most elementary and profound of protests. Gandhi used walking to bring down an empire. In fact, he understood walking is still within nature.

It clearly gives message that trapped in our rhythms of daily life; we often ignore the many physical and psychological benefits of walking. The simplest form of exercise is walking; it has a multitude of benefits both physical and psychological. It is probably the best form of exercise for someone who has a lot of weight to lose. It's accessible, cheap, fairly easy on already-stressed-by-excess-weight joints and less intimidating than a gym or a class. A simple walk on a daily basis puts you on sound health. An early morning walk is a blessing for the whole day. A morning walk is good for our legs, arms, chest and waist. In fact, it is a good exercise for the whole body. Fresh air improves our normal bodily function.

Research reveals that walking increases the level of endorphins — naturally secreted hormones working in brain which increase the sense of wellbeing. A Study conducted by Dr. James O. Hill in conjunction with the University of Colorado Health Science Center showed that walking 2000 additional steps daily prevents body weight gain. Additional research showed that 10,000 steps is the break point to lose weight. Walking is not only vital to weight loss, but it is also effective in reducing symptoms of hypertension, diabetes and it also lowers the risk to develop cancer. According to survey Walking is super pill and is the most prescribed exercise for obese patients (84 per cent), followed by diabetics



(76 per cent) and patients suffering from blood pressure (72 per cent), cholesterol (65 per cent) and cardiovascular diseases (56 per cent). It is a fact that health is wealth. If health takes a back seat in our life and we trust all our energies towards amassing wealth indiscriminately, we may not be in a healthy condition to enjoy our hard-earned wealth.

Walking is one of the simplest and most effective forms of exercise, offering numerous physical and mental health benefits. Walking is so easily accessible to all of us, that we never stop to imagine it can have so many benefits. Taking the stairs instead of the elevator could be a great exercise for those work or study on tall buildings. Walking to nearby locations instead of riding the bus or a car is healthy for our body and wallet.

There is something about walking as a ritual, elegant in its routineness that we must grasp. Walking is a great equalizer, democracies' greatest act, more primordial than the vote. Walking is the act of the body exploring itself as it traces the world. It is said that when you walk, you talk to your deepest self, even as you listen to the silence of the body and its rhythms. One must remember that walking curbs your sense of power and domination, provides you with a sense of modesty and locality. Let us make walking a part of our daily routine and experience the numerous health benefits it has to offer.

A Thoughtful, Informed Decision

Cosmetic gynecology is not about meeting unrealistic beauty standards. It's about addressing real concerns, physical, emotional, or both. Like any medical procedure, it requires thoughtful consideration. The first step should always be a consultation with a qualified cosmetic surgeon who can explain the options, set realistic expectations, and ensure safety.

As awareness continues to grow and social taboos begin to fade, more women are learning that it's perfectly valid to seek help for intimate health issues. Whether for relief, recovery, or confidence, cosmetic gynecology offers a path that's personal, private, and increasingly accepted as part of modern women's healthcare.

Cosmetic Gynecology is opening a New frontier in Women's Health

By: Dr Saurabh K. Gupta

Cosmetic gynecology is a growing field in women's healthcare that focuses on improving the appearance, comfort, and function of the female intimate area. Once considered too sensitive to discuss, it is now gaining wider attention as more women seek solutions for concerns related to childbirth, aging, or personal discomfort. With medical advancements and increased awareness, cosmetic gynecology is becoming a legitimate and empowering choice for many.

What It Includes

Cosmetic gynecology covers both surgical and non-surgical procedures. Common surgeries include vaginoplasty, which tightens the vaginal canal after childbirth or aging, and labiaplasty, which reshapes the labia when enlargement causes discomfort or hygiene issues. Hymenoplasty, the reconstruction of the hymen, is also requested for personal, cultural, or social reasons. In India, where virginity before marriage still carries cultural significance in many

communities, some women opt for this procedure to restore the appearance of an intact hymen.

On the non-surgical side, laser vaginal rejuvenation helps improve tissue tone, lubrication, and elasticity, particularly useful for postmenopausal women. These treatments are usually quick, require little downtime, and are performed by trained gynecologists or cosmetic surgeons.

Why Women Are Seeking It

Women choose cosmetic gynecology for many reasons. After childbirth, some experience looseness, scarring, or a drop in confidence. Others face physical discomfort from enlarged labia, which can interfere with activities like cycling, running, or even sitting. Some women simply want to restore a sense of control over their bodies, especially after major life events like delivery, trauma, or menopause.

For older women, especially those who are postmenopausal, procedures like laser treatment or PRP therapy can help with vaginal dryness, discomfort, or mild urinary leakage. These

changes are often underreported due to embarrassment, but they can significantly affect quality of life.

The motivation is not always cosmetic. Often, it's about physical relief, improved confidence, or restoring normalcy. Whether for function or form, the key factor is that the choice is personal and based on the woman's own comfort and well-being.

Breaking Taboos

In India, intimate health is often wrapped in silence. Many women are reluctant to talk about discomfort in their private areas even with doctors. But this is slowly changing. With better access to information and growing awareness, women across cities and towns are becoming more open to exploring these options. Urban clinics report rising interest from diverse groups, newlyweds, mothers, professionals, and even older women. The shift reflects a broader understanding that intimate health is not a luxury or indulgence, but an important part of a woman's overall well-being.

At the same time, many women still approach cosmetic

gynecology with hesitation, often due to lack of information or fear of being judged. That's why clear, honest guidance from trained specialists is essential. Education, empathy, and medical transparency play a big role in normalizing these conversations.

73 Palestinians killed while waiting for aid across Gaza: Health ministry

'UN facilities were spared from evacuation orders'

DEIR AL BALAH (GAZA STRIP), July 20: At least 73 people were killed while attempting to access aid at locations across Gaza on Sunday, the health ministry in the Palestinian territory said.

The largest toll was in northern Gaza, where at least 67 Palestinians were killed while trying to reach aid entering northern Gaza through the Zikim crossing with Israel, according to the ministry and local hospitals.

More than 150 people were wounded, with some of them in critical condition, hospitals said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether they were killed by the Israeli army or armed gangs or both. But some witnesses said that the Israeli military shot at the crowd.

The killings in northern Gaza didn't take place near aid distribution points associated with the Gaza Humanitarian Fund, or GHF, a US- and Israel-backed group that hands out food packages to Palestinians. Witnesses and health workers say hundreds of people have been killed by Israeli fire while trying to access the group's distribution sites.

The Israeli military didn't immediately make any comment on Sunday's killings.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military published new evacuation warnings for areas of central Gaza on Sunday, in one of the few areas where the military has rarely operated with ground troops.

The evacuation cuts access between the city of Deir al-Balah and the southern cities of Rafah and Khan Younis in the narrow enclave. The announcement came as Israel and Hamas have been holding ceasefire talks in Qatar, but international mediators say there have been no breakthroughs.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin



Netanyahu has repeatedly stressed that expanding Israel's military operations in Gaza will pressure Hamas to negotiate, but negotiations have been stalled for months.

Earlier this month, the Israeli military said that it controlled more than 65% of the Gaza Strip. Cutting off access.

The area of Gaza under the evacuation order is where many international organisations attempting to distribute aid are located.

The United Nations has been in contact with Israeli authorities to clarify whether UN facilities in southwestern Deir al-Balah are included in Sunday's evacuation order, according to a UN official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak to the media.

The official said that in previous instances, UN facilities were spared from evacuation orders. The evacuation announcement covers an area stretching from a previously evacuated area all the way to the coast and will severely hamper movement for aid groups and civilians in Gaza.

Military spokesman Avichay Adraee warned that the military

will attack "with intensity" against militants. He called for residents, including those sheltering in tents, to head to the Muwasi area, a desolate tent camp on Gaza's southern shore that the Israeli military has designated a humanitarian zone.

Gaza's population of more than 2 million Palestinians are in a catastrophic humanitarian crisis.

Hamas triggered the 21-month war when militants stormed into southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, killing around 1,200 people and taking 251 others hostage. Fifty remain, but fewer than half are thought to be alive.

Israel's military offensive that followed has killed more than 58,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many militants are among the dead but says more than half of the dead have been women and children. The ministry is part of the Hamas government but the UN and other international organisations see it as the most reliable source of data on casualties.

The Hostages Family Forum, a grassroots organisation that represents many of the families of hostages, condemned the evacua-

tion announcement and demanded that Netanyahu and the Israeli military explain what they hope to accomplish in the area of central Gaza, accusing Israel of operating without a clear war plan.

"Enough! The Israeli people overwhelmingly want an end to the fighting and a comprehensive agreement that will return all of the hostages," the forum said. On Saturday night, during the weekly protest, tens of thousands of protesters marched in Tel Aviv to the branch of the US Embassy, demonstrating for an end to the war.

Humanitarian disaster grows On Sunday morning, ambulances in front of three major hospitals in Gaza sounded their alarms simultaneously in an urgent appeal to shed light on the hunger crisis in the territory. The health ministry posted pictures on social media of doctors holding paper signs about malnourished children and lack of medication.

Zaher al-Wahidi, one of the spokespeople at the health ministry, said that at least nine children under 5 years old have died of malnutrition as of Sunday since the Israeli's imposed aid entry blockade in March.

He explained that tracking the number of people dying of starvation is hard because some could be suffering from other medical conditions that could be worsened when compounded with severe hunger.

In northern Gaza, Shifa Hospital director Abu Selmiyah said that the hospital recorded 79 people who died of malnutrition in the past month.

Israeli bombardments continued to pound the Gaza Strip overnight. Large explosions in northern Gaza were visible from Israel as plumes of fire shot into the sky. (AP)

Syria's armed Bedouins say they have withdrawn from Druze-majority city after fighting

MAZRAA (SYRIA), July 20: Syria's armed Bedouin clans on Sunday announced that they had withdrawn from the Druze-majority city of Sweida following over a week of clashes and a US-brokered ceasefire, as humanitarian aid convoys started to enter the battered southern city.

The clashes between militias of the Druze religious minority and the Sunni Muslim clans killed hundreds and threatened to unravel Syria's already fragile postwar transition. Israel also launched dozens of airstrikes in the Druze-majority Sweida province, targeting government forces who had effectively sided with the Bedouins. The clashes also led to a series of targeted sectarian attacks against the Druze community, followed by revenge attacks against the Bedouins.

A series of tit-for-tat kidnappings sparked the clashes in various towns and villages in the province, which later spread to the city. Government forces were redeployed to halt renewed fighting that erupted Thursday, before withdrawing again.

Interim President Ahmad al-Sharaa, who was more sympathetic to the Bedouins, had tried to appeal to the Druze community while remaining critical of the militias. He later urged the Bedouins to leave the city, saying that they "cannot replace the role of the state in handling the country's affairs and restoring security."

"We thank the Bedouins for their heroic stances but demand they fully commit to the ceasefire and comply with the state's orders," he said in an address broadcast Sunday.

Dozens of armed Bedouin fighters alongside other clans from around the country who came to support them remained on the outskirts of the city and were ordered off by government security forces and military police. They



blame the clashes on the Druze factions loyal to spiritual leader Sheikh Hikmat al-Hijri and accuse them of harming Bedouin families.

"We will not leave until he turns himself in alongside those with him who tried to stir sedition. And only then will we go home," Khaled al-Mohammad, who came to the southern province alongside other tribesman from the eastern Deir al-Zour province, told The Associated Press.

Aid convoys enter Sweida but tensions persist

The Bedouins' withdrawal brought a cautious calm to the area, with humanitarian convoys on their way. The Syrian Red Crescent said Sunday it sent 32 trucks loaded with food, medicine, water, fuel and other aid, after the fighting left the province with power cuts and shortages.

Syria's state news agency SANA reported that the convoy entered Sweida on Sunday, but accused al-Hijri and his armed supporters of turning back a government delegation that accompanied another convoy.

The Foreign Ministry in a statement said the convoy accompanying the delegation had two ambulances loaded with aid provided by local and international organisations.

Al-Hijri in a statement did not directly respond to the accusations but said that he welcomes any assistance for Sweida and slammed what he claims was distorted campaigns against him.

US envoy appeals for an end to fighting

Washington's special envoy to Syria, Tom Barrack, said the clashes and atrocities "overshadowed" an initial cautious optimism about the country's post-war transition and the international community's lifting of sanctions.

"All factions must immediately lay down their arms, cease hostilities and abandon cycles of tribal vengeance," Barrack said on X. "Syria stands at a critical juncture — peace and dialogue must prevail — and prevail now."

Dozens of Druze civilians were killed in a series of targeted attacks in the city at the hands of Bedouin fighters and government forces. Videos also surfaced online of fighters destroying portraits of Druze religious officials and notables in homes, and shaving the mustaches of elderly Druze, seen as an insult to culture and tradition.

Druze militias in return attacked Bedouin-majority areas in the outskirts of the province, forcing families to flee to the neighbouring Daraa province. (AP)

Indonesian passenger ferry catches fire at sea, killing at least 5

MANADO (INDONESIA), July 20: A passenger ferry carrying hundreds of people caught fire at sea on Sunday off Sulawesi island in Indonesia, killing at least five people, officials said. More than 280 people were rescued and evacuation efforts were ongoing.

The KM Barcelona 5 was headed to Manado, the capital of North Sulawesi province, from Talaud, an island district in the province when it caught fire in waters near Talise, said Vice Adm Denih Hendrata, commander of the Indonesian Fleet Command.

He said that three navy ships had been deployed, and 284 passengers and crew members had been evacuated so far. The rescue operation included assistance from local fishermen, who saved some survivors wearing life jackets as they were drifting to nearby islands in the choppy waters.

Rescuers retrieved five bodies, including a pregnant woman.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, and no exact figures of passengers and crew members onboard the ferry. "We are still focusing on evacuation efforts," Hendrata said, adding that the cause of the fire was being investigated. Photos and videos released by the National Search and Rescue Agency showed terrified passengers, mostly wearing life jackets, jumping into the sea. Orange flames and black smoke billowed from the burning vessel.

Indonesia is an archipelago of more than 17,000 islands where ferries are a common method of travel. Disasters occur regularly, with weak safety enforcement often blamed. (AP)

Sri Lanka sacks high-ranking police officer over Easter Sunday bombings

COLOMBO, July 20: A deputy inspector general of police in Sri Lanka has been sacked from the service following a disciplinary inquiry related to the 2019 Easter Sunday terror attacks.

