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Assam bids tearful adieu to music legend Zubeen Garg

State icon's sister lights the pyre amid gun salute • Several dignitaries attend cremation ceremony

GUWAHATI, Sept 23: Singer Zubeen Garg's body was cremated with full state honours in the sylvan surroundings of Kamarkuchi on the outskirts of Assam's Guwahati on Tuesday amid chanting of Vedic hymns as thousands of mourners gathered to bid farewell to the popular crooner.

His sister Palme Borthakur and music composer Rahul Gautam, a protégé of the singer, lit the pyre, amid gun salutes.

They went around the pyre seven times as priests guided them, and all present at the site, most with moist eyes, stood up to pay their last respect to the singer who mesmerised people with his

more than 38,000 songs over three decades.

Zubeen's wife, Garima Saikia Garg, was sitting on the side of the platform where his last rites were performed, and was seen sobbing all through the rituals as the singer's friend and Union Minister Pabitra Margherita consoled her.

Garg's 85-year-old ailing father, Mohini Mohan Borthakur, was sitting at a distance surrounded by family members.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, also a Zubeen fan, was seen standing near the platform where the pyre was lit. As the smoke from the flames flared up, slogans like 'Zubeen,

Zubeen' and 'Jai Zubeen da' reverberated in the air, and people were heard singing his song 'Mayabini Ratir buku'. This continued all through the rituals held in an emotionally charged atmosphere.

After the tributes were paid to the popular singer, the Assam Police gave him the gun salute and sounded the bugle.

Earlier, the mortal remains of Garg were taken to a platform and placed on the pyre amid chanting of Vedic hymns and blowing of conch shells. The family performed certain Vedic rituals while Union ministers Sarbananda Sonowal, Kiren Rijiju and the chief minister placed wood on the pyre. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Five arrested in Jorhat over NH-715 blockade, threat to Press Club

HT Bureau

JORHAT, Sept 23: Pulbar police arrested five persons on Tuesday in connection with the blockade of National Highway 715 near Ajanta Bypass and threats to demolish the Jorhat Press Club.

The protestors had demanded that the mortal remains of singer Zubeen Garg be brought to Jorhat for a few hours.

Police resorted to a mild lathi charge to clear the blockade during the post-midnight hours between Monday and Tuesday.

The blockade, which began Sunday night, had crippled vehicular movement in upper Assam, causing severe inconvenience to commuters and even ambulances, as the protestors refused to heed police instructions.

On Monday, the protestors allegedly threatened to damage the Jorhat Press Club over the lack of live coverage of their stir by electronic and digital media.

In response, police provided security to the Press Club and arrested five persons, including one from Dhemaji district.

Among the accused is Chandan Das of Teok Boloma, who was seen in a video issuing the threat.

The other four are Ujjal Bora (27) and Dhrubajyoti Sharma (30), both from the Pulbar area, Bitupan Baishya (28) of Rowrah, Jorhat, and Debojit Gogoi (24) from Dhemaji. The five have been booked under (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM Himanta thanks Modi for personally sending condolences, prayers for Zubeen Garg

GUWAHATI, Sept 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi for personally sending his condolences for cultural icon Zubeen, who was cremated with full state honours on Tuesday.

He said the people of the state appreciate the gesture of Union minister Kiren Rijiju laying a wreath as a mark of last respect on behalf of the prime minister.

"Gratitude to Adarniya @narendramodi ji for personally sending in your condolences and prayers for Zubeen," Sarma said in a post on X.

"The people of Assam acknowledged this kind gesture as Hon'ble Union Minister Shri @KirenRijiju ji laid the wreath on behalf of you," he added.

Rijiju, a Lok Sabha MP from neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, in a post on X after attending Garg's funeral, said, "Paid my last respects to musical icon of Assam and Northeast, late Zubeen Garg and laid the wreath on behalf of the Hon'ble Prime (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Second post-mortem exam of Zubeen Garg's body done at GMCH

GUWAHATI, Sept 23: Singer Zubeen Garg's body underwent a second post-mortem examination at the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital on Tuesday morning.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma visited the Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex in Sarusajai early in the morning and paid his tributes to the singer before the body was taken to the hospital for the post-mortem examination.

"A few hours left before #BelovedZubeen begins his final journey. A short while ago, I joined his well-wishers at Sarusajai Stadium to pay my tributes," Sarma posted on X.

"The last two days symbolised the love he commands over people. There will never be another Zubeen," he added.

Following the post-mortem examination, Garg's body was brought back to the stadium, from where it will be taken to the cremation site at Kamarkuch in Sonapur on the outskirts of the city. The gates of the stadium, where his body had been kept since Sunday, were closed at midnight.

Educational institutions are closed across the state in honour of the icon, while government



offices have been shut only in the Kamrup (Metro) district.

Huge LED screens have been put up in several places across the state so that fans can witness Garg's last journey.

Garg's last rites will be held with full state honours. Police personnel will be the pallbearers of the coffin after it is brought out of the vehicle at the cremation site in Kamarkuchi. The state has declared a dry day. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

After students' resentment, TU to honour Zubeen Garg: A larger than life persona beyond his music

TEZPUR, Sept 23: Tezpur University on Tuesday announced it will erect a statue of cultural icon Zubeen Garg on the campus and also mull conferring an honorary doctorate (posthumously) on him, the institution said in a statement.

The varsity will also institute a scholarship in his name, with the announcements coming following resentment among students, who alleged that the university authorities had failed to show due respect to Garg after his death.

The university had witnessed a heated exchange of words between Vice Chancellor Shambhu Nath Singh and students on Monday evening, leading to a situation where the VC had to nearly flee from the spot to escape the pupils' ire.

The students had submitted a list of demands on Sunday, including a week-long 'shradhanjali' (homage) to Garg and an apology to the people of the state for "late response" in offering condolences over Garg's death.

"The university hereby informs that it accepts all the points mentioned in the letter for further needful administrative action," the statement said, referring to the list of demands from the students.

It said that in honour of the cultural icon, the university is proposing to build a statue of Garg at a designated site on the campus.

"The university is mulling to confer upon him an honorary doctorate (posthumous) in recognition of his contribution to Assamese culture and music. The university shall institute a scholarship in his name within the Department of Cultural Studies to support and nurture young talent in the field of art, culture, and music," the statement said.

It stressed that in no way is the university or the VC supportive of any work that is detrimental to the interests of the state or the varsity students. On another demand, the statement said the nomenclature (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

GUWAHATI, Sept 23: His music captured the hearts and imagination of millions without any doubt, 'Ya Ali' may have catapulted him to national fame, but there was much more to singer Zubeen Garg's larger-than-life persona that made lakhs mourn him since Friday when he died in Singapore.

His 38,000 songs in 40 languages and dialects, numerous films he acted in and directed, and stage shows may have mesmerised people across generations, but it was his irreverent outbursts, often replete with common slangs, that resonated more with people and made him an icon among generations, irrespective of language, religion, community, caste or creed.



Zubeen ranted against the hypocrisy of established institutions, called a spade a spade which often led to controversies, made politically incorrect but honest statements on issues of the day, extended a helping hand to the poor and the troubled, passionately loved nature and animals—all these and many more of his personality traits locked in his frail frame of steel inspired millions and made them his ardent fans.

His antics on stage, often in an

inebriated state, irked many who expected a proper behaviour from a popular artist and the elder generation, used to the lulling socially relevant music of Bhupen Hazarika and other music legends of Assam, was initially hesitant to accept his music, which created a fresh, new and path-breaking trend.

Zubeen, however, marched on undeterred, cocking a snook at his critics, and went on to create music with lyrics that embodied passion, romance, beauty, loss, desolation, hope and much more, converting critics to admirers.

He took on the might of the proscribed outfit, ULFA, when he defied their diktat of not singing Hindi songs during Bihu functions, took on the traditional institution of 'Sattras' saying that the head of these Vaishnav monasteries should not be called 'Prabhu Ishwar' (Gods) as they, too, are mere human beings, asked present Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to give him a copyright fee for imitating his style of dancing on stage during election campaigns, was at the forefront of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and there are many more from Zubeen's repertoire that

endeared him to the masses. There was a section that tried to give a political colour to his singing for BJP during the last elections but he shut them up by saying that he had also sung for Congress on many occasions and "I am non-political. I am a singer, will sing for anyone who pays me".

His well-wishers, on many occasions, requested him not to make controversial statements, but he said that he cannot stop himself from speaking what he feels, and his spontaneous 'Ghenta, kakou khatir no koru' (Damn! I don't have to please anyone) struck a chord with the younger generation in search of an icon.

Zubeen's tender and emotional side came to the fore when he spoke about his deceased mother and younger sister, Jonki Borthakur, who died in a road accident (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Stock markets decline for 3rd straight session on FII outflows, H-1B concerns

MUMBAI, Sept 23: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined for the third consecutive day on Tuesday in a volatile trade, dragged by selling in IT and blue-chip private banking shares and foreign fund outflows amid concerns over the steep hike in US H-1B visa fees.

After oscillating between gains and losses during the day, the 30-share BSE Sensex closed lower by 57.87 points or 0.07 per cent at 82,102.10. During the day, it hit a high of 82,370.38 and a low of 81,776.53, fluctuating by 593.85 points.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dipped 32.85 points or 0.13 per cent to 25,169.50.

Buying in auto and select public sector banks cushioned the losses, analysts said.

Among Sensex firms, Trent, Tech Mahindra, Hindustan Unilever, UltraTech Cement, Asian Paints, Eternal and ITC were the major laggards. Selling in HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank also dragged the key indices.

However, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, Maruti and State Bank of India were among the gainers.

"The domestic equity market traded rangebound and ended flat, indicating continuation of the con-



solidation. Broader sentiment stayed cautious, with small- and mid-cap stocks lagging the benchmarks," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said.

Sector-wise, autos, metals, and financials gained on signs of robust festive demand post-GST cuts, while FMCG and realty stocks came under pressure from profit booking, Nair added.

The BSE smallcap gauge dipped 0.35 per cent while midcap index declined 0.29 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, FMCG

dropped the most by 1.28 per cent, followed by realty (0.89 per cent), BSE Focused IT (0.72 per cent), consumer durables (0.66 per cent), teck (0.63 per cent) and IT (0.63 per cent). Metal, bankex, auto, financial services and telecommunication were the gainers.

"Equity markets staged a sharp rebound from the day's lows as investors took heart from expectations of a revival in domestic demand, supported by the latest GST-driven reforms. Sentiment was further lifted by optimism around the upcoming India-US trade negotiations, which fueled buying at lower levels and re-

flected renewed confidence in the market's near-term outlook.

"Despite FII outflows, strong DII buying provided a cushion, giving market participants confidence and underscoring domestic liquidity as a key anchor of stability," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,910.09 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng settled lower while South Korea's Kospi ended in positive territory. Equity markets in Japan were closed for a holiday. Markets in Europe were trading higher. US markets ended higher on Monday.

Meanwhile, the rupee slumped by 52 paise to hit an all-time low of 88.82 against the US dollar in intra-day trade on Tuesday amid sustained outflow of foreign funds.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.45 per cent to USD 66.87 a barrel.

On Monday, the Sensex dropped 466.26 points or 0.56 per cent to settle at 82,159.97. The Nifty declined 124.70 points or 0.49 per cent to 25,202.35. (PTI)

Dhama attributes revenue surplus status of UK to good governance policies

DEHRADUN, Sept 23: Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama on Tuesday said Uttarakhand has become a revenue-surplus state due to its good governance policies.

Uttarakhand recorded a revenue surplus of ₹ 5,310 crore in 2022-23, according to a recent report by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG).

The state has joined the list of 16 states that have recorded a revenue surplus during 2022-23.

"Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to a 'developed India,' we have taken concrete steps to financially empower the state. This is not just a statistical achievement but a decisive step towards Uttarakhand's economic self-reliance and a prosperous future," Dhama said.

The Chief Minister said the government is committed to making Uttarakhand a developed and self-reliant state by adhering to policies of transparency, accountability, and financial discipline.

"As on 31st March 2023, 16 states, out of the total 28 states, were revenue surplus and 12 were in revenue deficit," said the CAG report on State Finances 2022-23.

Uttar Pradesh was followed by Gujarat with a revenue surplus of ₹ 19,865 crore, Odisha (₹ 19,456 crore), Jharkhand (₹ 13,564 crore), Karnataka (₹ 13,496 crore), Chhattisgarh (₹ 8,592 crore), Telangana (₹ 5,944 crore), Uttarakhand (₹ 5,310 crore), Madhya Pradesh (₹ 4,091 crore), and Goa (₹ 2,399 crore).

The 12 revenue deficit states were Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Maharashtra, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal. (PTI)

CSL to develop shipbuilding clusters, set up ₹ 15,000-cr shipyard in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Cochin Shipyard Ltd (CSL) is considering an investment of about ₹ 15,000 crore to establish a shipyard in Tamil Nadu in collaboration with a Korean partner, an official statement said on Tuesday.

In the first phase, the greenfield project is expected to create nearly 10,000 jobs, comprising 4,000 direct and 6,000 indirect opportunities and may also include a modern ship repair facility, the statement said.

CSL signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Guidance, the nodal agency of the Government of Tamil Nadu, in line with the Government of India's vision for developing shipbuilding clusters.

CSL has also signed an MoU with HD Korea Shipbuilding & Offshore Engineering (HD KSOE) for a long-term strategic collaboration in shipbuilding.

The partnership seeks to combine CSL's legacy, infrastructure, and domestic expertise with HD KSOE's advanced technology and global experience, marking a significant step in strengthening India's shipbuilding capabilities, the statement said.

Under the MoU, CSL's 310-meter new dry dock, which was inaugurated by Prime Minister of India on January 17, 2024, will be utilised to construct large



vessels such as Suezmax tankers, container ships, and Capesize bulk carriers, with a capacity of up to six vessels annually, it said.

To support this, the statement said, a dedicated Block Fabrication Facility (BFF) is planned at Kochi in approximately 80 acres, with an annual capacity of 1,20,000 MT, involving an investment of about ₹ 3,700 crore.

This initiative is expected to generate around 2,000 direct jobs and substantial indirect employment estimated at 2 to 5 times higher in sectors such as logistics, MSMEs, supply chain, and ancillary industries, it said. (PTI)

Rupee extends losses, slumps 48 paise to all-time low of 88.76/USD

MUMBAI, Sept 23: The rupee on Tuesday extended its losses and slumped 48 paise to hit an all-time low of 88.76 against the US dollar in afternoon trade, as markets digested the shockwaves from President Donald Trump's steep H-1B visa fee hike.

Forex traders said H-1B visa fees hike sparked worries over remittances and potential equity outflows from India's IT sector -- a double hit for the currency, at a time when foreign inflows have already been weak this year. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 88.41, then lost further ground and touched an all-time intraday low of 88.76 against the US dollar, registering a decline of 48 paise over its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee depreciated by 12 paise to close at 88.28 against the US dollar.

Forex traders said the rupee is dwindling towards record low levels as market participants are analysing the likely repercussions of the US's new USD 1,00,000 H-1B visa levy, which could result in a slowdown in remittance growth and curtail service exports to the US.

Moreover, global risk aversion and trade policy uncertainty have also exacerbated the rupee's depreciation.

"Equity markets reflected the nervous mood, with investors pulling out ₹ 2,910 crore on Monday. The outflow underscores how global policy shocks can quickly

translate into pressure on India's financial markets, keeping the rupee on edge," CR Forex Advisors MD Amit Pabari said.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.04 per cent higher at 97.38. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, was trading 0.51 per cent lower at USD 66.23 per barrel in futures trade. On the domestic equity market front, the Sensex fell 271.99 points or 0.33 per cent to 81,887.98, while the Nifty was down 80.65 points or 0.32 per cent to 25,121.70. Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors offloaded equities worth ₹ 2,910.09 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. (PTI)

BJP leaders change header picture of social media handles to highlight GST reforms

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Several BJP leaders on Tuesday changed the header picture of their social media handles to highlight the latest GST reforms and the government's thrust on adoption and promotion of 'swadeshi' products.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan were among the top BJP leaders who changed the header pictures.

This comes a day after the

header picture on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's X handle was changed to highlight his thrust on 'swadeshi' amid what he has described as "GST bachat utsav".

Besides the "GST bachat utsav", the picture included the slogan "har ghar swadeshi, ghar ghar swadeshi". Modi on Monday said the next generation GST reforms will boost savings and directly benefit every section of society, as he asserted that it is imperative to walk on the path of self-reliance to achieve the collective goal of Viksit Bharat by 2047.

In an open letter to Indians

which he posted on X, Modi said that from September 22, next generation GST reforms have begun to make their presence felt, marking the start of a 'GST Bachat Utsav' or 'GST Savings Festival' across the country.

"This year, the festive season brings an added reason to rejoice. These reforms will boost savings and directly benefit every section of society, be it farmers, women, youth, poor, middle class, traders or MSMEs. They will encourage greater growth and investments and accelerate the progress of every state and region," the prime minister said. (PTI)

Tax practitioners' group seeks extension of return filing, audit filing deadlines

KOLKATA, Sept 23: The All India Federation of Tax Practitioners (AIFTP) has made an appeal for extension of the due dates for filing income tax returns (ITRs) and tax audit reports for the assessment year 2025-26, citing floods, landslides, technical glitches and compliance challenges.

AIFTP President Samir Jani said the body has submitted a memorandum to Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) Chairman seeking extension of the ITR filing deadline in non-audit cases from September 15 to October 15, the tax audit report deadline from September 30 to October 31, and the ITR filing deadline in audit cases from October 31 to November 30.

AIFTP Representation Committee Chairman Narayan Jain said several states have been severely affected by floods and landslides, disrupting internet,

transportation and power supply, making it "almost impossible" for taxpayers and professionals to file returns on time.

The group has also cited delays in the release of ITR forms and utilities, technical issues on the income tax portal, discrepancies in Form 26AS, AIS and TIS, and compatibility issues. In addition, the revised format of financial statements for non-corporate entities prescribed by ICAI requires additional preparation and review time.

Festivals such as Navratri, Durga Puja, Dussehra and Diwali, which require frequent travel by taxpayers and professionals, were also flagged as factors affecting compliance timelines.

AIFTP has also filed a writ petition in the Delhi High Court seeking directions to the CBDT for extension of the filing deadlines. (PTI)

HCC secures contracts worth ₹ 2,566 cr

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Hindustan Construction Company Limited (HCC) on Tuesday said it has been awarded two contracts valued at ₹ 1,418.3 crore and ₹ 1,147.51 crore, respectively, by the Patna Metro Rail Corporation Limited (PMRCL).

The company in a statement said the contracts involve the construction of 10.67 km of underground tunnels using Tunnel Boring Machines (TBM) and six metro stations under Phase I of the Patna Metro Rail Project.

According to the statement, package PC-05 includes the design and construction of twin tunnels using a shield TBM, a cut-and-cover tunnel, an underground ramp at Mithapur, and three metro stations: Vikas Bhawan, Vidyut Bhawan and Patna Station.

Package PC-06 comprises an underground ramp at Rukanpura and three metro stations: Rukanpura, Raja Bazar and Patna Zoo, it said.

Both packages also encompass architectural finishing, water supply systems, sanitary and drainage works for stations along the Danapur-Khemnichak Corridor. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Assam bids tearful adieu

A branch of the sandalwood tree, which Zubeen had planted on his birthday in 2017, was placed on the pyre. Earlier, the popular singer's body was brought on Sunday and kept at Arjun Bhogeswar Baruah Sports Complex for fans to pay homage. After being brought to Kamarkuchi, his body was placed on a podium, next to the platform where his last rites were performed. The funeral pyre, constructed on the platform, was covered in a white canopy and decorated with flowers all around it.

A team of Assam Police personnel were the pallbearers of the casket carrying Zubeen's mortal remains. A large number of people gathered around the cremation site since Monday night, and the entire area reverberated with slogans like 'Long Live Zubeen', 'Jai Zubeen da'.

People were heard humming his song 'Mayabini Ratir buku', which the singer had once said should be sung at his funeral.

Members of the family, including his wife Garima, paid tributes to the singer at the cremation site. Sonowal, Rijiju and Margherita, along with Sarma, assembly speaker Biswajit Daimary and several cabinet ministers and senior government officials, laid floral wreaths on the singer's coffin. Sonowal, Margherita, the chief minister and leader of the opposition Debabrata Saikia went down on their knees to pay tributes to the singer. Representatives of the Arunachal Pradesh government, Assam Sahitya Sabha (ASS), various students' unions, Hatimura Karbi Samaj, Artists Forum, Zubeen Garg Fan Club and others also paid their last respects to Garg.

Meanwhile, the second post-mortem examination of Garg's body was conducted at the Gauhati Medical College Hospital on Tuesday morning. The first autopsy was conducted in Singapore, where he died on September 19 while swimming in the sea.

Earlier in the day, Garg's body, placed inside the cold glass coffin, draped in the traditional Assamese 'gamosa', was taken in a flower-bedecked ambulance from the sports complex to the cremation site.

A huge black and white portrait of the singer was placed in front of the vehicle. Zubeen's last journey passed through Sarusajai, Beltola, Khanapara and Jorabat to reach Kamarkuchi. The singer's family, close relatives and a few friends followed him in separate vehicles. (PTI)

Five arrested in Jorhat

sections 49, 121(2), 74, 75(2), 189(3), 190, 285, 126(2), 223, and 132 of the BNS in Pulibar PS case number 122/2025.

Meanwhile, normal life resumed on Tuesday, the fifth day after the sudden demise of iconic singer and musician Zubeen Garg, following his last rites at Guwahati's Sonapur.

Shops and business establishments reopened in the afternoon, vehicles gradually returned to the roads, and grocery shops and vegetable markets witnessed a rush of customers.

CM Himanta thanks Modi for

Minister @narendramodi ji at the funeral site." "His music was the soul of Assam and a gift to Bharat. Though he is no more, his voice will live forever in our hearts," the Union minister added. Garg died while swimming in Singapore on September 19. He was 52. (PTI)

Second post-mortem exam

while the Meghalaya government has also said that all wine shops will remain closed on its side of the route through which Zubeen's cortege will pass. Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju will represent the Centre at the last rites.

Besides the CM, Governor Laxman Prasad Acharya, Chief Justice of Gauhati High Court Ashutosh Kumar, assembly speaker Biswajit Daimary, Leader of the Opposition Debabrata Saikia, and representatives of the All Assam Students' Union (AASU) will attend the cremation. (PTI)

After students' resentment

of the students' representative body, Tezpur University Students' Council, is a statutory provision under the Tezpur University Act, 1993. In order to consider a change in nomenclature to Tezpur University Students' Union, the institute will initiate the due process for amendment of the Act in Parliament.

Garg (52), who died while swimming in the sea in Singapore last week, was cremated with full state honours on Tuesday at Kamarkuchi, on the outskirts of Guwahati. (PTI)

Zubeen Garg: A larger than

while returning from a Bihu function, popular poet late Hiren Bhattacharya, his pet dogs and the many animals and birds he rescued, giving each a name with his surname attached to it.

It was these contradictions in him that led to the creation of music that touched the hearts of all, irrespective of social, economic, religious and political affiliations, with lakhs of people thronging the Arjun Bhogeswar Sports Complex here, where his body lay in state since Sunday after arriving from Singapore, where he died while swimming in the sea.

The 52-year old singer, music composer, film director and actor, named Jibon Borthakur by his family in his childhood, went on to become Zubeen Garg with his mother, inspired by the famed Zubin Mehta's music, calling him so but the Brahmin surname was discarded by the singer who claimed he was an atheist and believed in the "religion of humanity". He began singing from the age of three and he is popular Assamese or western, folk or classical-based songs, Garg gave voice to varied genres of music and excelled in all, with most later year singers emulating his inimitable style.

