

6 **NATION**

- AADHAAR alone cannot get one enrolled as voter: BJP
- INDIA bloc constituents in Bihar working unitedly, poll results will be fruitful: Rahul

7 **ARUNACHAL**

- Community support rises for Siang Upper Multipurpose Project
- Consultative meeting on NH-415 flyover held in model village

Efforts must be made to 'save' Upper Assam: CM

'Names of evicted people will be deleted from voters' list of that place'

MARGHERITA, Aug 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said the names of people evicted from encroached land will be deleted from the voters' list of the place where they were living illegally.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme in Margherita in Tinsukia, Sarma claimed the previous generation of the state failed to "save" lower and central Assam, but efforts must be made to "save" upper and northern parts, in an apparent reference to the sizeable population of Bengali-speaking Muslims in those areas.

"If someone is evicted from a place, their name cannot be on the voter list of that place. Along with eviction, names will be deleted from the voter list," he said.

"Their modus operandi is to enter upper and northern Assam now. Our attempt is to ensure that,



like lower and central Assam, these parts are not gone. We and our previous generation failed to save lower and central Assam, but we are now trying to save upper and northern Assam," he added.

Sarma had earlier said that till July 15, 1,19,548 bigha (160 sq km) of land was cleared of encroachment after he took over as the chief minister in May 2021, affecting about 50,000 people.

The chief minister had earlier claimed that the state was witness-

ing "invasion" from people of "one religion", who are allegedly encroaching on land to alter its demography.

Asked if his government was planning any eviction drive in Margherita, Sarma said the process has already started.

"I have held a discussion with the district commissioner and the superintendent of police. The people who have come from outside and have no link here, those people will be evicted. The process has started," he said.

He claimed that "10,000-12,000 unknown people have gradually entered Margherita", located on the eastern-most tip of upper Assam.

On objections in granting land rights in tribal areas of Margherita, Sarma said Moran, Mottock, Ahom, Gorkha, Koch-Rajbongshi and other such communities have been (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Not good if House not allowed to run session after session for narrow political gains: Amit Shah

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said Parliament or Assemblies are places of debate and discussion but it is not good if the House is not allowed to function session after session in the name of opposition for narrow political gains.

Shah made the remarks here while addressing the All India Speakers Conference, three days after the Monsoon Session of Parliament came to an end with little business conducted due to repeated disruptions and adjournments following opposition protests.

The home minister also said that when there is limited debate or discussions in Parliament, the contribution of the House in nation-building gets affected.

"Debate must take place in a democracy. But it is not good if the House is not allowed to function in the name of opposition for someone's narrow political gains.

"Opposition should always be restrained. But in the name of opposition, if the House is not allowed to function day after day or session after session, it is not good. The country has to ponder over it, the people have to ponder over it, and elected representatives have to ponder over it," he said.

Shah said all discussions must have some sense, and everyone must work towards increasing the dignity and respect of the post of the Speaker.



"We should work to offer an impartial platform to raise the issues of the people. The arguments of both the treasury and the opposition should be impartial. We must ensure that the functioning of the House is carried out as per rules and regulations of the respective House," he said.

Citing the humiliation of the Mahabharata character Droupadi in Hastinapur, he said, whenever the dignity of the House is compromised, the country has seen dire consequences.

The home minister lauded the democratic tradition of India since Independence and said democracy here has roots so deep that it has not seen shedding of even a single drop of blood during (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

3 peddlers held, drugs worth ₹ 7 cr seized in 3 ops

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Three suspected drug peddlers have been arrested and contraband items, including morphine and Yaba tablets worth over ₹ 7 crore, have been seized from them in separate operations across Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The operations, two in Sribhumi district and one in Karbi Anglong, were carried out on Saturday, he said.

"The relentless crackdown on drugs continues. In two separate anti-narcotics operations carried out by @sribhumipolice , 20,000 YABA tablets priced over ₹ 3cr, were recovered last night," Sarma said in a post on X on Sunday.

Two persons have been arrested in these (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Minister Piyush Hazarika visits erosion-hit Kokradanga

HT Correspondent DHUBRI, Aug 24: Cabinet minister Piyush Hazarika on Sunday visited the erosion-hit Kokradanga area along the Indo-Bangladesh border in South Salmara-Mankachar district and conducted a boat ride to inspect the massive erosion caused by the Brahmaputra.

The minister travelled from Dhubri by speedboat to assess the 400-metre stretch of severely eroded riverbank that has posed a major threat to residential and agricultural land.

He inspected the emergency anti-erosion works undertaken by the Water Resources Department and interacted with local residents to hear their concerns.

Responding to their appeal for long-term measures, Hazarika assured that strong and permanent

preventive works would be implemented along a 500-metre stretch.

He directed the department to begin work immediately using Geo Mega Tubes for riverbank protection.

"We understand the urgency of this matter and the fear it has caused among the people. The government is committed to providing a lasting solution," the minister said.

The inspection was attended by MLA Aminul Islam, the Deputy Commissioners of Dhubri and South Salmara-Mankachar, and BJP district presidents Ranjit Kumar Ray and Ranjit Kumar Saha.

Residents of Kokradanga expressed hope that the government's commitment and the introduction of modern technology would bring permanent relief from the recurring erosion problem.

Assam govt gets land in Mumbai for devp projects: Sonowal



GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Sunday said four bighas (around 2.5 acres) of land has been allotted to Assam government by the

land parcel has been allotted on lease for a period of 60 years to the Government of Assam.

"Located at the prime real estate of Mumbai's Colaba, the said parcel of land paves the way for the state to develop essential public infrastructure for the direct benefit of its citizens," he added.

The decision follows a request from Assam Chief Secretary to the Union Ministry, seeking allocation of land for a dedicated centre or infrastructure project that can serve the long-term needs of the people.

"This is a people-first initiative. The project will be developed in line with the needs and aspirations of the people of Assam. Located at the heart of Mumbai, this will plug a big aspiration of the people of Assam to have an access in Mumbai city (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

First Driver Training, Testing Centre opens in Nagaon

NAGAON, Aug 24: The first Accredited Driver Training Centre (ADTC) and Automated Driving Testing Track (ADTT) in Assam has been opened in Nagaon district, officials said.

The centre, situated in Rangalu, Kathiatiali, was inaugurated by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday, they said.

It is an initiative towards transparency and citizen-centric public service delivery, an official statement said.

Through accredited and quality training and testing, the centre aims to improve road safety by refining drivers' skills, it said.

The process of granting driving licenses would also be streamlined, ensuring greater transparency and minimising human intervention, the statement (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta slams Harsh Mander, Prashant Bhushan

A 'few individuals' visiting different parts of the state to 'spread unrest', claims Assam CM

MARGHERITA, Aug 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday claimed that the Congress, Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind, intellectuals like Harsh Mander and Prashant Bhushan and some elements in Pakistan and Bangladesh are working to weaken the state.

He said "few individuals" have been visiting different parts of the state since Saturday to "spread unrest", while asserting that the government is keeping a watchful eye to foil all such attempts.

Speaking to reporters on sidelines of a programme here, Sarma said, "In Assam, Congress, Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind, Prashant Bhushan, Harsh Mander and intellectuals like them, and some elements from Pakistan and Bangladesh are active with the aim to weaken our state."

"We, all Assamese and Indians, have to be united to defeat this conspiracy," he added.

Sarma claimed that few individuals are

moving across the state since Saturday to spread unrest.

"Harsh Mander, Prasant Bhushan have been visiting different places since yesterday. Another group of similar people, including Jawahar Sircar, Wajahat Habibullah and Fayaz Shaheen are also touring lower Assam districts. They are only meeting leaders of minority community and Jamaat-e-Islami in Assam to create an atmosphere of unrest," the chief minister said.

Sarma said their movements are being closely monitored to ensure that "they do not succeed the way they did during NRC".

In a post on X, the chief minister said, "After Jamaat-e-Hind's outburst demanding my dismissal yesterday, a Delhi-based team — Harsh Mander, Wajahat Habibullah, Fayaz Shaheen, Prashant Bhushan, and Jawahar Sircar — is now camping in Assam." Sarma alleged that their sole aim is to paint the lawful (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Nikki Haley urges India to take Trump's view on Russian oil seriously

NEW YORK, Aug 24: India should take President Donald Trump's concerns over its procurement of Russian crude oil seriously and work with the White House to find a solution to the issue, Republican leader Nikki Haley said.

The Trump administration has been severely critical of India for its procurement of discounted crude oil from Russia. Interestingly, Washington has not been criticising China, the largest importer of Russian crude oil.

Defending its purchase of Russian crude oil, India has been maintaining that its energy procurement is driven by national interest and market dynamics.

Haley, the Indian-origin Republican leader, on Saturday posted on 'X' a portion of an opinion piece she wrote in the Newsweek four days back.

The former South Carolina governor's social media post urging New Delhi to take President Trump's concerns over the Russian crude oil seriously came after she faced criticism within her party following the opinion piece.

In the article, Haley argued that India

must be treated like the "prized free and democratic partner that it is—not an adversary like China."

"Scuttling 25 years of momentum with the only country that can serve as a counterweight to Chinese dominance in Asia would be a strategic disaster," she wrote.

In her post on Saturday, Haley said, "India must take Trump's point over Russian oil seriously, and work with the White House to find a solution. The sooner the better."

"Decades of friendship and goodwill between the world's two largest democracies provide a solid basis to move past the current turbulence," she said.

"Navigating issues like trade disagreements and Russian oil imports demands hard dialogue. But, we should not lose sight of what matters most: our shared goals. To face China, the United States must have a friend in India."

A number of officials of the Trump administration have been critical of India for its energy ties with Russia.

White House Trade Adviser Peter Navarro on Wednesday accused India of running a "profiteering scheme" by using

discounted Russian crude oil and then selling refined petroleum products at premium prices in Europe and other places.

Washington has been arguing that India's purchases of Russian crude oil are funding Moscow's war in Ukraine.

India has strongly rejected the charges.

"It's funny to have people who work for a pro-business American administration accusing other people of doing business," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Saturday.

He was responding to a question on the US criticism of India on the crude oil issue during an event.

"That's really curious. If you have a problem buying oil or refined products from India, don't buy it. Nobody forces you to buy it. But Europe buys, America buys, so you don't like it, don't buy it," he said.

The relations between New Delhi and Washington are on a downturn after Trump doubled tariffs on Indian goods to a whopping 50 per cent including a 25 per cent additional duties for India's purchase of Russian crude oil. New Delhi turned to purchasing Russian oil (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Infra worth cr has become ineffectual due to situation in B'desh: Tripura min

AGARTALA, Aug 24: Infrastructure worth crores of rupees has become ineffectual due to the present situation in Bangladesh, Tripura's Food and Civil Supplies Minister Sushanta Chowdhury said on Sunday.

Addressing a session of the Indian Building Congress's Tripura chapter, Chowdhury said there must be dialogue between the people of the two countries for peace and prosperity.

"Tripura is a landlocked state with Bangladesh as its neighbour. The present situation in Bangladesh is upsetting for us. We don't consider Bangladesh our enemy. We should not forget Bangladesh found a place in the global map as an independent nation because of India," he said.

"We must pray to god to bring back the good days because infrastructure worth crores at Sabroom (Maitri (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Elevated ozone and nickel levels observed at some sites

CPCB-DPCC report finds minimal health, environmental impact from Delhi's waste-to-energy plants

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: All four waste-to-energy plants in Delhi located at Okhla, Ghazipur, Bawana and Tehkhand are largely compliant with regulatory norms and pose minimal risk to public health and the environment, according to a joint report by the Central Pollution Control Board and Delhi Pollution Control Committee.

The report, filed before the Supreme Court and the National Green Tribunal, says all four plants operate with pre-processing facilities that raise the calorific value of waste above 1,500 kilocalories per kilogram, in line with the Solid Waste Management Rules, 2016.

Stack emissions, including suspended particulate matter and heavy metals like nickel, meet stipulated



standards, though dioxin, furan and cadmium plus thallium levels, exceed the norms at Bawana.

However, the estimated incremental cancer risk from dioxin emissions, even at that facility, remains well below the one-in-a-million threshold recognised by the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

Ambient air quality monitoring at the eight stations around the plants showed PM10 and PM2.5 occasionally breached the prescribed limits

but were within the range seen across Delhi's 39 Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS).

Elevated ozone and nickel levels were observed at some sites.

The report, however, notes that nickel exceedances are based on 24-hour data and not directly comparable with long-term averages and that the contribution of Waste To Energy (WTE) plants to these pollutants is negligible.

It calls for expanded nickel monitoring at Ghazipur and Bawana.

Regarding waste ash, bottom ash at three plants meets the norms, while fly ash meets the standards except in Bawana, where fly ash exceeds the norms for cadmium, manganese, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Army opens café at Mayudia Pass to boost civil-military ties in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, Aug 24: The Indian Army's Dao Division has opened the first-ever café at the scenic Mayudia Pass in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Dibang Valley district, marking a milestone in civil-military relations and community development.

The newly launched Mayudia Cafe promises to serve as both a rest

stop for travellers and a platform for local cultural and economic growth, a defence communique informed here on Sunday.

Saturday's inauguration was led by the General Officer Commanding (GoC) of Dao Division, in the presence of Lower Dibang Valley deputy commissioner F Brahma, enthusiastic locals, and troops of the

Spear Corps.

Until now, Mayudia Pass, known for its breathtaking Himalayan vistas and strategic importance, lacked even a basic food joint.

The café not only fills this gap but also embodies the Army's commitment to supporting grassroots needs, encouraging entrepreneurship, and strengthening bonds with the local community.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu in a social media post on Sunday, lauded the initiative and the soldiers behind it.

"The Indian Army opened the doors to 'Mayudia Cafe,' a small space in the high Himalayas that offers warmth in every sense of the word. Built by 10 Mahar and 12 Engineers, this café will serve as a warm haven for civilians and jawans, blending comfort with the charm of the Himalayas," Khandu said in a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Centre denies deleting Punjab food law beneficiaries, asks state for data cleanup

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The Centre on Sunday asserted that it has neither deleted the name of even a single beneficiary entitled under the food law in Punjab nor reduced foodgrain quota, and asked the state government to clean up the data to ensure only deserving poor get ration.

Addressing the media in Chandigarh on Saturday, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann had claimed that his government received a report from the Centre, suggesting the deletion of 8,02,493 ration card holders in Punjab as they are no longer eligible.

Union Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi outrightly rejected the allegations, saying the Punjab government is trying to spread lies.

"The central government has not given any direction to delete the name of any beneficiary in the state of Punjab," Joshi told reporters here.

The Union Minister said 1.41 lakh crore poor people are entitled to get foodgrains under the National Food Security Act (NFSA), 2013, and the Centre is allocating foodgrains for these total beneficiaries. "We have not reduced allocation by even one kg," Joshi asserted.

Elaborating on the issue, the Union Minister informed that the Centre had, in April 2023, written



to all states to conduct e-KYC for all beneficiaries under the NFSA.

The deadline was June 2025, and the Punjab government has completed the e-KYC process for 90 per cent of beneficiaries.

As per the available data, Joshi said, "There are more than 10 lakh beneficiaries who are doubtful", which means grains are diverted for black marketing.

There are nearly 9.45 lakh beneficiaries in Punjab who have an income of more than ₹ 6 lakh annually, he pointed out.

"(The) Punjab government should clean up the data of beneficiaries. The names of those who are not eligible should be removed, and the names of deserving poor

who are not getting ration should be included," the Union Minister said.

Joshi said the Punjab government, which is ruled by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), is blaming the Centre instead of stopping the diversion of foodgrains to wrong beneficiaries.

"He (Punjab CM) does not want to stop illegal transactions. Bhagwant Mann ji and AAP do not want to stop corruption. They are putting wrong allegations on the Central Government," he charged.

The Union Minister alleged that the Punjab chief minister has raised this issue without understanding, under the influence of somebody.

Joshi said the identification of beneficiaries under the NFSA is the responsibility of the state governments.

"Poor people should get free rations. Those poor who have not got a ration card should be included in the list," Joshi said, as he urged the Punjab government to clean up their data.

After the Punjab chief minister's press conference, Joshi on Saturday gave a strong rebuttal through a social media post.

"Bhagwant Mann ji needs to get the facts right," Joshi had said in a post on X, clarifying that the mandatory eKYC of beneficiaries was directed by the Supreme Court and the Centre is merely asking states to implement it.

He said the Punjab government has been given multiple extensions to complete the process.

The Centre has merely asked to do a recheck on the beneficiaries based on the inclusion criteria set by the Punjab government, Joshi had said.

The Union Minister's post was in counter to the Punjab chief minister, who had said, "Recently, we received a report from the BJP government at the Centre that 8,02,493 ration cards are being cut". Mann asserted that his government would not allow the deletion of even a single ration card. (PTI)

Two-day GSTAT litigation conference ends at ICAI Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: The Guwahati Branch of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), under the aegis of the Goods and Services Tax and Indirect Taxes Committee of ICAI, successfully organised "Sameeksha", a two-day conference on Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunal (GSTAT) litigation procedures, on August 22 and 23 at ICAI Bhawan here.