Nilantha Jayawardena, who previously served as the head of the State Intelligence Service (SIS), was placed on compulsory leave by the National Police Commission (NPC) in July 2024, pending an internal investigation. Following the conclusion of the inquiry, the NPC decided to dismiss Jayawardena from service.

"It was decided at the meeting of the police commission held on July 17 to order the immediate dismissal from police service of the senior deputy inspector general of police, Nilantha Jayawardena," the NPC said in a statement. About 270 people, including 11 Indians, were killed as suicide bombers be-

TOKYO, July 20: Exit polls show Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba's ruling coalition is likely to lose a majority in the smaller of Japan's two parliamentary houses in a key election Sunday, worsening the country's political instability.

Voters were deciding half of the 248 seats in the upper house, the less powerful of the two chambers in Japan's Diet.

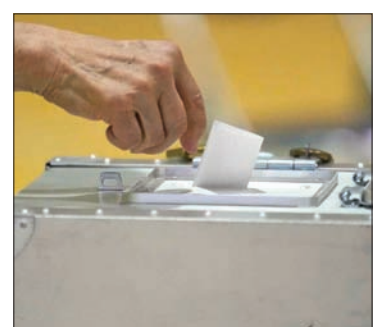
Ishiba has set the bar low, wanting a simple majority of 125 seats, which means his LDP and Komeito Liberal Democratic Party and its Buddhist-backed junior coalition partner Komeito need to win 50 to add to the 75 seats they already have.

That is a big retreat from the 141 seats they had pre-election, but media surveys predict big setbacks for Ishiba.

Exit poll results released seconds after the ballots closed Sunday night mostly showed a major setback for Ishiba's coalition. Japan's NHK television projected a range of 32-51 seats for the prime minister's coalition, while other networks projected it would win just over 40 seats.

A poor performance in the election would not immediately trigger a change of government because the upper house lacks the power to file a no-confidence motion against a leader, but it would certainly deepen uncertainty over his fate and Japan's political stability. Ishiba would face calls from within the LDP party to step down or find another coalition partner.

Soaring prices, lagging incomes and burdensome social security payments are the top issues for frustrated, cash-strapped voters. Stricter measures targeting foreign residents and visitors have also emerged as a key issue, with a surging right-wing populist party



leading the campaign.

Sunday's vote comes after Ishiba's coalition lost a majority in the October lower house election, stung by past corruption scandals, and his unpopular government has since been forced into making concessions to the opposition to get legislation through parliament. It has been unable to quickly deliver effective measures to mitigate rising prices, including Japan's traditional staple of rice, and dwindling wages.

US President Donald Trump has added to the pressure, complaining about a lack of progress in trade negotiations and the lack of sales of US autos and American-grown rice to Japan despite a shortfall in domestic stocks of the grain. A 25 per cent tariff due to take effect August 1 has been another blow for Ishiba. Ishiba has resisted any compromise before the election, but the prospect for a breakthrough after the election is just as unclear because the minority government would have difficulty forming a consensus with the opposition.

Frustrated voters are rapidly turning to emerging populist parties. The eight main opposition groups, however, are too fractured to forge a common platform as a united front and gain voter support as a viable alternative.

The emerging populist party San-

seito stands out with the toughest anti-foreigner stance, with its "Japanese First" platform that proposes a new agency to handle policies related to foreigners. The party's populist platform also includes anti-vaccine, anti-globalism and favours traditional gender roles.

Conservative to centrist opposition groups, including the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan, or CDPJ, the DPP, and Sanseito have gained significant ground at the Liberal Democrats' expense.

The spread of xenophobic rhetoric in the election campaign and on social media has triggered protests by human rights activists and alarmed foreign residents.

The LDP has almost continuously dominated Japan's postwar politics, contributing to its political stability and social conformity.

Voters are divided between stability and change, with some voicing concern about escalating xenophobia.

Yuko Tsuji, a 43-year-old consultant, who came to a polling station inside a downtown Tokyo gymnasium with her husband, said they both support the LDP for stability and unity and voted "for candidates who won't fuel division."

"If the ruling party doesn't govern properly, the conservative base will drift toward extremes. So I voted with the hope that the ruling party would tighten things up," she said.

Self-employed Daichi Nasu, 57, who came to vote with his dog, said he hopes for a change toward a more inclusive and diverse society, with more open immigration and gender policies such as allowing married couples to keep separate surnames. "That's why I voted for the CDPJ," he said. "I want to see progress on those fronts." (AP)

Exit polls show Japan's ruling coalition is likely to lose key election

10 more killed in Pak due to monsoon rains, toll crosses 200

ISLAMABAD, July 20: The death toll in Pakistan due to monsoon rains crossed 200 on Sunday as another 10 people have been killed, according to the country's chief disaster control body.

The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) said another 10 people were killed and 18 injured on Saturday, taking the cumulative death toll to 203 and that of injured to 562.

The seasonal downpour began on June 26 when the first spell of monsoon rain was recorded, triggering flash floods in the northwest of the country.

Of the latest deaths, nine were in Punjab and one in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), while of the 18 injured, 17 were in Punjab and one in KP.

The NDMA data shows that

of the 203 deaths, 123 were in Punjab, 41 in KP, 21 in Sindh, 16 in Balochistan and one each in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Islamabad capital territory.

At least 454 people were injured in Punjab, 58 in KP, 40 in Sindh, four in Balochistan and six in PoK.

The Punjab province, located in the east of the country, has been the worst hit, with a rain emergency already declared. The government has banned bathing and swimming in ponds, rivers and natural water streams.

The KP province witnessed more damage to property than any other part of the country.

According to the NDMA, out of a total of 767 houses partially and fully damaged, 216 were in KP, 162 in Punjab, 124 in Gilgit-Baltistan, 87 in

Sindh, 78 in PoK, 64 in Balochistan and 36 in the Islamabad capital region.

At least 195 animals were killed due to rains, including 85 in Sindh, 65 in KP, 34 in Punjab, six in Gilgit-Baltistan and five in Kashmir.

The intensity of rainfall has decreased in the last couple of days, but scattered downpours were reported, according to the National Weather Forecasting Centre.

The centre said in its Sunday forecast that rain with strong winds and thunderstorms is expected in Sindh, south Punjab, PoK, northeast and south Balochistan, upper Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Islamabad.

"During this period, heavy rain is likely at a few places in south Sindh, east Balochistan and PoK," it warned. (PTI)

Tsunami threat is over after several large quakes off Russia's Pacific coasts

MOSCOW, July 20: The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre says there is no longer a danger of tsunami waves on Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula after five powerful quakes — the largest with a magnitude of 7.4 — struck in the sea nearby on Sunday.

The largest quake was at a depth of 20 kilometres and was 144 kilometres east of the city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, which has a population of 180,000, according to the US Geological Survey.

Smaller — but still substantial — quakes were recorded before and after. Russian state media said, citing local geologists, that over two dozen aftershocks had hit Kamchatka. It added their strength was gradually receding.

The PTWC initially said there was a danger of major tsunami waves but later downgraded its warning before finally saying the danger had passed.

Russia's Emergency Ministry also issued a tsunami warning following the largest quake, urging residents of coastal settlements to stay away from the shore.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage, and the ministry said it had no plans to evacuate residents. Just over two hours later, it reported that the danger had passed.

On November 4, 1952, a magnitude 9.0 quake in Kamchatka caused damage but no reported deaths despite setting off 9.1-metre (30-foot) waves in Hawaii. (AP)

Typhoon Wipha causes major disruptions in Hong Kong and southern China

HONG KONG, July 20: Typhoon Wipha toppled trees and caused major flight disruptions Sunday in Hong Kong and at some nearby airports in China as it moved west off the southern coast of the country.

Airports in Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and the casino hub of Macao cancelled or postponed flights for most of the day, according to their websites. Hong Kong grounded at least 400 flights, affecting around 80,000 passengers, broadcaster RTHK said. Some high-speed train services were also suspended.

The typhoon stayed just offshore until about 6 pm, when it made landfall in a coastal area of Taishan city in Guangdong province, China's National Meteorological Centre said. It then weakened to a

severe tropical storm with maximum sustained winds of 108 kph.

Earlier Sunday, the Hong Kong Observatory issued a hurricane signal No 10, its highest warning. The eye of the storm passed just south of the city around midday with maximum sustained winds of 140 kph, the observatory said.

The high winds brought down trees in Zhuhai and other cities on China's southern coast.

In Hong Kong, vehicles weaved around branches strewn on the streets. The government said that it had received more than 450 reports of fallen trees and that 26 people had sought medical treatment at public hospitals. A statement didn't provide details on any injuries.

More than 250 people had sought refuge in public shelters, the statement said. Hong Kong



Disneyland and other amusement parks were closed.

The storm, which reached typhoon strength overnight, later passed off Macao and was forecast

to make landfall on China's coast late Sunday. It is expected to reach Vietnam later this week.

Wipha, which is a Thai name, passed over the Philippines at trop-

ical storm strength and drenched parts of Taiwan on Saturday. Names for typhoons in the western Pacific are chosen by the countries in the region.

In the Philippines, the storm intensified seasonal monsoon rains, leaving at least one villager dead in floodwaters in northern Cagayan province.

More than 3,70,000 people have been affected by days of stormy weather, including 43,000 who fled to government-run emergency shelters or homes of relatives because of flooding, landslides and fierce winds. More than 400 houses were damaged, officials said. Elsewhere in Asia, five days of torrential rain in South Korea has left 14 people dead and 12 others missing, the government said Sunday. (AP)

AAPWU submits five-point memorandum to Arunachal CM



HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, July 20: The All Arunachal Pradesh Workers Union (AAPWU), affiliated with the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), has submitted a comprehensive five-point memorandum to the Chief Minister of Arunachal Pradesh, highlighting a series of urgent issues concerning the welfare, promotion, and regularisation of long-serving casual and contingency workers in the state.

In the memorandum, the union demanded the immediate cancellation of the Limited Departmental Examination (LDE) currently conducted by the Arunachal Pradesh Staff Selection Board (APSSB) for recruitment to posts like Lower Division Clerk (LDC),

LDC-cum-Computer Operator, Data Entry Operator, Handyman, and Driver.

The union strongly recommended that such vacancies be filled through the Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) mechanism, citing Government Notification No. AR-54/2016 dated July 8, 2016.

The union argued that many employees who have completed 12 years of continuous departmental service are at a disadvantage when facing LDEs due to lack of exposure to competitive exam preparation, reasoning aptitude, and English comprehension.

They emphasised that these workers often do not have the time or means to attend coaching

classes and hence must be assessed through internal promotions.

The AAPWU also urged the government to create Category-I (C-I) and Category-II (C-II) sanctioned posts in every department and to regularise all casual and contingency workers who have rendered more than 15 years of continuous service.

Citing the creation of numerous new administrative units such as districts, blocks, circles, and subdivisions, the union stressed that the current workforce is insufficient to meet increasing departmental demands.

Further, the memorandum called for the one-time regularisation of Work-Charged Adhoc (W/C Adhoc) and Work-Charged

Temporary (W/C T) employees, many of whom, the union noted, have been serving for 6 to 10 years without confirmation in sanctioned posts.

It also raised concern over delays in service extension processes for these categories of workers.

The union made a strong appeal for the immediate release of retirement benefits under the Arunachal Karmayogi Samman Nidhi scheme, launched in March 2025.

This scheme provides a one-time retirement benefit of ₹3 lakh to contingency workers, ALCs, and casual labourers retiring at 60 after 20 years of service.

The AAPWU asked the government to extend this benefit to all such workers retrospectively from the beginning of their service or, if not feasible, to allow them to continue their service beyond 60 years.

Lastly, the memorandum requested that all Muster Roll workers, particularly those engaged in Group D positions, be upgraded to the status of Casual/Contingency staff as per available vacancies in respective departments.

The union said that Muster Roll employees were facing hardship due to inconsistent and insufficient wage disbursement and deserved better employment terms.

Expressing hope for urgent intervention, the AAPWU has appealed to the Chief Minister and the state government to treat the demands with priority in the interest of thousands of long-serving but unregularised workers who have played a crucial role in the functioning of the state machinery.

Bomb squad successfully neutralises IED in Namsai



HT Correspondent
DIBRUGARH, July 20: In a significant anti-terror operation, an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) recovered from Nongtaw village in Piyong circle of Arunachal Pradesh's Namsai district was safely diffused and later destroyed by the bomb disposal squad of the Indian Army's Dibrugarh-based 2 Mountain Division on Sunday.

The sensitive operation was carried out with extreme precaution to ensure the safety of security personnel and civilians in the area.

According to defence sources, the IED was detected near a culvert, a location seen as strategically vulnerable and possibly chosen to target patrolling security forces.

Given the potential threat, jammer were deployed at the site to prevent any remote detonation, and a controlled diffusal was ex-

ecuted under strict security protocols.

Officials believe that the IED recovery and neutralisation may be linked to inputs provided by ULFA (Independent) self-styled brigadier Rupom Asom, who was recently apprehended by security forces in Arunachal Pradesh.

During his interrogation, Rupom Asom reportedly disclosed vital information about the group's activities in the region, including the presence of Over Ground Workers (OGWs) who have been allegedly assisting the banned outfit in operational logistics and reconnaissance. Security agencies have indicated that targeted action will be taken against these individuals following the lead.

The operation comes amidst heightened security in the region in the run-up to the Independence Day celebrations.

Intelligence reports had earlier

warned of multiple ULFA (I) hit squads infiltrating sensitive areas of Arunachal Pradesh and Upper Assam with the intention of executing subversive acts.

As a result, surveillance and counter-insurgency operations have been intensified in districts bordering Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

In a related development, Assam Rifles recovered a substantial cache of arms and ammunition from Namdapha National Park in Changlang district on Thursday, further indicating a pattern of militant mobilisation in the area.

The successful neutralisation of the IED in Namsai is being seen as a major boost to ongoing counter-insurgency efforts in the Northeast, reflecting the alertness and preparedness of security forces to thwart any attempt to destabilise the region ahead of a national event.

'Work for the greater good, not for rewards,' says businessman Ha Tatu

HT Correspondent
ITANAGAR, July 20: Businessman and social worker Ha Tatu on Sunday urged citizens to serve society selflessly, without waiting for rewards or recognition.

Speaking at a large prayer gathering at the Second Coming Christian Prayer Centre (SCCPC) in Virup Si, Sekar Dokap Colony under Ward No 11 near 6 Kilo in the capital city, Tatu encouraged attendees to work for the greater interest of society, humanity, and mankind.