The Bollywood music industry beckoned him in the mid-1990s and belted out many popular numbers in films and albums alike but was soon disenchanted, returning to Assam to climb the height of popularity with his numerous songs.

He often said that he could have stayed on in Mumbai (he still has a house there) and made a lot of money, but he returned as he felt a responsibility towards his people. Zubeen's ill-health, mostly due to an erratic lifestyle, was a matter of concern for many, and he was hospitalised several times during the last few years.

His fans and well-wishers often admonished him to take care of his health but he always came out of the hospital with a smile on his face, saying, "nothing will happen to me, I still have many dreams to fulfil". Zubeen often talked about the many songs he was yet to sing and compose, the films he wanted to make, write his autobiography titled 'Eucalyptus', about the house he was building overlooking the mighty River Brahmaputra, the many more people he wanted to help as their happiness brought a smile to his lips and several other unrealised dreams which has been cut short by his death. (PTI)

Delhi Navratri food poisoning: 'Will not compromise on quality,' says Minister

GOVERNMENT OF ASSAM
OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL-CUM-CHIEF 'SUPERINTENDENT
DIPHU MEDICAL COLLEGE HOSPITAL
(Under Society for Medical Education, Diphu)
Tel No:-0361-299916, e-mail : principal@diphu@gmail.com

Memo No. SMED/DMCH/VRDL/Staff/151/2023/988

NOTICE FOR INTERVIEW

With reference to the Advertisement No. /DMCH/VRDL/Staff/151/2023/786 dated 14-08-2025, It is for the information of all the concerned eligible candidates that the walk-in- interview/ written test for recruitment of Research Scientist-B (Medical & Non Medical) post on contractual basis for VRDL, Diphu Medical College & Hospital, Diphu scheduled on the following date, time and venue as shown below.

Sl No.	Name of the post	Date	Time & Venue
1.	Research Scientist-B (Medical & Non Medical)	07-10-2025: Document Verification and written Examination 07-10-2025 : Interview	Reporting Time for the candidates is 9 AM sharp and Interview/ written test shall start from 10.30 AM in the conference hall of the office of the undersigned. (Administrative Block, Academic Building)

There will be a written test/ Interview. The list of accepted candidates and rejected candidates will be available in the official Website of Diphu Medical College & Hospital, Diphu (<https://dmcessam.in/>)

Sd/-
Principal-Cum-Chief Superintendent
Diphu Medical College & Hospital
Diphu, Assam

DIPRD/HLT/181/24-Sept-25

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Food Processing Industries Minister Chirag Paswan on Tuesday assured a thorough investigation into the food poisoning incident that affected around 200 people in north-west Delhi after consuming buckwheat flour ('kuttu ka atta') during the ongoing Navratri fasting.

Speaking on the development at a media briefing on the upcoming World Food India event here, Paswan said, "This issue does not come directly under my ministry. Definitely, it is our responsibility if such issues come, there should be an investigation. We will not compromise on the quality of the processed foods."

The incident, which came to light early Tuesday morning, has affected residents from various areas, including Jahangirpuri, Mahendra Park, Samaypur, Bhalswa Dairy, Lal Bagh and Swarook Nagar. The Jahangirpuri Police Station received information at 6:10 am about a large number of people reporting uneasiness after consuming the flour. "Whenever the government receives such complaints, it is investigated by our officials and through FSSAI. We ensure there is a full investigation on adulteration in foods," Paswan stated, emphasising the government's zero-tolerance approach towards food safety violations.

The minister expressed particular concern about the timing of the incident: "During the Navratri festival, kuttu ka atta (buckwheat flour) is consumed widely. When such reports are surfaced at this time, I want to assure you that an investigation will be conducted." Medical teams have promptly provided care and supportive treatment to those affected, with patients being treated at Babu Jagjivan Ram Hospital. (PTI)

Citizens urge naming of Dhubri-Phulbari bridge after Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

DHUBRI Sept 23: A strong public demand has emerged in Dhubri to name the upcoming Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge after the late cultural icon Zubeen Garg. The sentiment was voiced during a Shradhanjali programme held on Monday evening at GTB Road near PWD More, where hundreds of citizens gathered to pay tribute.

The event, organised by local social activist Rezzak Khan, drew participation from people across various walks of life. Attendees lit candles, offered floral tributes, and signed a memorandum addressed to the Chief Minister of Assam, urging that the bridge be named after the beloved singer.

"Zubeen Garg was not just a singer, he was an emotion for Assam and the Northeast. His music united generations and gave voice to our cultural pride. Naming the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge after him would be the greatest tribute from this region," said organiser Rezzak Khan while addressing the

gathering.

Since the news of Zubeen Garg's passing on Saturday, an outpouring of grief has been witnessed across Assam and neighbouring states. In Dhubri, several organisations, educational institutions, and cultural groups have held tribute meetings and memorials in his honour. From candlelight vigils to musical performances, citizens have been expressing their profound respect for the artist whose songs transcended boundaries of age, language, and region.

The Shradhanjali was among the largest public gatherings in Dhubri so far. Attendees unanimously voiced that naming the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge after Zubeen Garg would be a lasting way to honour his legacy and ensure his memory remains embedded in the region's cultural landscape.

The signed memorandum will be submitted to the Assam government in the coming days, as the demand continues to gain momentum among the public.

KA pays tribute to Zubeen Garg with rallies and shradhanjali

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Sept 23: Joining the rest of Assam in mourning, Karbi Anglong bid farewell to beloved singer Zubeen Garg through heartfelt tributes and public gatherings.

In Diphu, youths carried out a rally through the town, holding portraits of the late singer, while a shradhanjali was held at Diphu Railway Station, where a large portrait was displayed. People lit lamps and incense sticks to pay their respects.

At Langhin, the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and Dularai Bodo Harimu Afat organised a shradhanjali ceremony. Popular Karbi Anglong singer Bishweswar Basumatary performed songs of Zubeen Garg in a moving tribute.

Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Bilimohon Khakalari, also paid his respects at the event.

Members of several Bodo social organisations, including ABSU, Kachari Samaj, All Bodo Women's Welfare Federation, Dularai Bodo Harimu Afat, Goanbura Santha, and the Ex-BLT Welfare Society, were present to honour the legacy of the cultural icon.

Tribute to Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Sept 23: The Bokajan Community Health Centre (CHC) observed the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP) at the Bokajan Sports Association (BSA) Auditorium, marking the occasion with both public health support and cultural remembrance.

As part of the Seva Saptah Nikshay Mitra Initiative, essential items including rice, lentils, and edible oil were distributed to 30 beneficiaries. Prior to the formal proceedings, a shradhanjali was held in memory of popular singer Zubeen Garg, paying homage to the late cultural icon.

The event was attended by Deputy Speaker of the Assam Legislative Assembly Dr Numal Momin, SDO (Civil) Kakumoni Saikia, Dr Debraj Deori Chairman of Bokajan Municipal Board, Sardili Bey, Semion Rongphar, and other dignitaries.

Polling held smoothly across all 12 constituencies with no incidents or re-polls required

BTC elections 2025 witness peaceful polling with 82.94 percent voter turnout

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Sept 23: The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Elections 2025 concluded peacefully across all 12 constituencies of Kokrajhar district on September 22, with an impressive overall voter turnout of 82.94 percent.

Polling began on schedule at all 942 polling stations and proceeded smoothly, with no incidents of violence or disruptions reported. As a result, no re-polling was required in any constituency. A total of 700,951 voters were registered in the district, comprising 350,534 male and 350,417 female voters. Altogether, 581,379 votes were cast.

Among the constituencies, Parbatjhora (ST) saw the highest voter turnout at 87.59%, followed by Srirampur (Non-ST) at 86.96%, Fakiagram (Non-ST) at 85.60%, and Guma (Open) at 84.57%. Other constituencies also recorded strong participation: Banargaon (ST) at 82.84%, Dotma (ST) at 82.33%, Jamduar (ST) at 82.23%, Baukhungri (ST) at 82.02%, Kachugaon (ST) at 82.07%, Salakati (ST) at



81.61%, Sorabil (ST) at 79.90%, and Debargaon (ST) at 76.97%.

The District Administration expressed satisfaction over the peaceful and orderly conduct

of the polls and extended its gratitude to polling personnel, security forces, and the voters for their cooperation and enthusiasm in strengthening the democratic process.

Karbi freshers meet 2025 held in Delhi

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Sept 23: The Karbi Freshers Meet 2025 for Delhi-NCR was held on September 21 at Karbi Bhawan, GK-II, organised by the Karbi Students' Union, Delhi. The event aimed to welcome and introduce new Karbi students in Delhi to the existing student community, according to Union president Franklin Rongphar. A Mr and Miss Freshers competition was held as part of the celebration. Sarpinpo Teron Langne was crowned Mr Freshers, while Charne Jirleen Beypi was named Miss Freshers. The day featured cultural performances, songs, dances, speeches, and enthusiastic student participation.

Dr Amphu Terangpi, Assistant Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), attended as the chief guest and encouraged the students to stay rooted in their culture while striving for academic excellence.

Dr Brotrasing Bey, Research Associate at ICAR-NAIP, New Delhi, along with students from Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagao, and Delhi, also participated in the programme.

Correspondent of TIME 8 died in mysterious accident In grief and song, Assam remembers Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Sept 23: Iftikar (Bitu) Rahman, aged 47, son of Noor Rahman and a resident of Demow Dehajan, as well as the Demow Correspondent of Time8, died under mysterious circumstances in an accident that occurred in Demow Santipur on Sunday night.

According to sources, Iftikar Rahman was covering the shradhanjali programme for the beloved singer Zubeen Garg, which was organised at several locations across Demow on Sunday. After completing his assignments, he was returning home from the Demow Press Club when the incident took place.

Reports suggest that Rahman fell at the site of the accident and remained there for nearly an hour before some local youths spotted him. They immediately informed his family and the Demow Police. Upon arrival, the police rushed



him to Demow Model Hospital, where the attending doctor declared him brought dead. He had sustained a head injury.

Following the post-mortem, Rahman's body was brought to the Demow Press Club, where a shradhanjali programme was held on Monday afternoon. Padma

Dhar Dutta, Sepon Mouzadar, and Ajay Kumar Gogoi, Adviser of the Demow Press Club, lit earthen lamps and incense sticks, offered flowers, and paid their respects to the late journalist.

Members of the Demow Press Club, leaders of AASU and ATTSA, the President of Athabari Gaon Panchayat, and numerous well-wishers also participated in the tribute, offering flowers and incense sticks, and praying for the eternal peace of his departed soul. A one-minute silence was observed in his memory.

His untimely demise has been widely mourned throughout the area. He is survived by his wife, a daughter, his parents, a brother, and several other relatives.

The family lodged an FIR at the Demow Police Station on September 22, 2025, requesting that a case be registered, a thorough investigation be conducted, and the culprit be arrested.

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Sept 23: In a wave of collective sorrow that has swept across Assam and echoed through the soul of a nation, the immortal voice of Zubeen Garg has fallen silent. The beloved singer, composer, and cultural icon, who once declared, "I have no religion, no caste, I am human and an atheist," passed away on September 19 in Singapore at the age of 52, succumbing to a tragic drowning.

Affectionately known as Zubeen Da, he was more than an artist — he was Assam's living heartbeat, a voice that stirred hearts and bridged divides through melodies of love, resilience, and raw emotion. His untimely demise, just a day before he was scheduled to perform at the North East India Festival in Singapore, has left a deep, aching void.

From September 20 to 23, the Margherita Eco Park in Tinsukia district transformed into a sacred space of remembrance. The Margherita Municipal Board turned the park into a luminous haven where thousands gathered daily, regardless of caste, creed, language, or religion, forming a powerful tapestry of unity and mourning.

Earthen lamps flickered like stars against the dusk, candles burned in silent vigil, and vibrant floral tributes — marigolds and jasmine were laid at his portraits, whose eyes seemed to radiate warmth even in absence.

Chants of solidarity filled the air: "Jai Zubeen Da, Zubeen Long Live, Jai Aai Asom." Admirers of all ages — children, youth, elders — poured into the streets. Massive candlelight processions wound through Margherita, Ledo, Bargolai, Jagun, Lekhapani, and Segunbari, creating rivers of light that pierced the night.

As thousands marched arm-in-arm, their voices rose in harmony, singing Zubeen's timeless hits like "Mayabini" and other Assamese ballads of love and longing. These were not mere processions — they were soulful pilgrimages, forged in unity, love, and an unshakable bond of humanity.



On Tuesday in a symbolic gesture of connection, the Margherita Municipal Board hosted a live broadcast from the Eco Park, enabling people across the region to join in the final tribute. Thousands gathered once more, eyes fixed on glowing screens under the afternoon sun, as Zubeen's music played on in solemn loops.

Anand Kumar Sharma, Chairman of the Margherita Municipal Board, expressed the depth of public sentiment, saying, "The people of Margherita have come together to be part of this solemn moment and pay their final respects to the icon who will forever live in everyone's hearts through his music and legacy."

As the broadcast concluded, the crowd broke into one last, thunderous chorus of Zubeen's songs — a collective vow that his spirit, fierce, free, and forever human, will endure not in monuments, but in the rhythms and melodies that continue to stir the soul of Assam and the nation.

Zubeen Garg's legacy honoured in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Sept 23: The District Administration of Kokrajhar joined the people of Assam in bidding a solemn farewell to legendary artist, actor, producer, and director Zubeen Garg. His last rites, held at Sonapur, were live-streamed today at the DC Office Conference Hall in the presence of District Commissioner Masanda Pertin, along with officers and staff who gathered in deep mourning to pay their respects.



Earlier, floral tributes were offered at the Basic Training Centre, Kokrajhar, where poll-related activities for the BTC Elections 2025 are being conducted. The DC accompanied by senior officials and polling personnel, paid homage to the cultural icon, recalling his immense contribution to Assamese music, cinema, and culture.

As a mark of respect, a Dry Day was observed throughout Kokrajhar district on 22nd and 23rd September. The order, issued by the District Magistrate, followed the Government of Assam's notification extending State Mourning until September 23.

The District Administration, Kokrajhar, joins the rest of the state in mourning the passing of Zubeen Garg, whose legacy as a cultural torchbearer will continue to inspire generations.

NFR observes 'Swachhata Hi Seva'

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 23: As part of the ongoing "Swachhata Hi Seva" initiative, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) organised a series of plantation and cleanliness drives across its five divisions. The activities were carried out at railway stations, offices, hospitals, workshops, and railway colonies, with enthusiastic participation from railway officials and Safai Mitras.

The plantation drive was held under the theme "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam," symbolising a tribute to motherhood and a commitment to environmental conservation. The initiative reflected NFR's dedication to creating a cleaner and greener future through actions aimed at making a lasting positive impact across the Northeast.

In addition to tree plantation, large-scale cleanliness drives were conducted in railway colonies, stations, and other public areas under NFR. Railway staff and Safai Mitras worked together to clean surroundings, remove waste, and spread awareness about hygiene and the importance of maintaining a litter-free environment.

Special tribute ceremony held for Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Sept 23: A centrally organised tribute ceremony is held at Nehrubali Field in Nagaon today to honour the memory of legendary singer Zubeen Garg. People from all walks of life, along with various organisations and institutions across the district, gathered to pay their heartfelt respects to the iconic artist.

On Tuesday Zubeen Garg's last rites were performed at Komarkuchi in Sonapur. The ceremony was broadcast live on large screens across Nagaon district. In Nagaon town, thousands of people

assembled at the Clock Tower to witness the live telecast, which was arranged by local MLA Rupak Sarma in coordination with the district administration.

The tribute event at Nehrubali drew hundreds of participants from the social, cultural, literary, and sports fraternities. As part of the ceremony, Zubeen Garg's ashes were also immersed at Nehrubali, marking an emotional moment for his admirers.

In a Facebook Live address, MLA Rupak Sarma announced plans to establish a memorial for Zubeen Garg in Nagaon. The pro-

posed memorial will feature detailed information about his life and work, along with facilities for visitors to listen to his songs — a tribute to the lasting legacy and admiration he commands in the region.

Meanwhile, 'The Art Village', a local art group, also paid homage through a visual art tribute. Artists from Jyoti Chitrangan Vidyalaya created portraits of Zubeen Garg, while painters like Sujit Das and Smriti Hazarika contributed with heartfelt artworks celebrating the life of the beloved cultural icon.

Mega health camp under Susrukha Setu draws over 1900 beneficiaries

Second LAC-wise camp marks 5th day of Seva Saptah with screenings, referrals, and wellness services for children

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Sept 23: Cachar District Administration scripted another milestone in community healthcare delivery with the successful organisation of the second LAC-wise Mega Health Camp under the flagship initiative 'Susrukha Setu' on Tuesday, coinciding with the 5th day of "Seva Hi Samarpan: Seva Saptah." Held at Assam Palace in Silchar constituency, the camp witnessed an overwhelming response with 1,918 beneficiaries screened and 234 numbers of patients referred for Phase-II specialized treatment at tertiary hospitals. The programme was attended by Silchar MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, District Commissioner Mridul Yadav, IAS, District Development Commissioner, Narsing Bey, ACS, CEO Zilla Parishad Pranab Kumar Bora, ADC (Health) Dr Khaleda Sultana Ahmed, Assistant Commissioner Neihat Haolai, ACS, Assistant Commissioner (Health) Deepa Das, ACS, and Joint Director of Health Services Dr Shibnanda Roy along with senior officials, medical professionals, and community representatives.

In his keynote address, MLA Silchar Dipayan Chakraborty began by paying homage to late iconic singer Zubeen Garg and expressing gratitude Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for his

visionary leadership in steering Assam towards becoming one of the nation's top five states. Calling the camp a milestone in health delivery, the MLA said that the initiative was not just about treatment, but about instilling a sense of security and trust among the people. He urged parents to make full use of the camp facilities, ensure regular check-ups, and promote healthy practices such as yoga, a disciplined lifestyle, and freedom from harmful addictions. He emphasised that this camp reflected the government's determination to extend quality healthcare even to the most remote corners of the district, leaving no mother, child, or elderly person outside the fold of medical care.

The MLA praised the efforts of the Cachar District Administration under the leadership of DC Mridul Yadav and lauded the selfless contribution of doctors, nurses, ASHA workers, and volunteers who made the programme meaningful. He also referred to the recent adoption of 100 TB patients by 100 Nikshay Mitras under Seva Saptah, organised at Gandhi Bhawan on Monday, where patients received food baskets and pledged support. He described Nikshay Mitra not merely as a nutritional support scheme but as a mission that restores dignity and hope among patients, strength-



ening their will to complete treatment. He stressed that no one in Silchar should fight TB alone and urged Cachar to set an example in fulfilling the Prime Minister's vision of a TB-free India by 2025.

While speaking at the event, Cachar District Commissioner Mridul Yadav, IAS, highlighted that the initiative reflects the government's vision of

strengthening preventive healthcare in Assam. He said that with 'Susrukha Setu' the district seeks to build a bridge of security where every child and every family feels assured of timely medical attention. He further assured that all the patients referred from the camp to tertiary hospitals will receive complete care and all necessary facilities for treatment.

The DC reiterated that the District Administration will continue to oversee and support such drives so that no citizen is deprived of access to healthcare.

It is important to note that the Mega Health Camp was specially designed for children in the age group of 0-18 years and offered specialist consultations across pediatrics, neurology, ophthalmol-

ogy, ENT, and other departments. Beneficiaries underwent screenings for congenital heart conditions, neurological disorders, psychosomatic illnesses, TB, cancer, and other health issues, while diagnostic facilities including lab tests, ECG, and dental check-ups were made available. Immunization services, physiotherapy, Ayush and Unani consultations, and distribution of PMJAY health cards were also carried out. A yoga demonstration by NGO Shiv Durga Club of Palonghat added a wellness dimension to the programme, encouraging families to adopt preventive lifestyle practices.

Later, MLA Dipayan Chakraborty and DC Mridul Yadav visited the screening counters, interacted with doctors, staff, and patients, and personally reviewed the functioning of the camp. Officials informed that with Silchar setting the momentum, similar health drives will be rolled out across 5 LACs of Cachar. By combining modern medical facilities with community participation, the Mega Health Camp has reinforced the healthcare framework of the district and rekindled hope for a healthier, disease-free future for the people of Cachar.

This is stated in a press release issued by Regional office of Information & Public Relations Barak valley Zone Silchar Assam.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

I often quote myself. It adds spice to my conversation.
- George Bernard Shaw

India-ILO pacts on jobs

Given the significant discrepancies in job descriptions across nations, the Government of India and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have signed an agreement on 16 September to fund a feasibility study on an international classification of occupations based on skill and qualification requirements. The initiative, supported by a €650,000 contribution from India, represents the country's first direct funding agreement with the ILO and reflects the country's growing leadership and engagement in multilateral cooperation. India funded a two-year ILO study to create a unified system for classifying jobs by skill and qualification levels, scheduled from September 2025 to September 2027, will examine the development of a standardized taxonomy to improve comparability of job roles and qualifications across countries. The findings are expected to inform policies on recruitment, migration, education and career guidance, particularly in the green, digital and care economies. India's commitment follows its G20 presidency in 2023, where member states called for greater comparability of skills across borders. India's leadership in South-South cooperation and its active role in platforms like BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) and IBSA (India-Brazil-South Africa) have positioned it as a key player in shaping inclusive and sustainable labour policies.

Early findings from the OECD showing significant disparities in job descriptions across nations, underscore how important this latest joint study between the ILO and the Government of India is. The project aligns with Sustainable Development Goals 4 and 8, focusing on quality education and decent work. The study will apply cutting edge technologies, including artificial intelligence and big data, to analyse and harmonize existing occupational taxonomies. India's upcoming BRICS presidency in 2026 is expected to further amplify its role in global labour policy. This partnership between India and the ILO sends a powerful message: the importance of working internationally together to build a future of work that is equitable, adaptable, and inclusive.

India's commitment to leveraging digital innovation in order to enhance labour market efficiency and worker welfare stressed. This commitment, he said, was recently showcased at the International Labour Conference, where India presented two key digital public goods, the National Career Service (NCS) Portal and the e-Shram Portal. This MoU marks a crucial step towards expanding global job opportunities for India's youth. The agreement will help Indian workers to seamlessly integrate into global labour markets. It reinforces India's vision of becoming not just the skill capital of the world, but also a trusted source of talent for countries facing workforce shortages. This initiative has the potential of not only enhancing the global competitiveness of Indian graduates but also positioning India as an international hub for high quality, future-ready education and skilling.

Durga Puja festival and its significance

By: Diganta Barooah

Durga Puja is a celebration of the Goddess Durga — who represents the embodiment of Shakti, the powerful feminine force that governs all cosmic creation, existence, and change — and her victory over a demon named Mahishasura. She is said to have descended from her home in Kailash with Lord Shiva to her maternal home on Earth. Durga Puja starts after the completion of Pitr Paksh and is celebrated during Navratri. During this time, people will recite prayers, perform rituals, and sing songs dedicated to her. This celebration is especially significant in the Indian state of Bengal and Assam and in neighbouring country Nepal. Durga Puja, major festival of Hinduism traditionally held for 10 days in the month of Ashvin, or Ashvina (September–October), the seventh month of the Hindu calendar, and particularly celebrated in West Bengal, Assam, and other eastern Indian states. Durga Puja is a special puja (offering) festival that celebrates the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon king Mahishasura (from the Sanskrit terms mahisa, “buffalo” and asura, “demon”). It begins on the same day as Navratri, which is held over nine nights in many northern and western states and which more broadly celebrates the divine feminine (shakti). Durga Puja's first day is Mahalaya, which heralds the advent of the goddess. Celebrations and worship begin on Shashthi, the sixth day. During the following three days, the goddess is worshipped in her various forms as Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. Images (murtis) of the goddess—astride a lion and attacking Mahishasura—are placed at various elaborately decorated pandals (temporary structures of bamboo and other materials) and installed inside temples. The celebrations end with Vijayadashami (“Tenth Day of Victory”), when, amid loud chants and drumbeats, sacred images are carried in huge processions to local rivers, where they are immersed. That custom is symbolic of the departure of the deity to her home and to her husband, Shiva, in the Himalayas.