The programme was directed by ICAI Central Council Member CA Ravi Kumar Patwa from Silchar, while Branch Chairperson CA Raginee Goyal curated and coordinated the event.

On the opening day, Adv (CA) Shreya Mundhra from Kolkata and Adv Neerav Mainkar from Mumbai conducted technical sessions, offering participants detailed insights into the processes of drafting, filing and representing appeals before the GST Appellate Tribunal, which is expected to begin functioning shortly.

The discussions included the legal frame-

work, preparation and verification of appeal forms, handling of defects and condonation of delay, along with practical aspects of drafting statements of facts, grounds of appeal and pleadings.

Following these sessions, a Moot Tribunal was conducted by CA Sushil Kumar Goyal and Adv Boudhayan Bhattacharya from Kolkata.

The exercise simulated a full-day tribunal proceeding to train chartered accountants in presenting cases before the GSTAT.

This hands-on session enabled participants to develop conceptual clarity and hone advocacy and representation skills in a quasi-judicial setting.

The two-day conference combined legal knowledge with practical application, equipping members with the expertise required to handle appellate litigation before the GSTAT.

Organisers stated that the initiative will help chartered accountants explore litigation and representation before the upcoming tribunal as a significant area of professional growth.

Indira IVF expands presence in Assam in Dibrugarh

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Indira IVF Hospital Limited has further strengthened its presence in the Northeast with the inauguration of a state-of-the-art fertility clinic at Naliapool, Dibrugarh.

The new facility is aimed at improving access to advanced reproductive healthcare and addressing the growing demand for fertility treatments in Assam and adjoining regions.

The inauguration ceremony, held on Sunday, was attended by several dignitaries.

According to an official statement, the Mayor of Dibrugarh, Dr Saikat Patra, graced the occasion as the chief guest, while Dr Prakash Gupta, Centre Head of Indira IVF Dibrugarh, was also present.

Speaking at the launch, Mayor Dr Patra said infertility treatments had long been considered inaccessible for many due to high costs and limited availability in smaller towns.

He noted that the entry of Indira IVF in Dibrugarh would be a significant step towards bridging this gap.

"Fertility treatments are often seen as out of reach for many families because of affordability concerns. Indira IVF's presence in Dibrugarh will help address this challenge and make advanced care more accessible for couples," he said.

Nitiz Murdia, Managing Director of Indira IVF, emphasised that the organisation's expansion is driven by its focus on accessibility and patient-centric care.

"Accessibility is at the heart of our expansion. By opening a clinic in Dibrugarh, we are ensuring that couples in Assam do not have to travel to distant cities for fertility care. Our goal is to bring advanced procedures closer to people's homes so that support is more accessible," he said.

Highlighting the role of the new centre, Dr Prakash Gupta said awareness about fertility has grown in recent years but many still delay seeking help. "With this clinic, we hope to encourage individuals and couples to seek timely assistance. Dibrugarh is a rapidly growing city with evolving healthcare needs, and this clinic allows us to serve aspiring parents and make IVF services more accessible and reliable across both urban and rural areas," he added.

The Dibrugarh centre will offer a wide range of fertility-related diagnostic and treatment services, backed by Indira IVF's experienced team of doctors and support staff.

The facility is expected to serve not only Dibrugarh but also patients from nearby districts and neighbouring states, reducing the need for long-distance travel to metropolitan cities.

Data centre industry entering phase of unprecedented growth: Nextra CEO

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The data centre industry is entering a phase of unprecedented growth, Nextra CEO Ashish Arora has said, adding that as AI, cloud, and digital connectivity redefines lives and work, the underlying infrastructure, too, must be future-ready technologically, operationally, and environmentally.

In its sustainability report 2025 listing out its key achievements, Nextra by Airtel said 49 per cent of the total power consumed at core data centres was sourced from renewable energy sources.

"Data centre industry is entering a phase of unprecedented growth -- and Nextra is proud to be at the forefront of this transformation," Arora said in the CEO message in the report.

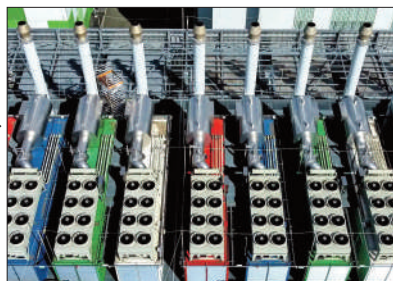
With the world increasingly shaped by digital experiences, the infrastructure that powers

such future too must be built on the pillars of environmental stewardship, resilience, and innovation, he wrote.

"As one of the fastest-growing data centre operators in the country, we recognise that with scale comes responsibility," he wrote.

As AI, cloud, and digital connectivity redefine people's lives and work, the infrastructure supporting this shift must be future-ready in every sense, technologically, operationally, and environmentally, he wrote.

Nextra Data, a wholly owned subsidiary of Bharti Airtel, headquartered in New Delhi, is among the largest and fastest-growing data centre providers, offering a scalable and sustainable platform for businesses to host their mission-critical applications. (PTI)



Credit card business to get fresh push from November onwards: PNB MD

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: In a bid to enhance other income, Punjab National Bank (PNB) plans to give a fresh push to its credit card operations from November onwards as it expects its revamped IT infrastructure to be in place by that time.

"PNB credit card is not visible in the market, although the features are at par with any other card in the market. Therefore, we have strengthened the credit card division and put a general manager in-charge for the business.

"We are also enhancing digital infrastructure to support the business. So, total revamping is happening in the credit card business," the bank's MD Ashok Chandra told PTI.

The bank is planning to reshape this entire activity and come up with new direction for growing the credit card business, he said, adding that "in next 3 months, the revamped IT infra will be in place and I am very hopeful that by November or December onwards, PNB will be in full swing as far as



credit card business is concerned".

Chandra also said the bank is in the process of improving its internet banking and the mobile banking facility, and the PNB One mobile app for retail and current account customers will also get a facelift. "This project is going on for the last one year...we have a very good mobile app, but we are coming out with some good AI model, and the vendor, Infosys, is

working on that. By the end of September, the revamped mobile app will be launched with enhanced features, convenient for the customers to use," he said.

Besides, he said, the business mobile app, which is also an important priority for the bank, is coming up with a new version.

"So, digitally, the bank is doing a lot of activities, and we always feel that whatever we do, it should

improve the process and it should enhance the customer experience," he added.

In a bid to shore up realisation from recovery, PNB has identified about 100 non-performing assets (NPA) accounts for sale to Asset Reconstruction Companies (ARCs) during the current financial year. "More than 100 accounts we have identified...the book size will be somewhere around ₹ 4,000-5,000 crore. That is the outstanding book (for sale to ARCs)," Chandra said.

Asked what the amount the bank can realise from the sale, he said, "We expect to recover something in the range of 40-50 per cent minimum. Through that route also, we are expecting a good recovery should happen this financial year".

There may be an account where 100 per cent recovery is also going to take place because you have a good security now, but in some cases, it could be low, he said, adding that "we are anticipating that average recovery should be 40-50 per cent minimum". (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Efforts must be made

given 'patta' as they have been residing here for long and "they are not our enemy". He said land rights will be granted to the people of these communities in places where they have been living for a long time. (PTI)

Not good if House not

regime changes, unlike many countries where the democratic situation deteriorated over the years.

He said if there is no debate in parliament or legislative assemblies, these would remain lifeless buildings. "The task of expressing views in these buildings is done by all members under the leadership of the Speaker, and only then does it become a living entity, which works in the interest of the country and the State," he said.

Terming the Speaker as the guardian as well as a 'sevak' (servant), Shah said brainstorming is the best way to resolve problems of the people in a democracy.

He said the objectives of any law being enacted should always be the welfare of people, inclusive development of the country, ensuring administrative efficiency, internal security and external security of the nation.

The home minister also paid tributes to Vitthalbhai Patel, the first elected Indian Speaker of the Central Legislative Assembly.

He said on this very day 100 years ago, the great freedom fighter was appointed the President of the Central Legislative Assembly, marking the beginning of India's legislative history.

Shah said the contribution of Vitthalbhai, who was the brother of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, got overshadowed over the years.

"If the freedom struggle of the country was important, then running the country and establishing legislative procedures are equally important. Vitthalbhai Patel played an important role in establishing and strengthening democracy even during difficult days. We should all remember that," he said.

Talking about Vitthalbhai, Shah noted that he had created an independent legislative assembly. He said that no legislative assembly can work under an elected government, and legislative assemblies should be independent. Vitthalbhai said only then will the meaningfulness of the debates in the legislative assemblies be maintained, the Home Minister said.

The home minister said the decision to establish the independent legislative department, which was taken by Vitthalbhai Patel during the British era, was also accepted by the Constituent Assembly.

Therefore, today, this department operates under the presiding officer in all the legislative assemblies of the country as well as in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, he said.

He said the position of the Speaker of the legislative assembly is of utmost importance and it is the responsibility of the Speaker to protect the prestige of the House and enhance it, and these tasks were excellently performed by Vitthalbhai Patel.

Shah said Vitthalbhai Patel worked to establish many traditions in the House, which today serve as a guiding light for legislative works, especially for the Speaker.

"When we talk about Vitthalbhai Patel, we, the people of Gujarat, proudly say that Gujarat has given two great individuals. The first brother, Sardar Patel, worked day and night shoulder to shoulder with Mahatma Gandhi in the freedom movement.

"And the second, Vitthalbhai Patel, laid the foundation of India's legislative traditions and established the strong foundation of today's democracy," he said. (PTI)

First Driver Training, Testing

said. The venture would generate employment opportunities for skilled youth in the areas of training and testing.

Similar facilities will be set up in Amingaon, Kamrup district, and Howly in Barpeta district, it said.

The state government has also submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways to establish such centres in Biswanath and Dibrugarh districts, the statement added. (PTI)

Assam govt gets land

that can serve the needs of people -- be it patients, students or even entrepreneurs," Sonowal said.

While the specific plans for development are under consideration, officials indicated that the focus will be on building infrastructure with high public utility -- ranging from healthcare and educational needs to welfare and social service facilities as well as acting as an incubation centre for entrepreneurs, he added.

The 60-year lease ensures that the government has ample time and flexibility to plan and execute sustainable projects, he added.

"Mumbai is a financial hub. With the development of this land parcel, we are confident that the entrepreneurs from the state can also have access to the opportunities from the maximum city," Sonowal said. (PTI)

3 peddlers held, drugs

operations, he added. Yaba tablets are illegal in India as it contains methamphetamine, a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act.

In another post on the social media site on Saturday evening, the chief minister had said that a suspected drug peddler has been arrested with morphine worth over ₹ 4 crore. "Weekend calls for getting high? Well not in Assam, because our party plans are different," Sarma said.

"4.1 kg of morphine worth ₹ 4cr+ has just been taken off the market in an excellent operation by @karbian-glongpol. 1 person arrested. We will keep playing spoilsport!" the chief minister added. (PTI)

Himanta slams Harsh

evictions as so-called 'humanitarian crisis'. "This is nothing but a planned attempt to weaken our fight against illegal encroachers. We are alert and firm -- no propaganda or pressure will stop us from protecting our land and culture," he added. (PTI)

Nikki Haley urges

sold at a discount after Western countries imposed sanctions on Moscow and shunned its supplies over its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. (PTI)

Infra worth cr has

Setu) and Srimantapur (land port) has become ineffectual. There must be dialogue between the two sides for peace, prosperity and tranquillity," he added.

The Maitri Setu, built over the Feni river, connect the two sides of the international border. It provides access to Bangladesh's Chittagong Port, which is just 80 km from the border. The strategic Agartala-Akhaura rail line could not have been commissioned because of the situation in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh High Commissioner to India M Riaz Hamidullah visited Tripura earlier this month and met Chief Minister Manik Saha.

He also visited the Maitri Setu and the Agartala-Akhaura railway line, raising hopes that the two projects would be made operational soon. (PTI)

Army opens café at

post on X. "Special thanks to GOC 2nd Mtn Div Maj Gen V S Deshpande for presiding over the inauguration virtually and to all dignitaries and locals who graced the occasion. And also thanks to our soldiers, who stand watch on cold nights and still find time to make life better for others," he said.

Encouraging travellers to experience the new facility, the chief minister said, "To everyone traveling along the Roing-Hunli road: stop by Mayudia. Enjoy the view. Have a cup of tea. And remember the spirit that made this possible."

Speaking at the event, the GOC of Dao Division said the café would serve as "a much-needed rest point for travelers and a symbol of hope, opportunity, and friendship."

Brahma also commended the Army's efforts, calling it a remarkable example of bridging gaps and creating platforms for sustainable development in remote regions. (PTI)

CPCB-DPCC report finds

lead and copper. Leachate treatment data revealed that Bawana's treated effluent exceeds the norms for biochemical oxygen demand.

Ghazipur showed elevated levels of dissolved solids and chlorides, while Tehkhand reported exceedances for both chloride and phenolic compounds. Reuse practices also vary by plant.

Groundwater sampling detected cadmium, copper and lead within permissible levels across all the sites, though iron exceeded the limits in Bawana and Ghazipur.

Broader groundwater observations flagged exceedances in total dissolved solids, hardness, sulphates, nitrates and phenolic compounds around Bawana, Ghazipur and Tehkhand.

The report's modelled ground-level concentrations of particulate matter, sulphur oxides, nitrogen dioxide, dioxins and furans (both 24-hour and annual averages) are extremely low (under 0.05 microgramme per cubic metre) and well below the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Recently, the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) issued directions to ensure that all the WTE plants are equipped with real-time Online Continuous Emission Monitoring Systems and Online Continuous Effluent Monitoring Systems.

These systems must transmit data to the state pollution boards and the CPCB within three months. A draft guideline on municipal solid waste incineration-based WTE plants has also been posted for public consultation.

The report emphasises that if the stakeholders implement the recommended measures, including improved ash segregation, odour control, green belts and effluent treatment, the overall environmental and health impact of the WTE plants can be minimised.

The report comes amid heightened court scrutiny of WTE projects.

The Supreme Court has been issuing directions on segregation, monitoring and accountability relating to Delhi's waste management.

In April, a bench led by Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the CPCB to study the environmental impact of the WTE plants and framed waste segregation, especially at source, as crucial for curbing pollution.

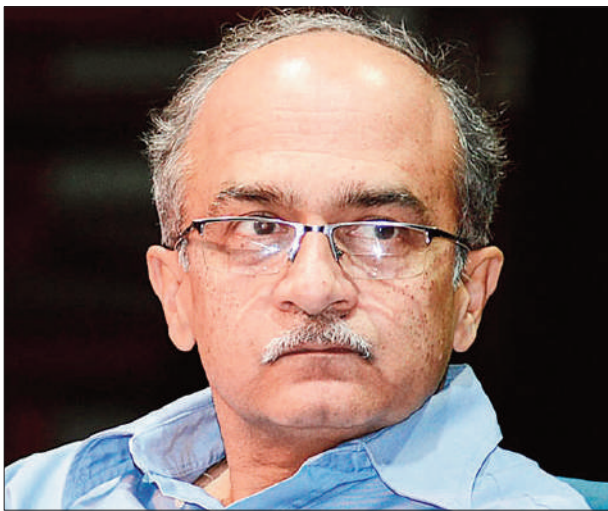
In a separate development in July, the Union Environment Ministry granted environmental clearance to a 30 megawatt WTE plant in Bawana, despite protests by nearby residents.

The Rs 660-crore project includes Rs 91.6 crore for pollution control and has provisions for wildlife conservation and healthcare outreach.

The residents criticised these assurances, citing air quality concerns and comparing the potential impact to the Okhla plant, which has long been a flashpoint of controversy.

The Supreme Court has sought a CPCB report on the plant's likely health and environmental impact. (PTI)

Assam CM engaged in illegal activities, alleges Prashant Bhushan



GUWAHATI, Aug 24 : Senior advocate Prashant Bhushan on Sunday slammed Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, alleging that the BJP leader was engaged in every kind of "lawless and illegal activity" and was trying to hide "this loot" from the outside world.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a function here, Bhushan said the Sarma-led government is "preventing" people from finding out what is happening in the state.

"It is clear that the Assam government of Himanta Biswa Sarma is engaged in every kind of lawless and illegal activity, particularly illegally pushing out citizens to Bangladesh and outside this country, illegally evicting people from their land, and illegally

demolishing their homes," he said. Bhushan, also a renowned social activist, further alleged that the state government was "illegally" attempting to hand over agriculturally productive tribal lands to companies like the Adani Group and others.

"A loot is going on in the state and the chief minister wants to hide this. Therefore, he wants to prevent independent people," he added.