The remarks were made while Tatu was addressing hundreds of Christian believers as the chief guest at the SCCPC prayer service.

According to an official release, the event was attended by several eminent personalities and members of the Christian community from across the city.

"We are God-fearing people and we believe in God," Tatu said. "What we are doing are acts of God. It does not matter which faith we belong to, but our actions must always serve the public good, humanity, and mankind. What we do on this earth will be remembered by others, so let our actions benefit others and not harm them," he added.

Underscoring the importance of values in everyday life, Tatu emphasized the significance of three 'S' — Shanti (peace), Shakti (strength), and Safalta (success).

He called on people to promote peaceful coexistence, communal harmony, and brotherhood.



"Carry forward your duties with a sense of responsibility, and in time, recognition and respect will follow," he said.

In a gesture of support to the prayer centre, Tatu also donated a diesel generator (DG) set to ensure uninterrupted power supply during electricity shutdowns and power cuts.

The contribution, he said, was meant to help ensure that prayer services and community gatherings could continue without disruption.

The event also saw the presence of Itanagar Municipal Corporation

(IMC) Ward No 11 Member Tarh Gida, who was the guest of honour.

Gida called for community co-operation and unity for the all-round development of the area and the state. He assured full support to the SCCPC and its team for future initiatives.

The function was also addressed by organising chairman Rughu Thomas, SCCPC founder Charu Menye Joram, and Speaker Pastor Joram Khoda, who extended their gratitude to the guests and congregants for their presence and blessings.

Earlier in the day, Ha Tatu, along

with dignitaries, inaugurated a new welcome gate near the old Toyota dealership at 6 Kilo along National Highway-415.

The gate, accompanied by multiple road signage along the approach road, serves as a marker and guide for devotees and visitors to the SCCPC located deeper inside Sekar Dokap Colony.

The official release stated that the event was marked by prayers, sermons, and messages of harmony, and concluded with a pledge by the community to work collectively for the betterment of society.

ITANAGAR, July 20: Arunachal Pradesh Women and Child Development minister Dasanglu Pul has expressed deep concern over the recent child abuse case reported in Lower Dibang Valley district of the state, and reiterated the state government's commitment to ensuring justice and safety of children.

In a meeting convened with key child welfare stakeholders at Roing on Saturday, Pul assured full government support to the victims and their families, an official statement said.

The stakeholders include members of the Child Welfare Committee (CWC), District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), and the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) of the district.

"My heart goes out to the victims and their families. We stand united to ensure justice and healing. No child should ever feel unsafe," the minister said, underscoring the importance of co-ordinated action in such cases.

At least eight minor girls were subjected to physical abuse in a private school at Roing, by a migrant youth from neighbouring Assam, who was later lynched by a mob on July 11.

The 19-year-old man, identified as Riaz-ul Kurim from Bongaigaon in Assam, was taken into police custody on Friday after it came to light that he had allegedly sexually assaulted several girls of a school, police had said.

The parents of the girls, who filed a complaint with the school authorities, had nabbed the youth



and thrashed him before police rescued him and took him into custody.

However, a mob barged into the police station, dragged the youth outside and beat him up. As he was rescued and taken to the hospital, they followed him and thrashed him again, ultimately leading to his death.

The youth used to work at a construction site near the school, police said.

The minister also welcomed the state cabinet's recent approval to implement the 'Support Person' provision under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

The initiative aims to provide emotional and procedural assistance to child victims during police and court processes.

"Children facing such trauma often feel scared, confused, and isolated. This important step ensures they receive emotional and procedural support, bringing us closer to a truly child-friendly justice system, one that protects, empowers, and upholds the dignity of our youngest citizens," the minister said.

The move is being seen as a significant milestone in Arunachal Pradesh's efforts to build a robust and compassionate child protection framework. (PTI)

Residents of Seijosa express gratitude for the timely action taken by NGO and the PHE deptt Pakke Kessang future front joins hands with PHE to restore water supply in Seijosa



HT Correspondent
BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 20: In the wake of a recent landslide that severely disrupted water supply in parts of Seijosa, local NGO Pakke Kessang Future Front has stepped forward to assist in emergency restoration efforts.

Working in close coordination with the Public Health Engineering (PHE) department, the organisation undertook urgent repair work to reconnect damaged pipelines and bring relief to residents struggling for clean and safe drinking water.

The landslide had left many households cut off from their regular water sources, heightening the risk of water scarcity and associated health concerns in the region.

A joint team comprising mem-

bers of Pakke Kessang Future Front and PHE employees swiftly mobilised to the affected locations.

The restoration work was led by Raybam Wahge, Tacho Tech, Jordan Wahge, Motilal Natung and several others who played an instrumental role in executing the repairs with limited resources under challenging conditions.

The coordinated effort resulted in the resumption of water supply to large parts of the affected area, much to the relief of the residents.

The team's round-the-clock work, despite tough terrain and logistical challenges, was widely appreciated by the local population.

Residents of Seijosa have expressed gratitude for the timely action taken by the NGO and the

PHE department, noting that the prompt response helped prevent the crisis from escalating further.

The initiative also underscored the significance of grassroots-level mobilisation and the critical role that community-based organisations can play in times of need.

Pakke Kessang Future Front, known for its engagement in social and environmental issues in the region, has once again demonstrated the value of civil society collaboration with government agencies in addressing urgent community needs.

As Seijosa gradually recovers from the aftermath of the landslide, the water restoration effort stands out as a testament to the impact of locally-driven, people-centric interventions.

Statehood is our right, says JK CM Omar Abdullah

SRINAGAR, July 20: Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Sunday made a forceful plea for restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir without further delay, and indicated that all avenues, including legal options, were being explored by the ruling National Conference in this regard.

Nearly ten months after the National Conference swept to power in the Union territory, Abdullah asserted that statehood was a fundamental right of the people.

"The Centre had promised it in Parliament and before the Supreme Court," he said.

Abdullah dismissed talk of a "hybrid system" of government under which law and order would continue to be with the Centre even after statehood is restored and said such talk was emanating from those who had cast doubts about the holding of last year's Assembly elections in which over 64 per cent of voters participated.

"Well, obviously, it's not an ideal situation. In spite of repeated promises, commitments in Parliament, commitments to the Supreme Court, the matter has still not sort of been resolved. And we're not asking for something that is not our due. Statehood is the right, it was promised to the people. "So, we're not asking for it. It's not some-

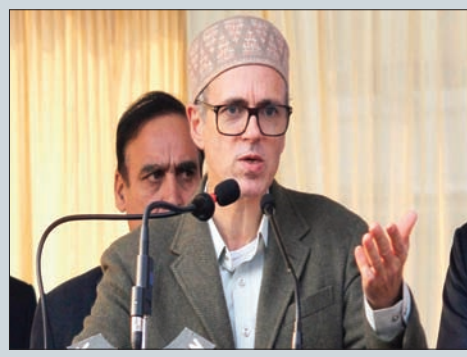
thing that is out of the ordinary or was not part of the public discourse. But, for reasons best known to the powers that be in the Union government, it hasn't happened so far. But, we're pushing," Abdullah told PTI in an interview.

Abdullah, who maintains a "cordial" relationship with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, refrained from disclosing specifics of their private discussions on the matter, affirming only that the issue of statehood has been raised "multiple times at multiple levels".

"Conversations that have been individually had between myself, the Prime Minister, Home Minister, etc. are not conversations that are meant to be shared. Rest assured, this issue of statehood and other issues concerning J&K have been taken up multiple times at multiple levels. And we continue to do so," he said.

He defended his pragmatic approach to engaging with the central government, emphasising that public appreciation for cooperation does not preclude him from speaking out when warranted.

"As far as enjoying a good relationship is concerned, I don't see why that is something that should invite so much commentary. At the end of the day, there are political equations that exist be-



tween political parties. "Those remain in terms of whatever the National Conference has with regard to the BJP's policies or vice versa. But then there are government-to-government relations. "You tell me, barring maybe one or two examples, generally in the country, relationships between the Union government and the Prime Minister's office, I mean, normally both sides make an attempt to keep the relations cordial. "In J-K's case, the onus is again more on both the individuals who occupy the office of the chief minister and the prime minister to keep things

cordial," he said.

Abdullah drew a contrast with past political dynamics, particularly the Peoples Democratic Party's (PDP) alliance with the BJP under Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Mehbooba Mufti.

"What was the compulsion for Mufti Sayeed to have an alliance with the BJP? And what all Mehbooba used to say about the Prime Minister and his person. That they have forgotten," he remarked, hinting at perceived political expediency.

He clarified his own stance: "Confrontation happens when confrontation is due. If up until now, the Government of India has been helpful, should I not be sort of at least publicly appreciative of that? But where things are not good or where things are wrong, I am not silent on that."

To a question whether his party was planning to move the Supreme Court for statehood, the chief minister said, "We are looking at various options. There have been a few conversations both within the party as well as with some experts to see what we should do."

The chief minister dismissed any suggestions of a "hybrid system" where law and order would remain with the Union government even after statehood is restored. "There is no such model in

this country. And why are people speculating? The people who are planting this are the same people who were planting that elections will not happen. Or elections should not happen."

"Yet these very same people are silent about the failures of Pahalgam or the spread of militancy."

He challenged those proposing such a system to explain the "dramatic spread" of terror infrastructure in J-K since January 2015, when he demitted office, which included the recent Pahalgam attack in which 26 people, mainly tourists, were gunned down by terrorists.

"In my time, we had reduced it virtually to two to two-and-a-half districts. Today, there is hardly a district in the Valley and a large part of Jammu that is not affected," Abdullah asserted.

He argued that this expansion of militancy occurred while J-K was a Union territory, under central control, not an elected government.

"Elected governments seem to have done a better job," he stated, dismissing the notion that an elected government is incapable of managing the security situation. "We have managed perfectly well in the past and we will manage well in the future also. This hybrid system is not acceptable," Abdullah said. (PTI)

Andhra liquor scam

Chargesheet mentions Ex-CM Jagan as kickback recipient, not named as accused

AMARAVATI, July 20: A chargesheet filed by Andhra Pradesh police in connection with the ₹ 3,500 crore alleged liquor scam in a local court has mentioned former chief minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy as one of the recipients of the kickbacks averaging ₹ 50-60 crore per month.

The 305-page chargesheet filed on Saturday, however, stopped short of naming Jagan as accused.

The court is yet to take the cognizance of the chargesheet.

In a post on X, Jagan termed the alleged liquor scam as nothing but a manufactured narrative, created purely for media theatrics and to divert attention from real issues.

According to the YSRCP chief the entire case is built on statements extracted under pressure, threats, third-degree torture, and through bribes and inducements.

Meanwhile, the chargesheet claims, "The collected amounts were eventually handed over to Kesireddy Rajasekhara Reddy (A-1)". "Rajasekhara Reddy would then pass the money to Vijay Sai Reddy (A-5), Mithun Reddy (A-4), Balaji (A-33) who would transfer it to former Chief Minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy. On an average, ₹ 50-60 crore was collected every month (during the 2019-24 YSRCP regime)," the charge sheet said, adding that it was corroborated by a witness.



The chargesheet alleged that Rajasekhara Reddy, "the mastermind and co-conspirator" behind the entire ₹ 3,500 crore liquor scam, had influenced excise policy manipulation besides being instrumental in replacing automated OFS (order for supply) with manual process; to have planted loyalists in APS-BCL (Andhra Pradesh State Beverages Corporation Limited). He allegedly created shell distilleries and handed over "kickbacks" to Jagan through another accused Balaji Govindappa, the chargesheet further alleged.

Rajasekhara Reddy routed as much as ₹ 250-300 crore cash for elections on behalf of YSRCP Party in tandem with accused Cheverreddy Bhaskar Reddy (former MLA) and was also responsi-

ble for laundering funds through over 30 shell firms. The amount was invested to acquire land, gold, luxury assets in Dubai and Africa, the charge sheet alleged.

The police alleged that the key accused brought out the new liquor policy during the previous YSRCP regime with an underlying intent of having full control over the supply and sale of liquor, thereby to achieve their broader goal of earning commissions/kickbacks between 2019 till 2024.

"The accused planned the change in excise policy and also its modalities, to ensure that they would receive large kickbacks, major portion of such kickbacks was received in cash, gold bullion etc," the charge sheet claimed. During investigation it was re-

vealed that the accused deliberately withheld OFS approvals to brands/distilleries who did not yield to the kickback demands.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged liquor scam has arrested YSRCP Lok Sabha member PV Midhun Reddy on Saturday, after grilling him for several hours.

In May, the Enforcement Directorate also filed a money laundering case to investigate the alleged liquor scam.

The federal probe agency has filed an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR) under sections of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) to probe alleged irregularities in the sale of liquor in the state.

From the investigation done so far, it was revealed that during the second half of 2019, a meeting of the owners of the distilleries was held by Sajjala Sridhar Reddy (A-6) at Hotel Park Hyatt, Hyderabad, the charge sheet claimed. The distilleries were told to co-operate with the syndicate, it added.

"During the meeting, the owners were intimidated that if they do not accede to their proposals and no orders will be issued to them. Such intimidation for kickbacks by threatening them with no issuances of OFS and thereby receiving kickbacks amounts to extortion," the chargesheet alleged. (PTI)

PM to visit Britain, Maldives

To Boost bilateral ties, inking India-UK FTA top focus

NEW DELHI, July 20: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay a four-day visit to the United Kingdom and the Maldives from Wednesday to shore up overall bilateral ties and ink the landmark India-UK free trade deal.

Modi will first travel to the UK on a two-day trip and then visit the Maldives to grace the island nation's Independence Day celebrations as "guest of honour", according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

The prime minister's visit to the Maldives from July 25 to 26 is seen as significant as it marks a reset of bilateral ties that had come under severe strain after Mohamed Muizzu, known for his pro-China leanings, came to power in November 2023.

In the first leg of his trip, Modi will visit the UK from July 23 to 24 to hold wide-ranging talks with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the MEA said on Sunday.

India and the UK are expected to formally sign the free trade deal during PM Modi's visit to London, people familiar with the matter said.

In May, India and the UK sealed the free trade agreement that is expected to benefit 99 per cent Indian exports from tariff and will make it easier for British firms to export whisky, cars and other products to India besides boosting the overall trade basket. The trade deal, firming up after three years of negotiations, is expected to ensure comprehensive market access for Indian goods across all sectors and India will gain from tariff elimination on about 99 per cent of tariff lines (product categories) covering almost 100 per cent of the trade values, according to officials.