Mythology

Durga Puja is associated with more than one legend from Hindu mythology. The primary myth behind the holiday is the slaying of the buffalo demon Mahishasura. The story first appears in the Devi Mahatmya, which forms part of the Markandeya Purana (5th or 6th century ce). In that account, Mahisa wagers a cosmic war against the devas (the male gods of the Hindu pantheon) and prevails because of a boon that has prevented his defeat by a male opponent. Finding their supremacy usurped, the devas—led by the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—combine their powers to create a warrior goddess named Durga (meaning “impassable”). Armed by the male gods, Durga personifies their collective energy, and she engages Mahishasura in battle. The shape-shifting demon assumes a variety of forms to attack the goddess, who finally beheads him, in his original buffalo form, on the 10th day of ferocious fighting. Durga Puja is also associated with the myth of akalbodhan (“untimely awakening”), in which Durga is invoked by the warrior prince Rama, signifying a period of special access to the goddess. The Hindu epic Ramayana tells the story of the abduction of Rama's wife, Sita, by the demon king Ravana and the war that follows. A Bengali version of the epic, composed by 14th-century poet Krittivas, offers an alternative telling of Rama's ultimate victory and establishes the celebration of Durga Puja in

autumn, a deviation from the customary festive period during harvest season earlier in the year. In Krittivas's rendering, Rama prays to Durga for assistance on the battlefield after failing to defeat Ravana and his powerful brother Kumbhakarna. Pleased, she grants him divine support and enables him to vanquish Ravana on the 10th day. According to the myth, Rama gathers 108 (a numerologically significant number in Hinduism) lotuses as a sacred offering but can find only 107 at the time of prayer. Undaunted, he prepares to pluck out one of his own eyes to replace the missing flower when Durga appears and restores the last lotus, revealing its absence to have been a test of Rama's devotion. Durga Puja thus signals the victory of good, symbolized by Durga and Rama, over evil, represented by Mahishasura and Ravana. In contrast to these warlike myths is a myth that marks the festive period as one of rest for the goddess, who is popularly supposed to be visiting her parents' home, having traveled from the abode she shares with Shiva in Mount Kailas.

Iconography

In most celebrations of the festival, Durga is worshipped with four companion deities: Lakshmi (goddess of wealth), Saraswati (goddess of learning), and the male deities Ganesha (an elephant-headed god who removes obstacles) and Kartikeya (god of war). Clay images are created by artisans and dressed in traditional Indian finery and jewelry. Durga herself, usually 10-armed and riding a lion (sometimes a tiger), is commonly depicted in the act of beheading Mahishasura. She carries in her hands the weapons given to her by the devas; among them are Shiva's trident, Vishnu's discus, a conch shell, a curved sword, and a bow and arrow. She is surrounded by Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha, and Kartikeya, represented with their associated symbols and mounts (vahanas): a lotus or owl, swan, mouse, and peacock, respectively. In parts of western and central India Durga is associated with the analogous festival of Navratri and worshipped in nine forms known collectively as Navadurga. These forms, or avatars, vary in the number of arms they are depicted with—2, 4, 8, or 10—and the mounts they ride—Shailputri on the bull Nandi; Kushmanda, Skandamata, and Katyayani on lions; Chandraghanta on a tiger; Kalaratri on a donkey; and Mahagauri on an ox. The second form, Brahmacharini, has no mount, and the ninth form, Siddhidhatri, is seated on a lotus flower.

Rituals and Celebrations

Durga Puja is associated with a variety of rituals, customs, and celebratory traditions. The arrival of the goddess is preceded by the ceremonial painting of Durga's eyes on the clay images to be worshipped in the pandals. The last five days of the festival form the primary period of veneration. A number of incantations, Sanskrit verses, readings from the text Devi Mahatmya, and recitation of the Durga Saptashati, verses dedicated to the goddess, accompany each rite. The ceremony of bodhan (awakening) takes place every day from Shashthi to the ninth day, Navami. The seventh day, Saptami, begins with the Nabapatrika Snan, a pre-dawn bath for Ganesha's wife, represented as a banana plant. Ashtami, the eighth and most auspicious day, is marked by anjali, a tribute of flowers by devotees, and shondhi puja, a rite held at the transition of Ashtami to Navami. Anjali is now commonly held on more than one day of the festivities. Most evenings end with an arti, a ceremony in which the deity is worshipped with lamps and chanting of incantations. Sometimes

compassion. Katyayani, fierce and righteous, is worshipped on the sixth day as the destroyer of evil and upholder of justice. The seventh form, Kalaratri, removes ignorance and darkness, inspiring fearlessness in seekers. The eighth day celebrates Mahagauri, a symbol of purity, serenity, and peace, whose blessings bring clarity and calm. Finally, the ninth night is dedicated to Siddhidhatri, the granter of wisdom and spiritual powers, leading devotees to completeness and divine realization.

Each day, devotees align their prayers, fasting, and rituals with the qualities embodied by these forms. This sequence of worship is not random; it creates a spiritual roadmap that moves from physical grounding to intellectual clarity, from emotional healing to divine wisdom. It is a journey of inner transformation that mirrors the eternal battle between ignorance and knowledge, chaos and order, bondage and liberation.

A Time for Inner Cleansing and Discipline

Navratri is not only about outward devotion but also about personal discipline. It is widely regarded as an ideal time for detoxification of the body, mind, and spirit. Fasting during these nine days plays a central role in this cleansing process. Traditionally, devotees abstain from heavy or tamasic foods—those believed to dull the mind and body—and instead consume sattvic meals that are light, pure, and conducive to meditation. Fresh fruits, milk, nuts, and simple vegetarian preparations dominate the diet, offering the body a chance to rest and reset.

Fasting, however, is not merely a dietary choice; it is an act of self-discipline and renunciation. It sharpens willpower, enhances clarity, and directs mental energy towards the divine. When combined with mantra chanting, meditation, and prayer, fasting becomes a tool for dissolving mental fog, calming emotional turbulence, and erasing negative thought patterns. It is as much a psychological and spiritual practice as it is a physical one. Ancient scriptures describe



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

Navratri as a bridge between the outer and inner worlds. Just as the body is cleansed of toxins through dietary restraint, the mind is cleansed of restlessness through spiritual practices. This holistic purification prepares the devotee for deeper self-realization.

Manifesting Prosperity and Removing Blockages

Navratri is also considered an especially auspicious period for new beginnings. The heightened spiritual energy of these days is said to remove obstacles and create pathways for progress. Many believe that it is the perfect time to initiate new ventures, whether personal or professional, as the blessings of the Goddess open doors to prosperity. In various traditions, spiritual remedies are observed to attract wealth and abundance. Devotees chant mantras dedicated to prosperity, place raw turmeric and red rice in their cash boxes as symbols of growth, and sometimes wrap a silver coin with perfume in a red cloth to keep in their safes. Offering sweets, red garments, and essential items to the needy is also a common practice, symbolizing generosity that returns as divine blessings.

These rituals, when performed with sincerity and devotion, are not mere superstitions. They represent the intention to align oneself with abundance and positivity, breaking cycles of stagnation and invoking fresh energy. For many, they become tools to harmonize material life with spiritual aspirations, ensuring balance in both per-

sonal and professional domains.

Awakening the Divine Feminine Within

One of the most empowering aspects of Navratri is its celebration of the divine feminine, not as an abstract ideal but as a living force within every individual. The worship of the Goddess during these nine nights is not confined to external rituals; it is an invitation to awaken Shakti within—the energy of creativity, resilience, intuition, and confidence.

This inner awakening has profound psychological and emotional implications. For those struggling with trauma, insecurity, or disconnection from their life purpose, Navratri provides an opportunity for healing. The act of invoking the Goddess becomes an act of reclaiming one's personal power. It encourages individuals to rise above fear, embrace their inner voice, and walk with renewed strength. By honoring the feminine energy, Navratri transcends gender boundaries. It reminds us that qualities such as compassion, wisdom, and inner strength are universal, and embracing them creates harmony both within and around us.

Sacred Spaces and Collective Energy

While Navratri is deeply personal, it is also a festival of community and collective energy. Across India, homes and temples are adorned with flowers, lamps, and incense. Families create sacred altars where daily offerings of fruits, flowers, and light establish a rhythm of devotion. This sacred

space becomes an anchor, not only during the festival but throughout the year, reminding devotees of their spiritual commitments.

Beyond the home, Navratri pulses with collective celebration. Cities and villages come alive with devotional songs, bhajans, and the rhythmic beats of Garba and Dandiya dances. People, irrespective of caste, class, or background, gather in unity, celebrating the divine with joy and abandon. This collective energy amplifies individual devotion, creating an atmosphere charged with positivity and upliftment. In many regions, Navratri culminates with Vijayadashami or Dussehra, the symbolic victory of good over evil, when the effigies of Ravana are set aflame. This act signifies the burning away of inner demons—pride, anger, greed—and the triumph of righteousness. It is a reminder that the external rituals of Navratri are mirrors of the inner battles every human must face.

A Festival of Renewal and Transformation

Ultimately, Navratri is far more than a religious festival. It is a spiritual opportunity to realign with one's higher self, shed old burdens, and embrace renewal. Each fast, each prayer, each offering is a step in dissolving negativity and inviting abundance. Through devotion, discipline, and self-awareness, Navratri offers a pathway to physical rejuvenation, emotional healing, and spiritual growth.

In honoring the nine forms of the Goddess, one discovers nine stages of inner awakening. In fasting and meditation, one finds purification. In collective celebration, one experiences unity and joy. And in invoking Shakti, one rediscovers the limitless power within. As the lamps are lit and the sound of drums fills the night, Navratri becomes not just a remembrance of divine stories but a living experience of transformation. It is a reminder that within each of us resides the Goddess—ever radiant, ever compassionate, ever powerful—waiting to be awakened. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

a kumari puja takes place, in which a prepubescent girl is worshipped as a living goddess. On Ashtami and Navami, celebrants perform a ritual dance called dhunuchi, which is named for the special incense burners held by the dancers. The dance is accompanied by the beating of drums called dhaks, which are played on each day of the festival. Sindoor khela, one of the most colorful customs, takes place on the morning of Vijayadashami, when married women apply sindoor, or vermilion (placed in the parting of the hair to signify the married state), to an image of Durga and to one another. The festivities conclude with the visarjan, the submersion of Durga in a body of water, symbolizing her return to Mount Kailas.

Durga Puja in the 21st century

The evolution of Durga Puja from a private, domestic affair to a public, community event took place over centuries but is largely undocumented. The zamindars (landowners) of Calcutta, now Kolkata, are believed to have been the first to open their annual festivities to the public, notably officials of the British Raj. While Kolkata's Durga Puja is still the most spectacular, the festival is also a major event in such states as Assam, Odisha, Tripura, Jharkhand, Bihar, and eastern Uttar Pradesh. The geographic footprint has expanded across urban centers in northern India, including Delhi, where there is a significant Bengali population, as well as in diaspora communities outside India. Madhya Pradesh worships Navadurga during the celebratory period. Durga Puja is also a major festival in the neighboring Muslim-majority country of Bangladesh. Nepal, which, like Bangladesh, shares a border with India, observes a version of the festival, called Dashain.

Economic impact in Kolkata

Over the years, a vibrant economy has sprung up around the celebrations. Durga Puja generates significant revenue through crafts and design, retail, food and beverage sales, advertisements, and sponsorships. Kolkata's annual festival was included on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity list in 2021 and is among the city's primary tourist attractions. An estimated 3,000 pujas are held across Kolkata's neighborhoods. The images and elaborate pandals are renowned for their variety in design and artistry, and they often represent contemporary sociopolitical themes. Several local pujas enjoy political patronage and corporate funding. The economic worth of the creative industries that contribute to Kolkata's Durga Puja is estimated at more than 32 crore rupees (more than \$38,000,000) and has an impact on the lives of artisans, technicians, and workers in a range of fields.

Modernization and Ecology

There has been an informal push in recent years to reform some traditions and rituals connected to Durga Puja, which is seen as “sarbojanin” (for everyone). The custom of sindoor khela has been criticized as exclusionary, and localized campaigns in Kolkata have increased the orbit of the tradition to include all women, regardless of marital status or gender. The tradition of animal sacrifice has long been discontinued. Attempts have also been made to minimize the damaging environmental impact of the visarjan of the clay images at the end of the festival. Government directives specify that these should be made using natural materials and nontoxic paint (similar efforts have been made to reduce the environmental impact of visarjan in the Ganesh Chaturthi festival). These guidelines, introduced in recent years, are not

yet widely followed, as only a handful of neighborhood pujas have been making an effort to use organic and recycled elements in decorations and images.

Dussehra

Dussehra, in Hinduism, holiday marking the triumph of Rama, an avatar of Vishnu, over the 10-headed demon king Ravana, who abducted Rama's wife, Sita. In the epic Ramayana, Rama, with the assistance of the monkey-general Hanuman, attacks Lanka to rescue Sita and slays Ravana. The festival's name is derived from the Sanskrit words dasa (“ten”) and hara (“defeat”).

Culmination of Navratri and Durga Puja celebrations

Symbolizing the victory of good over evil, Dussehra is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Ashvina (September–October), the seventh month of the Hindu calendar, with the appearance of the full moon, an event called the “bright fortnight” (shukla paksha). Dussehra coincides with the culmination of the nine-day Navratri festival and with the tenth day of the Durga Puja festival. Both Navratri and Durga Puja involve prayers offered to goddess Durga, a principal form of the supreme goddess in Hinduism. A collective of nine avatars of the deity, called Navadurga, is worshipped during Navratri. Durga Puja honors the goddess's demon-slaying form, known as Mahishasuramardini. The coinciding days of Dussehra and Vijaya Dashami mark the victory of Rama over Ravana for some, and of Durga over Mahishasura for others. For many, it marks the beginning of preparation for Diwali, which occurs 20 days after Dussehra.

Ram Lila and the burning of Ravana effigies

Dussehra is celebrated with great fervor and fanfare. In North India, it incorporates Ram Lila, a gala theatrical enactment of Rama's life story. Effigies of Ravana—often along with those of Meghnada (Ravana's son) and Kumbhakarna (Ravana's brother)—are stuffed with firecrackers and set ablaze at dusk in open fields.

Religious Significance of Durga Puja

Triumph of good over evil: The core narrative of Durga Puja celebrates the goddess Durga, an embodiment of divine feminine power (Shakti), defeating the demon Mahishasura after a fierce battle. This story is a powerful reminder of the ultimate victory of righteousness and courage over negative forces.

Celebrating divine feminine power:

The festival reveres Shakti, the powerful feminine force that governs creation, existence, and change. The worship of Durga highlights the importance of feminine strength and empowerment.

Divine homecoming:

The festival marks Goddess Durga's annual visit to her parental home on Earth from her celestial abode in Mount Kailash. She arrives with her children—Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesha, and Kartikeya—making it a family reunion and a joyful celebration.

Harvest festival:

As a post-monsoon harvest festival, Durga Puja celebrates the goddess's connection to nature and fertility. Rituals often involve the navapatika (nine leaves), a bundle of nine plants that represents the nine forms of Shakti and symbolizes the power inherent in all vegetation.

Cultural Significance of Durga Puja

Artistic expression: For months leading up to the festival, artisans craft intricate clay idols of the goddess and her family. The pandals, temporary pavilions built to house these idols, are renowned for their

elaborate, artistic themes that turn entire cities into public art exhibitions.

Showcase of heritage:

The festival is a grand display of traditional music, dance, and other art forms. The rhythmic beating of the dhak (traditional drum), the energetic dhunuchi naach (incense dance), and the performance of devotional songs fill the air with festive energy.

Culinary traditions:

Food is a central element of the celebrations, with community feasts (bhog) and traditional Bengali sweets shared among family and friends. It is a time for people to enjoy culinary delights that are rich in flavor and tradition.

Social Significance of Durga Puja

Community bonding: Originally a private ceremony for wealthy landowners, Durga Puja transformed into a public, community-centric event (sarbojanin) in the 18th and 19th centuries. It fosters social harmony by bringing people from all backgrounds and faiths together to organize and participate in the festivities.

Economic boost:

The festival provides a significant economic boost through a vibrant creative economy, supporting artisans, designers, technicians, vendors, and local businesses. It also draws domestic and international tourism, further stimulating the local economy.

Empowerment of women:

By celebrating the divine feminine, the festival encourages respect for women and motherhood. Rituals like Kumari Puja (worship of a young girl) and Sindoor Khela (married women smearing vermilion) highlight the power and importance of women in society.

Key Rituals Associated with Durga Puja

Mahalaya: This day officially heralds the advent of the goddess, with many people beginning preparations. The traditional radio program Mahishasuramardini is broadcast early in the morning.

Shashthi (6th day):

The actual worship begins with Bodhan, the ritual awakening of the goddess, typically under a wood apple (bilva) tree.

Saptami (7th day):

The Nabapatrika ritual involves bathing a banana plant bride (Kola Bou) in the river and placing it beside Lord Ganesha's idol.

Ashtami (8th day):

The most auspicious day includes Pushpanjali (floral offerings) and Kumari Puja (worship of a young girl).

Sandhi Puja:

This ritual marks the sacred juncture between Ashtami and Navami. It commemorates the moment Durga defeated the demons Chanda and Munda.

Navami (9th day):

The final day of worship features grand aarti ceremonies and the rhythmic dhunuchi naach.

Vijaya Dashami (10th day):

The celebration culminates with the immersion (visarjan) of the idols in water, symbolizing the goddess's return to her heavenly home. Married women participate in Sindoor Khela, smearing each other with vermilion.

Conclusion:

Durga Puja's significance lies in celebrating Goddess Durga's victory over the demon Mahishasura, symbolizing the triumph of good over evil and the power of feminine energy. It promotes community bonding, cultural heritage, and women's empowerment through active participation in rituals and festivities.

Decoding the impact of climate change on mental health

By: Aadya Chaturvedi

The Sikkim Glacial Lake Outburst Flood is one of the major disasters recently to be caused by climate change-induced glacial thinning, displacing more than 7,000 people. Cases of PTSD, anxiety and panic attacks have been reported amongst the survivors, both children and adults. Yet, while the focus has been on restoring healthcare infrastructure in the affected areas, the disaster management plans (DMPs) find no mention of counselling and psychiatric support for the victims. The absence of reliable data has made it difficult to determine the ability of survivors to rehabilitate and rebuild.

Global average temperatures rise year on year, with 2024 being the hottest year on record as each month breached the 1.5°C warming limit. Its effects on weather events, infrastructure, agriculture, and even on human physiology, dominate public discourse. However, an often overlooked fallout of the climate emergency is our mental health, which is rapidly gaining recognition. Mental disorders have a share of 6.54 percent of the global disease burden. There is an increasing consensus that this share is only set to increase due to the rising prevalence of stressors associated with resource insecurity, displacement and eco-anxiety. Although various epidemiological studies have tried to establish linkages between different aspects of climate change and mental health outcomes, the phenomenon has been hitherto understudied. The lack of systematic data collection hides the severity of this crisis.

A survey done to assess the psychological impact on the survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami shows a 27.2 percent prevalence for depression and anxiety and a 79.7 percent prevalence for mild to severe stress.

However, with possible ramifications of increasing temperatures on the rehabilitation of displaced communities, criminal

behaviours, cognition and productivity, urgent attention is merited. In this regard, the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare's National Action Plan on Climate Change and Mental Health (NPCCMH) is a laudable step that lays a broad framework to address these challenges. Nevertheless, assimilating this framework into local policy interventions remains to be seen.

Natural Disasters and Mental Health

Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events worldwide. Such disasters are typically followed by food and water insecurity, unemployment and homelessness, which can cause various psychological and psychiatric disorders amongst displaced communities. It has been noted that the incidence of such disorders is 40 percent more than physical injuries caused by a disaster.

A survey done to assess the psychological impact on the survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami shows a 27.2 percent prevalence for depression and anxiety and a 79.7 percent prevalence for mild to severe stress. Prevalence of sleep disorders and even increased substance use has been observed amongst victims of floods and landslides. Natural disasters can also impact the unborn and increase the risk of them developing neurodevelopmental conditions such as ADHD and autism. Nevertheless, it does not take only an adverse weather event to escalate the mental health crisis, as rising temperatures can have a bearing on our daily lives as well.

Rising Temperatures, Aggression and Crime

Studies have shown the correlation between temperatures and behavioural outcomes. Ambient temperatures can alter blood flow and serotonin levels, as well as disrupt our sleeping patterns. Thus, higher temperatures have been shown to increase irritability, mood swings and aggressive behaviour, a phenomenon referred to as the "temperature-ag-



gression hypothesis". According to a meta-analysis by Yale School of Environment, this phenomenon showed a positive correlation between an increase in mean temperatures and rates of homicidal and sexual crimes across parts of Asia. Even a 1°C increase in annual mean temperature has been found to increase the prevalence of interpersonal violence against women in South Asia by 4.49 percent. This trend can be observed acutely in metropolitan areas as they metamorphose into urban heat islands (UHIs) due to increasing concretisation, vehicular pollution and air-conditioning. An urban heat mapping model of Sydney suggested an increase in the frequency of violent crimes as surface temperatures in UHIs increased with a proportional decrease in green cover.

A study by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has shown that students perform cognitive tasks more slowly in higher temperatures when compared to moderate temperature settings.

Increased aggression caused by higher temperatures spills

over to our online behaviour too. A study published in The Lancet mapped the prevalence of hate tweets with the local average temperatures in the United States. It found that there was a 22 percent increase in hate speech online as temperatures deviated from the moderate range towards the hot weather extremes. With digital media gradually becoming the primary source of social interaction for the younger generations, such temperature induced extreme behaviours can increase instances of online harassment as well as heighten feelings of isolation, depression, and self-harm.

Impact on Cognition and Productivity

Consequences of a rising mercury go beyond altering behaviour and can hamper our brain's cognitive functions. Increased concentrations of greenhouse gases, such as carbon dioxide, can disrupt our critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making processes as they interfere with neurotransmission activity in the body. A study by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health has shown that stu-

dents perform cognitive tasks more slowly in higher temperatures when compared to moderate temperature settings.

In a survey conducted on a controlled sample of workplaces, workers in spaces with low concentrations of Volatile Organic Compounds, some of which are deemed to be greenhouse gases, scored 61 percent more on cognitive tests than their counterparts. This can lead to ramifications for the work sector. As per an estimate by the International Labour Organisation, heat stress can lead to labour productivity losses of US\$2,400 billion by 2030.

Disproportionate Socio-Economic Impact

These mental health outcomes will disproportionately affect poor, marginalised and vulnerable communities. Surveys have shown a higher prevalence of depression and anxiety amongst survivors belonging to lower-income groups. Communities living in mountainous, coastal and island terrains will be at a greater risk of displacement-induced eco-anxiety.

Surveys have shown a higher

prevalence of depression and anxiety amongst survivors belonging to lower-income groups.

Furthermore, in the cities, gated residential areas with better access to green spaces and air-conditioning will experience fewer law and order issues compared to slums and irregular housing colonies that lack basic civic amenities. This inequality will only get exacerbated since inhabitants of the latter usually work informal jobs in sectors such as agriculture and construction, which will be most impacted by rising temperatures. A similar trend will be seen across schools and workplaces. Thus, the impact of global warming on mental health outcomes will become a function of rising income and economic inequality.

Policy Recommendations

A major impediment in designing policy tools is the lack of consistent data. While NDMA has issued guidelines for psychosocial risk profiling of affected communities throughout the disaster management cycle, there is a lack of SOPs in State or District DMPs for the requisite data collection.

