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- Operation Blue Star a mistake, Indira Gandhi paid for it with her life: Chidambaram
- Chidambaram has exposed Cong's false narrative on Operation Blue Star: BJP
- APCC demands implementation of RTI and Whistle Blowers Protection Acts
- Police crack case within hours, arrest Grandfather in Assam hideout

Info sought by Singapore Police sent: Himanta

Zubeen's close associate Arun appears before CID, seeks justice for 'Dada'

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday said the Singapore Police has sought some "vital information" in connection with the death of singer Zubeen Garg in the island nation.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a function here, Sarma said the Assam government has already collected and forwarded the required inputs to the authorities in Singapore.

"Yesterday, the Singapore Police sent some vital queries to his family. We have already collected the inputs from the family and sent those to the Singapore authorities. They are investigating the case very seriously," he said.

The CM, however, did not specify what information the foreign nation sought from Garg's family.

The celebrated singer died while swimming in the sea in Singapore on September 19. He had gone to the Southeast Asian nation to attend the 4th edition of the North East India Festival.

The Indian government had earlier invoked the Mutual Legal As-



sistance Treaty (MLAT) with Singapore, seeking cooperation in the investigation into the death of the singer in the Southeast Asian country.

"The way the Assam Police has been active, the Singapore Police is also equally active in the investigation. They want to give us a proper report after conducting a thorough inquiry," Sarma said.

The chief minister said the Assam investigators' queries over Garg's death to the Singaporean authorities, however, remained

unanswered.

"Whatever information or statements we need related to the crime scene... we have sent our request through the Union Home Ministry under MLAT. These are now with the Singapore Attorney General's office," Sarma said.

A Special Investigation Team (SIT) under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Assam Police is probing into Garg's death.

The police had issued fresh summonses to 10 people associated

with the Assam Association Singapore, as they failed to appear before the investigating agency within the deadline of October 6.

"The expat Assamese community's support will increase, I don't want to say much now. We have received positive signals from them. The kind of moral pressure we are exerting, it will yield positive results soon," asserted Sarma.

Only one Assamese from Singapore, Runkamal Kalita, had appeared before the CID, and was interrogated for more than 24 hours.

"They had requested for video-conference, but we rejected that. A significant number of the Singaporean Assamese people have assured us to cooperate in the investigation. We can expect good news within a day or two," the CM said. Earlier, North East India Festival chief organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta, the singer's manager Siddharth Sharma, and his two band members - Shekhar Jyoti Goswami and Amrit Prabha Mahanta - were apprehended. Garg's cousin (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM backs Centre's Demographic Mission

'Assamese-Hindus now only about 40 pc of state's population'

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday claimed that Assamese Hindus now make up only around 40 per cent of the state's population, about the same as that of Muslims.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme here, Sarma said the state has witnessed a sharp shift in its population composition, and termed the Centre's proposed Demography Mission a significant step towards addressing the issue.

"Assam has been a big victim of demographic change. In 2021, the Muslim population crossed 38 per cent, and as we speak, it is about 39.5 per cent of the state population," he said.

He claimed that districts like Majuli, known as the seat of Vaishnavite culture and the world's largest inhabited river island, have seen 100 per cent growth in Muslim population.

However, he clarified that the increase was not due to natural growth among local Muslims, but because of infiltrators.

The Assam CM added that the Christian population in the state is around 6-7 per cent, and that "if people from other parts and communities are excluded, Assamese Hindus are not more than 40 per cent today."

"These figures are based on projections over the 2011 Census data. We are concerned about the situation," he said.

Sarma maintained that the Demographic Mission, announced by PM Narendra Modi during Independence Day speech, is the first definitive step to address the issue.

He also cited Union Home Minister Amit Shah's recent statement in Delhi, claiming that the rise in the Muslim population was not just due to internal growth but also due to people coming from outside.