A British readout had said Indian tariffs will be slashed, locking in reductions on 90 per cent of tariff lines, with 85 per cent of these becoming fully tariff-free within a decade. PM Modi will hold wide ranging discussions with PM Starmer on the entire gamut of India-UK bilateral relations besides exchanging views on issues of regional and global importance, the MEA said on Sunday, announcing the two-nation trip. It will be PM Modi's fourth visit to



the UK. The MEA said he is also expected to call on King Charles III.

"During the visit, the two sides will also review the progress of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) with a specific focus on trade and economy, technology and innovation, defence and security, climate, health, education and people-to-people ties," the MEA said in a statement.

From London, Modi will travel to the Maldives primarily to grace the island nation's 60th anniversary of its Independence on July 26. It will be Modi's third visit to the Maldives, and the first visit by an Indian head of state or government since President Muizzu assumed office in November 2023.

PM Modi and President Muizzu will hold discussions on issues of mutual interest and take stock of the progress in the implementation of the India-Maldives joint vision for a 'Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership'.

The joint vision was adopted during Muizzu's visit to India in October last year. "The visit reflects the importance India attaches to its maritime neighbour, Maldives, which continues to hold a special place in India's 'Neighbourhood First' policy and Vision MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions)," the MEA said.

It said the visit will provide an opportunity for both sides to further deepen and strengthen the close bilateral relationship. (PTI)

CBI-backed Interpol Red Notices doubled since 2023 with India's diplomatic, tech push

NEW DELHI, July 20: Interpol's Red Notices issued at the CBI's request have more than doubled annually since 2023, showing a paradigmatic shift in the country's pursuit of fugitives by building on the deliberations during the hosting of the Interpol General Assembly and G20 summit as well as by embracing technological sophistication, officials said Sunday.

The Lyon-based International Criminal Police Organization (Interpol) had issued 25 Red Notices in 2020, 47 in 2021 and 40 in 2022.

Since 2023, the number of Red Notices issued on India's request spiralled with remarkable alacrity -- 100 notices in 2023, 107 in 2024 and 56 in the first six months of 2025, the latest data seen by the PTI shows. The Interpol traditionally issued eight coloured notices for different purposes to 195 member countries, alerting them on a request from a country. It has added a ninth one -- Silver Notice -- on a pilot basis this year, in which India is also a participant, to track illicit assets parked abroad.

A Red Notice (RCN), the most important one to track a fugitive, is a request issued by Interpol to law enforcement worldwide to locate and provisionally ar-

rest a person pending extradition, surrender or similar legal action. It is the first crucial step in pursuing the extradition of a fugitive who escaped to a different country to evade the law. All state and central agencies submit their request for Interpol Notices to the CBI, which is the nodal agency for India for all Interpol matters. The CBI then makes the requests for the Notices to Interpol and coordinates with the intergovernmental organisation in follow-up.

"It is only after an RCN is issued that a fugitive can be located abroad. Once the alleged criminal is located, diplomacy and law enforcement work in tandem to secure the extradition or deportation," an official in the know of the process said.

The uptick was not only visible in terms of Red Notices issued on India's request, but also in other colour-coded Notices as well. The Blue Notices, through which a country seeks information about a person, have gone up from 47 in 2020 to 68 in 2024 and 82 till now in 2025; Yellow notices, used for seeking details of abductions, disappearances or identity issues, have gone up from one in 2020 to 27 in 2024 and four in 2025 (till now). (PTI)

3 associates in Patna hospital murder case held, transit remand awaited: Bihar Police

PATNA, July 20: The Bihar Police on Sunday said it has arrested the prime accused and his three associates for the murder of gangster Chandan Mishra inside a private hospital in Patna, and is waiting for transit remand from a court in Kolkata, where they were apprehended.

Patna SSP Kartikeya K Sharma told reporters here that an application for transit remand of the four persons, including prime accused Tauseef alias Badshah, who was arrested in a joint operation with Kolkata Police and Kolkata Special Task Force (STF), has been moved.

The police arrested Tauseef, his cousin Nishu Khan and their other associates Harsh and Bhim in Kolkata on Saturday, he said. "We are waiting for the arrival of Tauseef and three others, after which we shall immediately step up investigations into the case and ensure justice," the SSP said.

All four were arrested under relevant sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and the Arms Act, he added.

Chandan Mishra, a resident of Buxar district, who was a murder convict and out on parole, was shot dead

by gunmen inside a private hospital in Patna on Thursday morning. A purported CCTV footage of the incident, which went viral on social media, showed five armed men entering the ICU of the hospital and opening fire at Mishra on July 17.

According to the police, five people, including Tauseef, were identified in CCTV footage. "The remaining four shooters, who have been identified, are absconding and a search is underway to arrest them," the SSP said, declining to divulge their identity.

"Prime accused Tauseef was wanted by the police in several criminal cases, and also booked in the Arms Act and the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. Nishu was also wanted by the police in cases related to the Arms Act," said the SSP.

Based on the analysis of the scientific and electronic evidence, including CCTV footage and call detail records, investigators traced the locations of the accused in Kolkata, the SSP said.

"We contacted Kolkata Police and shared the details. Kolkata Police and its Special Task Force (STF) formed a team and provided all support to the Bihar Police in arresting the accused," he added. (PTI)

NDRF to soon commission cadaver dogs to assist in disaster operations

NEW DELHI, July 20: The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) will soon operationalise its first contingent of cadaver dogs who can sniff out the dead or human remains in a disaster or accident zone, officials in the federal organisation said.

About half-a-dozen such dogs are under training at the NDRF battalion bases in Arakonam in Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh's Ghaziabad for the last few months, they said.

For training the special canines, largely from the Belgian Malinois and Labrador breed, the force has procured a special scent from abroad that smells akin to the odour emitted by a dead body, they said.

"For all these years, the NDRF focussed on its mandate of saving lives. Utilising the golden hour of finding life during a disaster has been the guiding principle of the rescuers and hence finding the dead or mortal remains was not a priority," a senior NDRF officer explained to PTI.

However, we have seen that the force is also part of operations where NDRF personnel are tasked to retrieve bodies from under the debris like in the aftermath of a landslide or train or road accident, he said.

Finding bodies or human remains is important to ensure closure to the families and near and dear ones of the victims, he said. Hence, the NDRF few months back embarked on a maiden exercise to train cadaver dogs, the officer said.

A second officer said there are hardly any such dogs in the establishment of state rescue forces in India and those who have them, have had a mixed success rate.

The success of such dogs depends on a lot of factors, including prevailing weather conditions, humidity, snow and presence of other strong odours in the area of operation. Detection of the dead is harder than the alive, he said. (PTI)

Too young to work, too poor to stop: Children of brick kiln migrants struggle for basic rights

BULANDSHAHR/ALIGARH, July 20: In the scorching May heat, 12-year-old Rajni cradles her infant sister while stirring watery dal simmering in a soot-blackened aluminium pot outside her hut in Uttar Pradesh's Aligarh district.

Just as the thin lentils begin to look ready, she pours more water into the pot in a bid to stretch the modest meal, which otherwise wouldn't be enough to feed her family of eight.

When asked how it tastes, Rajni responds in a defensive tone: "This is not bad... It's better than no food." Fruits, she adds, are a rare treat -- usually available only when a local farmer tosses away overripe leftovers.

"This year, I ate a lot of mangoes," she said with a grin, referring to tapkas, the ripe mangoes that fall from trees that she and her friends were allowed to collect.

Rajni's family is one among thousands of seasonal migrants who travel each year to work in the sprawling brick kilns of western Uttar Pradesh.

But while the kilns promise in-

come, the real cost is borne by children like Rajni, who grow up without education, adequate food, or healthcare and are caught in a cycle of generational poverty and invisible labour.

In 2021, data submitted by the government to Parliament suggested that there are 1.74 crore workers in registered brick kilns, while independent research has shown that 20 per cent of this workforce consists of child labourers. "Therefore, it can be reasonably presumed that approximately 35 lakh children are working in brick kilns, with the number likely higher in illegal kilns," said Bhuvan Ribhu, a child rights activist who founded Just Rights for Children.

Most of the families' movement, dictated by the kiln season, spans eight to nine months a year. With no permanent address and no local documentation, the children are often excluded from even the most basic rights. Ten-year-old Neeraj, for instance, spends his days hauling lumps of dried mud in a wooden pan.



"I can't go to school because my father says we have come here as one unit and all need to work. If I get a chance to go to school, I would study hard and become an officer," he said.

His mother adds, "Each one of us, including the children, has a role in this industry."

Children are typically assigned so-called "lighter tasks," such as fetching water, helping to mould bricks, or carrying half-baked clay, but the physical toll is visible in

their frail, malnourished bodies.

"For every rupee a worker earns, nearly 25 paise goes to the agent and brick kiln owners are in direct touch with the agents, so we get just 75 per cent of the earnings, which comes to around Rs 400 per day for a family," explained Suresh, a brick kiln worker.

Elaborating further, Ramesh Shivastav, general secretary of the Mazdoor Adhikar Manch, said the system is designed to exploit the vulnerability of the migrant workers and their children and keep them indebted.

"For kiln owners, local labourers are a risk because they can protest against exploitation as they have their community here. This, however, is not the case with migrant workers, so kiln owners only hire them as they are vulnerable and less likely to resist exploitation. Moreover, as migrant workers' children don't attend school like the locals, the kiln owners get extra hands," he said.

Among the 20-odd children PTI spoke to across kiln sites in Aligarh and Bulandshahr, none were currently enrolled in school. Only two had ever attended school, and that too briefly, as their parents began migrating seasonally.

"My sister and I studied till class 5 when our parents used to find work in our village. That was back in 2018," said Naresh, a 14-year-old boy.

Despite the Right to Education Act mandating free and compulsory education for all children aged 6 to 14, migrant children remain excluded. The government

has tried to bridge this gap through the Poshan Tracker, linking anganwadis to migrant families, but the implementation is patchy.

While most parents were unaware of the scheme, the prospect of sending their children away from the worksite was a deal-breaker. "Who will fetch water or help us mould bricks if they go to school? We came here to earn, not to study. That will come later, maybe for their children," said Munni Devi, a mother of five.

Meanwhile, local anganwadi workers say they often hesitate to enrol children without documents like Aadhar.

"While Aadhaar now allows for easier enrolment, many children still don't come because of the distance. Most anganwadis are located within villages, while many families live on the outskirts. There's also fear that showing up at an anganwadi might draw attention to the fact that the children aren't attending school," said an anganwadi worker in Bulandshahr, speaking on condition of anonymity. (PTI)

Three new criminal laws enacted with effect from July 1 Tripura Govt implements Witness Protection Scheme: CM



HT Correspondent
AGARTALA, July 20: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday said that the present state government has implemented a Witness Protection Scheme to ensure the safety and cooperation of witnesses.

He stated that, under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, three new criminal laws have recently been enacted with effect from 1st July 2024—Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA).

Chief Minister said this while addressing a Workshop on Investi-

gation and Prosecution under New Criminal Laws and NDPS Act at Pragna Bhavan, Agartala today.

"New offences have been included such as terrorism and mob lynching which were not covered previously. The opposition had often questioned the absence of such laws. Additionally, provisions have now been made for organised crime, and stricter punishment for crimes against women and children. These laws aim to replace colonial-era punishments with a justice-focused approach, integrating technological advancements in police investigation and court procedures," he said.

Saha informed that on March

16, 2025, a meeting was held in Guwahati under the chairmanship of Home Minister Amit Shah to monitor the preparation and implementation of these three new criminal laws across all northeastern states.

"We were also present at the meeting. We had some shortcomings, which we discussed, and we have been instructed by the authorities. These new criminal laws mark a significant step towards creating a citizen-centric, more accessible, and efficient justice system. The laws reflect a victim-friendly, technology-driven, and time-bound approach to justice delivery," said Saha.

He further said that both the vic-

tims and the accused must receive all relevant documents—such as the FIR, police report, statements, and confessions within 14 days.

"Tripura has implemented a Witness Protection Scheme to ensure the safety and cooperation of witnesses. Social stigma makes it very difficult to get cooperation from witnesses. But under this scheme, we hope to provide necessary support. To implement the new criminal laws in both letter and spirit, all stakeholders present here must work in coordination for the benefit of the common people," he added.

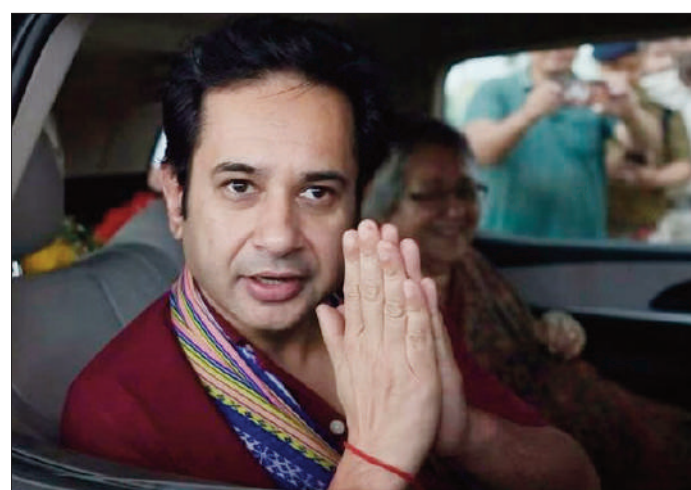
Saha, who is also the Home Minister of the state, said these three new laws would be beneficial for the people.

"Many will benefit from these laws. The rights of victims, as well as the accused, have been clearly defined. The new laws are designed to address issues in real time. Awareness sessions will also focus on how to collect evidence, identify sources, and other related topics," he said.

He noted that law and order in the state is currently very good and the government is working to improve it further.

"Discussions were also held on NDPS cases. Now, a person can file an FIR at any police station in the state. In rape cases, the Health Department must submit a report within seven days, and free treatment will be provided to victims. Many people are not yet aware of the three new criminal laws, and we must work to raise awareness," he added.

ECI invites TMP delegation for meeting on July 23: Pradyot Debbarma



AGARTALA, July 20: The Election Commission of India (ECI) has invited a delegation of Tipra Motha Party (TMP) for a meeting on July 23 to discuss the concerns raised by the party about possible enrolment of illegal immigrants in Tripura's voter roll, TMP supremo Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma said.