Earlier in the day, Sarma claimed that the Congress, Jamaat-e-Islami-Hind, and intellectuals like Harsh Mander, Prashant Bhushan, Wajahat Habibullah, Fayaz Shaheen, and Jawahar Sircar are working to weaken the state in collaboration with some elements of Pakistan and Bangladesh. (PTI)

Senior citizen Purna Sarma Barua passes away in Morigaon

HT Correspondent MORIGAON, Aug 24: Purna Sarma Barua, a senior citizen of Morigaon town, passed away early this morning at his residence in Ward No. 2. He was 65.

Barua was a retired government employee from the Forest Department. His demise cast a pall of gloom across the ward. As the news spread, large numbers of people gathered to pay their last respects.

The Morigaon Zila Brahma Samaj expressed deep condolences. He is survived by his wife Manju Sarma (Ward Member of Ward No. 2), a son, and other relatives.

His body was cremated at Morigaon cremation ground.

CEM Tuliram Ronghang congratulates Karbi Anglong karate participants for medal haul in national championship



HT Correspondent DIPHU, Aug 24: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and President of Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), Tuliram Ronghang, congratulated the 10 karate participants from Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong who were part of the Assam team in the recently concluded 33rd National Karate-do Championship held from August 17-20 at Raipur, Chhattisgarh, organised by the All India Karate Federation (AIKF).

Of the 14-member Assam team, 8 karatekas were from Diphu Dojo, Karbi Anglong, and 2 from West Karbi Anglong. The team bagged 12 medals – 2 gold, 5 silver, and 5 bronze.

Congratulating the players, the CEM said: "It is a proud moment for Karbi Anglong as our young

karatekas brought home 8 medals. Special applause to Klarjir Teronpi for clinching gold. Congratulations also to our silver medalists – Serjalin Teronpi, Nathaniel Timung, Sengklar Ronghang, and Nong'e Timung – and bronze medalists Lorna Teronpi, Denghai Kramsa, and Sengmet Singnarpi."

From Karbi Anglong: Klarjir Teronpi won gold in Kumite, Serjalin Teronpi silver in Kata, Nathaniel Timung silver in Kumite and bronze in Kata, Sengklar Ronghang silver in Kumite, Nong'ch Timung silver in Kumite, Denghai Kramsa bronze, Lorna Teronpi bronze in Kumite, and Sangmet Singnarpi bronze in Kumite.

Jacinta Hansepi, instructor of Diphu Dojo, and Borsing Rongphar served as judges in the competition.

NFR achieves a 2.5% rise in freight loading



HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) during July 2025, the zone successfully loaded 0.936 million tonnes (MT), reflecting a 2.5% increase compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year. The NRF ensures prompt delivery of essential commodities to end users.

Several commodities recorded significant growth in freight loading compared to last year. Cement loading rose by 191.3%, coal loading by 200%, fertilizer loading by 163.6%, and POL loading by 13.2%. Additionally, stone chips registered a notable rise of 150% compared to the previous fiscal year.

The consistent growth in freight loading reflects the rising economic activity in the region. This upward trend has strengthened the region's economic landscape while contributing significantly to NFR's revenue. Moving forward, NFR remains committed to technical advancements aimed at enhancing service reliability and efficiency, ensuring sustained growth in freight transportation.

Former national football referee Manoranjan Dutta passes away

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 24: Manoranjan Dutta, a noted former national football referee from Assam, passed away at his Kachalukhuwa residence at the age of 87 due to age-related ailments early this morning.

He was a respected figure in the football community, known for officiating in several high-profile national tournaments, including the Federation Cup, Santosh Trophy, and Bordoloi Trophy. Dutta earned recognition for his expertise and fairness on the field.

He also served as president of Nagaon Town Club, contributing to the development of football in the region. Apart from his football career, Dutta was a retired bank employee and a respected member of his community.

The Nagaon Sports Association paid tribute to Dutta, with its president Rupak Sarma expressing deep sorrow and condolences to the bereaved family. The sports community in Nagaon and beyond mourned his loss, acknowledging his significant contributions to state football.

272 families join BJP in West Karbi Anglong under CEM Tuliram Ronghang's leadership

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Aug 24: A significant mass joining programme was organised on Sunday under the 07 No. Kapili MAC Constituency in West Karbi Anglong, led by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Chief Executive Member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang.

During the event, 272 families formally switched allegiance from the Congress and the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHL) to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This was the fifth such programme under Ronghang's leadership in the Kapili Constituency, organised by the BJP Kapili Mandal Committee.

Addressing the media, CEM



Ronghang announced financial aid distribution, stating, "We have provided a cheque of ₹4 lakh from the KAAC CEM's Relief Fund and ₹5

lakh from the Assam Chief Minister's Relief Fund to the family of late Bina Engtipi of Dima Hasao district." He strongly condemned

the heinous crime linked to her death and demanded capital punishment for all accused.

Ronghang further assured that families residing on forest land would be granted Land Patta under the Forest Protection Act, 2006, to secure their rights and livelihood.

The event was attended by Lok Sabha MP Amarsing Tisso, Howraghat MLA Darsing Ronghang, KAAC Executive Members, MACs including local MAC Pawan Kumar, BJP West Karbi Anglong District President Radip Ronghang, KAAC Board Chairpersons, former EM Rensing Bey, along with party workers and district office-bearers.

Union Minister Pabitra Margherita inaugurates Eri Sun Silk Mill in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 24: Pabitra Margherita, Union Minister of State for Textiles and External Affairs, Government of India, inaugurated the newly built Eri Sun Silk Mill in Kokrajhar on Sunday.

The project, worth ₹13 crore, was inaugurated in the presence of the CEM of Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) Pramod Boro, EM Daobaisa Boro, and other dignitaries from the textiles sector.

During the event, the minister also launched a dedicated online shopping portal and mobile application aimed at promoting and supporting local weavers of the region, enabling them to reach wider markets and improve their liveli-

hoods. A large number of local weavers attended the programme and expressed their appreciation for the initiative, which is expected to significantly boost the handloom and silk industry in Bodoland.

Speaking at the event, Minister Margherita emphasized the cultural significance of traditional handwoven products, particularly the Aromai. He shared that he often presents the Aromai to foreign dignitaries as a mark of cultural pride, symbolizing India's rich handloom heritage. He further highlighted his commitment to promoting indigenous products on global platforms.

CEM of BTR, Pramod Boro, expressed his gratitude and sincere

thanks to the Union Minister in Kokrajhar today. He said that handlooms are the pride of the people of Bodoland Territorial Region.

"I'm delighted to join Shri Pabitra Margherita, Hon'ble Union Minister of State, Textiles and External Affairs, at the inauguration of the new Eri Sun Silk Mill at Bodoland Silk Park, Adabari, Kokrajhar today. Built under the North East Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS), this state-of-the-art mill will significantly boost silk spinning capacity, empower local weavers, create new livelihood opportunities, and strengthen Bodoland's position as a hub of Eri silk production," CEM Boro said.

Reiki workshop successfully held in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: A Reiki workshop was successfully held at the ITO auditorium in Machkhowa, Guwahati. The workshop, led by Reiki Grand Master Mitali Bhattacharya, drew over a hundred participants who were captivated by her insightful presentation.

Reiki, a holistic healing practice, offers a comprehensive approach to physical, mental, and emotional well-being. By harnessing universal life force energy, Reiki equips individuals with tools to overcome chal-

lenges, alleviate stress, promote peace and happiness, and enhance overall wellness.

The workshop began with the lighting of a lamp by Yogacharya Subhashish Kar, Founder-President of the Indian Yoga Culture and Yoga Therapy Centre. Dr. Shantanu Roy Choudhury, Associate Professor at Pandu College, attended as guest of honour. Dhananjay Talukdar, State Reiki organiser and Yoga Pracharak Awardee, attended as an invited guest.

Screening test for Pratibha Protsahan Yojana 2025 conducted successfully across the state

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: The screening test for the Governor Assam Pratibha Protsahan Yojana 2025 was conducted successfully today across five centres in the state. The centres included Cotton University (Guwahati), Kokrajhar University (Kokrajhar), Rabindranath Tagore University (Hojai), Dibrugarh University (Dibrugarh), and Tezpur College (Tezpur).

The Governor Assam Pratibha Protsahan Yojana is a visionary initiative of Assam Governor Shri Lakshman Prasad Acharya, aimed at identifying and supporting meritorious aspirants from Assam in their journey to crack the UPSC Civil Services Examination. Selected candidates under the programme will receive free, high-quality coaching by Arya Pratibha Vikas Sansthan, an institute based in the National Capital Region (NCR).

The screening test was organised by Raj Bhavan, Assam, with active cooperation and logistical support from the district administrations at each test location. The examination was conducted smoothly and efficiently, ensuring a fair opportunity for all aspirants.

Governor calls for strengthening Red Cross institutions

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, Aug 24: On the second day of his official visit to Silchar, Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya reiterated his call for strengthening the humanitarian services of the Indian Red Cross Society and adopting a people-first approach in healthcare.

In the morning, the Governor visited the Ramakrishna Mission Sevashram, where he offered prayers, before arriving at the Silchar branch of the Red Cross Society. There, he participated in a tree plantation programme and inaugurated a blood donation camp, appreciating the institution's commitment to service.

Speaking at the event, the Governor said: "The Red

Cross Society has been engaged in humanitarian service for many years. From blood donation to providing medical care to the needy, its role in social welfare is immense." At the Red Cross Children's Hospital, he lauded PM Narendra Modi's healthcare reforms and CM Himanta Biswa Sarma's focus on developing Red Cross institutions in Assam. He highlighted Ayushman Bharat, Mission Indradhanush, and health infrastructure upgrades as transformative initiatives. The Governor praised the Red Cross for its tireless service during the COVID-19 pandemic, stressing: "Healthcare should not just cure but care. Strengthening institutions like Silchar's Red Cross Hospital means strengthening society."

Small Tea Growers demand urgent government intervention over declining leaf prices

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Aug 24: The All Assam Small Tea Growers' Association (AASGA) has expressed concern over the sharp decline in tea leaf prices and demanded urgent government measures to fix the price if Assam's tea industry is to survive.

Addressing newsmen on Saturday, an AASGA office bearer said that in most districts of Upper Assam, small tea growers were being forced to sell tea leaves at ₹17-18 per kg, and in Tinsukia district one factory had offered only ₹22 per kg of green tea leaves, whereas the

cost of production stood around ₹25.

"The extremely low prices offered by factories will ultimately spell doom for Assam's tea industry," he said.

Small tea growers in Assam contribute nearly 50% of the state's made tea. Pointing out that year after year factories exploit growers by taking advantage of the seasonal glut, the office bearer said the District-level Price Monitoring Committees headed by the DCs fix prices (₹25 per kg), but factories often reduce them by ₹2-3 or even more, making a mockery of the system.

He alleged that middlemen are also running a syndicate, further hurting growers. Factories reject consignments at ₹15 citing "poor quality," after which middlemen persuade growers to sell at ₹10, only to resell the same leaf back to the factory at ₹12, pocketing the difference.

This vicious cycle, he said, forces small growers to cut costs by ignoring quality standards, resulting in Assam tea losing its reputation.

AASGA urged the government to urgently address these issues, warning that otherwise Assam's once-vibrant tea industry faces destruction.

Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha president Jiten Bey clears air on Eklavya Model Residential Schools

HT Correspondent

DIPHU, Aug 24: Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (BJYM), East Karbi Anglong district committee president Jiten Bey on Sunday clarified the misconception created by All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHL) president J.I. Kathar about the proposed setting up of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in Karbi Anglong, which aim to provide free, high-quality education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students.

The opposition to the setting up of the schools was mentioned in one of the points of the memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India by the APHL during the mass rally organised on August 20 here.

Kathar termed the Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) as among the most underdeveloped schools in India. He stated that if such schools were set up in Karbi Anglong, the

students would become dull and unable to adapt to the modern system of learning.

Responding to Kathar's statement, the BJYM-KADC president said that the EMRS is a scheme of the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, which was initiated way back in 1997-98 with the purpose of providing free, high-quality education to Scheduled Tribe (ST) students from Classes 6 to 12. The aim was to bring tribal students on par with the general population by offering them access to quality education, sports, and local art and culture. The scheme was launched during the Prime Ministership of I.K. Gujral.

Bey said that as the schools are set up under the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, they are for the benefit of tribal students with free education. There are 721 EMRS schools across the country, out of which 477 schools are functional. "With such a large num-

ber of EMRS schools that have been set up by the government to help poor students, are the children admitted in these schools not intelligent?" Bey asked Kathar.

Bey further stated that the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, has been working hard to bring EMRS schools from the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, to Karbi Anglong for the benefit of ST students. He (Ronghang) has envisioned introducing the schools in all 26 MAC constituencies in both Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

"When the CEM is working for the educational benefit of ST students, Kathar is misleading the people with his false propaganda. The BJYM condemns Kathar for making such false statements and has demanded a public apology," Bey stated.

I have never met a man so ignorant that I couldn't learn something from him. -Galileo Galilei

NDA's V-P poll nominee

As is his wont, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made one of his standard Smart Alec comments when holding forth on the BJP/NDA vice-presidential candidate, CP Radhakrishnan. Apparently, 'CP' and Modi are long-standing friends with Radhakrishnan's deadly devotion to public service, the clincher in CPR's favour. Modi has "endorsed" CP Radhakrishnan for Vice-President and nothing else needs to be told. Obviously, "CPR" is a far cry from 'Vice-President' Jagdeep Dhanekar, who went without much to leave behind except the Bharatiya Janata Party's surprise exclusion from Dhanekar's circle, which Modi & Co., never thought would turn out like it did, much to the surprise of the safe party. Currently, Radhakrishnan is Maharashtra Governor and hasn't been anybody's headache; no rancours with opposition parties, none anything at all. Modi couldn't stop himself from praising Radhakrishnan at a felicitation for the NDA/BJP candidate at the Parliament Complex on Tuesday with the Prime Minister expressing happiness and enthusiasm. Word has gone around that Radhakrishnan's is everybody's idea of Vice-President and his supporters span all parties. Also, that he is a Chola equivalent though Prime Minister Modi praised "CPR" for his simple lifestyle and dedication to public service.

Radhakrishnan's interest in sports is a known factor. Jagdeep Dhanekar and Radhakrishnan are like chalk and cheese. Dhanekar resigned on July 21 under mysterious circumstances. Modi has called for a unanimous election, but it is hard to guess why Radhakrishnan should be accorded such a concession. So, there will be a contest, after all. The BJP believes Radhakrishnan will find support from across political parties and across states. Prime Minister Modi has been laying the 90ground for the election of the BJP/NDA candidate, and has been citing reasons why "CPR" fits the role eminently. Among the reasons Modi cited included issues like "S&P Global Ratings' recent upgrade of India's long-term sovereign credit rating" and the robust state of India's economy, next-generation reforms and GST rate simplification.

Tuesday, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spoke to Chief Minister MK Stalin and sought support for Radhakrishnan with the request hopefully finding favour with the DMK, a thinking that will go astray. Only the naive will agree that the Tamil of the Dravidian stock will vote for a BJP/RSS candidate. Also, things are too close for the assembly elections and Tamil Nadu has a huge complement of Muslim voters. There is apparently a great equation between Chief Minister MK Stalin and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh but that won't work wonders. Rajnath Singh and BJP's state unit Chief Nainar Nagenthran called up Chief Minister MK Stalin and spoke of "Tamil pride" and "improved ties if "CPR" is elected Vice President. Problem is, in these times of dog-eat-dog, nothing is a surety, "guaranteed".

Srimanta Sankardeva and the Shaping of Assamese Identity

The evolution of Assamese identity is incomplete without acknowledging the towering presence of Srimanta Sankardeva, whose life and work in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries not only gave Assam a religious awakening but also provided it with a cultural and social foundation that continues to define the community's sense of self. Sankardeva was more than a saint; he was a poet, playwright, musician, social reformer, philosopher, and cultural architect. His contributions went far beyond devotional spirituality, touching every aspect of Assamese life, from language and literature to art, music, theatre, and community organisation. Through his remarkable vision and creativity, Sankardeva forged a cohesive and inclusive framework that bound together diverse communities of Assam, thereby shaping an identity that was distinctly Assamese while being simultaneously rooted in broader Indic civilisational values.

Born in 1449 at Bordowa in Nagaon district, Sankardeva lived during a time of turbulence and transition. Assam was a mosaic of tribes, castes, and communities, each with its own customs, rituals, and faith systems. The society was marked by hierarchical divisions, ritual orthodoxy, and frequent conflicts. Into this fragmented world entered Sankardeva, whose central mission was to unify people through a spiritual and cultural philosophy based on devotion to a single deity—Lord Krishna. This philosophy, known as Ekasara Dharma or Neo-Vaishnavism, emphasised direct devotion without the mediation of elaborate rituals, animal sacrifices, or rigid priestly control. It promoted bhakti through chanting, singing, and collective worship, making spirituality accessible to all, irrespective of caste, creed, or social background. This egalitarian approach resonated deeply with the common people and slowly became a unifying thread across Assamese society.