"The central government will form a high-power committee under this mission to detect, delete, and deport infiltrators. It is for the first time that the government of India has spoken in such clear terms," Sarma said, adding that he would seek further clarity on the initiative in his next meeting with Shah. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Fact-finding team in Tezpur University to look into allegations against VC

TEZPUR, Oct 12: A fact-finding committee, formed to look into allegations concerning the functioning of vice-chancellor (VC) of Assam's Tezpur University, will be on a two-day visit to the varsity from Sunday, an official spokesperson said.

The team will hold sittings over the two days and interact with students, employees and other stakeholders, he said.

The three-member committee, headed by IIT-Guwahati Director Devenendra Jalihal, was notified as per order of the Governor, who is also the Chancellor of the central varsity, on October 8.

The other members are Dibrugarh University VC Jiten Hazarika and Higher Education department secretary Narayan Konwar.

"The committee will meet various stakeholders, including students, staff and faculty members, to find facts about the allegations concerning the VC," the spokesperson said.

"The stakeholders can meet the committee and will submit their grievances and reports," he added.

The Raj Bhawan notification forming the committee had said that the attention of the governor was drawn to "certain serious allegations" concerning the functioning of the Tezpur University VC, which have purportedly led to a tense situation on the campus.

Prima facie satisfied that a formal inquiry is warranted, the fact-finding committee was formed, it had said.

The committee has been asked to submit a detailed factual report to the Governor-cum-Chancellor of the University within seven days from the issue of notification.

The situation in the university had been tense since mid-September, with students accusing VC Shambhu Nath Singh and varsity authorities of not showing due respect to cultural icon Zubeen Garg even as the state was mourning his death.

The university had witnessed heated scenes and an exchange of words between the VC and students on September 22, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam govt launches foreign language training programme for youths

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: An Assam government initiative to train the youth of the state with foreign language skills was launched by Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday, with the first cohort to learn Japanese language.

Sarma said the Chief Minister's Foreign Languages Initiative for Global Human Talent (CM-FLIGHT) will equip the youth of the state to find employment opportunities in different parts of the world.

"Assam's Gateway to Global Careers Launched the Chief Minister's Foreign Languages Initiative for Global Human Talent-a scheme which will empower Assam's youth with foreign language skills and open doors to global working opportunities to make them economically strong," Sarma said in a post on X.

In the first phase, 180 youths will receive Japanese language training along with cultural training, job placement support and financial assistance, he said.

Sarma asserted that this initiative will further deepen "our robust Indo-Japan collaboration across various sectors and boost people-to-people ties between Assam and Japan."

"All thanks to ASEAN ONE and our other esteemed partners, this programme will be run right here in North East Skill Centre, Guwahati and equip our youth to make a mark in Japan's globally renowned workplaces and boost their overall career prospects," the chief minister said, while extending his best wishes to the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Custodial death of youth sparks outrage in Jorhat

HT Bureau

JORHAT, Oct 12: The death of a 21-year-old youth in police custody here on Sunday has triggered widespread sensation, with family members demanding an impartial investigation and strict action against the police personnel involved.

The deceased, identified as Pritam Dutta of No 2 Chengeligaon under Bhogdoi police outpost, was reportedly picked up by a police team late on Saturday night in con-

nection with a theft case. According to his father, a daily wage earner, the police informed the family that Pritam was being taken for questioning.

He said that around 8.30 am on Sunday, he went to the Bhogdoi outpost to enquire about his son's condition and was told that Pritam had been shifted to Jorhat police station.

The father later went to work, but around 11 am, he received a call from the village headman in-

forming him that his son had been admitted to Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH) in a serious condition.

When the family reached the hospital, they found that Pritam had already died.

The father alleged that the police informed them that Pritam had committed suicide with a blanket inside the police station, a claim the family refused to believe. Later, the father lodged an FIR against the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Bokajan observes shutdown in protest and mourning for Oriwel Timung

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Oct 12: Bokajan remained shut till 6 pm on Saturday in protest and in remembrance of late Oriwel Timung, who was killed in an inter-state border clash between villagers of Assam and Meghalaya at Tapat on October 9.

Timung lost his life after being attacked with a sharp weapon by a Khasi mob from Meghalaya when he, along with other villagers from Tapat in West Karbi Anglong district, objected to the harvesting of paddy inside Assam's territory.