The meeting has been called following a request from the TMP, a constituent of the BJP-led coalition government in Tripura.

"After we raised our concerns about possible enrolment of illegal immigrants in Tripura's voter roll and demanded a Bihar - like Special Intensive Revision (SIR), the Election Commission of India has called us for a meeting on July 23 to discuss these issues," Debbarma

said in a Facebook post on Saturday.

"My only answer to all those who continue to criticise us - at least we are trying to protect our next generation and looking beyond party politics, this is not just a fight of Tipra Motha Party but every Indian. Please rise above party politics and unite against illegal migration," he said.

The nine-member TMP delegation, headed by Debbarma, will raise several key issues related to the electoral process in the north-eastern state, said a party press release.

It added, "A major demand will be for a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral roll in Tripura, similar to the process recently carried out in Bihar." (PTI)

Four militants arrested in Manipur



IMPHAL, July 20: Security forces have arrested four militants belonging to different proscribed outfits from Imphal East and West districts of Manipur, police said on Sunday.

Police arrested an active cadre of the banned outfit UPPK from Kangla Pat in Imphal West district on Saturday. He has been identified as Yumnam Prem Meitei (23).

A militant belonging to KCP (PWG) was nabbed from the parking area of Polo Ground in Imphal West district recently. He was identified as Nanaoh (43) and was involved in extorting shops in the valley area.

"He also mediated between groups in matters related to crimes against women by means of criminal intimidation and through kangaroo courts," a police statement said.

An active cadre of the banned outfit PREPAK was arrested from Seijang Awang Leikai in Imphal East district on Saturday.

Security forces arrested one active cadre of the proscribed People's Liberation Army from Napet village in Imphal East district on Saturday.

Also, security forces seized a .303 rifle, a country-made .32 pistol, a country-made single-barrel rifle, two improvised mortars, an improvised rocket bomb, three improvised hand grenades, cartridges, and other items from Lamzang village in Churachandpur district on Saturday. (PTI)

Meghalaya govt directs unrecognised schools to obtain recognition within 6 months

SHILLONG, July 20: The Meghalaya government has directed over 500 unrecognised schools operating in the state to obtain formal recognition within six months, in compliance with the provisions of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, an official said recently.

An official notification mandates that all schools functioning without formal recognition must submit their application in Form 1 to their respective District School Education Officers (DSEOs).

Schools are required to secure recognition from the competent authority within six months from the date of issuance of this notice.

"Failure to obtain recognition within the stipulated time frame shall result in the closure of the school, and it shall not be permitted to continue operations thereafter," the notification stated.

"No permissions will be granted to open new schools without prior consent from the government," an official said.

According to the latest UDISE+ data for 2023-24, Meghalaya has 7,779 government schools.

In total, the state has 14,601 schools across all types, including government, aided and private institutions.

Authorities of schools that are yet to be recognised have been advised to immediately approach their respective DSEOs to initiate the recognition process.

The government has also clarified that no new school shall be allowed to begin operations without obtaining prior recognition from the competent authority. (PTI)

Pen down agitation by lecturers to begin

IMPHAL, July 20: The 2018 batch of the Lecturer Association Manipur (LAM) has announced a six-day pen-down strike in protest starting from July 21 against the non-implementation of their long-pending service regularisation order, which was approved by the Manipur Cabinet in 2019.

The announcement was made by Irengbam Malemnganbi, General Secretary of LAM, during a press conference held on Saturday at the Manipur Press Club, Imphal. She said that the unanimous decision to launch the strike was taken by the 603 lecturers of the association after years of repeated appeals to the government yielded no response.

"The regularisation order was passed in 2019 by the then state Cabinet, yet it remains unimplemented even after five years. We are left with no option but to resort to protest," Malemnganbi said.

According to the association, 603 individuals were appointed as contract lecturers in 2019. Subsequently, on January 8, 2022, the then State Cabinet took a unanimous decision to issue the service regularisation order under Order No. 40/1/2018-SE(S). The same order explicitly mentioned, "payment of the entitled pay and allowances of the Higher Secondary



Lecturers w.e.f. April 1, 2023."

The government order also stated that the regularisation was issued "in pursuance of the decision of the State Cabinet taken on April 1, 2022, with the concurrence of the Department of Personnel vide U.O. No. 96 (A)/2021-2022/DP dated 5/1/2022 and the Finance Department (PIC) vide U.O. No. 332/2021-2022/FD(PIC) dated 8/1/2022."

Despite this formal approval, the lecturers claim the government has failed to implement the order in practice. Malemnganbi said the 603 lecturers have continued to serve in their respective positions, supporting the government's efforts to improve the education sector, but without receiving a single month's regular salary for the past three years.

"What's more concerning," she added, "is that many of the lecturers

are currently residing in relief camps due to the ongoing unrest in the state, yet they continue to perform their duties. Tragically, three of our colleagues have already succumbed to illnesses without ever receiving their regularised pay."

Malemnganbi made a direct appeal to the government to implement the regularisation order without further delay. She warned that if the government fails to provide a written assurance within the strike period, the association will be compelled to intensify its agitation. The lecturers have demanded immediate action from the state government to uphold the 2019 cabinet decision and regularise their services. The pen-down strike is set to begin this week and will continue for six days, during which the lecturers will abstain from all academic and administrative responsibilities across the state. (NNN)

Unfortunate that efforts of Mizoram BJP to improve road condition misconstrued

AIZAWL, July 20: The BJP's Mizoram unit on Sunday said it is unfortunate that the efforts made by its president Dr K Beichhua to improve the poor road conditions along National Highway 306/6 have been misconstrued by some politically motivated people.

A BJP statement said the party's top priority is development and proper maintenance of the highway, considered Mizoram's lifeline, which has been neglected by successive state governments for over 30 years.

"It is extremely unfortunate that Beichhua's efforts have been adversely commented on by people who are completely misguided by partisan politics," the release said.

The National Highway Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), submitted a daily report as sought by the state BJP chief while complaining that repair works of the worst stretches of the national highway could not be completed expeditiously due to traffic snarls. (PTI)

Stray dog menace in Shillong

SHILLONG, July 20: The Meghalaya Pradesh Mahila Congress (MPMC) has expressed deep concern over the growing menace of stray dogs attacking pedestrians in various localities of Shillong.

MPMC president Joplyn Scott Shylla recently said that reports of citizens, especially women, children, and the elderly being chased or bitten by stray dogs have become increasingly frequent, creating fear and insecurity among the public.

The MPMC stated that public safety must be the topmost priority and urged the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) and concerned departments to take immediate action to address the issue.

Specifically, the MPMC has called for the SMB to catch and relocate stray dogs to proper shelters or holding facilities.

"It is alarming that despite multiple incidents being reported, the municipal authorities remain silent and inactive. The Meghalaya Pradesh Mahila Congress believes that public safety must be the topmost priority, and urgent action is needed to prevent further harm," Shylla said.

"We strongly urge the Shillong Municipal Board and concerned departments to immediately take steps to catch and relocate these street dogs to a proper shelter or holding facility. The city cannot wait for a tragedy to occur before the administration responds responsibly," she stated.

This plea comes in light of recent court directions tasking the government and municipal authorities with addressing the issue, including constructing dog shelters and implementing sterilization and vaccination drives. (NNN)

Naga rally in Tamenglong district calls against unauthorised construction of road



IMPHAL, July 20: Hundreds of Naga protesters recently staged a rally in Manipur's Tamenglong district headquarters to condemn the alleged unauthorised construction of a road by Kuki organisations, which would connect Churachandpur and Kangpokpi districts.

The demonstrators also voiced concerns over irregularities in the distribution of NFSA (National Food Security Act) rice in the district.

Organised by representatives of the civil society organisations, Tamenglong, the rally began at Lower Ground and culminated at Haipou Jadonang Park, covering a distance of nearly 3 km.

Speaking to reporters during the rally, a protester said, "We strongly condemn the unauthorised construction of the Tiger/German road that will connect Churachandpur

and Kangpokpi districts as it encroaches on the ancestral lands of Naga areas—particularly those of the Liangmai, Zeme, Inpui, and Romgeme communities. This is a direct violation of indigenous land rights and must be stopped."

The protesters also raised concerns over the alleged non-delivery of NFSA rice quotas for April and May 2025, alleging that the delay had severely impacted the food security of residents in the district.

In addition, they highlighted the pending construction of the General Nursing and Midwifery (GNM) Institute, claiming that the stalled project is depriving local youth of vital opportunities in health education and employment.

The protesters also submitted a memorandum to the Manipur governor through the deputy commissioner of the district. (PTI)

MSCW takes suo moto cognizance of young girl's murder

SHILLONG, July 20: The Meghalaya State Commission for Women (MSCW) has taken suo moto cognizance of the recent murder of a young girl in Williamnagar in East Garo Hills.

In a statement the MSCW said, "We are deeply disturbed by the suffering endured by the victim and extend our heartfelt condolences to her family. Such egregious acts of violence are intolerable and represent a direct attack on the values of humanity and justice that our society upholds."

The Commission asserted that the perpetrator of this inhuman act must be apprehended without delay and brought to justice through the strongest provisions of the law.

"We request the Meghalaya Police and all concerned authorities to prioritise the investigation, ensure transparency, and provide regular updates to the public," it said while urging local communities, civil society, and concerned citizens to cooperate fully with investigative agencies to ensure that justice is delivered swiftly.

"Recognising the gravity and urgency of the situation, the Meghalaya State Commission for Women is taking suo moto cognizance of the case. The Commission will independently monitor the progress of the investigation," the MSCW said.

The Commission also assures to intervene, if required, to ensure the victim's family receives all necessary support and assistance.

It will work with government agencies to strengthen the protective and preventive mechanisms for children and women in the region.

The Commission also reiterated its commitment to ensuring justice for the victim and holding the perpetrator accountable.

"We remain steadfast in our efforts to enhance the safety, dignity, and welfare of all women and children in Meghalaya. The Meghalaya State Commission for Women stands with the family of the victim and the community of Williamnagar in this moment of immense tragedy. Justice must prevail; the safety and dignity of every girl and woman is our shared responsibility," it stated further. (NNN)

Sumac berries, gooseberries and banana peels among ingredients Herbal rush among Manipur startups to go beyond caffeinated drinks

IMPHAL, July 20: Aiming to present tea lovers an alternative to caffeine-based beverages, a number of young Manipur entrepreneurs are experimenting with indigenously grown plants to produce flavoured herbal drinks.

Sumac berries, gooseberries and banana peels are among the ingredients that go into the making of these unconventional beverages.

For Elizabeth Yambem, the founder of 'Dwellers Tea', the longingness for home and the desire to reconnect with childhood memories prompted her to launch her own brand of beverages.

"We produce more than 10 varieties of herbal tea and employ 20 women at our Uripok manufacturing unit in Imphal West district. Our products are sold outside the state, too," Yambem told PTI.

She said her company procures locally grown indigenous plants cultivated by farmers from various villages and hill districts, including Phayeng in Imphal West, and Ukhrul.

"I wanted to relive the childhood memories of Sumac berries, gooseberries, the vibrant Red Roselle, and the bittersweet Nong-mang-kha (a traditional medicinal



plant) lovingly brewed by our elders in a way that could suit the changing times," she said.

"We started researching for locally grown ingredients, many of which had medicinal properties, in 2016 and launched the company in 2017 in Guwahati. We relocated to Imphal in 2018," Yambem said.

Yambem is not alone in the growing number of young entrepreneurs experimenting with unique ingredients to come up with herbal beverages in the northeastern state.

Selina Mutum, the founder of 'Nongmadol Beverage', focuses on producing drinks with banana and pineapple peels to which spices are added for extra flavour.

"In my locality, I had seen some manufacturing units producing banana chips but wasting the peels. I wanted to promote a sustainable way to use those unused peels as well as bring a new flavour-based beverage that is purely herbal," Mutum told PTI.

"We formally launched the product in January, 2024 at our unit in Heingang in Imphal East district. We have a team of six dedicated women," she said.

She, however, said operations are occasionally impacted as packaging materials from outside the state do not arrive on time, due to the crisis caused by the ethnic conflict in Manipur.

Yambem and Mutum's companies produce around 500-700 boxes of herbal beverages per month.

While the herbal drinks of 'Dwellers Teas' start from ₹ 50 a packet, the prices of 'Nongmadol Beverage' range from ₹ 50 to ₹ 200 per packet.

Manipur University student Thounaojam Selika, who has a liking for such beverages, said, "Herbal drinks are becoming more and more popular among the youths in the state, as those don't contain caffeine and have various health benefits. It is also very popular on the varsity campus." (PTI)

‘Don’ director Chandra Barot dies at 86; film fraternity mourns his demise



MUMBAI, July 20: Veteran filmmaker Chandra Barot, best known for directing the 1978 Amitabh Bachchan-starrer “Don”, passed away on Sunday due to cardiac arrest at a hospital in Mumbai, his family said.

He was 86.

Barot was battling ‘Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis’ (IPF-fibrosis of lungs) for the last 11 years and had been receiving treatment at the Guru Nanak Hospital, as per his family.

“Chandra passed away at the Guru Nanak Hospital this morning at 6.30 due to cardiac arrest caused by a chest infection. He had IPF, which is fibrosis of the lungs, for the past 11 years,” his wife Deepa Barot told PTI.

Before making his directorial debut with “Don”, the filmmaker served as an assistant director to actor-director Manoj Kumar in “Purab Aur Pachhim”, “Roti Kapada Aur Makaan”, “Yaadgaar”, and “Shor”.

After “Don”, Chandra Barot directed a Bengali film - “Aashrita” (1989).

Released in May 1978, “Don”, featuring megastar Amitabh Bachchan in a double role -- that of a mafioso and a simpleton --

went on to become a blockbuster with its racy music, iconic dialogues and pulsating action.

One of the most celebrated films of Chandra Barot’s career, “Don” had its fair share of ups and downs.

On the 40th anniversary of the movie in 2018, Chandra Barot in an interview with PTI shared an interesting insight that he, along with his friends Amitabh Bachchan, Zeenat Aman and Pran -- all three who featured in “Don” -- decided to make the film to pull one of their producer friends, Nariman Irani, out of debt.

“Bawa’s (Irani) wife was a hairdresser and knew writer Salim Khan. We asked her to put in a word for us. When we met Salim, he didn’t have a script ready but told us, ‘There is one subject which no one understands’.