In this regard, Japan, a leader in disaster management, has established Disaster Mental Health Care Centers and Disaster Psychiatric Assessment Team System databases that collate data post specific disasters and from counsellors at the provincial level, respectively. India can benefit from incorporating such models in DMPs at sub-national and district levels.

Furthermore, data is also necessary to address the impact of rising temperatures on general mental well-being. To mitigate this, the NPCCMH proposes surveillance programmes through District Environmental Health Cells that are tasked with collecting and collating data on "mental health problems" from government-run health care facilities. For efficient implementation, the Plan should delineate the scope of this terminology and identify critical districts using IMD's 'Climate Hazard and Vulnerabil-

ity Atlas of India'.

These efforts should be supplemented by providing better access to mental health services, specifically to vulnerable communities. Heat Action Plans can be useful tools to provide localised counselling services through Primary Health Centers, Anganwadi Centers or tele-counselling services under the Tele Manas Programme of the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare.

Infrastructure changes are necessary to counter the 'UHI Effect', which can lead to an average surface temperature increase of up to 2.5°C in urban areas. Strategies such as expanding urban green spaces, rejuvenation of local water bodies, district cooling systems, lime-washing of roofs and adopting construction practices suitable to the local climate can help in moderating temperatures. Urban development schemes such as Nagar Van Yojana, Amrit Sarovar Yojana and State Cool Roof Policies can be leveraged to alleviate the heat stress in cities.

Conclusion

As inequalities of income, wealth and access to resources increase, a concomitant surge will be seen in the mental health burden, as the disproportionate effects of climate change will widen the schism of global inequality. Consequently, addressing associated mental health challenges becomes pertinent for community health and social cohesion.

Although the World Health Organisation and many national governments have acknowledged these challenges, a mere recognition on the policy level will not suffice. A multi-stakeholder and inter-ministerial approach is required for systematic data collection and increasing access to mental health services. More investments are required to mitigate heat stress in urban areas. Only a cross-sectoral comprehensive approach can prepare India to mount a resilient response to the adversities of the future. (Courtesy: ORF)

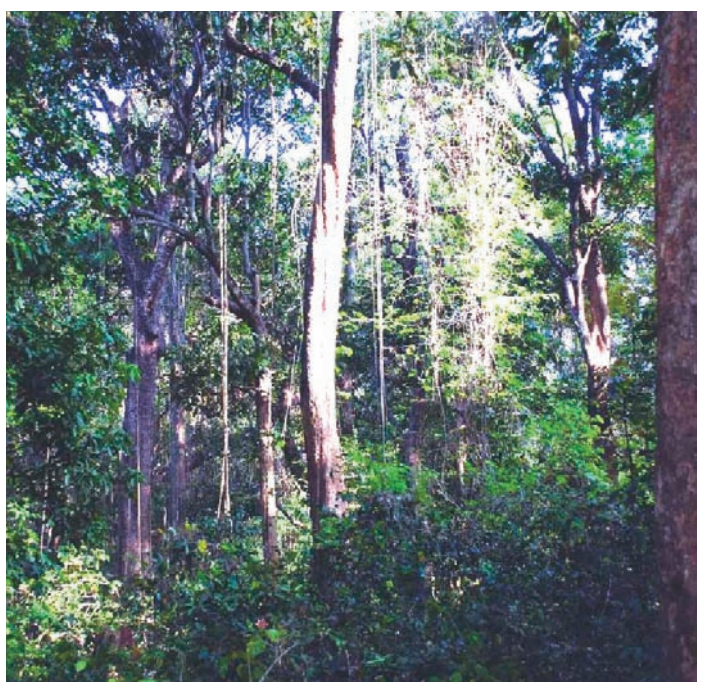
Encroachment crisis threatens ecology, food and water security

By: V K Bahuguna

The forest resources of India have always been a victim of encroachments ever since India attained freedom in 1947. Because of land hunger and involvement of politicians and social activists, the encroachments on forests have been given different colour and explanation by different groups. It is a well-known fact that India's food and water security is dependent on a healthy forest resource. The forest land encroachment has evolved into a chronic environmental and socio-political crisis, eroding biodiversity, exacerbating climate vulnerability, and displacing tribal and rural poor communities. Driven by population pressures, economic demands, and weak institutional frameworks, this issue has been significantly worsened by political actions — ranging from populist policies to regulatory dilutions — that prioritise short-term gains over sustainable conservation.

As on March 2024, according to the report submitted by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in the National Green Tribunal, a figure of over 1.3 million hectares of forest land remains encroached across 25 States and Union Territories. These States and UTs are Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Chhatisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, Kerala, Lakshadweep, Maharashtra, Odisha, Puducherry, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, Mizoram and Manipur. States and UTs still to submit the data and details on forest encroachment are Bihar, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, Telangana, West Bengal, Nagaland, Delhi, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. Assam (3,620.9 sq km) and Madhya Pradesh (5,460.9 sq km) are worst affected, followed by Karnataka and Maharashtra. This represents a continuation of trends where India has lost significant forest cover, including 18,200 hectares of natural forest in 2024 alone, according to Global Forest Watch.

There have historically been various reasons for the encroachments on forests. Driven by land hunger, many communities cleared the forest for farming and housing, especially in tribal areas. Large chunks of forests are legally diverted for developmental purposes



like dams, irrigation, roads, railway and mining projects, and other developmental works. Urban expansion and illegal mining have also taken a great toll on the primary forests. Since 2014, over 1.73 lakh hectares of forest land have been approved for diversion for non-forestry purposes in India under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2024, as per the figures presented in Parliament. Illegal felling of trees by villagers, smugglers and poachers is also a very serious problem.

Forest reservation after the establishment of the Indian Forest Department in 1864 has always been a subject of debate and discussion, even among the British. Baden Powell, the British civil servant who also worked as Conservator of Forests in Punjab, had always espoused the cause of totalitarian control of forests due to ecological and economic reasons. Compared to him, the German forester Dietrich Brandis, who was appointed as Inspector General of Forests from 1864 to 1883, adopted a pro-people line and, because of him, while the reservation of forests was done, two-thirds of forests were left for the people's use.

However, in many places there were clashes, but by and large the scientific management of forests ensured better fire protection and soil and moisture conservation. The 1894 forest policy of the colonial regime subordinated forestry to agriculture and large tracts of forests were diverted for agricul-

ture for food production, but it also gave more control to the State for commercial exploitation, especially for expansion of the railway network. A lot of protection forests were created for soil, moisture, and water conservation which boosted agriculture.

However, this policy went topsy-turvy because of the First World War during 1914 to 1918 when the British Navy needed timber. The British tried to improve things by creating forestry training institutions and the Forest Research Institute, but the two World Wars heavily impacted the sound management of forests. After independence, the ex-princely states incorporated as reserve and protected forests were mostly degraded and also the cause of friction in many places. This friction continued, on the one hand, by the activists who claimed that the reservation process was bulldozed on people by the government.

This helped promote encroachments under political patronage until the Forest Conservation Act was enacted in 1980 after the 42nd Constitutional Amendment Bill brought forest and wildlife as concurrent subjects.

Forest and its biodiversity cannot speak for itself. Whatever the history, it is a fact that forests and foresters are treated as road blockers by most of the political parties who rule, as the concept of conservation clashes with the interests of voters and priorities for development. The situation becomes grim as the mineral, tribal and forest

maps overlap. Even after enactment of the Forest Rights Act in 2006, the encroachment problem has not subsided; rather, the degraded forests have increased to 28 million hectares.

The FSI report of 2023 clearly shows that more than 50 per cent of the natural forests have deficient regeneration. When this writer was IGF in the Ministry, only 3.5 lakh hectares of land were under encroachment before 1980 when the government agreed to regularise these encroachments, and around 13 lakh hectares were after 1980 in 2001. Now under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) 2006, the Ministry of Tribal Affairs website states that 50,75,083.51 acres of forests under individual rights have been vested to 23,86,670 families. Similarly, 181,98,863.89 acres of forests were vested as community rights to 1,21,705 communities. Naturally, the Act, at the behest of Gram Sabha, distributed and bartered away forests which were not encroached. The process is still going on despite nineteen years of enactment of the Act.

The Act is becoming a political tool to garner votes in the name of issuing land parcels to tribal families. There are reports of heavy encroachments all over and unless a last date is fixed for application submission, the medicine for correcting historical injustice is gradually becoming a 'poison' for the forests and the people dependent on forests.

It is high time that the RSS affiliate Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, which has been single-mindedly supporting this Act, realises and gives leadership so that genuine tribals do not suffer in the long term and must root for a deadline for filing applications. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is oblivious of the serious repercussions that are unfolding for the country's ecological, food, and water security. The mandarins in government must not fall prey to concerted attempts by foreign-funded NGOs to criticise the forest departments unfairly for meeting their vested agenda. The community rights can only become productive if they are made part of a sound working plan prescription. Planting trees is simple, but manning forests needs professional inputs. Indian forests are crying hoarse to stop further legal or illegal depredation of forests. Nature has started taking revenge, as witnessed in this monsoon. Time to think and think again. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

UNESCO recognition for Kerala's Varkala Cliff sparks celebration — and unease

By: K A Shaji

On a late monsoon morning, the sandstone cliffs of Varkala glisten under subdued light, their rust-red faces streaked with centuries of salt spray and rain. Below, the Arabian Sea churns restlessly, hurling waves at the cliff's base before retreating. Above, coconut palms bend in the breeze, pilgrims descend barefoot to the Janardana Swamy temple beach and fishermen mend their nets for uncertain journeys ahead.

For centuries, this dramatic stretch of Kerala's coastline has been a place where geology, faith and livelihood meet. Now, UNESCO has placed the Varkala Cliff on its tentative list of World Heritage Sites. The achievement is a global recognition of what locals have always known, this is not just scenic land, but sacred, fragile and irreplaceable.

Rare geological treasure shows climate signs

Unlike Kerala's otherwise flat, sandy shore, Varkala is the only place where cliffs rise directly against the sea. Locally called Sivagiri Thuru, the formation belongs to the Mio-Pliocene age, dating back millions of years. Its laterite and sedimentary layers hold fossils and traces of ancient climates, as an outdoor archive of earth's evolution.

"Every band of clay, every fossil remnant tells a story," said Meera Menon, a coastal geologist at Kerala University. "But what makes the cliff scientifically invaluable also makes it vulnerable. Laterite crumbles under pressure. Any disturbance like roads, septic tanks, drainage can destabilise the whole structure. Once collapse is irreversible." Erosion is already evident. Monsoons have triggered landslides and cracks; buildings teeter at the edge. Experts warned that unregulated construction and climate-driven sea surges are accelerating damage.

The cliff is also a spiritual site. The Janardana Swamy temple, over two millennia old, anchors its southern end. Pilgrims gather in their thousands on Karkidaka Vavu day to perform rituals for ancestors, transforming the beach into one of Kerala's largest sacred spaces. Nearby stands Sivagiri Mutt, founded by social reformer Sree Narayana Guru.

"The cliff is more than land and stone; it is a witness to faith," says temple priest Narayanan Nam-



boothiri. Fisherfolk call it their guardian, a landmark that guides them home in storms.

Tourism's double edge

Over the past three decades, Varkala has become Kerala's backpacker alternative to Kovalam. Guesthouses, cafés and yoga centres line the cliff-top walkway. Tourism has brought money, jobs and cosmopolitan energy to what was once a sleepy coastal town.

But the boom comes at a cost. Waste spills untreated down slopes, septic tanks leak into porous soil and unauthorised buildings mushroom. During peak season, the narrow paths clog with crowds. "Tourism saved us from poverty, but it may kill the very cliff that sustains it," admitted Ramesh, a café owner. Activist S J Sanjeev was more blunt: "Kerala celebrates its assets while destroying them through greed. There's no carrying-capacity study, no regulation. Profit comes first, responsibility nowhere."

Anxiety among fisherfolk

At the cliff's base, where waves crash and nets are hauled in, worry runs deep. Fish catches have fallen, fuel prices have soared and erosion is eating into homes. Now UNESCO recognition brings fresh fears. "They say it's world heritage, but will we still have a place here?" asks Devaki, who sells dried fish on the beach. "Developers will come with money and push us out in the name of heritage." For fisherman Madhavan, the cliff once offered quiet protection. "When I was young, it was just sea and prayers. Now it is music, waste and crowds. If the cliff goes, so does our home."

Sea-level rise, stronger monsoons and unpredictable surges threaten Kerala's coast. In 2018 and 2019, back-to-back floods destabilised parts of Varkala's laterite layers. "The cliff has withstood natural forces for millennia," said Menon. "But human interfer-

ence and climate change create unprecedented stress. The question isn't if collapses will happen, but when — and how severe."

Governance failures

The tourism department markets Varkala as a heritage gem, but regulation lags. Building codes are flouted, waste management is weak and coordination between geologists, planners and local bodies is poor. Proposals for a geopark or heritage zone remain stuck in bureaucracy. "This is classic governance failure," said environmental historian Dr T R Ajith. "Kerala is good at branding, poor at protecting. Without strict regulation, UNESCO status could hasten destruction, not prevent it."

Some NGOs run awareness campaigns for visitors and a few cafés practise waste segregation and eco-friendly toilets. Schools are taking students on field trips to learn geology firsthand. The state has promised a comprehensive management plan, though details are scarce. "The cliff's future depends on defining carrying capacity, regulating construction, involving locals and adapting to climate change," said Sanjeev. "Anything less is tokenism." As the sun sets, painting the cliffs crimson and the sea gold, Varkala's paradox is clear. It is a place where fragility itself draws pilgrims, scientists, tourists and locals. But its survival hinges on choices made now.

"The cliff holds memory, faith, livelihood and science woven together. Recognition is only the first step. What follows will decide if Varkala endures as a wonder or becomes a cautionary tale," said Sanjeev. The years ahead will test Kerala's ability to balance pride with responsibility, profit with preservation. For fisherfolk, pilgrims, scientists and future generations, the cliff's fate will determine whether humanity can live with its heritage, or consume it. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

NATO warns Russia to use all means to defend against airspace breaches

'Russia should be in no doubt', warns NATO and allies

BRUSSELS, Sept 23: NATO warned Russia on Tuesday that it would use all means to defend against any further breaches of its airspace after the downing earlier this month of Russian drones over Poland and Estonia's report of an intrusion of Russian fighter jets last week.

The September 10 incident in Poland was the first direct encounter between NATO and Moscow since the war in Ukraine began. It jolted leaders across Europe, raising questions about how prepared the alliance is against growing Russian aggression.

Estonia said three Russian fighter jets entered its airspace for 12 minutes on Friday without authorisation, a charge that Russia has rejected.



"Russia should be in no doubt: NATO and Allies will employ, in accordance with international law, all necessary military and non-military tools to defend ourselves and deter all threats from all directions," the alliance said in a statement.

commitment to Article 5 of its founding treaty that an attack on any one ally must be considered an attack on them all.

The allies provided no details about what measures they might take.

The statement came after Estonia requested formal consultations under Article 4 of NATO's treaty that requires a meeting whenever one of the alliance members believes its territorial integrity, political independence or security is threatened.

On Monday, Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that Poland would "without discussion" shoot down flying objects when they violate Polish territory. It's not entirely clear whether other allies endorse that approach. (AP)

China's top defence scientist held for corruption



BEIJING, Sept 23: A top Chinese scientist, who specialised in developing semiconductor chips for weapon systems, has been detained by anti-corruption authorities, his company Zhejiang Great Microwave Technology said.

The company said in a statement it had "learned on September 21 from the family of Yu Faxin, the company's actual controller and chairman, that Yu has been subjected to detention measures by the Supervisory Commission of Huangshi", the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Tuesday.

Yu is also a distinguished professor at Zhejiang University's School of Aeronautics and Astronautics in Hangzhou.

He is an expert in microwave and millimetre-wave radio frequency technology and has overcome technical hurdles in the areas of communication, navigation and radar tech, according to the Post report.

Yu also works on process technology for semiconductor materials, including gallium nitride and gallium arsenide compounds, according to the university.

Since he took over power in 2012, President Xi Jinping, who heads the ruling Communist Party, the military and the Presidency, has continuously carried out

an anti-corruption campaign purging, punishing and sacking scores of generals of the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

China's parliament on Friday expelled four top PLA generals as part of a widening campaign against corruption in the military ranks.

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress - China's parliament - announced that the generals had been dismissed as deputies of the House.

The Great Microwave Technology's statement said, while Yu was "temporarily unable to fulfil his responsibilities as the chairman", the company would operate as normal with "other directors and senior management performing their duties normally".

The statement did not give further details. The company said in its 2024 annual report that it was a major supplier of radio frequency transceivers and chips for wireless communication, power management integrated circuits for satellite communication and space target monitoring radar, as well as microsystems for data links.

In addition, it said its chips were widely used in military equipment, some of which was showcased in the 70th National Day military parade in 2019 and at exhibitions of military-civilian integration and hi-tech achievements. "[Our products] provide effective communication support for the informatisation and modernisation of national defence, and play an important role in the rapid development of domestic equipment," it said, the Post reported. In the field of satellite internet, the company said its products had helped to reduce the size and weight of satellites and payload systems. "The company has established itself as one of the most important suppliers of domestically produced basic components, with a significant advantage in both market share and positioning," the annual report said. (PTI)

Military-run Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger pull out of key international court

BAMAKO(MALI) Sept 23: Ruling military juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger say the three countries are withdrawing from the International Criminal Court, accusing the global tribunal of what they say is selective justice.

The pullout was not unexpected in the wake of the coups that brought the juntas to power in the three western African countries. The ICC, based in The Hague, is the world's permanent global tribunal for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Since the coups, the three countries' military leaders abandoned longtime military partners, including the West and the West Africa regional bloc. They have established new alliances, mainly with Russia, whose President Vladimir Putin faces an arrest warrant by the ICC over Russia's war in Ukraine.

In a joint statement late on Monday announcing their withdrawal, the three said the ICC has become an "instrument of neocolonial repression in the hands of imperialism," without elaborating on the allegation. (AP)

Vedas were written almost 2000 years before Jesus walked the earth, remarks a hindu user

US politician sparks row over remarks on Hindu God Hanuman, faces backlash

HOUSTON, Sept 23: A US politician has sparked a controversy by describing Hindu God Hanuman as "false" and declaring America to be a "Christian nation", drawing sharp criticism from the community members and internet users.

Sharing a video of a 90-ft bronze statue of Hanuman located in Texas, Republican leader Alexander Duncan posted on social media last week, "Why are we allowing a false statue of a false Hindu God to be here in Texas? We are a CHRISTIAN nation!"

His remarks prompted a strong response from the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), which called out the Texas Republican Senate candidate and demanded action against him for what it described as anti-Hindu hate.

Tagging the official X handle of the Republican Party of Texas, the foundation wrote, "Hello @TexasGOP, will you be disciplining your senate candidate from your party who openly contravenes your own guidelines against discrimination - displaying some pretty sordid anti-Hindu hate - not to mention disrespect for the 1st Amendment's Establishment Clause?"



The Hanuman statue, also known as the Statue of Union, is located at the Sri Ashtalakshmi Temple in Sugar Land. It is North America's tallest Hanuman statue.

Duncan's remarks also drew widespread criticism from internet users. One user wrote, "Just because you're not Hindu, doesn't make it false. The Vedas were written almost 2000 years before Jesus walked the earth and are extraordinary texts. And there's obvious influences on Christianity...so it

would be wise to honour and research the 'religion' that predates and influences yours."

Another internet user said a statue doesn't count as "forcing their religion" on anyone.

"We may be a Christian MAJORITY nation but, if you try to claim that other beliefs are not allowed here, then you are advocating a theocracy which is antithetical to American values," the user posted on X.

The Texas GOP has not yet commented on the controversy. (PTI)

US, China 'talking past each other' on key issues, says US lawmaker visiting Beijing

BEIJING, Sept 23: The United States and China are talking past each other on key issues, said a US lawmaker leading a bipartisan congressional delegation to Beijing on Tuesday.

The visit, led by Rep Adam Smith, a Democrat on the House Armed Services Committee, is the first from the House of Representatives to China since 2019, and comes as tensions have risen between the two countries over trade, technology and opposing views on global conflicts.

The aim of the trip, Smith said, is to increase dialogue between the two sides.

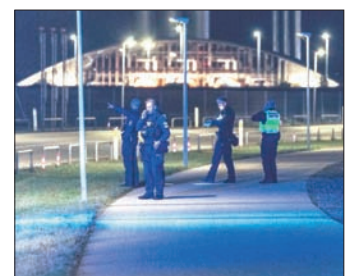
"You have to be willing to start the process of saying, Okay, this is where I'm coming from, where are you coming from?" And we're not even at that point yet. We're still sort of talking past each other," Smith said Tuesday.

The US delegation said they hoped China would take meaningful action to reduce the inflow of fentanyl into the US and they expressed concern over China's restrictions on the global supply of rare earths, according to a readout from the House Armed Services Committee on Monday.

Smith also said Tuesday he is concerned that the US and Chinese militaries are coming too close to each other operationally, and that he wants the Chinese side to engage in more dialogue.

"We've seen this with our ships and our planes, their ships, their planes, coming entirely too close to one another," he told reporters. "At the height of the Cold War, we had regular conversations, regular treaties with the Soviet Union." (AP)

Danish police investigates drones over Copenhagen Airport



COPENHAGEN(DENMARK), Sept 23: A skilled drone pilot flew two to three large unidentified drones over Copenhagen Airport on Monday night, shutting down the airspace for hours as the unknown perpetrator appeared to be showing off their capabilities over Scandinavia's largest airport, police said Tuesday.

Officials chose not to shoot down the drones because the risk was too great because of the airport being full of passengers, the planes on the runways and nearby fuel depots, Jes Jespersen, senior police inspector of the Copenhagen Police, said during a news conference.

Jespersen called the pilot "a capable actor" and said the culprit seemed intent on showing off their skills and possibly practicing their techniques. The drones disappeared after several hours.

There were no signs that the drone pilot intended to cause harm to anyone, he added. The drones' lights turned on and off and appeared to engage in different flight patterns.

"It all indicates that you are not out to attack anyone, but you are out to show off and maybe to practice," he said of the pilot. Still, authorities couldn't rule out the possibility of the drones being part of a Russian hybrid attack, he said.

The two to three drones appeared to have flown many kilometers to reach the airport. Investigators are looking at how the drones reached the airport whether it was by land or possibly on boats coming through the strategic straits into the Baltic Sea. (AP)

Trump to take aim at 'globalist institutions,' make case for his foreign policy record in UN speech

NEW YORK, Sept 23: Watched by the world, President Donald Trump returns to the United Nations on Tuesday to deliver a wide-ranging address on his second-term foreign policy achievements and lament that "globalist institutions have significantly decayed the world order," according to the White House.

World leaders will be listening closely to his remarks at the UN General Assembly as Trump has already moved quickly to diminish US support for the world body in his first eight months in office. Even in his first term, he was no fan of the flavour of multilateralism that the United Nations espouses.

After his latest inauguration, he issued a first-day executive order withdrawing the US from the World Health Organisation. That was followed by his move to end US participation in the UN Human Rights Council, and ordering a review of US membership in hundreds of intergovernmental organisations aimed at determining whether they align with the priorities of his "America First" agenda.

"There are great hopes for it, but it's not being well run, to be honest," Trump said of the UN last week.

The US president's speech is typically among the most anticipated moments of the annual assembly. This one comes at one of the most volatile moments in the world body's 80-year-old history. Global leaders are being tested by intractable wars in Gaza, Ukraine and Sudan, uncertainty about the economic and social impact of emerging artificial intelligence technology, and anxiety about Trump's antipathy for the global body.

Trump has also raised new questions about the American use of military force in his return to the White House, after ordering US airstrikes on Iranian nuclear facilities in June and a trio of strikes this month on alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea.