The institutionalisation of this philosophy was achieved through the creation of Namghars and Sattras. Namghars, or prayer halls, were not just spaces of worship but also became centres of community life, where social and cultural issues were discussed, and collective decisions were taken. This practice democratized religion and created a sense of participatory identity. The Sattras, monastic institutions established by Sankardeva and his disciples, further strengthened this system by acting as repositories of art, literature, music, dance, and religious learning. They nurtured

a unique cultural tradition that not only ensured the continuity of Sankardeva's teachings but also transmitted them across generations. Even today, Namghars and Sattras remain vital pillars of Assamese society, symbols of unity and moral anchorage.

Sankardeva's vision extended to literature and language, where his contributions shaped the linguistic and literary identity of Assam. He composed devotional songs known as Borgeets, rich in lyrical beauty and spiritual fervour. These songs, written in the lyrical Brajavali language, are still sung in every Namghar, creating an unbroken continuity of tradition. His Kirtan Ghoxa remains one of the most influential religious texts of Assam, providing philosophical clarity to the principles of Neo-Vaishnavism. Through his translations and adaptations of Sanskrit scriptures into the local idiom, Sankardeva made religious knowledge accessible to ordinary people, empowering them through a shared cultural vocabulary. In doing so, he elevated the Assamese language into a literary medium capable of expressing profound spiritual and artistic ideas, thereby consolidating linguistic identity.

Another groundbreaking contribution of Sankardeva was his invention of the Ankiya Naat and the theatrical tradition of Bhaona. These one-act plays, performed with music, dance, masks, and costumes, brought to life episodes from the life of Krishna and other mythological narratives. More than entertainment, Bhaona served as a didactic medium, conveying religious and moral messages to a largely non-literate society. The performances were community events, bringing together villagers of all backgrounds, thus reinforcing the shared cultural experience that transcended social divisions. This integration of literature, performance, and spirituality made Sankardeva not only a religious leader but also the father of Assamese theatre.

His genius further manifested in the creation of the dance form Sattriya, originally conceived as a devotional performance art within the Sattras. Over time, it evolved into a classical dance tradition of India, recognised nationally and globally. Sattriya, with its intricate gestures, storytelling techniques, and deep spiritual resonance, embodies Sankardeva's vision of art as a medium of devotion and cultural preservation. Alongside music, literature, and theatre, Sattriya dance continues to be a marker of Assamese identity, linking the people of the state to a legacy that

is both sacred and artistic.

Sankardeva also had a remarkable eye for visual culture. He encouraged the weaving of the Vrindavani Vastra, a grand textile tapestry depicting episodes from Krishna's life. This work of art, created under his guidance, stands as a testimony to Assam's artistic and devotional excellence. He inspired the craft of mask-making, particularly used in Bhaona performances, which has today developed into a distinctive cultural tradition still practised in Sattras like Samaguri Satra. These artistic innovations enriched the cultural life of Assam and provided the community with tangible symbols of its identity.

What set Sankardeva apart was his inclusiveness. Unlike many religious reformers of his time who focused on narrow sectarian goals, Sankardeva envisioned a society that embraced diversity. His writings explicitly mention tribes such as the Bodo, Karbi, Miri, Khasi, and Garo, acknowledging them as integral to the Assamese fold. By extending spiritual equality to all, he broke down rigid caste barriers and tribal divisions, weaving an identity that celebrated pluralism. This inclusive ethos resonates strongly in modern Assam, where multiple ethnicities coexist within the broader Assamese cultural framework. Sankardeva's philosophy remains a reminder that Assamese identity is not monolithic but a shared creation of many voices, bound by a common cultural fabric.

The significance of Sankardeva's legacy did not remain confined to his own era. Over centuries, his ideas provided Assamese society with resilience against external influences and cultural homogenisation. During colonial times, when Assam was subjected to economic exploitation and cultural marginalisation, the Sattras-Namghar tradition kept alive the distinct cultural identity of the people. In the modern period, institutions like the Srimanta Sankardeva Kalakshetra in Guwahati testify to the enduring relevance of his vision. This cultural complex preserves and promotes the rich traditions initiated by the saint, ensuring that his ideals continue to inspire new generations.

At the same time, Sankardeva's philosophy has not remained untouched by critique. Scholars and cultural observers have noted that while Neo-Vaishnavism offered inclusivity, over time some of its institutions developed their own hierarchies and orthodoxy. Certain tribal rituals and indigenous practices were marginalised as the Neo-Vaishnavite framework consolidated itself. These tensions reflect the dynamic and contested nature of

cultural identity, reminding us that legacies must continually adapt to remain true to their original spirit of openness and inclusivity. Yet, these critiques do not diminish Sankardeva's immense contribution; rather, they underscore the need to re-engage with his vision in ways that respond to contemporary challenges of pluralism and cultural negotiation.

Today, Sankardeva's presence in Assam is not merely historical memory but a living influence. His songs echo in Namghars, his plays are performed in villages and cities alike, his dance form graces national stages, and his inclusive philosophy informs social and political discourse.

Leaders across the spectrum invoke his legacy to emphasise harmony, unity, and cultural pride. Awards in his name celebrate individuals contributing to literature, art, and social life, extending his vision into modern times. More than five centuries after his birth, Sankardeva continues to serve as the cultural conscience of Assam, a figure who embodies its deepest values while inspiring its future directions.

The shaping of Assamese identity through Sankardeva's work can be understood as a multidimensional achievement. Spiritually, he provided a simple, egalitarian path of devotion that appealed to the masses. Culturally, he enriched the Assamese language, literature, music, theatre, dance, and visual arts, creating a comprehensive artistic tradition that distinguished Assam from its neighbours. Socially, he broke down hierarchies and created institutions that fostered community life, participation, and inclusivity. Politically, though indirectly, he gave Assam a cohesive identity that helped it survive the challenges of colonialism, migration, and modernisation. His influence thus extends from the intimate rhythms of daily prayer to the broad contours of Assamese self-definition.

As Assam navigates the complexities of the twenty-first century—issues of ethnic assertion, migration, linguistic preservation, and globalisation—Sankardeva's legacy remains deeply relevant. His insistence on inclusiveness amidst diversity, his faith in community-based institutions, and his vision of culture as a unifying force offer valuable lessons. If Assamese identity today stands as a blend of multiplicity and unity, it is because Sankardeva, centuries ago, laid down the foundations of a society that could embrace difference while affirming a common cultural spirit. He was not merely a saint of his time but the soul forge of a people, shaping a legacy that continues to sustain Assam's sense of self in an ever-changing world.

TIROBHAV TITHI: Remembering Sankardeva's Eternal Light

By: Dipak Kurmi

Each year, when the date of 25 August dawns, the heart of Assam beats in a rhythm unlike any other day. It is not an ordinary date, but a sacred moment inscribed in the cultural and spiritual calendar of the land. For this is the Tirobhav Tithi of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva, the revered saint-scholar, poet, dramatist, musician, artist, social reformer, and spiritual architect of Assamese civilisation. His passing from the mortal world in 1568 did not mark an end but the continuation of an eternal presence that still inspires, guides, and nurtures Assamese society. The rituals and observances performed on this day are more than commemorations of a death; they are affirmations of a life so luminous that it still illuminates the collective conscience of the people.

Srimanta Sankardeva was born in 1449 at Alipukhuri near Bordowa in Nagaon district, in an age when Assam was a tapestry of kingdoms, localised cultures, and social hierarchies. From these beginnings arose a figure who would profoundly shape not only the religious but also the cultural, social, and artistic ethos of the region. To describe Sankardeva merely as a saint or reformer is to understate his legacy. He was a polymath whose genius spanned literature, music, drama, dance, painting, philosophy, education, and institution building. His multifaceted contributions, interwoven with spiritual depth, gave rise to a movement that continues to resonate across centuries.

At the heart of his mission was the Ekasara Nama Dharma, also known as the Neo-Vaishnavite movement of Assam. Rooted in the Bhakti tradition of surrender and devotion to a single compassionate deity, this religious philosophy emphasised absolute faith in one God—Vishnu or Krishna—attained through chanting His name. Unlike rigidly ritualistic practices that often created barriers of caste, wealth, or priestly privilege, Sankardeva's path was inclusive, accessible, and egalitarian. He opened the doors of devotion to peasants and princes alike, women and men, high-born and low-born, erasing social distinctions in the presence of divine truth. In a society deeply fractured by hierarchy, this vision was revolutionary. His call for devotion through prayer, song, and community gatherings created a new spiritual landscape in Assam—one that emphasised fraternity, simplicity, and equality.

The legacy of Sankardeva, however, is not confined to the theological. He was equally the architect of Assam's cultural identity. By composing devotional songs known as Borgeets, he elevated Assamese music to classical heights. These Borgeets, characterised by their serene beauty and deep spiritual resonance, remain a central part of Assamese devotional practice, sung in Namghars and Sattras even today. They embody not merely melodic artistry but also philosophical depth, reminding the listener of the divine presence in every breath.

Sankardeva's creativity extended to theatre and performance. He pioneered the Ankiya Naat, a form of one-act play rooted in devotion and moral instruction. These were performed as Bhaonas, where dialogue, dance, music, and spectacle combined to create a holistic experience of spiritual teaching. Far from being mere entertainment, Bhaonas served as classrooms of ethics, philosophy, and community bonding. They became instruments through which the ordinary villager absorbed the timeless truths of the Bhagavata Purana, retold in the language of the people.

In the realm of dance, Sankardeva's genius birthed the Sattriya tradition, now recognised as one of the eight classical dance forms of India. Sattriya was not created merely for performance but as a form of devotion, a medium through which

the body itself could become an instrument of worship. Over time, this art has transcended its monastic origins to become a celebrated cultural heritage of Assam, a living bridge between the spiritual and the aesthetic.

Language was another realm where Sankardeva's influence proved transformative. At a time when Sanskrit was considered the supreme medium of religious discourse and vernacular tongues were often dismissed, he consciously chose Assamese and a hybrid literary dialect known as Brajavali to compose his works. By doing so, he gave dignity to the mother tongue of his people, ensuring that the highest truths of devotion and philosophy were communicated directly to the masses. His magnum opus, the Kirtan Ghoxa, remains a cornerstone of Assamese devotional literature.

Along with this, his trans-creations of the Bhagavata Purana, his theological commentaries, and his lyrical poetry enriched Assamese literature and standardised its linguistic form. He was not just a writer but also a nation-builder through language, uniting diverse groups under a shared idiom.

Sankardeva was not only a creator but also an institution-builder. The community centres he established, known as Namghars (prayer halls) and Sattras (monastic institutions), continue to be the backbone of Assamese society. These were not only places of worship but also hubs of education, art, culture, and social discourse. In the Namghar, devotion was collective, prayers were sung, dramas were enacted, and the community found its moral compass. In the Sattras, learning was imparted informally—through the study of scripture, the performance of music and dance, and the enactment of plays. Generations of Assamese society were shaped by these institutions, which remain vibrant to this day, preserving and trans-

The Tirobhav Tithi of Srimanta Sankardeva is thus more than a religious anniversary. It is an act of collective remembrance, cultural preservation, and spiritual renewal. Each 25 August, when prayers resound in Namghars, when lamps are lit in Sattras, and when communities gather in devotion, the saint's presence is felt not as a memory but as a living force. His songs are still sung, his plays still performed, his dances still taught, his scriptures still recited, and his institutions still flourish. Few figures in history achieve such immortality, where centuries cannot erode their influence because their work is woven into the very fabric of a people's identity

mitting Sankardeva's legacy across centuries.

The religious movement he spearheaded also had far-reaching political consequences. Both the Koch kingdom and the Ahom kingdom were touched by his influence, integrating his teachings into their political and cultural frameworks. His Neo-Vaishnavite movement provided a unifying thread that cut across regional divisions, consolidating a sense of Assamese identity. In this sense, Sankardeva was as much a political and cultural reformer as he was a spiritual guide.

The observance of his Tirobhav Tithi on 25 August is therefore not a mournful ritual but a celebration of an unending presence. In the Indian spiritual tradition, the death of a saint is seen as a moment of transcendence, when the finite merges with the infinite. For his followers, Sankardeva's passing symbolised not a loss but an entry into eternity. The rituals performed on this day—prayers, Borgeet singing, Bhaona performances, scriptural recitations—are imbued with joy and gratitude, affirming that his teachings are not relics of the past but living traditions guiding the present.

In modern Assam, the significance of this observance has only deepened. In an age of rapid change, where cultural memory is often fragile and threatened by commercialisation or neglect, the remembrance of Sankardeva is an act of preservation. Each gathering in a Namghar, each chanting of a Borgeet, and



each performance of a Bhaona is a reaffirmation of Assamese identity, a reminder of the values of inclusivity, fraternity, and devotion that the saint embodied. For the youth, the Tirobhav Tithi serves as a cultural compass, guiding them to cherish their heritage not as folklore but as a living current of inspiration.

Nationally, Srimanta Sankardeva's contributions must be seen within the broader canvas of the Indian Bhakti movement. Across India, saints like Kabir, Mirabai, Tulsidas, and Chaitanya Mahaprabhu were reimagining devotion as a personal and direct bond with God, free from rigid rituals and mediators. Sankardeva stands shoulder to shoulder with these figures, yet his movement was unique in its synthesis of art, community institutions, and regional identity. His Borgeets enriched Indian devotional music, his Sattriya dance expanded India's classical repertoire, and his dramas added new dimensions to Indian theatre. In him, spirituality and creativity were inseparable, each feeding into the other.

The philosophy he taught continues to hold profound relevance for the modern world. At a time when divisions of caste, class, and religion still fracture societies, his call for equality before God resounds with urgency. When religion often succumbs to commercialisation or becomes a tool of division, his vision of devotion as inclusive community life offers a corrective. When art is increasingly commodified and disconnected from moral or spiritual roots, his example shows how music, theatre, and dance can elevate society rather than distract it. His insistence that spirituality must be lived through shared institutions, through education and creativity, is a lesson as vital today as it was five centuries ago.

The Tirobhav Tithi of Srimanta Sankardeva is thus more than

a religious anniversary. It is an act of collective remembrance, cultural preservation, and spiritual renewal. Each 25 August, when prayers resound in Namghars, when lamps are lit in Sattras, and when communities gather in devotion, the saint's presence is felt not as a memory but as a living force. His songs are still sung, his plays still performed, his dances still taught, his scriptures still recited, and his institutions still flourish. Few figures in history achieve such immortality, where centuries cannot erode their influence because their work is woven into the very fabric of a people's identity.

To honour Sankardeva on his Tirobhav Tithi is therefore not to look back nostalgically at a golden age but to live in the continuity of his vision. His life reminds us that greatness lies not in dominance but in service, not in exclusivity but in inclusivity, not in material accumulation but in cultural and spiritual enrichment. The saint who departed in 1568 remains alive in the heartbeat of Assam, and each year, 25 August renews the covenant between his people and his vision.

Srimanta Sankardeva was more than the architect of Assam's cultural and spiritual identity; he was a beacon of universal values. His legacy teaches that devotion is strongest when it is shared, art is truest when it uplifts, and society is noblest when it embraces equality. The lamps that are lit in his memory on this day are not extinguished with the night; they continue to glow in the consciousness of generations, guiding them toward truth, harmony, and compassion.

Thus, the Tirobhav Tithi of Mahapurush Srimanta Sankardeva is not an ending remembered, but an eternal presence celebrated. In the silence of prayer, in the cadence of song, in the rhythm of dance, and in the unity of community, the saint lives on—his light undimmed, his message unforgetting, his vision ever relevant. For Assam and for India, 25 August is a day when time itself pauses to honour a man who, though gone from the mortal plane, remains eternally woven into the destiny of his people. *(The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)*

What to know about breast anatomy

By: Krystal Cascetta

Both males and females have breasts, but they are more developed in females. Each breast contains many glands and other structures that allow them to perform their functions. Namely, the primary biological function of the breast is to produce milk to feed infants. However, the breast can also be a symbol of femininity and play a role in sexual attraction and pleasure.

Breast cancer is a type of cancer that begins in the breast. Other than skin cancer, it is the most common Trusted Source cancer in American women, and while much rarer Trusted Source, can also occur in men. Awareness of the symptoms and the need for screening are important ways of reducing the risk of breast cancer.

In this article, we will explore the various components that comprise male and female breasts. It will also discuss how a person can perform a self-examination for breast cancer.

The breasts are glandular organs that sit atop the chest wall and pectoral muscles. The breasts are present in both sexes. However, the female breasts are more developed. The breasts are also an important component of the female reproductive system. When puberty occurs, the female breasts develop at an accelerated rate due to the effects of estrogen and other hormones. These result in the development of adipose (fatty) tissue that gives the female breasts their hemispherical shape, as well as the development of glandular tissue and the duct system.