“We said ‘we don’t care, we just want ‘Salim-Javed’ written on the posters’. It was a ready script and we took it immediately. It didn’t even have a title. Everyone in the industry called it ‘Don waali script’,” Chandra Barot had recalled. Sadly, Irani passed away six months before the release of “Don”, he added. (PTI)

BILLIE EILISH ANNOUNCES COLLABORATION WITH JAMES CAMERON: WORKING ON SOMETHING VERY SPECIAL

LOS ANGELES, July 20: Popular singer Billie Eilish says she is set to collaborate with the Oscar-winning director James Cameron on an upcoming 3D project.

The “Bad Guy” singer performed in Manchester on Saturday, where she shared the news during her performance. She is currently on her “Hit Me Hard and Soft” tour.

Eilish said she is working on something “very special” with the “Avatar” franchise director, Cameron.

While not revealing many details, the Grammy winner told the crowd, “So you may have noticed that there are more cameras than usual in here,” according to the entertainment news outlet Variety.

“Basically, I can’t say much about it but what I can say is that I’m working on something very, very special with somebody named James Cameron and it’s going to be in 3D. So, take that as you will and these four shows here in Manchester, you and me are part of a thing that I am making with him. He’s in this audience somewhere, just saying. So don’t mind that, and also I’ll probably be wearing this exact outfit for like four days in a row,” the 23-year-old singer added.

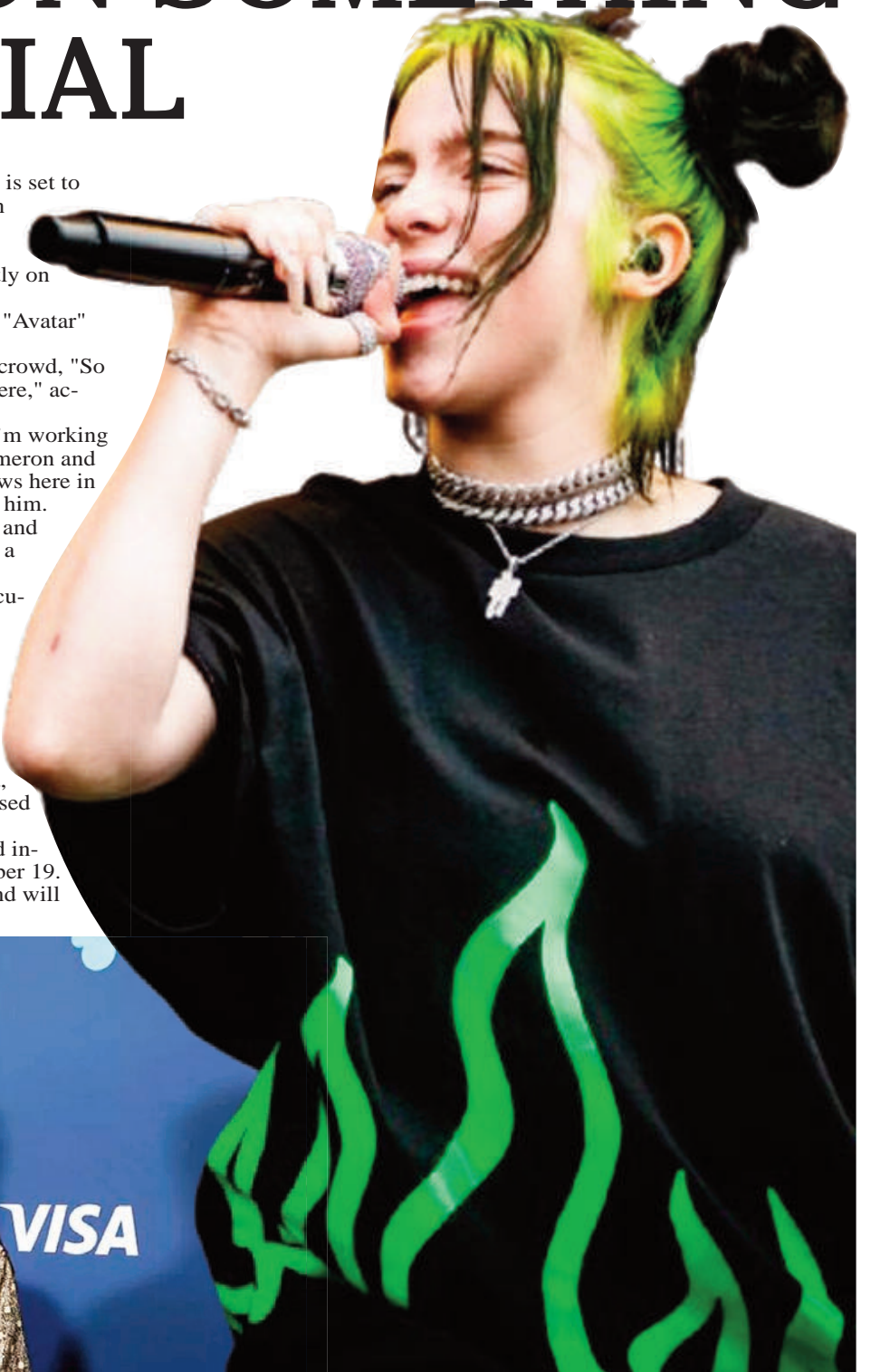
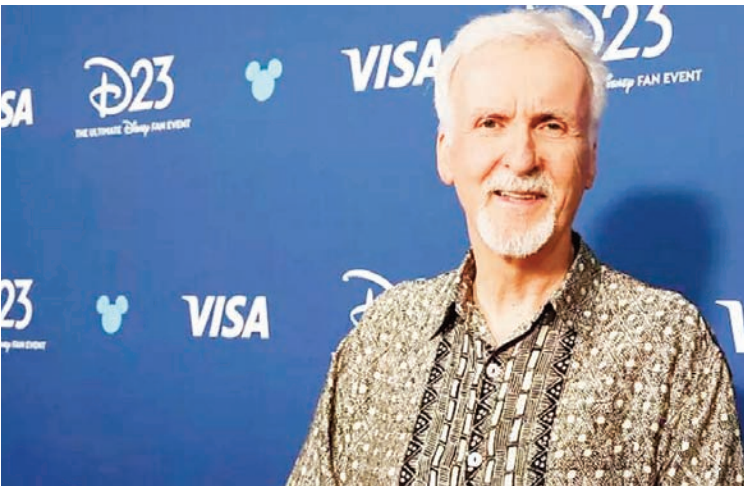
Although she didn’t specify the title of the project, fans are speculating she meant the upcoming installment of the “Avatar” franchise.

Released in 2009, “Avatar” became the top-grossing film of all time at the worldwide box office with more than USD 2.8 billion in revenues. It was nominated for nine Academy Awards including best picture and best director, and won three Oscars, for best cinematography, production design and visual effects.

The blockbuster movie featured Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver and Stephen Lang. Its second installment released in 2022, titled “Avatar: The Way of Water”.

Cameron’s next, titled “Avatar: Fire and Ash”, which is the third installment in the franchise is slated to hit the big screen on December 19.

“Hit Me Hard and Soft: The Tour” began in October last year and will conclude in November. (PTI)



Amitabh Bachchan praises son Abhishek: Never give up

NEW DELHI, July 20: Bollywood legend Amitabh Bachchan penned a heartfelt note admiring his son, Abhishek Bachchan, who has recently completed 25 years in the acting industry. Amitabh shared a post on his blog on Saturday.

“The essence of life is NEVER GIVE UP .. fight till the very end .. you may win you may lose .. BUT AT LEAST YOU FOUGHT. The ‘pluckiest’ .. loser has more respect than the ‘so called winner’ .. for the pluckiest loser always shall be remembered by - ‘he fought and almost WON’. That has a greater sense of success than the more monetary guideline of commercial success .. 25 years !! that is no mean feat .. comparisons with others is a weakness .. the results speak more than any other ‘ness’,” the post began.

“You Abhishek have ever and ALWAYS compared yourself with yourself .. not many can do that .. And each day I learn more and more .. They tell me you have done enough sit back and relax ..NO .. sitting back is a defeat of life - you are giving up .. and one should NEVER GIVE UP,” he added.

Abhishek made his debut in 2000, alongside Kareena Kapoor Khan in “Refugee”. Directed by J P Dutta, the film featured Abhishek in the role of a nameless Indian Muslim, who helps illegal refugees cross the border between India and Pakistan in the Great Rann of Kutch.

His latest work is “Housefull 5”, co-starring with Akshay Kumar, Riteish Deshmukh, Jacqueline Fernandez, Nargis Fakhri and Sonam Bajwa among others.

Released on June 6, the film is the fifth installment of the “Housefull” franchise, which began in 2010. (PTI)



Janel Parrish, Michael Naizu to star in ‘Bound For Glory’

LOS ANGELES, July 20: Hollywood actor Janel Parrish, best known for her work in the drama series “Pretty Little Liars”, will feature in a new indie film, titled “Bound For Glory”. According to the entertainment news outlet The Hollywood Reporter, the film also stars Michael Naizu and marks the collaboration for both actors, who have previously worked in “Christmas Is Canceled”. The film was released in 2021.

“Bound For Glory” is directed by Naizu, alongside his brother, John Wilcox. It is inspired by Naizu’s background as a Chinese American navigating Hollywood, and follows “a mixed-race, working-class couple in crisis, interweaving themes of identity, codependency and generational expectation,” according to the official synopsis.

The production of the film is slated to begin in the fall in Los Angeles and Pittsburgh. Parrish said she is happy to collaborate with her “Christmas Is Canceled” co-star.

“So happy to be working with Michael Naizu again, this time to tell his beautiful and compelling story,” the 36-year-old actor said in a statement.

“It means so much to collaborate with AI storytellers and help bring narratives to life that reflect who we are and why representation matters,” she added.

Naizu said the story is deeply personal for him. “To have Bound For Glory backed by a trailblazing organization like Gold House is incredibly meaningful. I honestly can’t wait to get cameras up and bring this story to life,” he added. (PTI)

India on precipice of amazing, undeniable global soft power: Comedian Vir Das



MUMBAI, July 20: India is on the precipice of an “amazing, undeniable” global soft power whose “guardians” in equal measure are both those living in the homeland as well as the Indian diaspora, Emmy-Award winning comedian and actor Vir Das has said.

“I think something that the diaspora does really well is protect culture,” Das said here during a special interaction hosted at

Asia Society.

Das, who won the 2023 International Emmy for Best Comedy for his comedy special ‘Landing’, said amid applause and laughter from the audience at the event that what he finds “lovely” about the Indian diaspora is that while they have an American accent and American values, but “at your shaadi, you (dance) to ‘Mehendi laga ke rakhna’”.

The Asia Society event on Thursday was presented in collaboration with global media platform, community and agency South Asian Trailblazers and was held on the eve of the premiere of Das’s latest comedy special ‘Vir Das: Fool Volume’.

“India is on the precipice of an amazing, undeniable global soft power, and it only translates when the bridge happens from me to you. So we are both ends carrying that soft power,” Das said, a mes-

sage for the Indian diaspora settled across the world.

“We are both guardians of India’s soft power at an equal level.”

Citing the example of Indian actor and singer Diljit Dosanjh, who became the first Punjabi singer to perform at the popular Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in California in 2023, Das said, “When Diljit performs at Coachella, that is an amazing, undeniable thing.” “The diaspora has to show up to pack Coachella. When he shows up in India, we’ll pack it for him. But when he comes to Coachella, show up, for modern Indian culture,” he said.

Das, who was first nominated for the 2021 International Emmy for Comedy for his previous Netflix special ‘Vir Das: For India’, had hosted the prestigious global awards last year.

Responding to a question during the interactive Q&A session with the audience on what are some of the things the next generation should adopt from the current one, Das said one would be to know “that India is far more open-minded than you think it is. I say this with all due respect to the diaspora.”

“Sometimes you are raised in a time capsule version of India, that is the last version of India that your parents left behind, and that India doesn’t exist anymore,” he said to applause from the audience.

Das added that “You are raised in more conservative households than we are, many times. So, please come and visit modern India.” “Come and visit a place that does everything from Diljit to Mika to ‘RRR’ to ‘Hanu-mankind’,” Das said, referring to the popular Indian artists, the

blockbuster movie which won the Oscar for Best Original Song at the 2023 Academy Awards for ‘Naatu, Naatu’ and the India-born rapper Sooraj Cherukat.

Das underlined that there are things happening in India right now that kids of the Indian diaspora need to know.

“The second thing is that it is okay to be flawed. I feel like children who are raised in the diaspora, you are under tremendous pressure to have model minority behaviour, more so than kids who are raised back home” because opportunities are far more scarce.

“It is a smaller community here, but try and create the abundance mindset that you had when there were a billion jobs for you. I know that there are fewer jobs, that’s a very tough mindset to create, but I think your child would be better served by creating that mindset,” Das said. (PTI)

Scottie Scheffler is on the verge of another major at the British Open by building a 4-shot lead

PORTURUSH (NORTHER IRELAND), July 20: The question Scottie Scheffler was asking of himself at the start of the week could very well be posed to those chasing him in the British Open.

What's the point? Scheffler delivered another example Saturday at Royal Portrush why he has dominated golf the last three years. He was the only player in the last eight groups not to make a bogey on his way to a 4-under 67 that allowed him to open a four-shot lead as he goes for the third leg of the career Grand Slam.

Scheffler has won the last 10 times he has led after 54 holes. It's never easy, no matter how he makes it look. But on this gorgeous day he was in full command of his game, and now is in prime position to win his second major of the year.

He was helped by a 6-iron to 10 feet for eagle on the par-5 seventh, and saved by three big par saves, two on the back nine, to keep everyone at a distance.

"Talking of execution, he's probably the best in the business right now," Rory McIlroy said after a 5-under 66 that brought him to only within six shots of Scheffler.

Scheffler had the golf world buzzing earlier this week when he said celebrations don't last but a few minutes. He loves the competition. He loves the work. But in terms of fulfillment, he often questions why he wants to win so badly when the thrill of winning is fleeting.

Ahead of him is competition, and still plenty of work.

He was at 14-under 199, four shots ahead of Li Haotong of China, who delivered his own mystery by saying he had no idea how he recovered from the full swing yips a few years ago to be in the final group of a major for the first time.