The latter strikes, including at least two fatal attacks on boats that originated from Venezuela, has raised speculation in Caracas that Trump is looking to set the stage for the ouster of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Some US lawmakers and human rights advocates say that Trump is effectively carrying out extrajudicial killings by using US forces to lethally target alleged drug smugglers instead of interdicting the suspected vessels, seizing any drugs and prosecuting the suspects in US courts.

"This is by far the most stressed the UN system has ever been in its 80 years," said Anjali K Dayal, a professor of international politics at Fordham University in New York.

Trump to hold one-on-one talks with world leaders
White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump would tout "the renewal of American strength around the world" and his efforts to help end several wars.

"The president will also touch upon how globalist institutions have significantly decayed the world order, and he will articulate his straightforward and constructive vision for the world," Leavitt said.

Following his speech, Trump will hold one-on-one meetings with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the leaders of Ukraine, Argentina and the European Union. He will also hold a group meeting with officials from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Turkey, Pakistan, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Jordan.

He'll return to Washington after hosting a reception Tuesday night with more than 100 invited world leaders.

Gaza and Ukraine cast shadow over Trump speech
Trump has struggled to deliver on his 2024 campaign promises to quickly end the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. His response has been also relatively muted as some longtime American allies are using this year's General Assembly to spotlight the growing international campaign for recognition of a Palestinian state, a move that the US and Israel vehemently oppose.

France became the latest nation to recognize Palestinian statehood on Monday at the start of a high-profile meeting at the UN aimed at galvanizing support for a two-state solution to the Mideast conflict. More nations are expected to follow.

Leavitt said Trump sees the push as "just more talk and not enough action from some of our friends and allies." (AP)

Russia, Ukraine fire drones, missiles and bombs as Zelenskyy seeks help at UN



KYIV, Sept 23: Russia said that it shot down three dozen Ukrainian drones heading toward Moscow while Ukraine said that Russian missiles, drones and bombs killed at least two civilians, as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy persevered with efforts to bolster international support for his country at a UN gathering of world leaders on Tuesday.

With his troops under strain on the front line after more than three years of fighting Russia's bigger invading army, Zelenskyy was due to begin meetings with leaders gathered in New York this week for the UN General Assembly.

Peace efforts set in motion by US President Donald Trump since he returned to office in January appear to have stalled. Trump's Alaska summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin and a White House meeting with Zelenskyy and key European leaders took place more than a month ago, but the war has continued unabated.

Zelenskyy said that he met late Monday in New York with Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy.

Kellogg and Zelenskyy discussed cooperation agreements on the manufacturing of drones and Ukraine's purchase of American weaponry, the Ukrainian president said on Telegram.

European leaders have supported Zelenskyy's diplomatic efforts, even as the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza is expected to take centre stage at the United Nations. Some European countries are alarmed by the possibility that the war could spread beyond Ukraine amid what they have called Russian provocations.

NATO allies will hold formal consultations at Estonia's request on Tuesday, after the Baltic country said that three Russian fighter jets entered its airspace last week without authorization.

Meanwhile, the full-scale war, which began on February 24, 2022, continues to take a heavy toll on Ukrainian civilians. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights said earlier this month that Ukrainian civilian casualties increased by 40 per cent in the first eight months of this year compared to 2024, as Russia escalated its long-range missile and localized drone strikes.

Also, a UN Human Rights Office report released Tuesday described the dire situation of thousands of civilians detained by Russia in areas of Ukraine it has captured.

"Russian authorities have subjected Ukrainian civilian detainees in occupied territory to torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, in a widespread and systematic manner," the report said.

Russian aircraft dropped five glide bombs on the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia during the night, killing a man, regional head Ivan Fedorov said Tuesday.

In the Odesa region of southern Ukraine, Russian ballistic missiles struck the town centre of Tatarbunary, killing a woman, regional head Oleh Kiper said Tuesday morning. (AP)

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China cancels schools, flights as it braces for Ragasa

Water level is forecast to rise about 2 metres over coastal areas

HONG KONG, Sept 23: Southern Chinese cities scaled back many aspects of daily life on Tuesday with school and business closures and flight cancellations as the region braced for one of the strongest typhoons in years that has already killed three people and led to the displacement of thousands of others in the Philippines.

Hong Kong's observatory said Super Typhoon Ragasa, which was packing maximum sustained winds near the centre of about 230 kph, is expected to move west-northwest at about 22 kph across the northern part of the South China Sea and edge closer to the coast of Guangdong province, the southern Chinese economic powerhouse.

China's National Meteorological Centre forecast the typhoon would make landfall in the coastal area between Shenzhen city and Xuwen county in Guangdong province on Wednesday.

Already hoisting a strong wind signal, the observatory in Hong Kong will issue storm warning signal No. 8, the third-highest in the city's weather alert system, on Tuesday afternoon and will assess



the necessity of upgrading the signal on Tuesday night or Wednesday morning.

The city categorises tropical cyclones with maximum sustained winds near the centre of 185 kph or above as super typhoons to make residents extra vigilant about the approach of more intense storms.

The water level is forecast to rise about 2 metres over coastal areas in the Asian financial hub on Wednesday morning, and the maximum water level in some areas could hit 4 to 5 metres above the

typical lowest sea level. The government said the water levels could be similar to those recorded during Typhoon Hato in 2017 and Typhoon Mangkhut in 2018 - estimated to have caused the city direct economic losses worth over 1 billion Hong Kong dollars USD 154 million and 4.6 billion Hong Kong dollars (about USD 590 million), respectively.

Residents living in flood-prone areas have already put sandbags and barriers at their doors, while others have put tape on windows and glass doors to brace for strong winds. Many people stockpiled food and daily supplies on Monday, as some market vendors reported that their goods were selling out fast.

Schools were closed in Hong Kong and the neighbouring city of Macao. Other cities such as the Chinese tech hub of Shenzhen and Foshan in Guangdong province and Haikou in Hainan province ordered class cancellations and a gradual suspension of other businesses and transportation.

Hundreds of flights were cancelled in Hong Kong. Shenzhen airport will halt all flights from Tuesday night. The Macao government activated its emergency response mechanism as it expected Ragasa would pass within 100 kilometers to the south of the casino hub on Wednesday morning.

At least six people were injured and over 7,000 people were evacuated in Taiwan when the typhoon swept south of the island, and over 8,000 households were impacted by a power outage, the Central News Agency reported.

In the Philippines, Ragasa left at least three people dead and five

others missing and displaced more than 17,500 people in flooding and landslides set off by the most powerful storm to hit the Southeast Asian archipelago this year, the country's disaster-response agency and provincial officials said.

The dead included a 74-year-old man, who died while being brought to a hospital after being pinned in one of four vehicles that were partly buried by mud, rocks and trees that cascaded down a mountainside onto a narrow road on Monday in the mountain town of Tuba in Benguet province, officials said. Two other villagers died in the storm, including a resident in Calayan town, a cluster of islands off northern Cagayan province where the super typhoon made landfall on Monday, officials said without providing details.

Ragasa, Tagalog for scramble, prompted the Philippine government on Monday to close schools and government offices in the densely populated capital region and 29 northern provinces. Fishing boats and ferries were prohibited from venturing into very rough seas and domestic flights were cancelled. (AP)

Arunachal DyCM interacts with shopkeepers, traders on benefits of GST



ITANAGAR, Sept 23: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Tuesday interacted with shopkeepers and traders at Naharlagun near here, and highlighted the benefits, processes, and compliance aspects of Goods and Services Tax (GST).

When GST was implemented, the indirect tax revenue of Arunachal Pradesh was ₹ 270 crore.

Today, it has reached ₹ 1,900 crore and an increase of 700 per cent, Mein said while leading the Next-Gen GST Prachar Abhiyaan at G-Extension market.

He said the number of GST taxpayers has also increased from just over 7,000 in 2017 to nearly 18,500 by mid-2025.

This increase is due to wider digital access, simplified registration processes, and efforts to bring small businesses into the formal economy, the Deputy CM said.

Terming the GST as 'One Na-

tion, One Tax', Mein said earlier there were many different tax systems. There was a time when Arunachal Pradesh citizens would get upset or shocked just by the mention of the word 'tax'.

He praised the Narendra Modi-led government for implementing the GST.

Lok Sabha MP Tapir Gao appealed to the people to use Swadeshi (indigenous) products to become a self-reliant and developed nation.

More than 300 items, including edibles, children's books, pencils and TVs, etc, have been made GST-free, which will benefit the general public, he said.

Expressing happiness over the GST reforms, IMC corporator Tarh Achak requested the business community to pass on the benefits to the customers.

He advised shopkeepers to sell their products at the correct rate, for which the government has brought out the reforms.

Rajya Sabha member and also GST Prachar Abhiyan convenor Nabam Rebia, Arunachal BJP president Kaling Moyong, MLAs Tojir Kadu and Techhi Kaso, Itanagar Municipal Corporation Mayor Tamme Phassang, and corporators, participated in the outreach initiative. (PTI)

Strategically important hydro project in Arunachal gets environmental clearance

Oju project largest in a series of dams proposed on Subansiri River

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: The central government has granted environmental clearance to the Oju hydroelectric project in Arunachal Pradesh's Upper Subansiri district, paving the way for the construction of one of India's largest hydropower ventures in a geologically sensitive and strategically important region bordering China.

The project, to be developed by Oju Subansiri Hydro Power Corporation Pvt. Ltd., envisages generating 2,220 megawatts of electricity through a run-of-the-river scheme with daily peaking capability.

It involves a 100-metre-high concrete gravity dam, a 14.12 km headrace tunnel and an underground powerhouse complex.

With an estimated cost of over Rs 24,942 crore, the dam is expected to produce 8,402 million units of electricity annually, according to the minutes of the meeting of the environment ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee held on September 12.

The Oju project is the largest in a series of dams proposed on the Subansiri River, often described as the lifeline of Assam, and has been in the pipeline for nearly two decades.

It has stirred concerns over its social and environmental consequences.

The entire 750 hectares required for the project is forest land, and though only nine families are listed for displacement, the impact on local tribal communities, who constitute nearly 98 per cent of the population in the area, is expected to be significant.

The public hearing held in September 2024



saw residents flag issues ranging from inadequate compensation to risks for fisheries, ecology, and sacred sites.

Many demanded that a fair share of the electricity generated be provided to the local population, according to the minutes of the meeting.

The public hearing also reflected mistrust over whether corporate social responsibility funds would actually reach local schools and health facilities.

Ecologists have warned that large dams in

the fragile Himalayan ecosystem could destabilise slopes, alter riverine ecology and endanger biodiversity.

The Subansiri basin falls in seismic zone V, the most vulnerable category.

Studies by the South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP) have in the past highlighted repeated monsoon damages at hydropower projects in the region, including the Subansiri Lower project downstream, calling them "ticking water bombs" for Assam.

The EAC itself deliberated extensively on the risks of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs), noting that potential peak discharges from upstream glacial lakes could overwhelm dam structures.

It directed the developer to include GLOF scenarios in the design flood estimates, establish a real-time early warning system and conduct community preparedness drills.

The committee has also mandated a post-commissioning environmental impact study after five years.

While there are no national parks or wildlife sanctuaries within 10 km of the project site, the dam will submerge 43.66 hectares of riverine forest and alter flows over an 18.6 km stretch. Nearly 17 lakh cubic metres of muck will be generated during construction, for which disposal sites covering 93 hectares have been identified.

The project proponent claimed that mitigation measures such as compensatory afforestation on 1,500 hectares and e-flow releases higher than those recommended in cumulative impact studies will protect river ecology.

About 1,500 jobs are expected during construction, with 300 permanent posts. The project proponent says the influx of workers and development of townships will stimulate trade and allied activities in the remote district.

Environmental groups and student bodies in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have consistently campaigned against large dams on the Subansiri, warning of downstream flooding and ecological collapse. (PTI)

Keyi Panyor District conducts 'Swachhata Hi Seva 2025' campaign



HT Correspondent

YACHULI, Sept 23: The District Administration of Keyi Panyor District successfully conducted the "Swachhata Hi Seva 2025 - Clean Public Spaces" campaign on Tuesday at the Mini Secretariat, Yachuli.

During the programme, the Mini Secretariat, Yachuli was formally identified as one of the Clean

Public Spaces in the district, reflecting a collective resolve to promote cleanliness and ensure a healthier civic environment.

The campaign witnessed active participation from community members, who joined in cleaning the premises, collecting waste, and spreading awareness about the importance of maintaining public spaces. Their efforts made the initiative a true people's movement.

Key officials present included Deputy Commissioner Smt. Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta, IAS, Deputy Commissioner Shri Likha Teji, Additional Deputy Commissioner, and other administrative officers of Keyi Panyor District. They encouraged the gathering and emphasised the importance of community-led cleanliness drives.

The District Administration expressed its heartfelt appreciation to the community and concerned departments for their enthusiastic participation and coordinated support, which contributed to the success of the programme.

Arunachal Cong terms PM's 'GST Bachat Utsav' a poll stunt

ITANAGAR, Sept 23: The Congress in Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday dismissed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement of "GST Bachat Utsav" as an election-time gimmick, accusing the BJP-led central government of using festivals and birthdays for political publicity while ignoring the economic distress caused by the Goods and Services Tax regime over the past eight years.

The opposition party claimed that the timing of the announcement, coinciding with Navratri celebrations and the Prime Minister's birthday, exposed it as "a spectacle to woo voters rather than genuine reform."

The Congress alleged that the Modi government's GST policies had led to high taxes on essential goods such as food, medicines and

education, increased compliance burden on small traders and MSMEs, and weakened state finances in the past years.

"GST Bachat Utsav is nothing but an election-time stunt. For eight years, the Modi government made life costlier with high GST on essentials. Now, on the eve of elections, it wants to project itself as a saviour," Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) spokesman Chera Taya said in a statement.

Modi had addressed the nation on Sunday on the eve of the new GST rates roll-out from the first day of Navratri, lauding it as the "GST bachat utsav" for shoppers as prices of a wide array of items have gone down.

The Congress' statement said that the party has consistently demanded

that GST be a rational, transparent and citizen-friendly regime.

The party asserted that the new "Next-Gen GST 2025" risked becoming a repackaging exercise unless the government extended GST compensation to states for another five years, simplified the tax structure, and ensured a zero slab for essentials.

It claimed that reducing slabs to 5 per cent and 18 per cent would push many items from the 12 per cent bracket into the higher category, making them costlier for middle-class families and small businesses.

The Congress further claimed that Arunachal Pradesh and other smaller states, which rely heavily on GST compensation, would face severe fiscal stress if the compensation fund is not extended beyond 2026. (PTI)

Governor extends greetings on Ke-Meh-Ha Festival



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 23: The Governor of Arunachal Pradesh, Lt General KT Parneik, PVSM, UYSM, YSM (Retd), extended warm greetings to the people of the State, particularly to the Idu Mishmi community, on the occasion of Ke-Meh-Ha Festival.

He expressed hope that the festival would usher in prosperity and tranquillity in society.

In his message, the Governor highlighted the significance of agriculture in the life of Arunachal Pradesh, stating that it has always been at the heart of the State's way of life and traditions.

He said that festivals are deeply connected with the cycles of cultivation and harvest, and through their rituals and community spirit, they not only bring joy but also serve as vital threads preserving and carrying forward the rich cultural heritage of the people.

The Governor urged the people to take pride in their customs, honour the wisdom of their forefathers, and pass on this legacy to future generations.

He especially called upon the youth to actively participate in the festivities, emphasising that such involvement keeps communities rooted in their identity while strengthening social bonds.

"On this special day, I join my Idu Mishmi brethren in offering prayers to Apeh-Mili and Apeh-Gonlo, seeking their blessings for abundance, good health, and happiness for all," the Governor said in his message.

Rijiju mourns demise of Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 23: Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju has expressed deep sorrow over the demise of singer Zubeen Garg, describing him as a "shining star" and a cultural phenomenon whose songs in many languages touched people across the Northeast, including Arunachal Pradesh. Rijiju, while speaking to the media, said that the untimely and tragic death of Zubeen Garg has saddened the entire nation.

He stated that Garg will always be remembered and will continue to inspire younger generations with his music and artistic legacy.

Comparing Garg's contribution to that of the legendary Bhupen Hazarika, the Union Minister underlined the deep bond the late singer had with Arunachal Pradesh.

"I pray to the Almighty for the eternal peace of the departed soul, and at the same time I pray to the Almighty to provide strength to the bereaved family at this hour of crisis," Rijiju said.

Confirming his presence at the funeral, Rijiju announced that he left Itanagar for Guwahati on Tuesday morning to attend the last rites, representing the central government and paying homage to the late artist.



It may be mentioned that Zubeen Garg, the renowned singer and cultural icon from Assam, passed away at the age of 52 while swimming in the sea in Singapore on Friday.

His sudden demise occurred a day before he was scheduled to perform at the North East India Festival (NEIF). The Assam Government has announced that Zubeen Garg will be cremated with full state honours on September 23 at a village near Guwahati.

Garg, who leaves behind a vast repertoire of songs across various languages, will continue to be remembered for his voice and the cultural impact he created across the region.

BJP Arunachal Pradesh refutes APCC allegations on PM Modi's rally

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 23: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Arunachal Pradesh has strongly refuted the allegations made by the Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) regarding the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the state and his public rally at IG Park, Itanagar, on September 22. In a statement issued on Monday, the BJP described the APCC's remarks as "misleading and politically motivated," asserting that the Prime Minister's rally was historic and marked by the laying of foundation stones for projects worth over ₹ 5,100 crore.

The party maintained that the programme was aimed at promoting progress for Arunachal Pradesh and contributing to the development of the nation, contrary to the Congress claim that the event was used only to "attack Congress and promote himself." The BJP said the people of Arunachal Pradesh had witnessed Congress's legacy of failure during its long years of rule. According to the statement, the Congress party left behind corruption, neglect of basic infrastructure, and policy paralysis that hindered the state's growth.

It accused Congress leaders of lacking the political will to develop Arunachal Pradesh, citing former Defence Minister AK Antony's statement in Parliament acknowledging fear of China as an obstacle to development. The BJP contrasted this with what it called "transformational develop-

ment" under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the double-engine government. It pointed to several major achievements including the completion of the Hollongi Greenfield Airport, upgrades to Tezu, Pasighat and Ziro airports, the extension of rail connectivity from ICR to the rest of the country, the construction of the Trans-Arunachal Highway linking district headquarters, and the double-lane road between Karsingsa and Hollongi.

The statement further noted the construction of tunnels, road connectivity to previously unconnected constituencies such as Tali and Vijaynagar, and the sanction of ₹ 45,000 crore for the Frontier Highway, described as one of the largest infrastructure investments in the state's history. It also cited advances in healthcare, education, digital infrastructure, and youth empowerment, as well as record funding for border area development under the Vibrant Village Programme and the establishment of six Advanced Landing Grounds to strengthen national security.

Dismissing the APCC's accusations of misuse of state resources and coercion of government employees, the BJP said such claims were "baseless" and reflective of Congress's own past misuse of power. It maintained that the IG Park event was part of the launch of Next-Gen GST reforms and that thousands of citizens had attended voluntarily to show their support for the Prime Minister's leadership.

Tage Taki urges farmers to avail benefits at training on mushroom entrepreneurship, banana fibre enterprise

HT Correspondent

KIMIN, Sept 23: The DBT-APSCS&T Centre of Excellence for Bioresources and Sustainable Development (CoE for BRSD), Kimin, inaugurated a three-day training programme on "Embark Your Mushroom Entrepreneurship Journey & Banana Fibre Enterprise Development" on Tuesday.

The inaugural session began with a welcome address and programme briefing by Debajit Mahanta, Project Director, DBT-APSCS&T CoE for BRSD, Kimin, who emphasised the immense potential of mushroom cultivation for entrepreneurship.

He noted that the training programme could be a significant step towards promoting mushroom-based enterprises in the state.

Prof Sandeep Das, Head, Department of Biotechnology and Director, Technology Incubation Centre, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, Assam, delivered a keynote address on mushroom cultivation.

He highlighted the diverse by-products from mushrooms, includ-



ing noodles and pastas, and stressed the importance of using spent mushroom substrate as organic manure, soil conditioners, and even in new mushroom-growing cycles, thereby reducing costs and waste.

Guest of honour, additional deputy commissioner of Kimin, Ocean Gao, APCS, underlined the role of entrepreneurship in rural empowerment.

He emphasised that in any business, patience and etiquette remain the true keys to sustainable

growth.

Chief guest, former minister and chairman of the Arunachal Pradesh State Council for Science & Technology, Tage Taki, stressed the pivotal role of farmers in driving the nation's economy.

He said that empowering farmers was essential for building self-reliant communities and making the nation truly Atma Nirbhar.

He appealed to the farmers to avail benefits from the training programme and to establish close linkages with the Centre of Excel-

lence for Bioresources and Sustainable Development, Kimin, for technical guidance and further support.

The inaugural session concluded with a vote of thanks by Pompi Das, Scientist-B, DBT-APSCS&T CoE for BRSD, Kimin, who expressed gratitude to the dignitaries, experts, participants, and the organising team.

A total of 23 participants attended the training, including eight farmers and Self-Help Group members from Liromoba and Yomcha areas of West Siang, five members from Organic Farmers Producers Company FPO from Rupa, West Kameng, and nine prospective entrepreneurs from Kimin in Papum Pare district and the Itanagar Capital Region, alongside scientists, researchers and officials of the CoE for BRSD, Kimin.

Over the three-day course, the participants will receive technical knowledge, hands-on experience, and entrepreneurial insights in mushroom cultivation and banana fibre enterprise development.

Capital Administration expresses gratitude for successful conduct of PM's visit

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Sept 23: The visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Indira Gandhi Park, Itanagar, on September 22 was conducted smoothly and successfully in a dignified manner, marking a historic and proud moment for Arunachal Pradesh.

The event was made possible through the collective efforts of various departments, agencies and officials working tirelessly in close coordination.

On behalf of the Chief Secretary, Capital Region Deputy Commissioner Toko Babu conveyed deep gratitude to the Principal Secretary, DGP, Commissioners, Secretaries, and Heads of Departments of the State Government for their guidance, support, and constant monitoring, which ensured the flawless conduct of the programme.

He said that the grand success of the high-profile event was a proud and historic moment for the people of the Capital Region and the State as a whole.

The District Administration of ICR also conveyed special thanks to Papum Pare Deputy Commissioner Vishaka Yadav, IAS, and Superintendent of Police Taru Gusar, IPS,



along with other officers, for their proactive support and valuable contribution to the smooth organisation of the Prime Minister's programme.

The Deputy Commissioner also extended special thanks to Administrative Officers, staff, and the State Police led by DGP Anand Mohan, IPS, along with Special Executive Magistrates, Executive Magistrates, security agencies, Fire and Safety personnel, PWD, CD-A and CD-B, Highway, Power, PHED, Forest, Protocol, Tax, Excise, Narcotics and GST Department, DMO and Health Officials, NIC State and District Units, BSNL, Doordarshan Kendra,

officers and officials of the Capital Administration, programme core team, and the event management team and staff members who contributed directly or indirectly to the successful conduct of the event.

The District Administration stated that the Prime Minister's visit was a proud moment for the people of Arunachal Pradesh, and its successful conduct reflected the spirit of unity, professionalism, and cooperation among all stakeholders.

It also expressed hope for continued support and collective commitment in all future assignments of public importance.

'Future of youth related to future of country'

Cutting down on imports and increasing exports biggest form of nationalism: Gadkari



MUMBAI, Sept 23: Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said on Tuesday that reducing imports and increasing exports is the most significant form of nationalism.

Addressing an event here, Gadkari said that a country advancing in knowledge and research will

emerge as a 'Vishwaguru', stressing the need to link education and innovation with national development.