The male breast structure is nearly identical to the female breast. However, they usually lack the specialized structures that allow female breasts to produce and secrete milk. In some cases, men may develop a condition known as gynecomastia. This is where the mammary glands enlarge and resemble female breasts.

Function of breasts

The primary function Trusted Source of the female breasts is to produce milk for breastfeeding. During pregnancy, the hormone prolactin stimulates milk production, while the hormone oxytocin stimulates the release of milk from the glands. The female breast also has a sexual function, as stimulation of the breasts or nipples may enhance pleasure.

In males, the breasts do not have a functional role. However, they may also enhance sexual pleasure following manipulation of the breast and



nipples.

Breast structure

Different structures make up the breasts, including structures underneath the skin. These structures include Trusted Source:

Chest wall

The chest wall includes Trusted Source the bones, skin, fat, muscles, and various other tissues that protect the organs between the neck and the abdomen.

The bones that make up the chest wall include the ribs, the breastbone (which a person can feel in between the breasts), and the spine. It also helps to support breathing and the movement of the upper arms and shoulders.

Pectoral muscles

The pectoral muscles Trusted Source make up the chest muscles. They are present underneath the breasts and provide support. The pectoral muscles include:

- Pectoralis major
- Pectoralis minor
- Serratus anterior
- Subclavius

Lobules

The lobules are glands that are responsible for

producing milk in the breast. The lobules are in clusters and form lobes. There are between 15–20 lobes embedded in the breasts' fatty tissue, and they radiate around the nipple. Some breast cancers start in the lobules and are known as lobular cancers. Male breasts typically lack lobules, as they do not produce milk.

Ducts

The ducts are the tubes that carry milk from the lobules to the nipple. A collection of lobules along with a duct form the terminal ductal lobular unit. There are many terminal ductal lobular units present in the breast. Most breast cancers start in the terminal ducts and are known as ductal cancers.

Mammary glands

The mammary glands are accessory glands present in the chest with specialized functions. It is an apocrine type of gland and its main function in females is to secrete milk.

The mammary glands are predominantly located in the pectoral region of the chest. However, a part of the mammary gland, known as the axillary tail, extends to the axilla, which is the region below the armpits.

Fatty tissue

Fatty tissue, along with fibrous tissue, makes up

the connective tissue that holds all the structures within the breasts in place. The fatty tissue fills the space between glandular (lobes and ducts) and fibrous (ligaments) tissue.

The fatty tissue determines the size of the breast. During puberty, increased estrogen levels stimulate the buildup of fatty tissue and glandular tissue which increases the size of the female breast.

Lymph nodes

The lymph nodes are small organs present throughout the body. The lymph nodes produce a fluid called lymph which contains lymphocytes. Lymphocytes are immune cells that fight infections and diseases. Lymph vessels transport filtered lymph fluid from the breast to the lymph nodes.

The axillary group of lymph nodes drains 75–80% Trusted Source of the lymph from the breasts. These lymph nodes are present in the underarm region. The internal mammary group of lymph nodes drains the remaining 20–25% Trusted Source of lymph. These nodes are present in the breast region.

Areola

The areola is the darker, pigmented, round area around the nipple. The areola has small bumps on its surface. These are sebaceous glands that release oily secretions that raise the areola and nipple from cracking.

Nipple

The nipple is the raised projection in the middle of the areola. About 15–20 ducts Trusted Source connect to the nipple. The nipple provides an exit for milk release during breastfeeding. The nipple also contains smooth muscles that can cause the nipple to become erect.

Checking for breast cancer

Breast cancer occurs when cells in the breast grow at an uncontrollable and accelerated rate. This can be due to mutations or changes in the genes that control the growth of breast cells. Breast cancer can spread to other regions of the body through the blood or lymph.

According to the American Cancer Society, breast cancer is the second Trusted Source leading cause of cancer death in women after lung cancer. The lifetime risk of getting breast cancer is about 1 in 833 Trusted Source for men.

Breast cancer treatment is more likely to be successful if a person can detect the cancer early. People can self-examine their breasts regularly to

increase the likelihood of early detection.

Both men and women can do similar self-examinations to check their breast health.

A person should start by first examining their breasts in a mirror with their shoulders straight and their arms on their hips. They should check that their breasts are their usual size, shape, color and that the breasts are evenly shaped.

People should look for changes such as:

- Dimpling, puckering, or bulging of the skin
- Changes in the position of the nipple or if the nipple is inward instead of sticking out
- Redness
- A rash
- Swelling
- Soreness

Next, the person should raise both arms and look for the same changes. They should also check to see if any fluid comes out of any or both nipples. The person should then lie down and examine their breast with their hands. To examine the left breast, a person should use their right hand and vice versa for their right breast.

They should examine the breast using a circular motion, starting at the nipple, and then fanning out in a circular motion, ensuring they reach their collarbone, upper abdomen, and the underarm region. A person should apply firm enough pressure to feel any lumps.

Lastly, the person should repeat the previous step while standing up.

If a person notices any changes, finds a lump, or experiences discharge from the nipple, they should seek advice from their primary care physician. A doctor will be able to check and order tests to ensure a correct diagnosis.

Click here to learn more about performing a self-examination for breast cancer.

Summary

The breasts are glandular organs present in the chest area of the upper body. They consist of specialized structures, including lobules and ducts, that facilitate milk production in females and are usually non-functional in males.

Breast cancer can occur in males and females. Therefore, it is vital for people to perform regular self-examinations to check for breast cancer. This includes visually examining the breast as well as manually examining the breast in a circular motion for lumps or skin changes. Early detection may help treat possible breast cancer more successfully. (Courtesy: MNT)

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM): An analysis

By: Diganta Barooah

(CONTD. FROM PREVIOUS ISSUE)
malnutrition, and other sanitation-related diseases due to reduced exposure to fecal-oral pathogens.

Enhanced Sanitation Coverage:

Over 11.64 crore household toilets constructed in rural areas, over 63 lakh household and 6.3 lakh public toilets built in urban areas. India declared ODF in 2019.

• Women's Safety and Dignity: Improved access to toilets, especially in rural areas, enhanced privacy, dignity, and safety for women and girls.

• Environmental Gains: Scientific solid and liquid waste management systems adopted. Remediation of legacy dumpsites and promotion of waste-to-energy technologies.

• Behavior Change and Awareness: Created a Jan Andolan (people's movement) around cleanliness and hygiene. Promoted lasting behavioral change through IEC (Information, Education & Communication) campaigns.

Socio-Economic Impact:

Employment generation in sanitation and waste sectors. Boost to startups and innovation in waste management through partnerships (SIIC-IIT Kanpur, and DPIIT for innovation).

Global Recognition:

Recognized as one of the largest and most impactful sanitation programs worldwide. It became a model for community-driven public health reform.

Challenges Faced by SBM:

• Maintenance of Sanitation Infrastructure: Community Sanitary Complexes (CSCs) suffer from poor upkeep due to lack of clear ownership and accountability, inadequate funds for routine maintenance and irregular water supply and electricity connections.

• Behavioral Change and Toilet Usage: Despite high toilet coverage, toilet usage remains inconsistent in some areas due to traditional habits and cultural beliefs, lack of awareness about hygiene benefits and poor quality or incomplete toilet construction.

• Solid and Liquid Waste Management (SLWM): Many villages lack infrastructure for segregation and storage of waste and transportation and treatment facilities. Functional status of PWMUs (61.4%), GOBARdhan units (58.5%), and FSTPs (Faecal Sludge Treatment Plants)/STPs (83.8%) in Gramen area needs improvement.

• Financial and Operational Bottlenecks: Delayed or inadequate funding at the state and local levels, complexity in fund utilization and gram panchayats often struggle with limited resources and personnel.

Urban Sanitation Challenges:

Overburdened urban infrastructure due to rapid urbanization, difficulty in managing legacy waste dumpsites and inconsistent door-to-door collection and segregation compliance.

Monitoring and Data Gaps:

Discrepancies between reported and ground realities (e.g., functional vs. constructed toilets), lack of robust real-time monitoring in some regions and insufficient third-party audits or community verification.

Inclusion and Equity Issues:

Sanitation access and quality may be lower for marginalized communities. Gender-sensitive sanitation (e.g., safe toilets for women and girls) still lacking in some areas.

Sustaining Community Engagement:

Post-certification (ODF/ODF+), interest and motivation wane without continued IEC. Volunteer fatigue and lack of incentives for local champions.

Different Issues Being Witnessed in Implementation of SBM:

✓ Persistent Traditional Beliefs Regarding Sanitation Work:

• Sanitation and waste management in India are associated with the wide prevalence of caste. Historically, the subjugated castes have been

forced to carry out sanitation work. * The SBM tried to create a narrative that sanitation is everyone's job. Instead, it has ended up continuing the same old caste practices. * The SBM is allegedly successful project; as no Opposition party or community has raised objections to it. While the entire project is governed and monitored by state agencies, the design makes it clear that large capital-intensive technologies are promoted. However, still those practices continue to hog the limelight.

No Universal Access to Toilets:

The Union government claims that India is open defecation-free, but the reality is different. A Comptroller and Auditor General report in 2020 raised many questions about the government's claims over the success of the SBM on this front. * It indicated the poor quality of construction of toilets under this scheme. * A few urbanisation studies pointed out that in some metros, communities in slums still do not have access to public toilets. * Even in rural India, toilet construction has not been linked to waste treatment. * In peri-urban areas, the faecal sludge generated is tossed into the environment. * Septic tanks are cleaned by manual scavengers and the sludge is thrown into various water systems.

Technology Not Acting as Alternative to Involvement of People:

* One thing the government intended to do via SBM was to reduce the involvement of people in waste management by replacing them with large, capital-intensive technologies. However, these installations have refused to live up to their promoters' promises, leaving town after town screaming for resources to fix them and, importantly, respond to the health crises emerging from badly managed waste. * Take, for example, solid and liquid waste management in cities. In most towns, the Union government is employing technological solutions in handling solid waste. Some of these solutions are in the form of waste-to-energy plants and biological methanation. But there are barely any success stories in either case. In this scenario, the governments outsourced most of the work to private players, who employed the same subjugated communities to handle waste.

Making Sanitation a Profit Entity:

* City governments are being asked to buy more machines including road sweeping machines that cost no less than Rs. 1 crore, more vehicles to transport the waste from one corner to another with geo-tagging, and so on. * Funds are made available to the city governments for such plans. However, all this work is being handed over to large contractors entering the city domains for making sanitation a profit entity. * Most of the workers employed by these contractors are Dalits. Hence, a scheme fully owned by the state has become a toolkit for the privatisation of public health services and continued caste discrimination.

Lack of Sanitation Inspectors:

* In March, 2024, in the Himachal Pradesh High Court, the Urban Development Department said that there are just five sanitation inspectors in the Shimla Municipal Corporation, which comprises 34 wards. Instead of recruiting more such inspectors, this cadre is being declared dead after they retire. * In a State where there are more than 50 municipal bodies, there are only 20 sanitation inspectors, which means that there are some municipalities that have no sanitation inspectors.

Lack of Water Supply:

* Infrastructures for toilet are important, but cannot alone stand as pre-requisite to interrupt fecal-oral transmission of pathogens. * In rural areas, lack of water supply is a key issue, only 42.5% of households had access to water for use in toilets, which increase toilet nonusage rates. * Other challenges such as improper fecal sludge management, inappropriate toilet technologies, and inadequate human resources persist that endanger in achieving sanitation coverage in rural areas.

✓ Open Defecation as a Habit Among Children:

* Data suggest that open defecation has decreased by 12% from 2015 to 2019, which means that nearly half of the rural population still defecates in the open. * Open defecation is traditional behavior in rural India and people perceive it to be healthier, cleaner, and sometimes "religiously acceptable." * This issue of open defecation is of greater concern and worrisome because government studies indicate, the proportion of children below 15 years of old is practicing open defecation more frequently than other age groups.

Challenges in Richer States:

* Despite progress, wealthier states showed mixed performance and smaller gains in toilet use compared to economically poorer states, highlighting the need for tailored strategies in different socio-economic contexts. * States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Gujarat showed smaller progress in regular toilet use compared to economically disadvantaged states, indicating that the program did not have the same impact across all states.

Various Ways to Improve the Effectiveness of SBM:

Focusing on Vulnerable Sections:

While, India has made substantial progress in sanitation coverage, some individuals, households, and community belonging to disadvantage sections of the society such as female-headed household, landless people, migrant laborers, and disable people still do not have toilets in their home or find the existing toilets not accessible. * It is crucial to support these un-served populations both from human rights and public health perspectives because these marginalized sections are already without access to basic services and experience various health issues.

Integration With Public Health Infrastructure:

Educational institutions, child-care centers, hospitals, and other government facilities need further development in sanitation practices. Sanitation coverage disaggregated data in public facilities and among the government departments requires innovation to make it a long lasting and feasible option, which will be vital in public health infrastructure.

Promoting Adequate Behavioural Change:

For India to realize in achieving sustainable development goal 6 (SDG), i.e., "ensure access to water and sanitation for all" by 2030, a number of factors needs to be considered. Country like India, which is vast in her diversity, culture, and population, where 60% of total population resides in rural areas, only access to toilet does not ensure hygienic and safe sanitation practices. * For instance, lesson from the India's first sanitation program "Central Rural Sanitation Programme" launched in 1986, stated that only toilet construction did not translate to usage of toilets. * This program focused on the household toilets construction and promotion of the pour-flush toilets. However, this program lacks the focus on behavior change toward toilet use that led failure of the program. * Therefore, promoting behaviourally sound practices are an urgent imperative.

Following the Holistic Path:

SBM must learn to resolve these issues by capitalizing political support, to pay subsidies directly to households through e-banking, strengthening monitoring system through technological platform and broadcasting the success of the program. * Moreover, it should also focus to promote objectives through information, education, and communication campaign and to provide individual toilet facilities in all households to achieve the goal of ODF by October 2, 2019 – to honor the 150th birthday of Mahatma Gandhi.

Improving Sewer Infrastructure in Village Areas:

* The absence of proper sewage systems probed a severe challenge when it came to implementation of Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Gramin scale. As the population went out to defecate, the areas lacked a working sewage system to treat the generated sewage. * Thus before constructing toilets, the gov-

ernment also had to address this problem. The village and rural segments also need to be integrated into the AMRUT programme of the government.

Robust Waste Management Systems:

* With pollution levels in cities growing and the overflowing of landfills, there is an urgent requirement to reinvent garbage management in cities so that waste is fully processed and not landfilled. * The ministry should take steps to scale up waste processing in all states that are lagging behind and emphasise on segregation at source, primary collection, secondary storage, transportation, secondary segregation, resource recovery, processing, treatment and final disposal of solid waste to achieve 100% solid waste management in the country.

Supplementing Urban Local Bodies:

* The strategies for providing basic services to the urban areas should be intensified and efforts should be made to improve the on-ground implementation of these schemes. * Urban local bodies in India, which lack critically in infrastructure and capability, should be provided support and equipped with better resources and avenues to enhance citizen participation in the management of urban areas.

Addressing the Tax Burden:

* While the focus of the government should be on ensuring that maximum waste in the country is processed, the increased tax burden under the Goods and Service Tax (GST) regime on the recycling and composting industry is not aligned with this 'noble' mission. * The increased tax slabs for recyclables is killing the recycling sector. The composting machines are now attracting 12% tax against the 8% previously. * While on one hand, the government is trying to promote city compost, imposing 5% GST will have a negative impact on its production and promotion. Therefore, the GST rate should be rationalized to achieve the long term goals.

Adoption and Integration of Technologies:

The e-Governance Solutions need to be incorporated including Mobile Apps, MIS, dashboards APIs, developed by the National Informatics Centre (NIC), aim to track the progress of ODF Plus progress in different states. * SBM-G e-governance solution should be a Robust, Interoperable, Scalable, Secure and Role-based system that enables user to enter all the assets of solid and liquid along with geo coordinates using mobile app.

Data Regarding Swachh Bharat Mission in Assam:

Numbers of IHHL (Individual household latrines) constructed in Assam under SBM (Gramin) since 2014 = 42,20,757

Numbers of Community Sanitary Complexes (CSCs) constructed in Assam under SBM (Gramin) since 2014 = 4,669

Number of Individual household latrines (IHHLs) constructed in Assam under SBM (Urban) since 2014 = 78,788

Number of Community and Public Toilets (No. of Seats) constructed in Assam under SBM (Urban) since 2014 = 3,356

Way Forward:

• Focus on sustainable waste management. • Promote Swabhav Swachhata, Sanskar Swachhata (Cleanliness as a habit and value). • Expand community engagement, recognize Safai Mitras, and build inclusive sanitation systems. • Ensure functionality of infrastructure and behavioral change for long-term success. No doubt, India has made rapid progress to achieve the SDG 6 by increasing nationwide toilet access under SBM. At the same time, India must scrutinize its success within the framework of environment safety and fecal-oral transmission of disease that help, especially to children to spend their childhood free from malnourishment or premature death. By doing so, and by responding to the complexities of SBM identified, will show India and other countries, the pathways of full-filling the sanitation agendas, by achieving universal sanitation for all and to meet the SDGs targets and objectives.