Another shot back was Matt Fitzpatrick, who was tied with Scheffler through six holes and couldn't stay with him when the No. 1 player began to pull away. Fitzpatrick missed a pair of short par putts and had to settle for a 71.

The biggest roars belonged to McIlroy, so much that it felt as though all of Northern Ireland was behind him. There wasn't an inch of grass or gorge to be seen beyond the wall of people lining the fairways. There were 30-yard gaps along the ropes for Scheffler.



McIlroy opened with three birdies in four holes. The roar that shook Royal Portrush came on the par-5 12th when McIlroy holed a 55-foot eagle putt that gave him a spark and the gallery hope — even though he still was six behind. He produced only one more birdie the rest of the way and still faced a big

climb. But this championship is now in the hands of Scheffler, who has been No. 1 in the world longer than anyone since Tiger Woods. And there was nothing Saturday to indicate he was going to make it easy on anyone chasing him. After his first three-putt of the tourna-

ment — making par after reaching the par-5 second hole in two shots — Scheffler made a 10-foot par putt that was as big as any. In deep trouble behind the 11th green, he hacked out to 10 feet to save par, then saved another par from the deep grass left of the 14th fairway.

Royal Portrush has a nasty par 3 at No. 16 known as "Calamity Corner." Scheffler made birdie for the third straight day, this time a 3-iron that settled 15 feet below the cup.

Each shot helped him pull away from the field. Each shot moved him closer to the claret jug, to go along with the PGA Championship he won in May and the two Masters green jackets he has won in two in the last four years.

McIlroy, who revved up the enormous crowd early, had the most bizarre moment of the championship when he went to gouge out a shot from the rough right of the 11th fairway and a second ball emerged from the turf.

"It's never happened to me before," McIlroy said. "It could never on any other course but a links course."

It led to his lone bogey. He responded with that eagle putt and probably needed more.

This is what McIlroy noticed last year, when Scheffler won nine times around the world. What impressed him was that Scheffler played so many bogey-free rounds.

Scheffler picked a great time for another one.

Fitzpatrick did his best to keep pace, but he missed a 4-foot par putt on the 13th, got a bad bounce on the 17th that led to another bogey and wound up five shots behind.

Scheffler will be paired in the last group with Li, who made history in 2020 at the PGA Championship when he held the 36-hole lead, becoming the first player from China to lead in a major. Li didn't make his first bogey until the 13th hole, and he dropped another shot on the 18th by driving into a pot bunker.

Scottish Open champion Chris Gotterup, in his first appearance in the British Open, had a 68 and joined the group at 8-under 205 that included McIlroy, Harris English (68) and Tyrrell Hatton (68).

This is Scheffler's largest 54-hole lead in a major — he was up by three shots at the PGA Championship and three shots in the 2022 Masters. (AP)

Pacer Anshul Kamboj added to India squad as cover for Akash Deep, Arshdeep

MANCHESTER, July 20: Pacer Anshul Kamboj has been added to the India squad in England as cover for Akash Deep and Arshdeep Singh, who are racing against time to be ready for the fourth Test beginning here at the Old Trafford on July 23.

Akash Deep, who is dealing with a groin niggle, played in the second and third Test against England at Birmingham and Lord's respectively, while left-arm pacer Arshdeep is yet to feature in a match in the on-going series.

There is no clarity as yet on Akash Deep's availability, while Arshdeep is unlikely to be available for selection for the Manchester Test, and therefore the selectors decided to call Kamboj, PTI has learned.

Arshdeep copped a blow on his left hand while trying to stop a shot from Sai Sudharsan on his follow through during the net session at Beckenham on Thursday, which necessitated the bandaging of his bowling arm.

"We'll take a call on the combination we play, particularly given



the Arshdeep situation as well, we'll make that call closer to Manchester," assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate had said.

"He took a ball while he was bowling...it's just a cut, so we have to see how bad the cut is. Ob-

viously the medical team has taken him off to see a doctor and obviously if he needs stitches or doesn't need stitches that's going to be important to our planning for the next few days," he added.

The 24-year-old Kamboj is a

worthy addition to the squad after his impressive effort for India A against the England Lions in two side games prior to the Test series.

He took five wickets across four innings at Northampton and Canterbury while moving the ball appreciably and finding disconcerting bounce on occasions.

The Haryana pacer is a hit the deck seam bowler and is being looked as a future prospect as Mukesh Kumar is already on the wrong side of 30s while Harshit Rana is yet to find his strides in red ball cricket.

Kamboj shot into fame after taking all 10 wickets in an innings against Kerala last year in a Ranji Trophy match at Lahli.

He is only the third bowler to achieve that feat in the Ranji Trophy after Bengal's Premangsu Chatterjee (1956-57) and Rajasthan's Pradeep Somasundaram (1985-86).

Overall, he took 34 wickets from six matches in the last edition of the premier domestic red-ball tournament. (PTI)

Asia Junior Mixed Team C'ships: India beat Hong Kong to top Group D



SOLO (INDONESIA), July 20: India continued their winning run, defeating Hong Kong China 110-100 to top Group D at the Badminton Asia Junior Mixed Team Championships here on Sunday.

Both India and Hong Kong had already secured their spots in the knock-out stage before their face-off.

Rujula Ramu once again gave India a winning start beating IP Sum Yau 11-8 and world number six doubles combination of Bhar-gav Ram Arigela and Viswa Tej Gobburu extended the lead to 22-13 against Cheung Sai Shing and Deng Chi Fai.

Hong Kong's Lam Ka To helped his team close the gap as he scored 13 points before Rounak Chouhan

could take India's tally to 33.

With just six points separating the two teams at 55-49 after five matches, junior world no. 1 Tanvi Sharma dominated Liu Hoi Kiu Anna in the second girls' singles to once again put India in the driver's seat by extending the lead 66-54.

Though the next four matches were close, India kept their nose ahead and ensured that they topped the group to set up a quarterfinal clash against Japan on Monday.

Japan finished second behind Thailand in Group A.

India had achieved their best result in the mixed team event back in 2011, clinching a bronze medal.

Last year, India fell short of a medal after losing 2-3 to Malaysia in the quarterfinals. (PTI)

Swimmer Srihari Nataraj betters 'Best Indian Time'

BERLIN, July 20: Swimmer Srihari Nataraj continued his record-breaking spree on Sunday as he bettered the 'Best Indian Time' in men's 100m freestyle, clocking 49.46 seconds set way back in 2008 from record books. He won heat number 6 race and made it to the semifinals at 12th position overall. On Friday, Nataraj had twice bettered his own 'Best Indian Time' in the 200m freestyle event.

In swimming, national record timings are those achieved only at the National Aquatics Championships. Timings clocked in other meets are considered "Best Indian Time" or "Best Indian Performance". (PTI)

Average day for Bhatia and Rai at British Open

PORTURUSH (NORTHERN IRELAND), July 20: Indian American golfer Akshay Bhatia shot a 1-under 70 in the third round to be Tied 34th at the British Open here.

Bhatia had two birdies on the seventh and the ninth and seemed to be ready to get more before two bogeys on the back nine.

Indo-British Aaron Rai, who had shown a lot of promise in the first eight holes on the first day, seemed to have lost that momentum. He shot even par 71 and was 18 places down on his second round to be T-44.

Sahith Theegala had missed the cut. (PTI)

Nishant Dev extends perfect pro record with TKO win against Evans

NEW DELHI, July 20: Indian boxer Nishant Dev extended his flawless run in the professional circuit, securing a Technical Knockout win over American LaQuan Evans in Frisco, USA.

The 24-year-old halted the more seasoned Evans in the sixth round of their Super Welterweight bout on Saturday night, recording his third consecutive professional victory.

Dev unleashed a flurry of unanswered punches that left Evans defenceless, prompting the referee to stop the contest at 1:58 in the sixth and final round. The fight was part of the undercard for the unification clash between WBC champion Jesse Rodriguez and WBO titleholder Phumlela Cafu. This latest win builds on Dev's earlier two knockout wins against American Alton Wiggins

and Mexico's Josue Silva in January and June respectively. A bronze medalist in the light middleweight (71kg) division at the 2023 World Championships and among India's most consistent amateur performers, Dev turned pro earlier this year after a narrow quarterfinal loss to Mexico's Marco Verde at the 2024 Paris Olympic qualifiers. (PTI)

International Chess Day celebrated in Mangaldai with open rapid tournament

HT Correspondent

MANGALDAI, July 20: The Intensive Care Chess Academy, Mangaldai, marked International Chess Day with enthusiasm by organising an open rapid chess tournament at Mangaldai Girls' College on Sunday.

The event witnessed participation from nearly 70 players representing various age groups.

The programme was inaugurated by Basanta Das, legislator of Mangaldai LAC, who highlighted the importance of chess in enhancing critical thinking and concentration.

He encouraged the organisers to promote the game among students in nearby educational institutions to support its wider growth.

The tournament was conducted under the supervision of chief arbiter Homen Rabha, assisted by Kabin Saharia and Prasanna Deka.

The event drew spirited participation and healthy competition among young chess enthusiasts.

Gurujyoti Das, president of the Mangaldai Sports Association and former MLA of Mangaldai LAC, also attended the event.

He urged participants to engage more in physical sports rather than mobile gaming, underlining the role of traditional games in holistic development.

Top performers were awarded prizes in five categories. In the Under-7 category, Kabyaneel Kashyap secured the first position followed by Satadajit Sarma.

In the Under-9 category, Divyansh Darshan claimed first place, with Debansh Kashyap and Krishangi Sarma securing the second and third positions, respectively.

In the Under-11 group, Suzein Ahmed stood first, followed by Riddhi-man Das and Kunal Bhargadwaj.

Iqtidar Saqib Ahmed won the Under-13 category, with Mrudusman Kashyap and Deba Pratim Baruah in second and third place.

In the Under-15 category, Sheikh Rishan Izaz took the top spot, followed by Chandimjyoti Kashyap and Avisker Tanay Rinku.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Mukul Kalita and Dilip Das, Secretary and President of the Intensive Care Chess Academy, respectively.

They expressed their gratitude to all participants, dignitaries, and supporters for contributing to the success of the event.

Hughes incident shows we can't be 100 %, says Amiss, who brought 'motorcycle' helmet to cricket

MANCHESTER, July 20: Safety equipment in cricket have seen a generational shift in standards since Dennis Amiss wore a motorcycle helmet against the fearsome fast bowlers of 1970s, but the pioneering former England opener understands that rare fatalities such as the tragic death of Australian Phillip Hughes cannot be ruled out entirely.

Amiss reshaped the game forever by wearing a rather heavy motorcycle helmet with a polycarbonate visor in the World Series Cricket staged between 1977 and 1979 in Australia.

Some of the best fast bowlers of the time such as Dennis Lillee, Jeff Thompson, Michael Holding, Andy Roberts, Joel Garner, Colin Croft and Imran Khan played in the WSC.

"People would say that because you were the first person to take a helmet. I went to the WSC. There were 19 fast bowlers who could bowl at 90 miles an hour. Having faced Lillee and Thompson two years previously, knowing the difficulties they gave us, I thought the head is so important," Amiss told PTI.

"If you get hit, there's serious consequences. As we saw with Philip Hughes, when he got hit on that vein there and died on the pitch, which was a terrible situation. So, I thought helmets would help. So, I took a motorcycle helmet with a polycarbonate visor to WSC," said Amiss.

Amiss, who played 50 Tests and is the first batter to score a hundred in ODIs, was expectedly sledged initially.

"I got a lot of stick for it. Hey, Amos, where's your motorbike? But David Hookes got his jaw broken in one match. He was sipping through a straw for six weeks. He said, can I borrow your helmet? I've got to play Andy Roberts. He did.

"The first ball he faced bounced straight at his head, and he hooked it for six, which was a great moment. I was watching it and Richie Benaud said that was the defining



moment in cricket. This chap's been sipping through a straw for six weeks, having had his jaw broken.

"He's got the same bowler, the same ground, pacy wicket, he's hooked it for six out of the ground," said the 82-year-old.

You can never be 100% sure about player safety

Hughes' untimely death resulted in the ICC bringing in several changes to improve player safety including the introduction of a concussion substitute in Test cricket.

Amiss feels the authorities have done a decent job in protecting cricketers but the incident involving Hughes shows that the danger will always lurk around.

"If you do put more protective material in you, you're going to make it heavier. But it's much lighter now than it ever was before. And it was very heavy and very hot.

"I played in Madura (in New South

Wales), I think it was. It was humid and hot. I batted all morning against the Aussies, and I nearly passed out. So that was the first one, which was heavy and hot. But then we put in the metal bars, and made it a bit lighter.

"I don't think you can be 100% there, but I think we've done a pretty good job in protecting people. I mean, Philip Hughes was very, very unlucky," said Amiss.

Bedi saved my Test career

Amiss was struggling against the Indian spin trio of Bishan Singh Bedi, Erapalli Prasanna and BS Chandrasekhar in the 1972 series, particularly against the mercurial leg-spinner from Bangalore.

With England due to tour Pakistan after the India series, Amiss had to do better his game against spin.

That was when his friend at Northamptonshire, Bedi, came to his rescue.

"I was left out of the side after two or

three Test matches, I wasn't playing particularly well, especially against Mr. Chandrasekhar, who kept getting me out. And we were going to Pakistan afterwards, so I had to get some cricket.

"But I couldn't practice because the practice wickets were in the middle where the Test was being played. Bishan came in and had a chat because he was playing county cricket for Northants.

"He said, Dennis, why you're not scoring runs. I said, I've got to practice and I can't. We're going to Pakistan and there's not much time.

He said, leave it with me. He came back and said, you've got a net. I fixed it."

Amiss recalled that Bedi, apart from himself, made both Prasanna and S Venkataraghavan bowl at him.

"He said, let the boys go back in the coach (bus) to the hotel. You stay behind. We'll have an hour's practice. I will bowl at you. Prasanna and Venkat will bowl at you, but no Chandrasekhar because he's got the sign over you. And those chaps, they simulated a match about bat and pad.

"Mr. Eknath Solkar was such a fine, close fielder, wasn't he? We simulated a match and they would say, that's out or that's not out. That hour was just so important to my career."

All those had a bright effect on Amiss' batting during the 1972-73 tour to Pakistan. The three-Test series ended in a 0-0 draw, but Amiss topped the run chart with 406 runs averaging 81 with two hundreds.

"It not only got me in a better frame of mind, but I think it probably saved my career because I might not have gone and been in the side in Pakistan straight away.