"The most important thing to make India Vishwaguru is knowledge. Every country that progresses in the world does so because of knowledge and research. A lot of research is going on in defence, agriculture, and information technology sectors," he said.

Noting that wars were earlier fought with soldiers and tanks, Gadkari said drones and missiles are now being used, indicating the shift in global dynamics towards knowledge-driven strategies.

The BJP MP stated Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set a goal of making India a five trillion-dollar economy and the world's third

largest.

"To achieve this, it is important to focus on knowledge and research, and ensure that the education we receive is relevant to our lives," he added.

"The future of youth is related to the future of the country. The things we import...conducting research on them, reducing imports, and increasing exports is the biggest form of nationalism," Gadkari said.

He emphasised that research in material sciences and technology would help reduce dependency on imports. Gadkari added that the world has shown interest in India's heritage, history, culture, and knowledge of yoga, and that the country must ensure that its knowledge benefits society and the nation. (PTI)

ED records statement of cricketer Yuvraj Singh in online betting app case

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Former Indian cricketer Yuvraj Singh on Tuesday appeared before the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for questioning in a money laundering case linked to an online betting app named 1xBet, officials said.

Singh (43), wearing a white T-shirt and pant, reached the agency's office in central Delhi around 12 noon accompanied by his legal team.

The investigating officer of the case questioned the all-rounder and left-hand batter and recorded his statement under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), the officials said.

An influencer named Anveshi Jain also appeared before the ED for questioning in the same case.

The federal probe agency has questioned former cricketers Suresh Raina, Shikhar Dhawan and Robin Uthappa apart from former TMC MP and actor Mimi Chakraborty and Bengali actor Ankush Hazra over the last few weeks as part of this investigation.

Actor Sonu Sood has been summoned for Wednesday by the ED in the same case.

The investigation into the operations of the 1xBet betting app is part of the ED's wider probe against such platforms on allegations of duping numerous people of crores of rupees and reportedly evading a huge amount of direct and indirect taxes.

According to Curacao-registered 1xBet, it is a globally recognised bookmaker with 18 years in the betting industry.

The brand's customers can place bets on thousands of sporting events, with the company's website and app available in 70 languages, as per the company information available on its website.

Some more sportspersons,



movie actors, online influencers and celebrities are expected to be questioned by the agency in the coming days as part of this probe.

The ED may also soon initiate the process to attach assets of individuals in this case who are found using the alleged proceeds of crime generated from the promotional activities of the app. A chargesheet will be filed subsequently before a court, as per the sources.

The agency's line of investigation, according to sources, is to know from the celebrities as to how they were contacted by the said betting company seeking their endorsement, the nodal person(s) for contact in India, the mode of payment (cash through hawala or banking channel) and place of the payment (in India or abroad), etc.

The agency, while recording the statements of the cricketers and actors, is understood to be asking them if they knew that online betting and gaming was illegal in India. It has also asked them to furnish a copy of their contracts and all relevant email and paper documentation made by them with 1xBet.

The agency is also looking at the end use of the money taken by the celebrities to check if any of them can be categorised as the "proceeds of crime" under the PMLA, according to the sources.

The Union government recently banned real money online gaming in India by bringing a legislation.

The ED, during a recent national meeting of its senior officers in Jammu and Kashmir, has also decided to initiate "focused strategies" to investigate financial crimes arising from this sector linked to alleged illegal betting and gaming. According to estimates by market analysis firms and probe agencies undertaken before the government ban, there were about 22 crore Indian users in various such online betting apps out of which half were regular users.

The online betting app market in India was estimated to be worth over USD 100 billion which was stated to be growing at the rate of 30 per cent, according to experts.

The government has told Parliament that it has issued 1,524 orders from 2022 till June 2025 to block online betting and gambling platforms. (PTI)

Allahabad HC stays probe against 558 aided madrassas

PRAYAGRAJ, Sept 23: The Allahabad High Court has stayed a probe against 558 aided madrassas in Uttar Pradesh by the Economic Offences Wing.

The probe of alleged violation of human rights was being conducted by the Economic Offences Wing in pursuance of a direction issued by the National Human Rights Commission based on a complaint made by a man named Mohammad Talha Ansari against these madrassas.

Challenging the direction as well as the inquiry, a petition was filed before the high court seeking to quash the orders of the NHRC dated February 28, April 23, and June 11.

The petition further prayed for quashing a consequential government order of April 23 for the inquiry.

On Monday, a bench of justices Saral Srivastava and Amitabh Kumar Rai while staying the orders issued notice to the NHRC as well as to the complainant, fixed November 17 as the next date of hearing.

It was submitted before the court that under Section 12 of the Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993, the functions of the commission are specifically enumerated.

It was further submitted that Section 36(2) of the Act clearly provides that the commission shall not inquire into any matter after the expiry of one year from the date on which the alleged act constituting violation of human rights is said to have been committed.

It was also submitted before the court that under Section 12-A, the commission may inquire suo motu, or on a petition presented by a victim or any person on his behalf, or on the basis of any direction or order of any court.

However, in the present case, none of the conditions stipulated under Section 12-A is attracted. The petition further urged that the complaint is silent regarding the date of the alleged act constituting violation of human rights and since the averments made therein are vague and do not disclose any specific date, it is not possible to ascertain whether the complaint was filed within one year from the date of the alleged violation. (PTI)

Indore building collapse

Tenant claims he had warned landlord about imminent danger

INDORE, Sept 23: The landlord had been warned a week ago about the dilapidated condition of the three-storey building in Ranipura here that collapsed on Monday night, claiming two lives, a tenant claimed on Tuesday.

Two members of a family died in the incident while 12 injured persons were pulled out from the debris, according to officials.

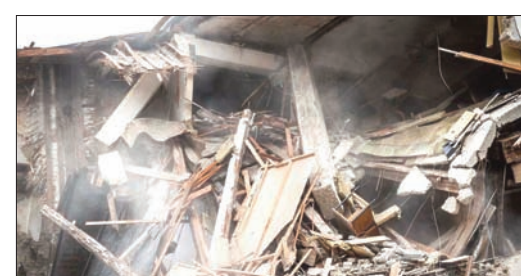
Three front rooms of the building were rented out while 22 members of landlord Sammu Ansari's family occupied the rest of the building, located in a densely populated area.

One of the rooms was rented by electrical goods businessman Shashank Gupta who used it as a warehouse.

"Eight days ago, after seeing the condition of the building, I told Ansari twice or thrice that it could collapse any moment, and he should be careful. The shutter of my warehouse had slid down on its own, which alerted me," Gupta told PTI as he visited the spot on Tuesday.

As the landlord ignored his warning, he rented two warehouses elsewhere and moved 70 percent of his goods there, Gupta added.

"If it had not rained on Monday, I would have moved the remaining goods too," he said, adding that he had already decided to vacate the warehouse.



Rainwater flowing down the Jawahar Marg which entered the basement and burrowing by rats caused the building's foundation to weaken over a period of time, Gupta said.

Mohammad Amil Ansari, who lives nearby, also said that the landlord had been warned by the tenants about the danger.

"Eight members of Ansari's family were outside at the time of the collapse. Had they been inside, the tragedy could have been even worse," he said.

A five-hour rescue operation ended early Tuesday morning, officials said, adding that the 12 injured persons have been admitted to the Government-run Maharaja Yashwantrao Hospital in the city.

The deceased were identified as Alifa (20) and Fahimuddin Ansari alias Fahim (40). (PTI)

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Vande Bharat Sleepers to be launched once second train arrives by Oct 15: Vaishnav



NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav on Tuesday said the Vande Bharat Sleeper trains will be launched once the second train is ready for regular service.

One train is ready for launch at Shakur Basti Coaching Depot in Delhi after undergoing necessary trials and testing, according to officials.

Briefing the media, Vaishnav said that the second train is being manufactured and will possibly be ready by October 15, 2025.

"Both the trains will be launched together," he said.

The minister emphasised that the second train is important to maintain the continuity of regular services.

"That's why we are waiting for a second rake. Once we get it, we will decide any route and start operations," Vaishnav added.

Speculation is rife that the trains will be launched between New Delhi and Patna as Bihar is going to polls by the end of the year.

Vaishnav, along with Minister of State for Railways Ravneet Singh Bittu, briefed the media on the status of the

existing and upcoming railway projects in Punjab.

They said the upcoming 18-kilometre Rajpura-Mohali line will connect the area to Chandigarh via the shortest route on the Ambala-Amritsar main line.

Besides providing direct connectivity between Rajpura and Mohali and reducing travel distance by approximately 66 kilometres, the rail link will also ease traffic on the existing Rajpura-Ambala route and shorten the Ambala-Morinda link.

Vaishnav said the Railway Ministry has also proposed to launch a new Vande Bharat train between New Delhi and Ferozpur Cantonment, which will cover the Faridkot, Bhatinda (W), Dhuri, Patiala, Ambala Cantonment, Kurukshetra and Panipat stations.

According to the Railways, the train will cover a distance of 486 kilometres between Delhi and Ferozpur Cantonment in 6 hours and 40 minutes. "I will request the Prime Minister to approve the Ferozpur-Delhi Vande Bharat train," Vaishnav said.

The ministers shared nine

important railway projects that were commissioned after 2014.

These include the new Nangal Dam-Daulat Pur Chowk line (61 kilometres, ₹ 672 crore), and the doubling of Chakki Bank-Bharoli line (3 kilometres, ₹ 15 crore), Jakhla-Mansa line (45 kilometres, ₹ 163 crore), JUC-SuchiPind line (4 kilometres, ₹ 24 crore), Ambala-Chandigarh line (45 kilometres, ₹ 338 crore), Mansa-Bhatinda line (49 kilometres, ₹ 216 crore), Amritsar-Chheharta line (7 kilometres, ₹ 31 crore), Jalandhar-Jammu Tawi line (211 kilometres, ₹ 850 crore) and Rajpura-Bathinda line (173 kilometres, ₹ 2,459 crore).

They also introduced seven railway projects under execution. These include Nangal Dam-Talwara new line (123 kilometres, ₹ 2,018 crore), Bhanupalli-Bilaspur-Beri new line (63 kilometres, ₹ 6,753 crore), and Ferozpur-Patti new line (26 kilometres, ₹ 300 crore), and the doubling of Mansa-Bhatinda line (80 kilometres, ₹ 449 crore), Ludhiana-Kila Raipur line (17 kilometres, ₹ 238 crore), Ludhiana-Mullanpur line (21 kilometres, ₹ 295 crore) and Alal-Himmatana line (13 kilometres, ₹ 174 crore). Vaishnav said 30 stations are being redeveloped under the Amrit Bharat station redevelopment scheme. Highlighting achievements in the trains' running schedules, Vaishnav said that 29 rail divisions -- including Malda, Mysore, Sialdah, Nagpur and Trivandrum -- have achieved 90 per cent punctuality. (PTI)

Armed forces to test capabilities of drones, counter-drone systems during exercise in Oct

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: The armed forces will test the capabilities of some of its drones and counter-drone systems during an exercise by the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) in the first week of October, a senior official said on Tuesday.

The exercise will be held somewhere in Madhya Pradesh from October 6-10, sources said. In his address at a conference on air defence systems here, Air Marshal Rakesh Sinha, Deputy Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (OPS) at HQ IDS, also spoke of the lessons drawn from Operation Sindoor and the need to "stay ahead" of the adversary in military thinking and planning.

The conference hosted in Delhi was themed on 'Counter UAVs & Air Defence Systems: The Future of Modern Warfare' and saw participation of senior military officers, representatives of various firms in the defence industry and domain experts.

A senior official of the HQ IDS said the exercise is named 'Cold Start'.

Later, interacting with PTI on the sidelines of the event, Air Marshal Sinha said the exercise



will be held in the Central Sector and will see participation of all three services.

Besides, industry partners, research and development partners, academia and others will be taking part in the upcoming exercise.

"We will be testing some of our drones and counter-drone systems during this exercise... with an aim to have an air defence system and Counter-UAS that is more robust," Air Marshal Sinha said.

Counter-UAS refers to Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems.

The exercise comes a little over a month after "Ran Samwad" -- a first-of-its-kind tri-service seminar on war, warfare and warfighting was held at the Army War College in Mhow in Madhya Pradesh.

Delivering the plenary address at the military seminar on August 27, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh emphasised the need to remain prepared for new innovations and unforeseen challenges while mastering existing technologies to stay ahead of the curve.

He dubbed the fusion of technology and surprise as the main reason behind the growing complexity and unpredictability of modern-day warfare.

"Future wars will not merely be battles of weapons; they will be a combined play of technology, intelligence, economy and diplomacy. The nation which masters the triangle of technology, strategy and adaptability will emerge as the true global power."

"This is the moment to learn from history and write a new one. This is the moment to anticipate the future and shape one," Singh said. (PTI)

IMD warns of heavy rain in Andamans due to cyclonic circulation

PORIT BLAIR, Sept 23: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a 'Cyclone alert' in the archipelago, due to a cyclonic circulation over the Bay of Bengal, which is likely to intensify from September 24, officials said on Tuesday. Local port warnings have been issued in the wake of the weather system, which is likely to cause heavy rainfall till September 25, they said. "Thunderstorm with gusty wind (40-50 kmph) and lightning is very likely to occur at one or two places over Andaman and Nicobar Islands on September 24," officials said. "Heavy rain (07-11 cm) is very likely to occur at one or two places over Andaman Island, and thunderstorm with gusty wind (40-50 kmph) and lightning is also very likely to occur at one or two places over Andaman and Nicobar Islands on September 25 and 26," he said. (PTI)

BJP MP Sudhakar's wife loses ₹ 14 lakh via 'digital arrest', money recovered



BENGALURU, Sept 23: In a swift operation, the Bengaluru police have recovered ₹ 14 lakh which BJP Chikkaballapura MP K. Sudhakar's wife Preeti had lost in a cyber fraud through 'digital arrest'.

According to police, the incident took place on August 26. Digital arrest is a cyber scam in which fraudsters impersonate police or enforcement agency officials and threaten victims through WhatsApp video calls, claiming they are booked in criminal cases.

Preeti (44), resident of Basaveshwarnagar, Bengaluru, received a WhatsApp call from cyber fraudsters posing as officials from the Mumbai Cyber Crime Police.

The fraudsters told her that there had been an illegal transfer of money from her bank account. They would send her money to the RBI for verification and would transfer it back to her account within 45 minutes. The scamsters also said that if she failed to transfer the money to the account they had specified, she would be arrested.

"By threatening, they got a total of ₹ 14 lakh transferred from the complainant's HDFC Bank account to an unknown YES Bank account and committed fraud," the police said.

Later, the same evening, Preeti lodged a complaint with the police. The complainant also made a call to the National Cyber Helpline (NCRP) number 1930 within the 'Golden Hour' and lodged a complaint, police said.

Accordingly, a case was registered and an investigation was taken up. As a result, the money transferred to the accused's account was frozen. On September 3, the 47th ACJM Court issued an order directing YES Bank authorities to return the frozen amount to the complainant's account.

"Acting on the order, the entire lost amount of ₹ 14 lakh was returned to the complainant," a press note said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police of West Division, Girish S, told reporters that efforts are on to trace the accused.

He also appealed to people not to panic if they fall victim to such scams. (PTI)

PM emphasises on technology for human empowerment

Ayushman Bharat effected revolution in public healthcare: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted on Tuesday that Ayushman Bharat, which was launched on this day in 2018, has effected a revolution in public healthcare, ensuring financial protection and dignity for its beneficiaries.

The medical insurance scheme provides annual health cover of Rs 5 lakh and covers the poor and all senior citizens above the age of 70.

Modi said on X, "Today we mark 7 years of Ayushman Bharat. This was an initiative that anticipated the needs of the future and

focussed on ensuring top quality as well as affordable healthcare for people. Thanks to it, India is witnessing a revolution in public healthcare. It has ensured financial protection and dignity."

He added, "India has shown how scale, compassion and technology can further human empowerment."

An official handle, tagged by Modi, said the government's showpiece welfare initiative covers over 55 crore citizens and lauded it as the "world's largest health assurance scheme". Over 42

crore Ayushman cards have been issued so far, it added.

It has led to the government's health expenditure rising from 29 per cent to 48 per cent, while out-of-pocket cost dropped from 63 per cent to 39 per cent, it added. "Millions of families saved from financial ruin during illness," it said.

When illness strikes, it shouldn't mean financial ruin, the statement said, claiming that the scheme has protected more than six crore families from poverty every year. (PTI)



Ground verification teams found only 2.50 MT and 8 MT Fresh inspection ordered on disappearance of 4000 MT of coal, Meghalaya govt tells HC

SHILLONG, Sept 23: The Meghalaya government has informed the high court that it has ordered a fresh inspection of coal dump sites in two villages in South West Khasi Hills district, after nearly 4,000 metric tonnes of illegally mined coal, detected in an aerial survey, could not be accounted for during ground verification.

A final report is expected within a month, the state government told the Meghalaya High Court through an affidavit on Monday.

The direction followed a probe initiated by the district deputy commissioner, in compliance with a July 24 high court order in connection with a PIL filed in 2022.

A three-member committee, comprising senior district officials, had been constituted to investigate the discrepancy.

"It is highly improbable for nearly 4,000 metric tonnes of coal to disappear without detection," the committee stated in its report.

It attributed the discrepancy to the region's difficult terrain and environmental conditions, noting that the errors were the result of unintentional gaps in information rather than negligence.

According to the report, the Meghalaya Basin Development Agency (MBDA)'s aerial survey had recorded 2,121.62 metric tonnes of coal in Dienggan village



and 1,839.03 metric tonnes in Rajaj village.

However, ground verification teams found only 2.50 MT and 8 MT, respectively.

The committee observed that the absence of geotagged coordinates likely caused inspection teams to miss the actual dump sites.

It recommended a re-inspection of both villages, with MBDA tasked with providing precise GPS coordinates to ensure accurate identification and verification of the coal dumps.

The committee also highlighted the persistent risk of cross-border smuggling and called for enhanced surveillance, stronger enforcement mechanisms, and coordinated inter-agency efforts.

During a review meeting on Au-

gust 11, the deputy commissioner clarified that earlier figures were based on incomplete data.

With updated information now available, a fresh verification will be carried out, and a final report will be submitted within a month.

The high court was also informed that MBDA and the Department of Mining and Geology have been directed to fully cooperate with the district administration in the verification process and provide all required data.

Former excise minister Kyrmen Shylla recently sparked public outrage after he jokingly remarked that the missing coal may have been washed away by monsoon rains, possibly into neighbouring Bangladesh.

His remarks triggered sharp con-

demnation from civil society organisations, citizens' groups, and opposition parties.

Critics called the explanation "absurd" and "irresponsible", accusing the former minister of trivialising a serious governance failure and undermining accountability.

The coal controversy is rooted in a larger, long-standing issue. The National Green Tribunal (NGT) had in 2014 imposed a blanket ban on unscientific and unsafe coal mining practices in Meghalaya, particularly rat-hole mining, citing grave environmental and safety concerns. The ban also extended to the transportation of illegally extracted coal, with limited exceptions allowed under court-monitored conditions.

Despite this, multiple investigations, including those by High Court-appointed panels, have revealed that illegal mining and coal transport have continued in many parts of the state, often under the radar of enforcement agencies.

In November 2023, a High Court panel confirmed that rat-hole mining was still being carried out in violation of the NGT ban.

The matter is being monitored by the High Court as part of ongoing efforts to enforce environmental laws and bring greater transparency and accountability to coal mining operations in Meghalaya. (PTI)

Tripura Assembly witnesses uproar over Royal Family Oppn's exclusion from PM's temple event



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Sept 23: A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated development projects at the Mata Tripurasundari Temple Complex, the Tripura Legislative Assembly today saw heated exchanges, with the Congress and ruling ally Tipra Motha Party accusing the government of sidelining both the Opposition and members of the erstwhile royal family.

Raising the issue during Zero Hour, Tipra Motha MLA Pathan Lal Jamatia termed Monday a "historic day" for the state but questioned why scions of the Manikya dynasty were kept out of the ceremony.

"The royal family has historic

significance. In temples like Tripura Sundari, Durga Bari and the 13 Goddess Temple, rituals are still performed in the name of Maharaja Pradyot Kishore Manikya Debbarma. Yet, he was not invited. I want to know why," Jamatia said.

MLA Biswajit Kalai echoed the sentiment, claiming the absence of royal family members had hurt the Tiprasa community. Ranjit Debbarma, another Tipra Motha legislator, added, "When we feel proud of MBB Airport, it is unfortunate no royal was invited yesterday. This will remain a black chapter for the state."

Responding to the allegations, Tourism Minister Sushanta Chowdhury clarified that the guest list was finalized by the Prime

Minister's Office (PMO), not the state government.

"Our East Tripura MP Kriti Devi Debbarma, elder sister of Pradyot, was included in the list but could not attend due to medical treatment. Several Tipra Motha leaders were present. As per protocol, the final list was approved by the PMO. The Opposition is trying to create controversy," he said.

Forest Minister and Tipra Motha leader Animesh Debbarma also confirmed that the issue of royal family representation had been discussed.

"I had suggested inviting Raj Mata Bibhu Kumari Devi. Finally, the PMO decided to invite Kriti Devi Debbarma to represent the royal family," he noted.

The Opposition, too, expressed discontent. Congress MLA Birajit Sinha alleged political bias in the invitations, asking, "Is the event and the temple only for the BJP?"

Concluding the debate, Power and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ratan Lal Nath admitted that while the state had initially prepared a guest list, the PMO made the final changes.

"We never intended to hurt anyone's sentiments. If anyone feels hurt, it is truly painful. We must be more cautious in the future," Nath said.

GST reforms to enable Manipur's people to purchase previously unaffordable items: BJP MP

IMPHAL, Sept 23: The lone Rajya Sabha MP from Manipur, Leishemba Sanajaoba, on Tuesday said that the GST reforms will lead to price reductions, enabling people of the state to purchase items that were previously unaffordable for them. Sanajaoba was speaking to reporters at the state party headquarters here.

"The GST reforms will strengthen the relationship between traders and consumers, and improve transparency. The reforms are satisfactory for every section of the society and will boost the economy," he said.

"The reforms will enable middle-class families of Manipur to purchase items that were previously unaffordable for them. Air conditioners and refrigerators are among the items that will be affordable. This is a welcoming development for Manipur as well as the temperatures in the state have significantly increased over the last few years," Leishemba said.

He lauded Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Finance



Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the reforms, and said the Centre is "pro-people".

With increased spending and more purchases, demand for items will increase, and so will production, leading to more employment opportunities, he added.

Effective September 22, Goods and Services Tax (GST) has become a two-tier structure of 5 and 18 per cent. The earlier rates of 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent have been clubbed into two rates of 5 per cent and 18 per cent, resulting in a reduced price of 99 per cent of daily use items. (PTI)

Tripura Govt working to narrow DA gap: Finance Minister

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Sept 23: The Tripura government is taking steps to gradually reduce the gap in Dearness Allowance (DA) for state employees, Finance Minister Pranajit Singha Roy informed the Legislative Assembly on Monday.

He was responding to a notice raised by MLA Gopal Roy during the mention session. The minister said the government, while keeping in mind the state's financial limitations, is working towards bridging the DA disparity and ensuring timely employee promotions through a permanent mechanism that is currently in the works.

Roy pointed out that the state had already increased the fitment factor from 2.25 to 2.57 in line with the Central Government's 7th Pay Commission, resulting in a 14.22% hike in basic pay.

"This revision benefits employees further with every DA increment," he said.

Highlighting other measures, the minister reminded the House that during the COVID-19 period, the government had extended Dearness Relief (DR) to employees and pensioners, and introduced cash in lieu of LTC.

He also noted that the earlier lack of policy to regularize fixed-pay employees was revised by the current government, which now allows regularisation after five years of continuous service, even across different posts.

On promotions, the minister acknowledged that legal hurdles had stalled the process for years.