Nepal declared free of rubella as a public health problem: WHO

By: Nandita Banerji

The World Health Organization (WHO) on August 18, 2025 has announced that Nepal has eliminated rubella as a public health problem, marking a major milestone for maternal and child health in the region.

Rubella, commonly known as German measles, is a highly contagious viral infection that poses particular risks for pregnant women, leading to miscarriage, stillbirth or severe birth defects. Although safe and cost-effective vaccines exist, the infection remains a global threat, with an estimated 100,000 infants born with congenital rubella syndrome each year worldwide.

Two doses of the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine, also known as the MMR vaccine, are recommended by doctors as the best way to protect against the diseases. According to the United States' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, most people vaccinated with MMR will be protected for life.

"Nepal's success reflects the unwavering commitment of its leadership, persistent efforts of the healthcare workers and volunteers and unstinting support of engaged and informed communities, for a healthy start for babies and a future free of rubella disease," said Catharina Boehme, Officer-In-Charge of WHO in Southeast Asia.

National immunisation drive

Nepal first introduced the rubella vaccine in 2012 through a nationwide campaign targeting children between nine months and 15 years. A second dose was added to the country's routine immunisation schedule in 2016.

Despite facing major public health emergencies in recent years, including devastating earthquakes in 2015 and 2023 and the COVID-19 pandemic, the country achieved more than 95 per cent coverage of at least one dose of rubella vaccine by early 2024.

Nepal's elimination effort was bolstered by measures such as "immunisation month" campaigns, outreach to unvaccinated children and district-level drives to declare areas fully immunised. The country has also introduced a robust laboratory testing algorithm to strengthen rubella surveillance, becoming the first in WHO's Southeast Asia Region to adopt such an approach.

A global challenge

While Nepal's achievement stands out, rubella and other vaccine-preventable diseases remain a concern globally. In 2022, an estimated 17,865 rubella cases were reported in 78 countries. Immunisation coverage has stagnated, with 14.3 million children worldwide missing out on all vaccines in 2024.

WHO estimates that around 85 per cent of infants globally received three doses of diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccine in 2024, while only 84 per cent received a first dose of measles vaccine, which is still below pre-pandemic levels. Health experts warn that measles, with its high transmissibility, often signals wider immunity gaps, underlining the need for continued progress towards the global Immunization Agenda 2030. (Courtesy: <https://www.downtoearth.org.in>)

SIR IS INTACT, AADHAAR ALONE CANNOT GET YOU ENROLLED, SAYS MALVIYA AADHAAR ALONE CANNOT GET ONE ENROLLED AS VOTER: BJP



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The BJP on Sunday accused the Opposition of indulging in propaganda after the Supreme Court said that voters excluded during the ongoing SIR exercise in Bihar can submit Aadhaar along with other documents, asserting that the apex court did not say

Aadhaar alone can be a valid document to get voting rights.

Aadhaar is only proof of identity and residence and it does not establish citizenship. BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said, adding that nowhere in the judgment did the Supreme Court even suggest that it should be

used as a valid document for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR).

The Opposition is spreading propaganda over the issue, he said. The Representation of the People Act states that a person will be disqualified from registration in electoral roll if he is

not a citizen of India, declared by a competent court to be of unsound mind or is disqualified under law relating to corrupt practices or offences in elections, Malviya said.

The Aadhaar Act, he added, says it is only proof of identity and residence, and does not es-

tablish citizenship.

"Asking the Election Commission to include Aadhaar as a document for automatic voter enrolment would render Section 16 of the RP Act and the Aadhaar Act meaningless. In fact, this very bench, on August 12, held that Aadhaar is not a legal document to prove citizenship," Malviya said.

Attributing to the Supreme Court what it has not said is contempt of court, he said in a swipe at the opposition parties.

"The truth is simple: SIR is intact, Aadhaar alone cannot get you enrolled, dead, fake, Bangladeshi and Rohingya names will be removed and only Indian citizens will elect the next government — not foreigners," he said.

Malviya also claimed that 65 lakh names removed from the draft voter roll in Bihar included fake, dead, and Bangladeshi and Rohingya names. While the Supreme Court asked the list of deleted names to be published so that the affected persons can reapply, Malviya said only 84,305 objections have been filed so far, which is barely 1.3 per cent of the total deleted names. It is well below the standard margin of error, he said.

"Clearly, the 'vote chori' cry is manufactured," the BJP leader added. (PTI)

INDIA bloc constituents in Bihar working unitedly, poll results will be fruitful: Rahul



ARARIA (BIHAR), Aug 24:

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday asserted that all the INDIA bloc constituents in Bihar were working unitedly for the upcoming assembly polls and that the results will be fruitful.

Addressing a press conference in Araria, with RJD's Tejashwi Yadav and leaders of other constituents of the INDIA bloc by his side, Gandhi said that the opposition alliance will soon come out with a common manifesto for the polls, due later this year.

"The INDIA bloc will soon come out with a common manifesto for the Bihar assembly polls. All constituents of the opposition alliance are working unitedly... we are both ideologically and politically aligned, mutually respecting each other. The results would be fruitful," Gandhi said.

"I call it a good partnership among all constituents of the INDIA bloc," he said.

Launching a scathing attack on the NDA government at the Centre, the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha alleged that the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in the eastern state was "an institutionalised attempt by the Election Commission to steal votes to help the BJP".

"We will not allow the EC to steal votes in Bihar. The poll panel is working for the benefit of the BJP. The SIR is an institutionalised attempt by the EC to steal votes in the upcoming assembly polls in the state to help the saffron party," he added.

The EC has been completely exposed as working for the BJP,

Gandhi said.

"When I exposed the EC over the irregularities committed in preparing voter lists in Haryana, Maharashtra, Karnataka and how forged voters were added to the rolls, the EC demanded an affidavit from me over the issue. But when Anurag Thakur of the ruling dispensation said the same thing in a press conference, the Commission did not ask for any affidavit from him. This shows that EC is not neutral," Gandhi said.

The partial behaviour of the EC needs to change, he added.

"The 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' in Bihar has been a great success, and people joined it in large numbers... we have received the support of crores of people of the state, who joined us on their own. It has established the fact that the EC is stealing people's votes in Bihar," the Congress leader said.

"One can imagine the impact of our yatra that even small kids are now raising the slogan of 'vote chor, gaddi chhor' (vote thief, vacate seat of power)," Gandhi said.

He, however, evaded a direct reply to a question as to why the Mahagathbandhan was not declaring Tejashwi Yadav as the chief ministerial candidate of the INDIA bloc for the upcoming polls.

"We are cooperating with one another, and we have to check 'vote chori' (vote theft)," he said.

Several other leaders of the INDIA bloc, including CPI (ML) Liberation's Dipankar Bhattacharya, VIP's Mukesh Sahni, besides Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, were also present at the joint press conference. (PTI)

SC directs boundary demarcation of wetlands within 2 months

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Noting that state wetland authorities are moving at a snail's pace, the Supreme Court has directed States to expedite the ground truthing and boundary demarcation of wetlands within two months.

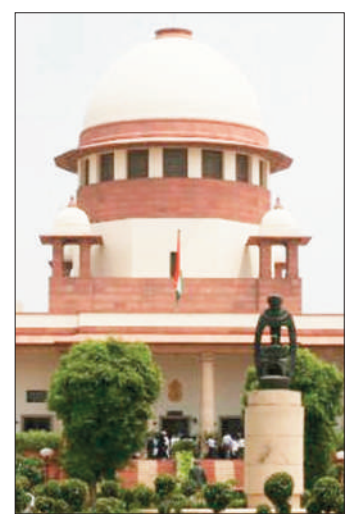
A bench of Justices Arvind Kumar and N V Anjaria said the exercise carried out by the authorities reflects the sorry state of affairs and the directions issued have not yielded positive results.

"We direct these States to expedite the ground truthing and boundary demarcation expeditiously and at any rate within an outer limit of two months from today, failing which, the secre-

taries of the concerned States of the Department of Environment and Ecology will have to personally remain present before this court on next date of hearing," the bench said.

The top court made clear that inaction on the part of these State Wetland Authorities would compel it to pass coercive orders against those States which have failed to comply with the direction issued earlier.

"In the light of the wetlands having been identified, it is incumbent upon the State Wetland Authorities to publish the same in the respective State Governments' website... Let the affidavit of compliance be filed immedi-



ately after such an exercise being undertaken and at any rate before the next date of hearing," the bench said in its August 19 order.

The apex court said the Union of India shall coordinate with the State Level Wetland Authorities and expedite the issuance of notifications for which the draft notifications are already in place.

"The statistics furnished would also reflect that wetlands, which are less than 2.25 hectares, are required to be identified as prescribed under the extant rules and the affidavits of the state governments of wetland authorities shall also delve upon as to the manner and method in which steps have

been taken or being taken to protect these wetlands which are less than 2.25 hectares, which according to the statistics is around 5,55,557 as mentioned in the Wetland Atlas," the bench said while posting the matter for hearing on October 7.

Advocate Akash Vashishtha, appearing for intervenors Manu Bhatnagar and Vikrant Tongad, submitted that apart from the 2,31,195 wetlands over 2.25 hectare in size identified by ISRO, there were 5,55,557 wetlands of 2.25 hectare.

The top court was hearing a PIL by bird enthusiast Anand Arya, advocate M K Balakrishnan and NGO Vanashakti. (PTI)

ISRO completes first air-drop test for Gaganyaan parachute system



BENGALURU, Aug 24: ISRO on Sunday successfully carried out the first Integrated Air Drop Test (IADT-01) to validate the parachute-based deceleration system for the upcoming Gaganyaan mission.

An ISRO official told PTI that the end-to-end demonstration was conducted near Sriharikota in Andhra Pradesh.

The exercise was jointly executed by ISRO, the Indian Air Force, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), the Indian

Navy and the Indian Coast Guard.

The Gaganyaan project aims to demonstrate India's capability to send humans into space and safely return them to Earth. Planned as the country's first human spaceflight programme, it will also involve precursor unmanned missions to test systems critical for crew safety.

The parachute-based deceleration mechanism is a key component to ensure the safe recovery of the crew module during re-entry and landing. (PTI)

After 'vote chori', BJP now engaged in 'satta chori': Kharge

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday alleged that after "vote chori", the BJP is now engaged in "satta chori" by bringing bills to "topple opposition governments within 30 days" and "destabilise democracy" by using arrest as a weapon.

Kharge claimed that the bills take away the right of citizens to form or remove their elected government and give that power to institutions like ED-CBI.

"It is like running a bulldozer on democracy," the Congress chief said.

He made the comments in his opening statement at the meeting with newly-appointed presidents of the District Congress Committees (DCC) of Haryana and Madhya Pradesh at the Indira Bhawan here.

Kharge cautioned the DCC chiefs to take special care in forming booth

and Mandal committees and ensure that the people on these panels are loyal to the party and do not waver from the ideology of the Congress.

"The district president forms the Block Committee under him. He forms Mandal and Booth Committees. When you form these committees, take special care that all these people are loyal to the party and hardworking. Most importantly, they should not waver from the ideology of the Congress," Kharge said.

Even if someone tempts them, their loyalty should remain for the Congress, such people are needed, he stressed.

Kharge said the Congress ruled the country for a long time because of its strong organisation and it was necessary for the ministers to contact the district president first when they went to the district.

"The district president is the

strongest link in the Congress organisation. If the government has to be elected in the state, he plays an important role in getting the candidate elected in the Legislative Assemblies. If the government has to be formed in the country, your support is needed to win the Lok Sabha," he told the DCC chiefs of Haryana and Madhya Pradesh.

"In between, there was a slight change in this tradition. Ministers started making their favourite people the district president. Ability and ideology started being ignored. Rahul (Gandhi) ji and I realised that we cannot return to power strongly without strengthening our organisation, without giving importance to the district presidents," he said.

Kharge pointed out that recently Rahul Gandhi had given a detailed presentation how votes were 'stolen' in Karnataka's Mahadevapura seat in a strategic way through a conspir-



acy. "We came to know all this after six months of research," he said.

"The Election Commission did not give any answer at first. Now the whole country is understanding this. The BJP government and ECI's narrative on SIR in Bihar has got a setback from the Supreme Court," he said.

Speaking about the recently-concluded Monsoon Session, Kharge said the opposition wanted Parliament to function and important is-

ssues of the public are discussed but the BJP government did not want key matters like SIR (Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls) and "vote chori" to be discussed.

"The BJP will continue to cut the votes of our people with schemes like SIR. The biggest responsibility of the district president is that we have to be careful for the entire five years," he said.

"We have to keep intensively checking our voter list so that if BJP people or BLOs cut the names of our people, we can catch them immediately," Kharge said.

He urged the Congress leaders to tell the people that the right to vote for everyone in this country is the gift of Congress.

"Rajiv Gandhi reduced the voting age from 21 to 18 years so that the participation of youth in democracy could be increased," he pointed out. (PTI)

'PM very concerned', says Rajnath after meeting Kishtwar cloudburst victims at Jammu hospital

JAMMU, Aug 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is very concerned about the recent cloudburst in a remote village in Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Sunday after meeting some of the victims undergoing treatment at the Government Medical College Hospital here. Expressing satisfaction over the treatment of the injured, Rajnath Singh said his plan to visit the cloudburst-hit area could not materialise due to inclement weather and a fresh landslide on the road en route. The defence minister was accompanied by Union minister and Udhampur MP Jitendra Singh and J-K Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha. After landing here from Delhi, the defence minister went straight to the hospital to meet the 16 people undergoing treatment. He was briefed by a team of doctors

on the condition of the patients.

The cloudburst struck Chisoti, the last motorable village en route the Machail Mata temple, on August 14, killing 65 people and injuring over 100. Thirty-two people missing since are yet to be found.

Briefly talking to reporters before leaving the hospital for Raj Bhavan, Rajnath Singh said, "The prime minister is very concerned and is monitoring the situation. I had planned to visit the spot but couldn't due to inclement weather and a landslide (at Pathernaki)... We are now going to the Raj Bhavan where we will talk to the (affected) people through videoconferencing."

Lauding the doctors for taking good care of those admitted to the hospital after the incident, the defence minister said the injured people are recuperating satisfactorily. (PTI)

Gaganyaan Mission symbol of new chapter in journey of Atmanirbhar Bharat: Rajnath

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Sunday said Gaganyaan mission symbolises a "new chapter" in the journey of Atmanirbhar Bharat and called astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla and the other three chosen Gaganyatris as country's "gems" and pioneers of national aspirations.

At an event hosted by the IAF at Subroto Park here, Singh felicitated the four Gaganyatris.

The ceremony comes after the successful Axiom 4 mission, in which Shukla was a team member and represented India.

"We do not see space only as a field of research, but as the future of tomorrow's economy, security, energy, and humanity," Singh said. He said that India is steadily advancing beyond the Earth's surface into "new frontiers of space."

"We've already marked our



presence from Moon to Mars, and today, the nation stands fully prepared for missions like Gaganyaan," the defence minister said. He termed the achievement as not merely a technological milestone, but "a

new chapter in Atmanirbhar Bharat when we are proudly standing tall among the world's leading space powers."

Singh underlined that India's space programme is not confined to laboratories and launch vehi-

cles, but rather a "reflection of our national aspirations and global vision."

"From Chandrayaan to Mangalyaan, we have demonstrated that even with limited resources, an unlimited will power can transform the most challenging goals into remarkable accomplishments," he said.

Group Captain Prasanth Balakrishnan Nair, Group Captain Ajit Krishnan, Group Captain Angad Pratap, and Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla are the four chosen Gaganyatris.

Their names were revealed for the first time in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre (VSSC) in Thiruvananthapuram in February 2024. The Gaganyaan project, formally announced by Modi in 2018, aims to send a three-member crewed flight into the 400

km-orbit for a three-day mission in 2027.

Singh felicitated the four Gaganyatris who are part of ISRO's maiden human space flight mission.

Later in his address, he described them as "gems" of the country and pioneers of national aspirations.

The event hosted at Air Force Auditorium, was also attended by Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh.

Shukla's wife and son, and family members of the other three Gaganyatris, also attended the event.

Singh, in his address, pointed out that technologies derived from space, be it communication satellites, or for weather monitoring or disaster management, are servicing every village and every field across India. (PTI)

Community support rises for Siang Upper Multipurpose Project

Villages sign MoUs backing SUMP as Deputy CM assures fair rehabilitation; Jaishankar raises river concerns with China

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Aug 24: Community support for the ambitious Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) is gathering momentum, with more villages in Arunachal Pradesh pledging their confidence in the initiative.