"But I was able to, after that, scored two 100s and a 99 in the next three Test matches in Pakistan because of what Bishan did in that last Test match, which was just unbelievable. That a player on the opposition side should come and help so much," said Amiss. (PTI)

WCL cancels legends match between India and Pakistan after Indian stars boycott game

BIRMINGHAM, July 20: A veterans' cricket match involving India and Pakistan in the World Championship of Legends here on Sunday has been cancelled after Indian players, including Shikhar Dhawan, refused to be a part of it citing the Pahalagam terror attack in April.

The second edition of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) tournament, which is co-owned by Bollywood star Ajay Devgn, started on June 18 at Edgbaston here and is scheduled for an August 2 final.

World Cup winner Yuvraj Singh is the captain of the India Champions, while the squad also features the likes of Dhawan, Harbhajan Singh, Yusuf Pathan, Irfan Pathan, Suresh Raina, Robin Uthappa and Varun Aaron among others.

The WCL organisers shared a statement on their X account, detailing the decision of cancellation and said their intention while conducting the match was to recreate some "happy memories."

"After hearing the news that the Pakistan hockey team will be coming to India this year, and seeing the recent India vs Pakistan volleyball match along with a few other fixtures between the two nations in different sports, we thought of continuing with the India vs Pakistan match at WCL, just to create some happy memories for people around the globe.

"But maybe in the process, we ended up hurting the feelings of many and stirring emotions," the WCL statement read.

The Pakistan team has in its ranks captain Shahid Afridi, Younis Khan, Sohail Tanvir, Wahab Riaz, Kamran Akmal among a host of yesteryear players.

The organisers also apologised for "unintentionally causing discomfort" to Indian legends.

"Hence, we have decided to call off the India-Pakistan match. We sincerely apologise again for hurting the sentiments and hope people will understand that all we ever



wanted was to bring a few happy moments to the fans," it read.

Former India opener Dhawan also shared a statement on X, announcing his stand not to participate in the match against Pakistan.

"This is to formally reiterate and confirm that Mr. Shikhar Dhawan will not be participating in any matches against the Pakistan team in the upcoming WCL League. This decision was communicated earlier during our discussion on call and WhatsApp dated 11th May 2025," read his statement.

Dhawan made it clear that he has taken the call in view of the current "geopolitical" situation between India and Pakistan in the aftermath of Pahalagam terror attack and the ensuing Operation Sindoor carried out by the country.

Operation Sindoor had led to a brief military showdown between the two arch foes before India agreed to halt its operations on Pakistan's request for a cease fire.

"In view of the current geopolitical situation and the prevailing tensions between India and Pakistan, Mr. Dhawan and his team have taken this position after due consideration.

"We respectfully request the league's understanding and cooperation on this matter," he said in the statement.

Off-spin legend Harbhajan, a sitting Rajya Sabha MP, Yusuf, who is also a Member of Parliament, and Irfan too have conveyed their decision to boycott the match against Pakistan, though they are yet to issue a statement in this regard.

The players received a lot of flak on social media for agreeing to play against the Pakistan team.

India had defeated Pakistan by five wickets to win the inaugural edition of the six-team legends tournament last year in Edgbaston.

While India does not engage with Pakistan in any bilateral sporting activities be-

cause of the existing geopolitical scenario, the two nations often meet each other at various levels of competitions featuring Olympic sports.

In fact, the Indian government has given its approval for Pakistan's participation in several major events to be hosted in India this year, including the Hockey Asia Cup (August), Junior Hockey World Cup (November-December), Junior Shooting World Cup (September), and the World Para Athletics Championships (October).

The reason being that any move to block Pakistan, in the aftermath of the Pahalagam terror attack that killed 26 tourists, would have been a violation of the Olympic charter, which is like a constitution for the Olympic Movement.

Rule 44 of the Charter specifically prohibits National Olympic Committees from excluding athletes based on "racial, religious or political reasons". Failure to grant visas can lead to "international isolation and loss of hosting rights for future events."

In cricket, India and Pakistan do not engage in bilateral series, limiting their face-offs to global ICC events such as the World Cup and Champions Trophy.

A hybrid hosting model was introduced during this year's Champions Trophy, under which India played its matches at a neutral venue — Dubai — while the rest of the tournament was held in Pakistan.

Following that precedent, Pakistan will play all its matches in Colombo during the Women's ODI World Cup this year. The tournament is being co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

However, the men's Asia Cup, tentatively set for September in the T20 format, remains in uncertainty as venue for the India-Pakistan clash is yet to be identified.

The BCCI has said unequivocally that it will not attend the Asian Cricket Council meeting, intended to thrash out a working model, if it is held in Dhaka. (PTI)

Germany beats France on penalties to reach Euro 2025 semifinals despite early red card



BASEL, July 20: Germany overcame France on penalties and reached the semifinals of the Women's European Championship despite playing almost the entire match — and extra time — with 10 players.

A drama-filled match finished 1-1 on Saturday, then Germany won the shootout 6-5 thanks to the heroics of Ann-Katrin Berger, who saved two shots as well as dispatching her own spot kick.

There were tears of joy from the Germany players after perhaps one of the greatest examples in soccer history of digging deep to defy the odds.

"Everyone was in each other's arms," Germany coach Christian Wück said. "Everyone was celebrating; everyone was happy that this hard-fought performance led us to victory."

"I can only say it again and again: I'm so proud of the team for the way they took on this challenge against an opponent who demanded everything from us. That was incredible."

Germany, which is bidding for a record-extending ninth European Championship title, will face World Cup winner Spain in Zurich on Wednesday.

Early drama over hair-pulling
That seemed improbable after less than 13 minutes when Germany midfielder Kathrin Hendrich pulled the hair of France captain Griedge Mbock and issued a straight red card.

Grace Geyoro converted the resulting penalty but Sjoekie Nüsken headed her team level just 10 minutes later.

Despite being at a numerical disadvantage, Germany could have taken the lead with a penalty of its own in the second half but France goalkeeper Pauline Peyraud-Magnin saved Nüsken's spot kick.

Nüsken scored Germany's last spot kick in the shootout.

Played short again

For the second straight match, Germany was forced to play the majority of the contest with 10 players -- Carlotta Wamser was sent off shortly before halftime of the 4-1 thrashing by Sweden in their final group match.

This time it happened even earlier.

A France free kick was headed wide but the video assistant referee spotted Hendrich yanking Mbock's ponytail.

Geyoro stepped up and, despite

the resounding jeers from the wall of Germany fans behind the goal, dispatched the penalty powerfully down the middle.

Germany knew that, with a player down, it had to take full advantage of its set-pieces.

Klara Bühl floated in a corner and Nüsken raced to the near post to meet it with a glancing header that looped into the far corner of the net.

Goals disallowed

Despite the player advantage, France was struggling to impose itself, although it had two goals ruled out for offside either side of the break.

Germany was gifted a chance to take a remarkable lead when France defender Selma Bacha gave away a needless penalty when she tripped Jules Brand near the by-line.

But France goalkeeper Pauline Peyraud-Magnin saved Nüsken's spot kick in yet another failed penalty at Euro 2025.

The best save of the night — and maybe even of the tournament — came from her Germany counterpart in extra time. A backward header from Germany captain Janina Minge had Berger scrambling back to scoop it off the line with an astonishing one-handed stop to spare her teammates's blushes.

Melvine Malard sent a long-range screamer crashing off the crossbar with almost the last touch of the 120 minutes.

More Berger heroics

Berger saved the first penalty she faced from Amel Majri, but Les Bleues were back level when Germany's Sara Däbritz hit the bar with her penalty.

Berger took the next spot kick, Germany's fifth, and left her counterpart with no chance. Shortly afterward the goalie saved again, this time to deny Alice Sombath and spark Germany's celebrations.

The result ended France's 11-match winning streak as the quarterfinals continue to be a stumbling block for Les Bleues, who have now been eliminated in the quarterfinals in seven of the past nine World Cups or Euros.

"I don't think we have a psychological problem. We have opponents of quality, and it gets harder and harder," said France coach Laurent Bonadei, who took charge in August.

"But I think my players gave us hope: Rome wasn't built in a day." (AP)

Sreeshankar wins long jump title in Portugal

NEW DELHI, July 20: Star Indian long jumper Murali Sreeshankar clinched the title with a leap of 7.75m at the Meeting Maia Cidade do Desporto in Maia, Portugal, a World Athletics Continental Tour Bronze-level meet. The Asian Games silver medallist registered his best effort in the second round on Saturday night.

Sreeshankar opened with a 7.63m jump, followed it up with his winning leap of 7.75m in the second round, and then recorded a solid 7.69m. His third attempt was a foul, while his final two jumps were measured at 6.12m and 7.58m.

Poland's Piotr Tarkowski matched Sreeshankar's 7.75m effort but his second best jump -- 7.58m -- was less than the Indian's 7.69m.

According to the World Athletics rules if two competitors tie, their second longest legal jump is used as a tie-breaker. The meet marks the 26-year-old's second outing since returning from a long injury layoff following knee surgery. He had announced his comeback with a solid 8.05m win at the Indian Open Athletics Meet earlier this month.

Sreeshankar will be aiming to qualify for the World Championships in Tokyo in September for which the direct qualifying distance is 8.27m.

The Commonwealth Games silver medallist will be competing in Europe and Central Asia till August 14 for which the government has approved Rs 5.58 lakh.

In 2023, the Kerala athlete had become only the third Indian to finish in the top three in a Diamond League Meeting -- after Vikas Gowda and Neeraj Chopra -- with a third-place finish in Paris, but his Olympics hopes went up in smoke after an injury early in the 2024 season. (PTI)

Carlsen to fight for third place after wins over Arjun and Praggnanandhaa

LAS VEGAS (USA), July 20: World number one Magnus Carlsen found his rhythm back, defeating Arjun Erigaisi 2-0 and R Praggnanandhaa 3-1 in the Freestyle chess Grand Slam, which is drawing to a close here.

With Hans Moke Niemann taking on his American counterpart Levon Aronian in the finals, Carlsen set up a clash with world number two American Hikaru Nakamura for the third place in the USD 750,000 prize money event.

It turned out to be an eventful two matches for Carlsen who was earlier denied the chance to win the event by Praggnanandhaa.

The Indian started off with another victory against the world's best in the first game of their mini-match. The Norwegian struck back in the return game and won the next set of games to find himself back in the event.

In his next match, Arjun enjoyed some opening advantage in the first game but could not hold it together while in the second Carlsen proved superior again.

In the other matches slated on the final day, Arjun will meet Fabiano Caruana of United States for the fifth-place play-off while Praggnanandhaa will have to fight for the seventh place against another



American Wesley So.

By his own admission, Nakamura said he was lucky. Winning 1.5-0.5 against Wesley So, Nakamura defeated Fabiano Caruana 3-1 in a match that saw fortunes fluctuating more than a few times.

On the final day, all eyes will be on Niemann who is the lowest ranked player in the last-8 stage and is fighting for the prize purse of USD 200,000 against comeback king Aronian.

Results penultimate day:

Match 1: Magnus Carlsen (Nor) beat

R Praggnanandhaa (Ind) 3-1; Hikaru Nakamura (USA) beat Wesley So (USA) 1.5-0.5.

Match 2: Arjun Erigaisi (Ind) lost to Carlsen; Nakamura beat Fabiano Caruana (USA) 3-1.

Line ups for the finale:

Final: Hans Moke Niemann (USA) vs Levon Aronian (USA)

3-4 place: Carlsen vs Nakamura

5-6 place: Arjun vs Caruana

7-8 place: Praggnanandhaa vs Wesley. (PTI)

ICC DEVELOPMENT AWARDS Nepal, Bhutan and USA are among 8 nations receiving top honours



SINGAPORE, July 20: South Asian neighbours Nepal and Bhutan were among eight nations to win global honours in the 2024 edition of ICC Development Awards, cricket's parent body said on the sidelines of its annual board meeting here on Sunday.

USA Cricket received the ICC Associate Member Men's Team Performance of the Year award for their success in the last calendar year, with

performances that included qualifying for the Super Eight of the T20 World Cup hosted by the USA and the West Indies.

Their victories against Canada and the historic win against Pakistan saw them knock out the Babar Azam-led team from the competition, bringing the tournament to the forefront of mainstream American television and news.

Apart from USA, Bhutan and

Nepal, other five nations to receive the awards were Indonesia, Namibia, Scotland, Tanzania, and Vanuatu.

There were 15 associate member nations shortlisted for the awards. Cricket Namibia have won the ICC Development Initiative of the Year award for their Ashburton Kwata Mini-Cricket Programme, the country's flagship grassroots development initiative.

For the first time, the ICC Female Cricket Initiative of the Year award will be shared by two Members -- Bhutan Cricket Council Board and Vanuatu Cricket Association.

The Cricket Association of Nepal (CAN) has received the ICC Digital Fan Engagement of the Year award. The organization's strategic expansion across Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X, and their newly launched CAN Domestic Facebook accounts resulted in a total reach of approximately 117 million.

ICC chairman Jay Shah said: "It is a pleasure to announce the global winners of the ICC Development Awards. This is a celebration of global exceptionalism, with all winners worthy of the accolades they have received in their mission to grow the game in emerging nations." (PTI)

Feel completely out of place when I see myself alongside Tendulkar with the trophy: Anderson

LONDON, July 20: England pace legend James Anderson confessed that seeing his name alongside the iconic Sachin Tendulkar on a trophy feels "completely out of place," calling it an incredible honour to be associated with "one of the greatest cricketers to have ever lived".

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) has rechristened the Test series between India and England as the Anderson-Tendulkar Trophy, paying tribute to the two titans of the sport.

Previously, the contests on English

soil were played for the Pataudi Trophy, named after former Indian captains Iftikhar Ali Khan Pataudi and his son Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi.

"It's not necessarily just how huge it is to have a trophy named after you, but alongside Sachin Tendulkar, who for me is one of the greatest ever cricketers to have lived."

"I feel completely out of place when I see myself alongside him with the trophy. I hold him in such high regard," Anderson told 'Sky Sports'.

"I watched him as a kid, played against him. He's just such an iconic cricketer who's carried the weight of a nation on his shoulders throughout his career and past it as well. So, to share something like this with him is an incredible honour."

Both Anderson and Tendulkar are widely regarded as all-time greats. They are the most-capped players in the history of Test cricket. Tendulkar played 200 matches, and Anderson appeared in 188 Tests. (PTI)

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