However, the government introduced ad-hoc pro-



motions to provide relief and is now drafting a comprehensive policy for regular promotions.

A proposal is also being prepared to extend the benefits of the Chief Minister's Jan Arogya Yojana to all government staff.

Other employee welfare measures cited include raising the retirement age of TSR (Tripura State Rifles) jawans from 58 to 60 years, increasing ration money and dress allowance for TSR and police personnel, tripling the monthly pension of Home Guards, raising the festival advance from Rs 5,000 to Rs 20,000, tripling the festival grant compared to 2018.

"Our government is committed to the welfare of employees. Every step is being taken to reduce disparities and ensure benefits reach all sections," the Finance Minister said.

Mizoram CM reviews progress of highway projects

AIZAWL, Sept 23: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Tuesday reviewed the progress of the highway projects undertaken by the NHIDCL in the state, officials said.

He told representatives of the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) that a large number of highways across Mizoram are in poor condition, with potholes and surface scratches.

He emphasised the importance of carrying out timely and proper repairs during the contractor's liability period.

Lalduhoma also said that when new bypass roads are constructed, the existing roads passing through towns must be properly handed over to the state PWD.

He urged the NHIDCL to give top priority to NH-6/306 between Aizawl and Vairengte, which is the lifeline of the state.

NHIDCL's Regional Executive Director Adelbert Susngi said the issues raised by the CM will be pursued as soon as possible.

He also briefed the CM on various challenges being faced by the NHIDCL at work sites. (PTI)

3,518 illegal immigrants, mostly Bangladeshis, arrested in Tripura since 2022: CM Manik Saha

AGARTALA, Sept 23: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday said 3,518 foreign nationals, mostly Bangladeshis, were arrested in the state since 2022 for entering the state illegally.

Speaking on a calling attention notice by Tipra Motha Party MLA Ranjit Debbarma, Saha said his government was working to prevent infiltration from across the border.

He said that following the regime change in Dhaka, the state constituted special task forces (STFs) in all eight districts to stop infiltration, in line with the Centre's directives.

"The STFs are not only working against infiltration but also keeping a close vigil on potential terrorist activities, drug smuggling, fundamentalist groups and international crime," he said. (PTI)

CANSSEA, allied forums stage sit-in in Nagaland with 5 charters of demand

KOHIMA, Sept 23: The Confederation of All Nagaland State Services Association (CANSSEA), along with allied service organisations, on Tuesday staged a sit-in outside its office here in support of the nationwide call given by the All India State Government Employees Federation (AISGF).

CANSSEA President Zubemo Lotha Tsanglao said the protest was a continuation of the general strike held on July 9, and would continue "till the goals are achieved".

He said while AISGF had placed 11 demands at the national level, CANSSEA has adopted five specific to Nagaland, which has been submitted as a representation to the chief secretary.

The employees demanded the constitution of a State Pay Commission ensuring the benefits of the Eighth Central Pay Commission and periodical pay revision once in five years.

They are also asking for the re-

peal of the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority Act, scrap NPS/UPS, direct fund managers to return the amount deposited to the state government, and bring all subscribers under EPS-95 to a defined benefit pension system.

Implementing a comprehensive health insurance scheme with government support, ensuring cashless treatment in all hospitals for pensioners, regular and contractual employees under the CMHIS (Chief Minister's Health Insurance Scheme), and improve facilities in empanelled district hospitals is their third demand.

They have also asked for implementing in toto the eligibility criteria for induction/selection to the IAS cadre of Nagaland as per the vacancy circular of March 10 to ensure equity, meritocracy, and service security across cadres in state services.

Nagaland National Pension System Government Service Employees Forum, President, Avizo

Nienu strongly reiterated the demand to scrap the New Pension Scheme (NPS) and restore the Old Pension Scheme (OPS).

He warned that NPS endangered the future of employees and "might drag lakhs of people into the market", posing one of the biggest governance challenges for Nagaland.

"The government is silent and not responding to our representations. If this continues, it might lead our good governance to a failure," Nienu said, urging the state to find ways to restore OPS "for the welfare of employees and citizens of Nagaland."

Responding to queries, Tsanglao acknowledged that certain demands, such as the NPS-OPS reversal, required central government intervention, though some resource-rich states had already restored OPS.

He said CANSSEA would continue to support the AISGF's movement to scrap the PFRDA Act and roll back NPS nationwide. (PTI)

ROJB would serve as a knowledge hub to integrate scientific research, indigenous practices, and innovative policies

JICA reaffirms partnership with Nagaland for biodiversity conservation

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, Sept 23: The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) reaffirmed its long-term partnership with Nagaland in building a resilient and ecologically sound future.

Addressing the Resource Organisation on Jhum and Biodiversity (ROJB) launching workshop here on Tuesday, chief representative of JICA India Takeuchi Takuro highlighted the achievements of the Nagaland Forest Management Project (NFMP), supported by JICA, which include over 38,000 hectares of plantation and the formation of 429 self-help groups to strengthen community livelihoods.

Termining the ROJB workshop a milestone for Nagaland's forestry sector, Takuro stated that the ROJB would serve as a knowledge hub to integrate scientific research, indigenous practices, and innovative policies in addressing challenges related to jhum cultivation and biodiversity conservation.

In his address as special guest of the inaugural programme, MLA and adviser for tribal affairs & election Tovihoto Ayemi lauded the environment, forest & climate change department, the project team, and JICA for their dedication in making the initiative a reality.

He underlined the cultural, social, and eco-



logical significance of jhum cultivation, describing it as a way of life that sustains food security and community bonds.

Stressing the urgent need to address shrinking fallow cycles, declining soil fertility, and biodiversity loss, Ayemi said the ROJB is envisioned as a centre of excellence to generate knowledge, strengthen community action, and ensure coexistence between jhum and biodiversity.

Ayemi also launched the official website and logo of ROJB, marking the formal unveiling of the initiative.

On the occasion, two MoUs were signed with partner institutions to strengthen collaboration in research, policy development, and community engagement. Jayesh Bhatia, managing director, Intellectap, presented the project management consultancy perspective.

He emphasised the importance of evidence-based strategies, collaborative partnerships, and sustainable livelihood models to address ecological and social challenges of the Northeast.

He also highlighted the role of ROJB in promoting policy advocacy, knowledge management, and institutional networking.

STARRY TOUCH: MOHANLAL, SHAH RUKH, RANI MUKERJI, VIKRANT MASSEY CONFERRED NATIONAL AWARDS



NEW DELHI, Sept 23: New Delhi— President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday conferred National Awards for acting to Shah Rukh Khan, Vikrant Massey and Rani Mukerji while Malayalam superstar Mohanlal was honoured with the Dadasaheb Phalke lifetime achievement award in a ceremony that doffed its hat to mainstream popular cinema. Filmmakers Vidhu Vinod Chopra, who took home the best film prize for "12th Fail", and Karan Johar and Apoorva Mehra, who received the award for "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Kahaani" for best popular film providing wholesome entertainment, completed the starry ensemble at the 71st National Film Awards.

The best director award went to Sudipto Sen for "The Kerala Story".

The National Awards for 2023 were announced in August. It's the first National Award for friends and frequent collaborators Shah Rukh and Rani as well as for Vikrant. While Shah Rukh got it for his role in "Jawan", sharing his

win with "12th Fail" star Vikrant, Rani bagged it for "Mrs Chatterjee vs Norway".

There were whistles and loud cheers as Rani and Shah Rukh went up to receive their awards at the traditionally sober ceremony. Mohanlal, recognised for a remarkable career spanning five decades and more than 360 films, got a standing ovation from the crowd gathered at the city's Vignyan Bhawan.

"I got to know that when Mohanlal's name was announced for Dadasaheb Phalke, there was wave of happiness among people. It shows that he has made a space for himself in countless people's heart," the president said in her address after the award ceremony.

"He has presented the softest of the soft and toughest of the tough emotions quite naturally," Murmu added in a speech in which she congratulated all the winners and touched on various issues, including the plurality of Indian cinema, Indian sensibility and women-centric films.

"Now we see women in many places in cinema like actors and producers. I have seen films about mothers, women uniting against societal wrongs, and strong women who raise their voices. I salute these filmmakers on behalf of sisters and daughters.

Please thank your crews for your success, they are behind it," she said. Just like Indian literature is created in various Indian languages, the president said, Indian cinema is advancing in so many languages, dialects, regions and local environments. Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw spoke of the Make in India initiative of the government. "Equipment used in the film industry such as big cameras... should be made in India. We will be started a programme on this soon," he said. The minister also stressed on the need to create a live concert economy with proper policy support, uniform guidelines and easy permissions. (PTI)

KARAN JOHAR ON NATIONAL FILM AWARD: SO EMOTIONAL TO WIN THE SAME YEAR AS RANI AND SRK



NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Filmmaker Karan Johar on Tuesday said he is humbled, honoured and filled with gratitude after receiving the National Film Award for Best Popular Film Providing Wholesome Entertainment for his 2023 movie "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani".

The producer-director, known for hits like "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", "Kal Ho Naa Ho", "My Name is Khan", received the honour from President Droupadi Murmu. Apoorva Mehta, his partner at Dharma Productions, also received the honour.

Johar posted photos, which included one with Rani Mukerji who was honoured with Best Actress honour at the 71st National Film Award ceremony, on Instagram.

"So humbled and honoured to win the most POPULAR FILM PROVIDING WHOLESOME ENTERTAINMENT at the NATIONAL AWARDS @mib_india #71stnationalaward.. Apoorva @apoorva1972 and I are deeply grateful to our entire family @dharmafilms for being our soul and spine....

"So emotional to win in the same year as Rani and Bhai @iamsrk..." he wrote in the caption.

Johar also gave a shoutout to Ranveer Singh and Alia Bhatt, the lead actors of "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem

Kahaani". "Karan Johar this side and I am a fragile today... thanks to the love and recognition," he added.

This is Johar's third national award in a row and his fourth one overall. The moment marks a full circle for Johar who was nominated in the same category for his directorial debut, "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai".

"This is my third national award in a row. In 2021, we got it for 'Shershaah' and in 2022, we got best VFX for 'Brahmastra' and most wholesome and popular entertainer of the year this year. There's a lot of energy, excitement and inspiration in my heart right now and a lot of gratitude," he told Doordarshan at the National Awards red carpet.

"Whenever we get a national award, I feel like I have done something right to win over hearts, the audience, the jury and to reach this stage. A lot of respect and gratitude to the jury," he added.

In 2021 Johar won special jury award for "Shershaah", in 2022 he won the special award for best VFX for "Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva" and most wholesome and popular entertainer of the year this year for "Rocky Aur Rani...".

"Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani" was produced by Johar's Dharma Productions. (PTI)

Katrina Kaif-Vicky Kaushal announce pregnancy

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Bollywood actors Katrina Kaif and Vicky Kaushal on Tuesday announced that they are expecting their first child. The couple shared the announcement on their Instagrams. Both shared a polaroid where the two are looking joyfully at Katrina's baby bump.



"On our way to start the best chapter of our lives with hearts full of joy and gratitude," they wrote in the caption to the post.

Katrina and Vicky tied the knot on December 9, 2021 at a private ceremony in Rajasthan. Vicky most recently appeared in the period drama "Chhaava" and is set to feature in Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "Love and War" alongside Ranbir Kapoor and Alia Bhatt.

Katrina was last seen in the 2024 thriller "Merry Christmas" opposite Vijay Sethupathi. (PTI)

Thriller series 'Harlan Coben's Lazarus' to stream on Prime Video in October

LOS ANGELES, Sept 23: Streaming service Prime Video on Tuesday announced that its upcoming thriller drama "Harlan Coben's Lazarus" will premiere on its platform on October 22.

The OTT platform released the official trailer of the six-episode series, which is based on an original idea from New York Times best-selling author Harlan Coben and written with BAFTA-winner Danny Brocklehurst.

It features veteran British actor Bill Nighy and Daisy Jones & The Six star Sam Claflin.

"Lazarus" follows Joel Lazarus (Claflin), who returns home after the apparent suicide of his father, Dr Jonathan Lazarus (Nighy). His homecoming sets off a series of disturbing and unexplained experiences that draw him into cold-case murders and force him to confront the long-unresolved killing of his sister 25 years earlier.

The show also features Alexandra Roach as Jenna Lazarus, David Fynn as Seth McGovern, Karla



Crome as Bella Catton, and Kate Ashfield as Detective Alison Brown.

Coben and Brocklehurst serve as executive producers alongside BAFTA-winner Nicola Shindler and Richard Fee for Quay Street Productions, part of ITV Studios, as well as Claflin.

Wayne Che Yip directs the first two episodes and also executive produces, while Matt Strevens serves as producer. It is backed by Amazon MGM Studios and Quay Street Productions in association with Final Twist Productions. (PTI)

I have done something right to win over hearts: Karan Johar on National Award win

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Karan Johar on Tuesday said there was a lot of gratitude, excitement and energy in his heart to receive the National Film Award for his 2023 film "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani" for the best popular film for wholesome entertainment.

The producer-director, known for hits like "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai", "Kal Ho Naa Ho", "My Name is Khan", is in Delhi to receive the National award.

"This is my third national award in a row. In 2021, we got it for 'Shershaah' and in 2022 we got best VFX for 'Brahmastra' and most wholesome and popular entertainer of the year (award) this year. There's a lot of energy, excitement and inspiration in my heart right now and a lot of gratitude," he told Doordarshan at the National Awards red carpet.

"Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani", starring Alia Bhatt and Ranveer Singh, marked Johar's return to directing after 2016's "Ae Dil Hai Mushkil".

This is Johar's third national award in a row and his fourth one overall. The moment marks a full circle for Johar

who was nominated in the same category for his directorial debut, "Kuch Kuch Hota Hai".

"Whenever we get a national award, I feel like I have done something right to win over hearts, the audience, the jury and to reach this stage. A lot of respect and gratitude to the jury. I am excited, there are three words in our category, 'wholesome', 'popular' and 'entertainer' so what else does a director want? This is even more special because my first national award was in this category for 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai' (debut film). So after 27 years to come to the same category is an emotional moment for me," the filmmaker added.

In 2021 Johar won special jury award for "Shershaah", in 2022 he won the special award for best VFX for "Brahmastra: Part One - Shiva" and most wholesome and popular entertainer of the year this year for "Rocky Aur Rani...".

"Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani" was produced by Johar's Dharma Productions. (PTI)

Sanya Malhotra-led 'Kathal: A Jackfruit Mystery' gets National Award for Best Hindi Film

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: "Kathal: A Jackfruit Mystery", featuring Sanya Malhotra in the lead, on Tuesday won the Best Hindi Film honour at the 71st National Film Award ceremony.

Director Yashowardhan Mishra alongside producers Guneet Monga Kapoor and Ektaa R Kapoor, along with Monika Shergill, the Vice President of content of Netflix, attended the ceremony.

The film revolved around Malhotra's character, Mahima Basor, a quick-onher-feet cop from a lower caste on a mission to find two premium-quality jack-

fruits that go missing from a local politician's garden. It released on Netflix on May 19.

The director said the film's win highlights how simple stories "told with heart and authenticity, have the power to resonate far and wide".

"To be at the National Awards ceremony and hold this award for 'Kathal' is both humbling and joyous. This moment is a beautiful reminder that stories rooted in the everyday, told with heart and authenticity, have the power to resonate far and wide."

Monika Shergill said re-

ceiving the award is a "moment of great pride" for her.

"This honor is a tribute to Yashowardhan Mishra's distinct voice as a storyteller along with the writing brilliance of his co-writer. Ashok Mishra, the creative partnership of Balaji Telefilms and Sikhya Entertainment, and a film that captures both the humor and humanity of India's heartland."

Ektaa Kapoor said, "Attending the National Awards and celebrating Kathal's win is a magical moment for our entire team at Balaji. This story was created to shine a light on

authentic, quirky Indian narratives, and today's recognition makes the journey unforgettable."

Guneet Monga and Achin Jain of Sikhya Entertainment called the honour "nothing short of surreal" in the joint statement.

"To see a story rooted in the heartland of India, in Madhya Pradesh, find its place on this stage is a moment we will always treasure... This honour is a reminder of why we tell rooted, authentic stories, so that voices from every corner of India find their place in the spotlight," Monga said. (PTI)



PSG's Dembele wins the Ballon d'Or and Barcelona's Bonmati achieves award hat trick

PARIS, Sept 23: Ousmane Dembélé won the Ballon d'Or for leading Paris Saint-Germain to its first Champions League title and Aitana Bonmati received the women's award for a third successive year.

Dembélé succeeded Manchester City midfielder Rodri to become the sixth Frenchman to win it after Raymond Kopa, Michel Platini, Jean-Pierre Papin, Zinedine Zidane and Karim Benzema.

Bonmati won ahead of her Spain teammate Mariona Caldentey. She's only the third player in the award's history to win three in a row after Platini (1983-85) and Lionel Messi (2009-12).

The award capped a remarkable turn of fortune for Dembélé, who at one point last season was snubbed by PSG coach Luis Enrique for disciplinary reasons. But once repositioned as a No. 9, he became a scoring machine and was inspirational in PSG's historic Champions League campaign. The French club also completed a quadruple last sea-



son. Dembélé was praised after the Champions League final for the way he contributed to PSG's pressing and his ability to defend during the 5-0 rout of Inter Milan. He delivered 35 goals and 16 assists in 53 official matches last season, and was involved in 14 goals (8 goals, 6 as-

ists) in the Champions League in 15 appearances.

Dembélé received the Ballon d'Or from former winner Ronaldinho and teared up during his acceptance speech in which he asked his mother to join him on the stage.

"It's incredible to win a trophy

like this," he said in French. "I worked for the team to help win PSG's first Champions League (...). To then be rewarded with an individual trophy like the Ballon d'Or is truly exceptional."

Dembélé won ahead of teenage star Lamine Yamal. The forward,

who turned 18 in July, helped Barcelona win La Liga and the Copa del Rey last season and reach the Champions League semifinals. Yamal was given the Kopa award for the best under-21 player for the second straight year.

"I need to keep on working to win other awards in the future," Yamal said through a translator.

Dembélé was injured and able to attend the ceremony in Paris while his team lost at Marseille 1-0 in the French league. He was one of nine PSG players nominated for the men's award, including goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma, forward Désiré Doué, who scored twice in the Champions League final, and winger Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

Although Bonmati lost to England in a penalty shootout in the Women's European Championship final last summer, she was named the best player of the tournament, which she began just days after being hospitalized by viral meningitis. Bonmati's spot kick in the

shootout was one of two saved by England's Hannah Hampton, who was voted the best women's goalkeeper.

"Third time in a row here and I still can't believe it," Bonmati said "I owe Barcelona everything, this is the club of my life."

She won a domestic treble with Barcelona and also reached the Champions League final.

Barcelona has won the last five women's awards but it was expected an Englishwoman would win for the first time. England won the Euros and Arsenal took the Women's Champions League. But with five England players among the women's top 10 nominees, the highest placed was Alessia Russo at third. Barcelona forward Vicky Lopez won the women's Kopa trophy and Sarina Wiegman, who led England to European victory, took the Johan Cruyff award for best women's coach. On a great night for PSG, Luis Enrique won in the men's category. (AP)

Lavanya Jadon takes one-shot lead in 13th Leg of Hero WPG Tour



GURUGRAM, Sept 23: Lavanya Jadon overcame a late double bogey to take a one-shot lead in the 13th Leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here Tuesday.

Lavanya was one shot ahead of the experienced Amandeep Drall (74) and amateur Zara Anand (74) at the DLF Golf and Country Club.

Amateur Lavanya Gupta, Vani Kapoor, Astha Madan and Ananya Garg carded 3-over 74 each to be tied fourth.

One shot behind them were six players, Heena Kang, Kriti Chowhan, Jahaanvie Walia and three amateurs, Mannat Brar, Anvvi Dahiya and Ananya Sood, all of whom shot 4-over 76 each.

Lavanya opened with a bogey, but got the shot back on the Par-3 second. Another bogey on sixth and a birdie on the ninth saw her turn in even par. On the back nine she birdied the 12th, but bogeyed the 13th and double bogeyed the 14th. A birdie on the 17th ensured she was even par and leading.

Amandeep had two birdies against four bogeys while Zara also had two birdies against four bogeys.

Vani, the leader on Order of Merit, had four birdies but she also had three bogeys and two double bogeys. (PTI)

Napoli returns to the top of Serie A with win over Pisa

NAPLES (ITALY), Sept 23: Leonardo Spinazzola and Lorenzo Lucca scored late and Napoli bounced back from a Champions League defeat at Manchester City to beat Pisa 3-2 and return to the top of Serie A.

Billy Gilmour scored his first of the season just before halftime and it looked like reigning champion Napoli was set for an easy victory against a side that has yet to win this season.

Napoli was pegged back by a M'Bala Nzola penalty on the hour but Pisa's hopes were extinguished in the final quarter. Spinazzola fired a low shot into the bottom corner to regain Napoli the lead in the 73rd minute and Lucca took a cute flick from Scott McTominay before slamming in the ball eight minutes from time.

Brazilian midfielder Lorrain converted a Samuele Angori cut-back in the 90th for Pisa but it remained joint bottom of the league with Lecce on one point and without a win in Napoli since 1986.

Napoli's fourth victory in a row took it back to the top of Serie A, two points ahead of Juventus. (AP)

Ex-Juventus boss Agnelli granted plea bargain that could clear way for soccer return

ROME, Sept 23: A plea bargain deal for former Juventus president Andrea Agnelli with a 20-month suspended sentence in a false accounting trial was granted by a judge — possibly setting up Agnelli's return to soccer after his sports ban expires next month.

The trial, which began after prosecutors started investigating Juventus in 2021, contributed to Agnelli's downfall at the record 36-time Serie A champion. Former Juventus vice president Pavel Nedved was granted a deal of 14 months and former Juventus sporting director Fabio Paratici got 18 months — with their sentences also suspended.

Former Juventus CEO Maurizio Arrivabene was cleared of wrongdoing by the court in Rome — where the trial was moved to after starting in Turin.

"The decision to request that this suspended sentence be applied, without recognizing responsibility — and therefore coherent with my position of innocence — was quite difficult," Agnelli said in a statement to Italian media.

Agnelli added that since the trial is still in the initial phase and preliminary hearings, "the alternative would have been remaining in limbo for a very long time."

"My love for Juventus remains total and unaltered," Agnelli said. He's been living in Amsterdam for more than two years and he plans to "carry out his future plans" in the Dutch city. Juventus, which is listed on the Milan stock exchange, was fined 156,000 euros (\$183,000)

and also reached a settlement with about 75 investors who the club will pay slightly more than 1 million euros (about \$1.2 million).

All of the parties involved denied any wrongdoing.

Juventus said in a statement reacting to the ruling that "while reiterating the correctness of its conduct and the soundness of its defensive arguments," the club "has deemed it appropriate to resort to this instrument in the best interest of the company itself, its shareholders and all stakeholders."

The case prompted Agnelli and Juventus' entire board of directors to resign in 2022. Agnelli was then given two separate bans by sports authorities, the last of which expires in October.

Agnelli was also considered the mastermind behind the failed Super League project and resigned his position as the head of the European Club Association when the doomed break-away plan was revealed in 2021.

Juventus was hit with a 10-point penalty in the 2022-23 season and then removed by UEFA from the Conference League for financial irregularities.

Juventus and its managers were investigated for cashing in on illegal commissions from transfers and loans of players and illicit handling of players' salaries. The case also explored whether investors were misled with invoices being issued for non-existent transactions to demonstrate income that in turn could be deemed false accounting. (AP)



Messi's Argentina most likely to play against Australia in Kerala friendly

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Sept 23: The Lionel Messi-led Argentina team will most likely face Australia in the eagerly-awaited friendly match in Kerala come November, official sources in the state's sports department said on Tuesday.