According to an official statement, a fresh round of village-level MoUs has signaled growing trust in the project's potential to safeguard lives, livelihoods, and the region's long-term future.

The latest endorsement has come from Begging village in Siang district, where over 85 percent of households expressed support for the preparation of the Project Feasibility Report (PFR).

This follows similar declarations from Riga and Riew villages, underscoring what officials described as a "rising sense of ownership" among communities in the Siang belt.

The statement noted that these endorsements are the result of sustained consultative efforts by the State Government to raise awareness about the project

and counter misinformation being circulated by certain groups.

Residents of Begging said they had been reassured by the government's commitment to fair recognition and resettlement safeguards.

"We stand in support of this project because it carries the promise of a better future for our children and generations to come. We love our land as we love our families. It holds our identity, our memories, and our heritage, and that is why it matters deeply that the government has engaged in proactive dialogue, listening to our concerns and assuring that families who part with land will be given the strongest possible support.

With fair recognition, resettlement safeguards, and priority to our communities to be detailed in the long-awaited PFR, we feel confident that our contributions will be valued. Together, we can protect our culture while also embracing new opportunities, walking shoulder to shoulder with our government towards a brighter tomorrow," a local from Beg-



ging was quoted as saying. Deputy chief minister Chowna Mein, along with other state leaders, has reiterated that project-affected families will receive adequate compensation and that the resettlement and rehabilitation process would be carried out transparently.

He further emphasized that the multi-

purpose project would open up opportunities for employment, self-reliance, and overall regional development.

"The growing support from our villages shows that people see SUMP as a project for their security and prosperity," a senior State Government officer stated on condition of anonymity. "Coupled

with the steps taken by our national leadership to highlight water concerns, this community confidence is a powerful signal that Arunachal is united in shaping its water security."

The official statement also highlighted the alignment between local community support and the broader national discourse on water security.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar recently raised India's concerns on transboundary river issues during his meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

His intervention was aimed at ensuring that both local aspirations and national strategic interests are safeguarded in the wake of reports of construction activity on China's dam project on the upper reaches of the Yarlung Tsangpo, which flows into Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang.

During the discussions, Jaishankar stressed the importance of transparency, information-sharing, and regional cooperation to protect riparian communities

in Arunachal.

He underlined that any upstream construction activity carries implications for the lives and livelihoods of people in the Siang region, and called for openness to ensure that India's riverine interests are not compromised.

Officials noted that this convergence between national diplomacy and community-level confidence-building reflects a unified approach to water and resource security.

"With local communities coming forward in large numbers, and the Centre raising concerns at the highest diplomatic levels, Arunachal Pradesh is demonstrating how local aspirations and national priorities can go hand in hand," the official statement added.

As village after village pledges support for the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project, the Arunachal Government believes that the project is steadily transforming from a developmental proposal into a people-backed movement aimed at securing the region's future.

Consultative meeting on NH-415 flyover held in model village

Committee formed to resolve issues



HT Correspondent

NAHARLAGUN, Aug 24: The first consultative and coordination meeting on the construction of the landing and takeoff points of the NH-415 Package B flyover was held at the general ground of Model Village in Naharlagun on Saturday.

According to an official statement, hundreds of residents from Model Village jurisdiction participated in the meeting, which was convened to discuss the benefits and challenges linked to the ongoing flyover construction.

Senior leaders, social workers, and local residents — many of whom have been living in the area since the NEFA days — shared their views during the meeting. Senior citizens recalled the establishment of Itanagar as the state capital and the subsequent expansion of the Capital Complex.

Local leaders expressed dissatisfaction over the non-provision of an officially signed map of Model Village jurisdiction, which they said was crucial both for the convenience of villagers and to protect the area from future encroachment.

Addressing the gathering, Itanagar Capital Complex MLA and Urban Affairs Minister Techu Koso reminded residents of their role as land donors for the state capital.

"We should be grateful that we are the land donors of the state capital, so we have been patient for several years. What we are doing today is not for ourselves but for our future. Before raising any issue, we should see that our demand does not cause harm or loss to others. At the same time, we should not compromise with our problems but resolve them through discussion and consultation, like today we are doing," he said.

He added that the presence of the Chief Engineer (Highways) and the Deputy Commissioner ensured that concerns would be taken up on priority in the wider public interest.

Capital Deputy Commissioner Toko Babu, who chaired the discussions, urged participants to look beyond past grievances and focus on future prospects.

"Since joining as DC three months ago, I have taken up the main and important issue of the Itanagar Capital Complex — the construction of NH-415 Package B. I assure you that everything will be settled down," he said.

The DC added that he has been closely monitoring the progress of the project, which is being carried out under directions from the court, and has instructed the executing agency and contractor to

enhance manpower to speed up the work.

He acknowledged that the flyover construction had been halted at one end due to local concerns and announced the constitution of a committee to examine the pros and cons of the project and recommend a solution.

The committee will be headed by Naharlagun Assistant Commissioner Khonda Bath, with the Chairman, Secretary, and IPR Secretary of the Model Village Welfare Committee (MVWC) as members, along with other local representatives.

"I am hopeful that the issue of the construction of the flyover landing and takeoff will be resolved soon," DC Babu said.

The meeting also saw participation from PWD highways chief engineer C S Choutan, MVWC chairman Nyaju Techu, General Secretary Dr Taba Konya, senior citizen and chief advisor Techu Toka, IPR Secretary and Coordinator Taba Tabang, advisor Techu Lala, Women Secretary Kipa Yatup, retired secretary Kapa Kholie, local resident Er Janu Tayeng (Tarh), and Head Gaon Bura Techu Murkhi, among others, who shared their experiences and advice.

Also present were Nirjuli Highway Executive Engineer Hage Tajang, Naharlagun Assistant Commissioner Khonda Bath, senior leader Taki Taba, GB Taba Changrang, Gram Panchayat Chairperson Taying Sonya, Gram Panchayat Member Taying Tagi, and other community representatives.

The official statement added that such meetings would continue to play a vital role in fostering dialogue, resolving disputes, and ensuring that infrastructure development in the Capital Complex proceeds in consultation with local communities.

8th Dorjee Khandu Memorial Badminton Tournament concludes in Tawang



HT Correspondent

TAWANG, Aug 24: The 8th Dorjee Khandu Memorial District-Level Badminton Tournament concluded here recently with vibrant participation, emotional tributes, and renewed commitment towards nurturing sports in the district.

According to an official statement, the three-day sporting event, revived after a gap of three years, was held at the auditorium near Higher Secondary School, Tawang.

A total of 111 matches were played across 21 categories, featuring players from sports clubs representing the three constituencies of the district — Tawang, Jang, and Lungla. The tournament, named in honour of former chief minister Late Dorjee Khandu, was sponsored this year by MLA Tawang Namey Tsering, who also attended the closing ceremony as the chief guest.

He was joined by Addl Deputy Commissioner Jang Hakraso Kri, DoKAA Director Thupten Kalden, Sharts Committee Chairman & Tawang LAMPS Dorjee Norbu, District BJP President Lhundup Choisang, as well as public leaders, officers, and sports enthusiasts. In his address, MLA Namey

Tsering recalled initiating the tournament in 2014 when he served as Chairman of the Tawang Badminton Association.

He paid tribute to the late leader, crediting him for boosting sports infrastructure and inspiration across Arunachal Pradesh.

The MLA also remembered Late Jambe Tashi, Lungla MLA, for motivating youth of the region to compete at national levels.

Highlighting future plans, Tsering announced that a new badminton coach would soon be engaged in Tawang to help train and mentor aspiring players.

He thanked the teams, especially from Jang and Lungla, for their spirited participation and for upholding the values of sportsmanship and camaraderie.

On behalf of the players, Dr Thupten Tashi of Jang Sports Club and Penjor of Lungla Sports Club conveyed appreciation for the warm hospitality and smooth organisation of the tournament.

Organising Secretary Pema Chowang also extended thanks to all participants and volunteers for their cooperation in ensuring the success of the event.

A symbolic handing-over ceremony marked the conclusion, with the Tawang District Badminton

Association led by President Dr Rinchin Neema and Secretary Nawang Thutan formally passing the responsibility of hosting the 9th edition of the tournament to Jang Sports Club, represented by its Secretary Pasang Khandu.

Adding to the excitement of the closing day, an exhibition match was played where MLA Namey Tsering teamed up with Sangey Wangchu of Monyul Sports Club to defeat Dr Rinchin Neema and Nawang Thutan of Tawang Badminton Association in two straight sets.

In the finals, Lungla Sports Club emerged as the dominant force.

They clinched the Men's Doubles Open title by defeating Monyul Sports Club Tawang with a convincing scoreline of 21-9.

In the Women's Doubles Open final, Lungla again prevailed over Monyul, securing a 21-16 win and lifting the trophy.

The event concluded amid loud cheers, mutual appreciation, and a collective pledge to further strengthen badminton in Tawang.

Organisers expressed confidence that the tournament would continue to serve as a platform for young talent to shine and for communities to unite in the spirit of sports.

Pre-Solung Festival celebrated with traditional fervour in Anini

HT Correspondent

ANINI, Aug 24: The Dibang Adi Family, Anini, celebrated the Pre-Solung Festival 2025 with great enthusiasm, drawing together community members, youth and dignitaries in a vibrant cultural gathering at Anini in Dibang Valley district.

According to an official statement, the event was graced by Mopi Mihu, MLA of Dibang Valley district and Advisor to the Ministers of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Geology, Mining & Minerals, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, as chief guest, while Dipen Molo, District BJP President, Dibang Valley, attended as guest of honour.

The programme began with the traditional Taku-Taabat Solung rituals performed by the Donyi-Polo priest, followed by the unfurling of the Solung Flag and the rendition of the Solung Anthem. Welcoming the gathering, chief advisor of the Dibang Adi Family, Er Alom Apang, extended greetings to all participants.

President of the Pre-Solung Celebration Committee 2025, Nixon Danggan, underlined the cultural significance of Solung, calling it a celebration of tradition, community solidarity and heritage preservation.

A felicitation ceremony was also held in honour of the chief guest, guest of honour, and other dignitaries present.

Adding to the festivities, the prize distribution ceremony of the Pre-Solung Futsal Tournament 2025 was conducted. Antibiotic Avengers were declared champions, bagging ₹20,000 and a trophy, while Siire Football Club emerged as runners-up with ₹10,000. Special awards for best scorer, goalkeeper, best player, and recognitions for discipline and teamwork were also presented.

Addressing the gathering, both the Chief Guest and guest of honour lauded the Dibang Adi Family for promoting cultural values and fostering youth engagement through sporting and festive activities.

The Pre-Solung Festival 2025 concluded on a note of unity, reaffirming the enduring traditions of the Adi community while blending reverence for heritage with the dynamism of modern celebrations.

8-yr-old student charred to death at residential school

ITANAGAR, Aug 24: A class 3 student was charred to death, while three others were injured in a fire at a government residential school in Shi-Yomi district of Arunachal Pradesh on Sunday, police said.

The incident took place at the boy's hostel of Papikrung Government Residential School around 2 am, Shi-Yomi Superintendent of Police S K Thongdok told PTI.

The deceased has been identified as eight-year-old Tashi Jempen, a class 3 student from Changp village.

The injured persons, identified as Lukhi Pujen (8), Tanu Pujen (9) and Taya Pujen (11), were first taken to a hospital in district headquarters Taro, around 85 km away, from where they were being taken to Zonal General Hospital at Aalo in West Siang district for better treatment. Aalo is another 130 km from Taro, around a five-hour journey.

Their condition is reported to be out of danger, he said.

A police team has been sent to the remote village, located 17 km from Monigong town, to probe the matter, the officer said.

A probe is underway to ascertain the cause of the fire as the village does not have power connectivity, he said.

Papirung is located just before the last Indian Army post in Tadadege village. (PTI)

Man held for murder of 16-year-old student

ITANAGAR, Aug 24: Arunachal Pradesh Police arrested a man for allegedly killing a 16-year-old boy, an officer said on Sunday.

The body of Nitul Nath, a Class 9 student of Global Academy and son of Balaram Nath, cook to Itanagar Superintendent of Police (SP), was found in his home at Dokum Colony, Naharlagun, on August 22.

Nitul was found with four deep injury marks on his face, suspected to have been inflicted with a sharp weapon. A special investigation team (SIT) was constituted to crack the case.

"Based on initial leads, police detained Norbu Dawa Sona, a third-semester student at

Rajiv Gandhi University and resident of the same colony. During interrogation, Sona admitted to murdering Nitul on the night of August 21 while under the influence of intoxicants. He also confessed to disposing of the weapon after fleeing the scene," SP Nye-lam Nega said.

Investigations revealed that Sona shared a close friendship with Nath, often guiding him like an elder brother. However, on the night of the crime, a quarrel broke out after Sona discovered a used pouch of ganja with Nitul. The argument escalated, leading to the brutal attack that killed the teenager. (PTI)

Weeklong Measles Rubella Vaccination Campaign underway in East Siang



HT Correspondent

PASIGHAT, Aug 24: A weeklong Measles Rubella Vaccination Campaign (MRVC) is being conducted in East Siang district, with a special focus on vaccinating left-out and drop-out children from measles and rubella preventable vaccines in Pasighat township areas.

The campaign was formally launched by Dr Yagling Perme, District Medical Officer (DMO), East Siang, at UPHC Baskata.

The initiative is part of an intensified outreach effort to enhance community health and safeguard children against the resurgence of these preventable diseases.

Under the program, health teams aim to identify children who have missed the Measles Rubella vaccine doses and ensure their vaccination with the required antigens.

During this one-week campaign, from August 21 to 27, a total of 19 vaccination sessions have been scheduled to cover 111 children aged between 9 months and 5 years. The drive is being supervised and

coordinated by the District Health Society, chaired by Deputy Commissioner Sonalika Jiواني, which has resolved to achieve 95% full immunization coverage by December 2025 and reach the 100% coverage mark by March 2026.

These targets are aligned with the Government of India's National Zero Measles Rubella Elimination Campaign to achieve complete immunization coverage by 2026.

To step up preparations, a meeting of the District Task Force for Immunization (DTFI) cum City Task Force for Immunization (CTFI) was held under the chairmanship of the DMO.

The meeting discussed the target beneficiaries, session planning, and monitoring support to ensure smooth implementation of the MRVC.

The medical officers in-charge of UPHC Baskata and BPGH will oversee the sessions, supervise vaccination work, and ensure daily progress reporting.

In addition, awareness cam-

paigns through district and block coordinators have been planned to strengthen IEC (Information, Education and Communication) activities across the Pasighat municipality area, encouraging parents to come forward with their children.

Highlighting the significance of the campaign, District RCHO Dr Nidak Angu explained that the sustained MRVC initiative is guided by several key objectives.

Firstly, the vaccine provides a powerful shield against measles and rubella, significantly reducing the risk of severe complications and mortality in children.

Secondly, achieving high vaccination coverage is essential for herd immunity, which indirectly protects vulnerable groups such as newborns and children with medical conditions who cannot be vaccinated.

Thirdly, a robust vaccination strategy is pivotal in eliminating outbreaks, thereby easing the burden on the healthcare system and

reducing related expenditures.

Dr Angu further emphasized that beyond disease prevention, the campaign plays a crucial role in promoting public health awareness.

By heightening community understanding of the importance of vaccination, the initiative fosters a culture of acceptance and proactive health-seeking behaviour.

Moreover, the campaign also resonates with global health goals by contributing to international efforts toward the total eradication of measles and rubella, ensuring equity in healthcare access and protection for all children.

The MRVC in East Siang has thus emerged not only as a vaccination drive but also as a community-centered initiative to safeguard future generations.

Authorities urged all parents and guardians of Pasighat municipal areas to take full advantage of this opportunity and ensure that no child is left out of the life-saving immunization program.

THE 37-YEAR-OLD PLAYED THE LAST OF HIS 103 TESTS IN 2023 PUJARA RETIRES FROM ALL FORMS OF INDIAN CRICKET

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Cheteshwar Pujara, the rock of Indian batting in the longest format for over a decade, on Sunday announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, bringing the curtains down on an exemplary Test career.

The 37-year-old made the announcement on social media, having played the last of his 103 Tests in 2023.

"As a little boy from the small town of Rajkot, along with my parents, I set out to aim for the stars; and dreamt to be a part of the Indian cricket team. Little did I know then that this game would give me so much - invaluable opportunities, experiences, purpose, love, and above all a chance to represent my state and this great nation.

"Wearing the Indian jersey, singing the anthem, and trying my best each time I stepped on the field - it's impossible to put into words what it truly meant. But as they say, all good things must come to an end, and with immense gratitude I have decided to retire from all forms of Indian cricket," Pujara said in a heartfelt note.