The Assam Jatiyatabadi Yuva Chakra Parishad (AJYCP), Bokajan regional committee, organised a shradhanjali programme in his memory at its office in Bokajan town on Saturday evening.

Members lit candles and incense sticks and offered floral tributes to the deceased.

Condemning the incident, the AJYCP called for an end to violence among indigenous communi-

ties on both sides of the border.

AJYCP executive member Jitu Phukon described Timung as a man who deeply loved his land and demanded a compensation of ₹ 20 lakh for his family from the state government.

The condolence meeting was attended by AJYCP advisor Horen Engti, former president of Assam Sahitya Sabha (Karbi Anglong) Barim Engti, and leaders of the Karbi Anglong Manipuri Students Union.

Timung was laid to rest at the Tapat Presbyterian Cemetery on Saturday.

His funeral was attended by family members, villagers, church representatives and leaders of various social organisations, including students, youth and women's groups.

Earlier in the day, Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Rina Terangpi, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Pastor appreciation day celebrated at Bokajan

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, Oct 12: In giving respect and honour to clergies and Pastors dedicating themselves to Church Ministry, the Pastor Appreciation Day was celebrated across the globe on Sunday.

Likewise, the Lakhijan Baptist Church of Saphapani Area Baptist Fellowship celebrated the Pastor Appreciation Day by conducting a special programme during the worship service.

The worship service started from 10 a.m., chaired by the Church secretary, Ranjit Hanse.

On this special occasion was invited the Principal of Christian English HS School, Diphu, Moses Hanse as the speaker.

He was welcomed and felicitated with Karbi traditional turban and a bag.

The Church Pastor, Rev Dr Aaron Teron and Jamuel Hanse were honoured by felicitating with Karbi traditional turban and presented them with gifts from the Church side and families and individuals to show their love and appreciation for their devoted service for the Church and its members.

Beautiful songs were presented by women and youths. Bible reading was taken up by Deacon Loren Tisso. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Afghanistan will not tolerate external aggression: Muttaqi

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: Hours after Afghanistan claimed killing 58 Pakistani soldiers in a retaliatory operation, the Taliban-ruled nation's foreign minister on Sunday said Kabul wants a peaceful resolution of the ongoing conflict with Islamabad but if the peace efforts don't succeed, then it has "other means".

In a firm message to Islamabad from New Delhi, Amir Khan Muttaqi said Afghanistan is fiercely united in confronting any "external invasion" and that any violation of its sovereignty will not be tolerated.

As the fresh fighting between the two sides broke out following a Pakistani air strike in Kabul on Thursday, Muttaqi, currently on a six-day visit to India, said at a media briefing that the overall situation is under "control".



In retaliation to the Pakistani action, Afghan forces Saturday night attacked a number of Pakistani military posts along the frontier between the two neighbours that triggered fears of a wider conflict.

A Taliban spokesperson said in Kabul that Afghan forces captured several Pakistani border posts, killed 58 Pakistani soldiers and injured 30 others during their operation.

In Islamabad, the Pakistani Army confirmed that at least 23 Pakistani soldiers were

killed in the clashes. It also said that over 200 Taliban personnel were killed in the intense overnight clashes along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The tensions between the two sides escalated after Islamabad demanded Kabul to take action against Afghanistan-based terror groups which are launching attacks on Pakistan. Kabul has denied the charges.

"The policy of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is to resolve all problems through discussion and understanding. We want to have zero tension and if they don't want that, then Afghanistan has other means," Muttaqi said in a clear message to Pakistan from New Delhi.

The Afghan foreign minister said Afghanistan has no problem (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Uttar Pradesh tops list in student enrolment in schools with a single teacher

Over 1 lakh single-teacher schools in India catering to over 33 lakh students: Data

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: Over 33 lakh students across the country are enrolled in more than 1 lakh single-teacher schools with Andhra Pradesh recording the highest number of such schools and Uttar Pradesh leading with the most number of student enrolments in them, according to official data.