No date has been fixed for the game, but it will take place in Kochi on any day between November 12 and November 18, the sources said.

They added that Australia will most likely be the opponent of the South American giants.

Another source said that a member of the Argentine support staff is expected to land in Kochi on Wednesday "for venue inspection."

There were some controversies surrounding the team's visit to Kerala, with some reports in early August this year saying that the South American side will not come to the state.

However, putting specula-



tions to rest later in the month, the reigning world champions announced that they would play a FIFA friendly against an unnamed opponent in Kerala in November. The state's sports minister V. Abdurahiman too confirmed the team's visit for

the game. "The Argentine national team, led by Lionel Scaloni, will have two FIFA friendlies in the remainder of 2025. The first, in October, from the 6th to the 14th, will be played in the United States (opponents and cities to be deter-

mined)," the Argentine Football Association had written on its official X handle.

"The second, FIFA friendlies in November, from the 10th to the 18th, will be played in Luanda, Angola, and Kerala, India (opponents to be determined)," the AFA statement had read.

Following the Kerala visit, Messi is also expected to embark on a multi-city tour of India in December, with stopovers at Kolkata, Mumbai, Ahmedabad and Delhi where a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi is planned. The move to bring Messi-led Argentina to Kerala first gained steam in September 2024 when Abdurahiman travelled to Spain to meet officials of the Argentine Football Association to work out the details.

Argentina's previous visit to India was in 2011 when they faced Venezuela at the Salt Lake stadium in Kolkata. (PTI)

The Ryder Cup is off to an emotional start for Team USA

FARMINGDALE (US), Sept 23: The Ryder Cup had moments of inspiration in vastly different forms during a quiet start to golf's most chaotic week. There were tears for the Americans as they gathered on the first tee at sunrise and a strong reminder for Europe as it goes after a rare road win.

U.S. captain Keegan Bradley had his entire team on the first tee before the gates open, no one in the massive grandstands that come Friday will be packed with flag-waving fans. He had Chris Mascali, a New York firefighter whose father died during the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, speak to the team. Mascali brought his uniform, along with the helmet of his father, Joe Mascali. Those now are in the team room for the Americans.

Bryan Robinson from FDNY Ladder 16 sang the national anthem as the large video board showed great moments in Ryder Cup history.

"I had this vision of doing that for about a year," Bradley said. "And to be out there and see it, and see how emotional the guys got, was a really special time for our team."

The Americans walked solemnly across the bridge from the first tee complex, headed to the practice area, then played 18 holes of the Black Course.

Team Europe spent two days at Bethpage Black a week ago and then dispersed — some to American homes, others playing some of Long Island's best golf courses — until returning to Bethpage for what it expects to be a big challenge. The Americans have lost at home only four times since the Ryder Cup began in 1927. European captain Luke Donald had his team wear salmon-colored pullovers or sweater vests, a subtle reminder of what can be done.

That was the Sunday color for the European team in 1987 when it

stunned the Americans at Muirfield Village to win its first Ryder Cup away from home. Europe has won three more times on U.S. soil since then, the most recent 13 years ago in what became known as the "Miracle at Medinah" because of the Sunday rally. "That's motivating to the guys that it can be done, it has been done, and again, we're here to try and do it again," Donald said. Europe is coming off a resounding win at Marco Simone and returns 11 of the 12 players from the Italy matches in 2023 — the exception is Rasmus Hojgaard, the identical twin of Nicolai Hojgaard, who played in the last Ryder Cup. But the Europeans lost by nine points in 2021 at Whistling Straits, by six points at Hazeltine in 2016 and by five points at Valhalla in 2008. "I think it's always important to rally around something," Donald said. "We always have things that we come up with that are important to us. History

and our unity and celebrating what we've done in the past and the legends that have kind of come before us is really important.

"This is going to be a difficult challenge."

There were not many surprises in the way Bradley grouped his three groups of four players for the only full practice round they play this week. Justin Thomas and Cameron Young were together, as they were in the Procore Championship two weeks ago in Napa, California. Ben Griffin, one of four Ryder Cup rookies, was with Bryson DeChambeau, who was not in Napa because he's with LIV Golf and thus ineligible for PGA Tour play.

Scottie Scheffler was with Russell Henley — they formed a tough partnership in the Presidents Cup last year at Royal Montreal — along with U.S. Open champion J.J. Spaun and Harris English. (AP)

Sreejesh targets senior team chief coach role in next five years

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Legendary goalkeeper PR Sreejesh says he hopes to realise his dream of becoming chief coach of the senior national team in the next five years, by which time he expects to gain the required maturity while working with juniors.

Sreejesh is chief coach of the junior men's hockey team and has already expressed his desire to head the senior side.

"Coaching is new to me. I played hockey for 25 years. So juniors is the right place for me to learn. I don't have the patience for the sub-junior level where you need to teach basics," Sreejesh told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"From a player to becoming a coach is a transition. I feel juniors is the best platform where I can learn a lot of things. So right now I am in that process."

"I need that maturity of becoming a senior coach. I can't suddenly jump into that. But definitely that's a future target. I am doing my bit,

I have done FIH Level 3 coaching course," he said.

"Five to six years down the line I think I will have the experience to head the Indian men's team as coach," said the talismanic custodian, who is the Director of Hockey at HIL side Delhi SG Pipers.

Sreejesh, a two-time Olympic bronze medalist, believes India have the potential to finish on the podium in the upcoming junior World Cup to be held in Chennai and Madurai from November 28 till December 10.

"This team does have the potential to win the medal. In juniors or seniors if you have to come to top four you have to control your emotions, need to learn to handle pressure, and play the normal game," he said. India will compete in the Sutan of Johor Cup, an invitational tournament in Johor Bahru, Malaysia from October 11 to 19 and Sreejesh feels the event will be the perfect opportunity to work on



the grey areas before the mega-event. "We chose 25 players, who were largely probabilities for Junior World Cup, so they knew tournaments like Sultan of Johor Cup is the last phase of preparations. In this tournament we will like to polish the skills because we have already taught them the system."

"This tournament is going to be an eye-opener for us and we will

get an idea how much more work we need to do," he said.

Sreejesh said besides the intricacies of the game, he is involving the junior players to read meaningful books by renowned sportspersons and coaches.

"You need to play hockey, there is nothing more than that but what I have inculcated in them is to read a book 'Relentless', a book written

by Michael Jordan's coach. It's all about passion, hardwork and so on.

"We are doing that keeping in mind that young guys think differently. Start thinking differently. They young players get annoyed sometimes because I tend to keep them away from mobile addiction as well with this exercise," he said.

"In this one hour session they are in a different world."

Tim S Grover, a renowned trainer to athletes like Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant, has co-authored the book with Shari Lesser Wenk. After a disappointing last year where both Delhi SG Pipers men's and women's teams finished at the bottom, they are expecting a positive result from the upcoming HIL.

"Majority of the players we have retained, we just need three players in the men's team and for women's team we need eight," Sreejesh said of HIL mini auction here on Wednesday, which will be held closed doors. (PTI)

Racing prodigy Atiqa Mir makes heads turn in Slovakia, narrowly misses out on podium

ORECHOVA, (SLOVAKIA), Sept 23: India's racing sensation Atiqa Mir finished an impressive fourth after being in the running for a famous victory for the majority of the action-packed race in the Champions of the Future Academy (COFTA) karting series here.

Atiqa showed exemplary race craft to put herself in a winning position before narrowly missing out on a podium finish in round 4.1 of COFTA, a series which is keenly tracked by the top brass of the F1 Academy.

The 10-year-old, who won in the DAMC series in Dubai earlier this month, is the first Indian to be supported by Formula 1 and is part of the F1 Academy DYD program. Atiqa finished just 0.32 seconds behind the race winner in the mini category, reflecting the highly competitive nature of a male dominated grid at Slovakia Karting Centre.

It was the first time that an Indian driver managed a top-four in the championship history and was the highest finish by a female in

the ongoing season.

In the second race of the weekend, Atiqa was running in a comfortable third place until she got hit from the back by another competitor on lap seven, forcing her off the track and as a result she lost multiple places to finish 11th.

The podium eluded her last weekend but with a performance like that, Atiqa again showed her exceptional talent against a very strong international grid.

Reflecting on her weekend, the AKCEL GP driver said: "I was so close to the win and the podium but happy at the same time with my progress and performance against this top European Grid. It's nice to see all the hard work and training paying off."

Atiqa comes from a racing family and her father Asif Nazir Mir, a Formula Asia Vice Champion, travels with her daughter to races around the world. He too was left impressed. "It was an incredible drive by Atiqa against this quality of drivers. Her hard work is beginning to pay off now." (PTI)

Australia have a well-balanced team with great depth in squad, says skipper Healy

BENGALURU, Sept 23: Captain Alyssa Healy believes the perfect mix of youth and experience in her side will help defending champions Australia lay their hands on a record-extending eighth Women's ODI World Cup title.

The upcoming edition of the tournament, co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka, begins on September 30, with Australia once again entering as overwhelming favourites.

"Our group is incredibly well-balanced, with plenty of youth to complement the more experienced players. While for some it will be their first ODI World Cup, they've all had exposure to major tournaments and high-pressure series," Healy wrote in her ICC column.

Australia rounded off their preparations with a thrilling 2-1 series win over India last week, boosting their morale further ahead of the marquee event.

"I think we're in a great spot as a team. We've had some valuable time together as a group across multiple camps over the winter and I think everyone has enjoyed the chance to tailor their preparation through the Australia A series and domestic cricket in England.

"We know we've put in the time both on and off the field, so we come in confident with that body of work behind us and are



ready to play some ODI Cricket.

"We're lucky enough to have great depth in our squad. Our bowling depth will be key with the warm conditions we

will no doubt face," the two-time World Cup winner said.

The Australians open their campaign against trans-Tasman rivals New Zealand in

Indore on October 1 before travelling to Colombo for matches against Sri Lanka (October 4) and Pakistan (October 8).

"As a team we've not played in Sri Lanka since 2016, but plenty of our group have had experience there over the years with various development tours. It'll be nice to get back there and hopefully have some success in our matches against Sri Lanka and Pakistan."

Personally, the 34-year-old skipper is relishing her return after an injury layoff earlier this year. Since returning to the side, she has featured in three T20s and three ODIs against India A, before leading Australia to the series win over India.

"For me personally, having the opportunity to play that series at home was huge, getting through six games of cricket in a short space of time was a big tick for me after coming back from injury," Healy reflected.

The defending champions are also strengthened by the return of all-rounder Sophie Molineux, who underwent a knee surgery earlier.

"We know we have to play consistently throughout, and every game is important. Our group is looking forward to that challenge and can't wait to get going," Healy signed off. (PTI)

Dickie knew tensions and pressures of Gavaskar concedes the death of Dickie Bird

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: The legendary Sunil Gavaskar on Tuesday consoled the death of renowned umpire Harold 'Dickie' Bird, saying the Englishman was a "unique character", who understood the "tensions and pressures" of the players.

Bird, 92, breathed his last at his home in Yorkshire, and had officiated in 66 Tests and 69 ODIs during a career that spanned from 1973 to 1996.

"That was a sad news indeed. Having played the game at the first-class level Dickie knew the tensions and pressures the players undergo and so was sympathetic to their frustrations if his decisions didn't go their way," Gavaskar said.

The former Indian skipper said the sport has lost a "unique character." "The players loved him because he was always ready to chat between overs and sometimes between deliveries too. Cricket has lost a unique character and a superb umpire. May his soul rest in peace," said Gavaskar.

Bird, too, had held Gavaskar in high esteem, rating him as the batsman with the best technique.

"Mind you, I had the best seat in the world and watched my share of batsmen around. But Gavaskar had the finest technique of them all — against pace, against spin," Bird had said in 2014 when India toured to England.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) too consoled the death of Bird.

"Everyone at the England & Wales Cricket Board is deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Dickie Bird. A proud Yorkshireman and a much-loved umpire, he will be sorely missed," the ECB posted on its 'X' handle.

Former India batter Dinesh Karthik wrote on his social media account: "RIP Dickie Bird. You stood in 66 Tests, 69 ODIs, and 3 World Cup Finals — remembered for your fairness, integrity, humour, and true Yorkshire spirit. A legend forever." (PTI)

Junior shooting World Cup to feature 208 athletes from 18 nations

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Hosts India will field a strong contingent of 69 athletes at the ISSF Junior World Cup which will bring together 208 young shooters from 18 countries at the Dr. Karni Singh Shooting Range.

Scheduled to be held from September 24 to October 2, the event will showcase the next generation of shooting talent competing across 15 Olympic events and two non-Olympic events, with a total of 51 medals at stake.

Other participating nations include the United States of America (20), Italy (10), Czechia (9), Islamic Republic of Iran (8), Croatia (7), Great Britain (6), United Arab Emirates (5), Slovakia (5), Qatar (4), Oman (4), Spain (8), Finland (3), Netherlands (3), Cyprus (3), New Zealand (2), Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (2), along with 40 Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN).

The athletes from the United States, Great Britain, Italy and Cyprus have arrived at the range and conducted an unofficial training session. (PTI)

Deepti jumps two places to 5th, Mandhana continues to hold top spot in ODI rankings

DUBAI, Sept 23: India all-rounder Deepti Sharma moved up two places to fifth in the ICC Women's ODI rankings for bowlers even as Smriti Mandhana continued to hold the top spot in the batters' list with a career-high rating after her sparkling show in the recently-concluded series against Australia.

Mandhana scored two scintillating hundreds in the three-match series at home against Australia, which the visitors won 2-1 in the run-up to the upcoming World Cup beginning September 30 in Guwahati. She has moved to a career-high rating of 818.

Deepti's pair of two-wicket hauls against Australia moved the India off-spinner up two spots to fifth with 651 points, while South African pacer Ayabonga Khaka moved three spots to 15th (548) after claiming 2/36 against Pakistan in Lahore in spite of non-favourable conditions.

India's Kranti Gaud (up 23 spots to 39th) continues her fine start to the international game, while England's Sophie Ecclestone (795 rating points) boasts an 85-point lead



as the top-ranked ODI bowler ahead of the World Cup.

While Mandhana maintained her numero uno status, Tazmin Brits made the most noteworthy move in the batting rankings, up 15 spots to sixth (669 rating points) with back to back unbeaten hundreds in the Proteas series win in Lahore.

Brits averages 91.85, hitting 643

runs at a strike rate of 94.14 in ODIs in the 2025 calendar.

It continues a dramatic rise from the prolific Protea, having been the 73rd ranked batter at the start of September 2023.

Pakistan's Sidra Amin meanwhile made a 10-spot move of her own having enjoyed a strong series herself, making 121 not out, 122 and 50 not out across the three

matches. Amin's rating of 636 points is a career high for the right-hander, who now sits in 13th, just 19 points from a top 10 spot.

Beth Mooney meanwhile made ground on the top two, up two spots (727 points), though it's still Mandhana by a distance leading the way at the top.

Other big movers of note further down include Australia's Georgia Voll (up 28 spots to 61st), and Pakistan's Natalia Perwaiz, who while outside the top 100 moved 54 spots thanks to a half-century in the second ODI.

South Africa's Marizanne Kapp moved closer to Ash Gardner atop the ICC Women's ODI all-rounder rankings, moving past Hayley Matthews to go to second (420) with a century and a two-wicket haul in back-to-back matches, while teammate Chloe Tryon showed her wares in spin-friendly conditions, taking a two-wicket haul of her own in the series.

Tahlia McGrath also moved up nine spots to 30th (128 points) thanks to a steady series with the ball. (PTI)

Dinesh Karthik appointed captain of Team India for Hong Kong Sixes

HONG KONG, Sept 23: Former India player Dinesh Karthik has been appointed captain of the country's team for the upcoming Hong Kong Sixes, the tournament organisers said on Tuesday.

The exciting short format tournament will start from November 7.

Known for his vast international experience, sharp leadership skills, and explosive batting, Karthik's inclusion as captain is set to inspire fans and elevate the tournament's competitive spirit. On his appointment as skipper, Karthik said, "It is an absolute honour leading Team India at the Hong Kong Sixes, a tournament with such rich history and global recognition."

"I look forward to lead a group of players who have such incredible records to their credit, and together we will aim to bring joy to the fans and play cricket that is both fearless and entertaining."

Burji Shroff, chairperson of Cricket Hong Kong China, said: "We are thrilled to welcome Dinesh Karthik as the captain of Team India for the Hong Kong Sixes 2025."

"His leadership and wealth of experience will add immense value to the competition, and we are confident that his presence will attract fans from across the globe to witness this spectacular cricketing festival." (PTI)

Rahul Chahar added to Surrey squad for final championship match against Hampshire

LONDON, Sept 23: Indian leg-spinner Rahul Chahar has been drafted into the Surrey squad for their season-ending fixture against Hampshire in the English County season.

The game is scheduled to take place at the Utilita Bowl from September 24 to 27.

The 26-year-old Chahar, who has represented India seven times in white-ball cricket, was registered for the final part of the County Championship season in early September, but was not required to play in the two home games at the Oval against Warwickshire and Nottinghamshire.

"Leg-spinner Rahul Chahar comes into the squad for the final Rothesay County Championship match of the season. Chahar plays

for Rajasthan in the Ranji Trophy and has represented India seven times in white-ball cricket," Surrey Cricket posted on X.

In the match for which he has been picked, Chahar will come up against fellow Indian all-rounder Washington Sundar.

According to a statement by director of cricket Alec Stewart on the club's website, they had initially planned to bring back Chahar's compatriot R. Sai Kishore, who picked up 11 wickets in two matches in his stint at the club, but a finger injury and subsequent surgery rendered the player unavailable.

"I'm excited to join Surrey for this week's match. I'm coming here to have an impact and help the team in their final match of the season," Chahar told the Surrey website.

Chahar, who currently plays for Rajasthan in the Indian domestic circuit, has played in 24 First Class matches and taken 87 wickets at an average of 28.01.

Stewart said, "Adding Rahul to the squad gives us another spin option at the Utilita Bowl."

"We always knew that we would be missing players for the final period of the season and try to plan accordingly given the potential surfaces and the opposition we're playing."

"We had originally earmarked for Sai Kishore to return for the latter stages of the season but he unfortunately has a finger injury resulting in an operation has meant he was unavailable." (PTI)

Every team has ability to beat India, it's about what happens on day: B'desh coach Simmons

DUBAI, Sept 23: Bangladesh head coach Phil Simmons doesn't believe that India is an unbeatable team and come Wednesday when his 'Tigers' take on the reigning world champions in an Asia Cup Super 4 encounter, it won't matter what Suryakumar Yadav and his men have achieved in the past four games.

Bangladesh will come into the match after having beaten Sri Lanka in an earlier Super 4 game, something that has boosted their confidence enormously considering T20Is aren't their 'Go-To' format.

Asked if this Indian team can be defeated, Simmons, who, in his playing days, represented a strong West Indies side in the late 1980s to late '90s, replied: "Every team has the ability to beat India."

"The game is played on the day. It's not what India has done before. It's what happens on Wednesday. It's what happens during that three and a half hour period. We will try to play as best as we can and hope to find chinks in India's armoury. That's the way we win games."

The 62-year-old Simmons understands the surround sound around any game involving India and wants his wards to soak in that electric atmosphere, stay in the moment, and enjoy the challenge to the fullest.

"Every game, especially games involv-



ing India, have a hype because they're the number one T20 team in the world. There must be a hype. We're just going to ride on the hype.

"We're going to enjoy the moment and enjoy the game."

Simmons believes that the Dubai International Cricket Stadium (DICS) track is

really good for batting and toss won't be a huge factor going into the match.

"I didn't see much of a difference in the wicket over the 40 overs. I think it's some of the best wickets I've seen here for a while. I think last night (India vs Pakistan) it was the same."

"The wicket was really good to bat. Bowlers had to bowl properly. I don't think the toss has that much of an effect."

The September heat in Dubai and Abu Dhabi is sapping and playing back-to-back T20 games in this weather can be a challenge physically, admitted Simmons.

"It is extremely difficult to play back-to-back T20 matches, back-to-back ODIs. So it's not a nice thing but again we are prepared, we have trained really hard."

"I think the guys are fit enough to handle the back-to-back game. But it is not a fair thing for any team to have to play back-to-back T20s. It's a lot more difficult than people seem to think," said the coach, who played 26 Tests and 143 ODIs for the West Indies during his playing days.

Talking about senior players in the squad, the coach couldn't stop praising Mustafizur Rahman, a seasoned left-arm seamer, for taking more initiative in team meetings and guiding the juniors in the team.

"He's been the main bowler. And he's

carrying that mantle of being the senior bowler on the team. And even in meetings and everything, he's really stepping up. So it's great to see him performing out there."

"Look, I am one who tries to control my emotions as much as possible. We are not here to win a game against Sri Lanka. We are here to win the tournament...then I can release my emotions. But I have to keep everybody grounded in the dressing room."

T20 cricket is increasingly becoming data driven and the analysts in every squad do a risk vs reward analysis while picking up the right combination. Simmons had a different take to this theory of having more risk-takers in the team.

"I don't know about risk in T20 format. Since I've been here, we've tried to make sure that this is the way we want to play. And we've picked the correct players to play that way. And so far, it's benefited us. It's going well," he asserted.

Bangladesh is an emotional country when it comes to cricket and Simmons was asked a pertinent question about how one handles the incessant criticism.

"...as long as I'm confident and my staff and myself, including the captain, are confident in what we're doing and how we're guiding the team, then criticism is like water off a duck's back," he said. (PTI)

Sports Minister Mandaviya reviews final preparations for World Para Athletics



NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Tuesday visited the JLN Stadium to oversee final preparations for the first-ever World Para Athletics Championships to be hosted here from September 26 to October 5.

Organising the competition marks a new chapter in India's ability to stage global tournaments of such a scale, further strengthening the nation's position as a hub for international sports.

The Minister of State for Sports and Youth Affairs, Raksha Khadse, also joined Mandaviya in meeting and interacted with the athletes.

Several senior officials from the Local Organising Committee, Paralympic Committee of India (PCI) and sports ministry also attended the inspection.

Mandaviya took a detailed round of the stadium including areas such as accreditation centre, medical centre, newly-laid warmup and the main MONDO track amongst others, which he had been inaugurated on August 29.

The track will host some of the world's finest para-athletes

from over 100 countries during the championships. There will be a total of 73 para-athletes vying for the top spot from the host nation.

"Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, India has emerged as a trusted destination for hosting major international sporting events. His belief that the world is one family — 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' — inspires us to bring athletes from across the globe together on Indian soil," Mandaviya said during the inspection.

"With more than 100 nations participating, this is not only the biggest para-athletics event ever hosted by India, but also a reflection of our capability, rich culture, and commitment to sports as a unifying force. Our effort is to ensure that every para-athlete experiences world-class infrastructure and feels fully supported here at the World Para Athletics Championships," he added.

Paris Paralympics medallist Sharad Kumar was also present with Simran Sharma and Preeti Pal, who have been practising on the MONDO track. (PTI)

India fined for slow over-rate in third WODI against Australia

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: The Indian women's cricket team was on Tuesday fined 10 per cent of its match fee for maintaining a slow over-rate against Australia in the third ODI here.

Hosts India suffered a 43-run defeat despite Smriti Mandhana's blazing 125-run knock to concede the series 1-2 to Australia at the Feroz Shah Kotla on Saturday.

GS Lakshmi of the ICC International Panel of Match Referees imposed the sanction as India were ruled to be two overs short of the target after time allowances were taken into consideration.

"In accordance with Article 2.22 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which relates to minimum over-rate offences, players are fined five per cent of their match fee for every over their side fails to bowl in the allotted time," the ICC said in statement.

"India captain Harmanpreet Kaur pled guilty to the offence and accepted the proposed sanction, so there was no need for a formal hearing," it added. (PTI)