The decision was not entirely surprising, considering the team's two other stalwarts, Virat Kohli



and Rohit Sharma, bid farewell to Test cricket ahead of the England tour earlier this year, while another long-time teammate, R Ashwin, retired midway through the Australia tour in December.

With 7195 runs at an average of 43.60, Pujara stands at eighth place in the all time leading run-getters from India. He also

amassed 21301 runs in first-class cricket.

With another domestic season around the corner, Pujara was expected to turn up for Saurashtra but the champion batter thought it was the right time to move on.

"We were hoping he would play the upcoming season but we respect his decision. What a leg-

end he has been for Saurashtra and Indian cricket. Alongside Ravindra Jadeja, Pujara is the biggest cricketer to have come out of Saurashtra and we can't thank him enough for his contribution to the game in the region.

"I would have loved to see him say goodbye from the ground but it his call and we wish him all the

best," Saurashtra Cricket Association president Jaydev Shah told PTI.

Pujara had made his first-class debut under Shah's captaincy.

"His dedication towards the game from the start and end of his career remained the same. That is how I would remember him. Also, a big salute to his father (Arvind Pujara) for shaping his cricketing career and making him one of the best in the business," Shah added.

During his time away from the Indian team, Pujara turned to commentary and was part of the broadcast team for the recent India-England series in the UK. As recently as last month, he seemed committed to play another year of domestic cricket and was keeping up with his fitness routine even while commentating.

Pujara collected 19 hundreds and 35 half centuries in his career ranging from 2010 to 2023. Following the retirement of Rahul Dravid, he became the wall of the Indian Test team especially in overseas conditions.

His conventional methods may not be the most attractive but were very effective. He was brilliant at tiring out the bowlers and batting time, something that was best displayed on the back-

back tours of Australia in 2018 and 2021 when he played a pivotal role in the team's successive series wins Down Under.

After the team moved on from him and Ajinkya Rahane in 2023, Pujara piled on runs in domestic cricket with the hunger of a teenager.

"He trained like an 18-year-old with us wanting to go back to where he belonged (Indian team). Such was his dedication to the game," said current Saurashtra head coach Niraj Odedra.

"I did not see the retirement decision coming but I am guessing he made the call knowing that he won't be playing for India again. Having said that his contribution to Indian cricket is immense. I would say it was a tad too late but a good decision," Odedra added.

As a person, Pujara remains a picture of humility. In his retirement message, he duly thanked the people and institutions that made him the player he became.

"I would like to thank the BCCI, and Saurashtra Cricket Association for the opportunity and support through my cricket career. I wouldn't have made it this far without the invaluable guidance of my mentors, coaches and spiritual guru - to them I shall always remain indebted. (PTI)

Sinquefield Cup: Gukesh takes on Firouzja, Pragg meets Duda

ST. LOUIS (USA), Aug 24: World champion D Gukesh has his task cut out when he takes on Alireza Firouzja of France while compatriot R Praggnanandhaa will meet Duda Jan-Krzysztof of Poland in the sixth round of the Sinquefield Cup here.

A rest day in high-level tournaments usually results in combative chess and past the half way stage both Pragg and Gukesh will not settle for anything less when the action resumes.

Local hero Fabiano Caruana leads the field on 3.5 points with two victories and three draws thus far and has been the pick among the 10 participants post the half way stage.

Praggnanandhaa is just a half a point behind on 3 with a lone victory over Gukesh in the first round followed by four back-to-back draws.

Also sharing the second spot is the in-form Armenian-turned-American Levon Aronian while a pack of five players - American duo of Wesley So and Samuel Sevian, Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France, Firouzja and Gukesh are all within striking distance with 2.5 points each.

Another half point adrift is Duda who has a full point lead over last placed Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan.

Firouzja is a tough customer but Gukesh is in the zone wherein he has survived some tough positions and came back strongly after his first-round loss.

The fact that Gukesh will have white pieces in this contest tilts the balance in favour of the Indian who needs a turnaround performance in the last four rounds.

Praggnanandhaa started off with a brilliant win but then he has been hunting for an elusive victory in the last four games. The Indian has got a perfect player to break the ice in Duda who is known for his uncompromising style and tactical complications.

While Caruana remains a favourite to win the title here, there are even more stakes besides the USD 350000 prize fund. The top four players in the overall standings of the Grand Chess Tour will make it to the grand finale slated to be held in Brazil later this year. (PTI)

Sharapova and Bryan Brothers enter tennis hall, with surprise appearance by Serena Williams



NEWPORT (US), Aug 24: Serena Williams made a surprise — and early — appearance at the International Tennis Hall of Fame, emerging from behind the stage to introduce "former rival, former fan and forever friend" Maria Sharapova for her induction.

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam champion who will be eligible for her own enshrinement in 2027, drew gasps and shrieks from the crowd at the Newport shrine.

"There are only a few players in my career who challenged me to be the very best, every single time we stepped out on the court," Williams said. "Maria Sharapova was one of them. Whenever I saw her name next to mine in the draw, I made sure I practiced harder."

And the feeling was mutual.

"It's a gift to have someone who motivates you to reach those heights. And I'll forever be grateful for bringing out the best in me," Sharapova said in her acceptance speech. "We both knew no other way than to fight our hearts out... We both hated to lose more than anything on this earth, and we both knew that the other was the biggest obstacle between ourselves and the trophy." The first Russian woman ever to reach No. 1 in the rankings and one of 10 women to complete the career Grand Slam, Sharapova was joined in the Class of 2025 by dominating doubles team Mike and

Bob Bryan. The twin brothers finished their speech with one of their trademark chest bumps.

Hall of Famers Martina Navratilova, Jim Courier, Stan Smith and Andy Roddick were among those in the crowd, wearing their blue Hall of Fame blazers. Sharapova and the Bryan brothers also received a cast tennis racket that is the hall's newest offering to inductees. Sharapova was described in her introductory video as someone who "combined grit with glamour," and some of the stylish outfits she competed in are already displayed in the hall — including a tuxedo-inspired dress she wore when she won Wimbledon in 2008.

Williams noted that her rival was the highest-paid female athlete in the world for 11 straight years — bolstered by endorsement income that surpassed her on-court winnings.

"She showed us all how to take excellence on the court and turn it into excellence in business, and fashion, branding and everything that she touched," Williams said. "She changed how women not only approached tennis, but sports and opportunity. She showed us that you can be fierce on the court and strategically off the court, and unapologetically herself the entire time."

Sharapova said her induction gave her a chance to look back — something she tried not to do when she was playing. (PTI)

Lakshya Sen, PV Sindhu face stern test at BWF Worlds

PARIS, Aug 24: Lakshya Sen will face a daunting opener against top seed Shi Yu Qi while former champion P V Sindhu will look to shake off a poor run as Indian shuttlers gear up for a stern test at the BWF World Championships beginning here on Monday.

It has been a tough year for India's leading players with injuries and inconsistent form hampering their build-up. Sen, ranked 21, is returning to the French capital a year after the heartbreak of finishing fourth at the Olympics.

Since then, the 24-year-old from Almora, who claimed a bronze at the 2021 edition, has struggled for results with a quarterfinal at the All England being his best show in 2024. He has often faltered in tight matches against Li Shi Feng, Kodai Naraoka and Shi, who leads their head-to-head 3-1. The Chinese

world No.1, in red-hot form with three Super 1000 titles this season, had beaten Sen in three games in Indonesia earlier this year.

In women's singles, Sindhu, a two-time Olympic medallist and 2019 world champion, will have to recover from the shock defeat against fellow Indian Unnati Hooda at the China Open.

The most accomplished Indian with five world championship medals, Sindhu will begin her campaign against Bulgaria's Kaloyana Nalbantova. Sindhu has endured a lean season, with a quarterfinal finish at the India Open her best result.

Now ranked 15, she could run into world No. 2 Wang Zhi Yi of China as early as the round of 16.

Prannoy, who claimed bronze in the 2023 edition, will open against Finland's Joakim Oldorff, but a poten-

tial second-round showdown with world No. 2 Anders Antonsen of Denmark looms large for the world No. 34 Indian.

Prannoy showed his trademark fight during a narrow three-game loss to Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei at the China Open, but he will need to win those clutch moments to cross the hurdles and go deep into the tournament.

Men's doubles spearheads Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, seeded ninth, have received a first-round bye and will play either compatriots Hariharan Amsakarunan and Ruben Kumar or Chinese Taipei's Liu Kuang Heng and Yang Po Han in the second round.

A tricky round-of-16 clash against China's Liang Wei Keng and Wang Chang, who enjoy a 6-2 lead in their head-to-head, lies

ahead. If they cross that hurdle, the Asian Games champions could meet old nemesis Aaron Chia and Soh Wooi Yik of Malaysia, who knocked them out of the Paris Olympics quarterfinals and lead their rivalry 11-3.

Satwik and Chirag, who won the 2022 bronze, have been consistent this year, making the semifinals at the India, Singapore, Malaysia and China Open and the quarterfinals in Indonesia.

The Asian Games champions are yet to convert their form into a title win — something they will be keen to change in the French capital.

In mixed doubles, 16th seeds Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto received a bye in the opening round, while Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Shivani Gaddu will open against Macau's Leong Lok Chong and Weng Chi Ng. (PTI)

Gyokeres scores his first goals for Arsenal in 5-0 rout of Leeds

LONDON, Aug 24: Viktor Gyokeres scored his first Arsenal goals on a day of intent from the Premier League team, before and during its 5-0 thrashing of Leeds.

The statement victory was preceded by the unveiling of new signing Eberechi Eze, whose move from Crystal Palace was confirmed as Gunners fans were taking their seats at the Emirates Stadium. The England international got a great reception when he was presented to the crowd in the moments before kick-off.

Jurrien Timber opened the scoring after 34 minutes from a corner for set-piece specialist Arsenal before Bukayo Saka doubled the home side's advantage on the stroke of halftime.

Gyokeres bounced back from missing an easy chance in the opening period to score on his home debut three minutes into the second

half, powering into the Leeds penalty area before sending a low right-footed shot past Lucas Perri.

Saka and Martin Odegaard were both forced off by injuries but spirits were raised again when Timber landed his brace shortly before the hour mark.

Max Dowman, aged 15 years and 235 days, delivered an impressive second-half cameo from the bench when he became the second youngest player — after Ethan Nwaneri — to represent Arsenal. And the teenager capped an eye-catching display by winning a penalty for his side in stoppage time which Gyokeres duly converted.

Tottenham continued its flying start to the Premier League season under new coach Thomas Frank as Brennan Johnson and Joao Palhinha secured an impressive 2-0 victory at Manchester City.

It was an afternoon to forget for

City goalkeeper James Trafford.

Spurs scored four without reply at City last season and this time celebrated a 2-0 triumph as on-loan Palhinha capitalized on a mistake by home debutant Trafford shortly after Johnson had opened the scoring.

Tottenham deserve the plaudits but much of the post-match analysis will surround goalkeeper Trafford, who returned to the Etihad Stadium this summer in a 27-million-pound (\$36.5 million) move from Burnley.

Johnson's opener was hard to prevent but Trafford could have been sent off for a clumsy challenge on Mohammed Kudus before his huge error allowed Palhinha to score in first-half stoppage time.

Ederson, back from illness, watched from the bench as speculation about his future and City's potential move for Paris Saint-Germain star Gianluigi Donnarumma rumbles on. (AP)

Barcelona roars back to win 3-2 at Levante as Atletico Madrid drops more points

BARCELONA, Aug 24: Barcelona fought back from a two-goal deficit to win 3-2 at Levante with a late own-goal by the hosts in the Spanish league.

Defending champion Barcelona needed Pedri González and Ferran Torres to score early in the second half to equalize after the newly promoted Levante had rolled to a surprise two-goal lead at halftime.

Lamine Yamal then helped to produce the winning goal when he curled a cross into the six-yard box and Levante's Unai Elgezabal headed into his own net.

Levante striker Iván Romero earlier struck from a counter-attack in the 15th minute that started Levante with a ball lost by Yamal. José Luis Morales made it 2-0 in first-half injury time by converting a penalty after a video review called a handball by Alejandro Balde when he blocked Morales' shot.

But Pedri started the fight-back in the 49th when he received Yamal's pass well outside the area, picked his spot in the corner of the net and blasted in a shot from long range.

Ferran, who had hit the woodwork in the first half, leveled in the 52nd when he fended off his marker and volleyed in Raphinha's corner kick.

Barcelona then pressed for the decider that Yamal helped find just after the 90 minutes were up.

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick praised Pedri for his goal, saying "it changed the match."

"The first goal we scored helped us a lot to get our confidence in the box, but until the end it was not easy for us to get the three points."

Barcelona won its opener at nine-

man Mallorca 3-0 last weekend.

Newcomer Marcus Rashford made his first league start for Barcelona since his loan move from Manchester United as a left-side forward for Flick. He was replaced by Dani Olmo at halftime, after the biggest threats had come from Pedri's passes in the middle and Yamal's incursions down the right.

"I think Marcus had some situations in the first half where he showed how good he is and how he can help us, and that is how we have to continue," Flick said.

Barcelona's Robert Lewandowski played his first minutes of the season as a late substitute after recovering from a muscle injury.

Atletico Madrid stumbled for a second straight game to start the season after squandering its lead in a 1-1 draw with promoted Elche. Diego Simeone's club revamped its already deep squad this summer with its sights set on challenging Barcelona and Real Madrid for the title. But this is not the start the Argentine coach wanted with his team having just one point so far.

Just like its 2-1 loss at Espanyol the previous weekend, Atletico's defense was uncharacteristically unable to protect a lead against Elche even with the backing of its home supporters.

Alexander Sorloth, who started alongside Julian Alvarez up front for Atletico, scored a fine eighth-minute opener when he ran onto a pass by defender David Hancko and looped an angled strike home.

Sorloth had a chance to make it a double moments later, but Elche goalkeeper Matias Dittoro blocked his shot from inside the box. (AP)

'He stood tall when the storm raged': Indian cricket fraternity hails Pujara's grit and resilience

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Cheteshwar Pujara's retirement on Sunday evoked an outpouring of admiration from the cricketing fraternity with former teammates and coaches saluting his grit, determination and selflessness that defined his Test career.

Pujara, who played 103 Tests and scored 7195 runs at an average of 43.60, announced his retirement from all forms of cricket, drawing curtains on a career that epitomised resilience in the longest format.

"He stood tall when the storm raged, he fought when hope was fading. Congratulations Pujji," India head coach Gautam Gambhir wrote on X.

Former India all-rounder Yuvraj Singh lauded Pujara's commitment to the national team.

"Someone who always put his mind, body and soul for the country! Many congratulations on an outstanding career Pujji! See you on the other side!" wrote Yuvraj.

Former India batter VVS Laxman recalled

the defining moment of Pujara's career, the series-clinching Test at the Gabba in 2021, when he endured several body blows.

"From the time I first saw Pujara and his potential, it was brilliant to see that potential translating into performance.

"His courage, grit and determination stood out and the body blows that he took in the Gabba Test we won against Australia symbolised Pujara the cricketer for me, willing to give everything he has for his country. Well done and wish you a happy and joyous second innings," Laxman wrote.

Anil Kumble, who coached India during part of Pujara's career, hailed him as a true ambassador of the game.

"Congratulations on a fantastic career! You have been a great ambassador of this wonderful game. We are all proud of all your achievements on the cricket field.

"You gave it your all for the team! It was a privilege to have worked with you and may you continue to shine in your second in-

nings! Best wishes to you, Puja, Aditi and your Dad. Well Done!!," Kumble wrote.

Pujara's long-time batting ally Ajinkya Rahane also paid a heartfelt tribute.

"Congratulations Pujji on a wonderful career. Loved every moment of playing alongside you and will always cherish our special Test wins together. Best wishes for the second innings!" Rahane said.

BCCI underlined Pujara's contribution to Indian cricket.

"Cheteshwar Pujara's career is a shining example of perseverance and selflessness. He personified the spirit of Test cricket. His ability to grind opposition attacks and his immense powers of concentration made him the bulwark of India's batting," BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia said.

"He showed that it was possible to succeed at the highest level while staying true to traditional values of the game. His commitment to Indian cricket, both at the international and domestic level, has been

outstanding. We thank him for everything he has given to the game and to the country," he added. Former India opener Virender Sehwag who also shared the dressing room with Pujara, also lavished praise on the champion batter. "Congratulations on a fabulous test career Cheteshwar. Your grit, determination and hardwork was inspiring and you can be very proud of what you have achieved. Best wishes for a memorable second innings," Sehwag said.

Former India all-rounders Suresh Raina and Irfan Pathan also chimed in with tributes. "Cheers to a legend! It's time to bid adieu to the incredible career of @cheteshwar_pujara You've given us countless memories," Raina said.

"Your grit has always spoken before your name. Big congratulations on a wonderful career. Your aggression was visible in your defence and you've made India proud. Pujji. Wishing you the best for second innings," Pathan said. (PTI)