According to the Ministry of Education's statistics, in the academic year 2024-25, there were 1,04,125 schools in India run by a single teacher each, and such schools catered to 33,76,769 students -- an average of about 34 students per school.

The Right To Education Act, 2009 mandates a pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) of 30:1 at the primary level (classes I-V) and 35:1 at the upper primary level (classes VI-VIII).

The highest number of "single-



teacher" schools in the country are in Andhra Pradesh, followed by Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Lakshadweep.

However, when it comes to student enrolment in schools with a single teacher, Uttar Pradesh tops the list, followed by Jharkhand, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

The number of single-teacher schools has decreased from

1,18,190 in 2022-23 to 1,10,971 in 2023-24, recording a drop of around six per cent.

"The government is on a mission to improve the learning outcomes and entail the best possible utilization of available resources by undertaking school mergers and consolidation of schools often called 'rationalisation of schools'," a senior official explained.

"Single-teacher schools hinder the teaching learning process and hence efforts are being made to re-deploy teachers from schools with zero student enrolment to single-teacher schools to ensure optimal teacher availability," the official added. Andhra Pradesh has 12,912 single-teacher schools, Uttar Pradesh 9,508, Jharkhand 9,1720, Maharashtra 8,152, Karnataka 7,349, Lakshadweep 7,217, Madhya Pradesh (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



GUWAHATI, Oct 12: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Sunday said that the Veterans' Swabhiman Rally 2025 was a reflection of the sacred bond between soldiers and citizens, describing it as a celebration of courage, sacrifice and national unity.

The Governor was speaking at the rally organised under the aegis of Headquarters 51 Sub Area at the Narangi Military Station in Guwahati.

The event paid tribute to the service and dedication of India's armed forces veterans while reaffirming solidarity with the families of fallen soldiers.

Calling the rally a moment of pride and reflection, Governor Acharya lauded the unwavering spirit of soldiers who have served the nation selflessly across generations.

He said a soldier never truly retires but begins a new journey from defending the nation to contributing towards its development.

"Honouring those who defend the country is not merely a responsibility but a part of India's cultural ethos," he said.

Highlighting several welfare initiatives for veterans and their families, the Governor mentioned the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme, the Prime Minister's Scholarship Scheme, and various programmes aimed at promoting skill development and self-employment among ex-servicemen.

He said Assam has been a leader in ex-servicemen welfare, citing the state's two per cent job reservation for ex-servicemen in Grade I and II government posts, the increase in medical college seats for children of veterans from three to nine, and the effective functioning of the Directorate of Sainik Welfare through its State Managing Committee.

The Governor also spoke about Raj Bhawan's own initiative, the "Rajyapal Assam (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

BALCO produces 1st metal from India's largest smelter, set to enter 'Million Tonne Club'

KORBA, Oct 12: Bharat Aluminium Company Limited (BALCO), a unit of Vedanta Aluminium, has achieved a major milestone in India's aluminium sector by producing the first metal from the country's largest 525 kilo Ampere (kA) smelter, the company said.

The breakthrough marks a significant step under BALCO's ongoing one million tonne per annum (MTPA) expansion project and establishes a new national benchmark in aluminium smelting technology, it said in a statement.

The BALCO plant is located in Chhattisgarh's Korba district. The 525 kA smelter represents a leap in technological advancement, surpassing the earlier Indian benchmark of 378 kA and setting new standards in scale, efficiency, and operational excellence, the statement said.

"Bharat Aluminium Company Limited has achieved a major milestone in India's aluminium sector by producing the first metal from the country's largest 525 kA smelter," it said.

The achievement underscores BALCO's role in driving India's



aluminium self-reliance and industrial growth, the statement added.

With the commissioning of the new 0.435 MTPA potline, BALCO's total aluminium production capacity will reach 1 MTPA, placing the company among the select global producers in the 'Million Tonne Club', it said.

This expansion supports the Government of India's 'Make in India' vision and advances the nation's self-reliance by ensuring greater availability of domestically produced, high-quality aluminium for critical sectors such as defence,

aerospace, automotive, construction, and power transmission, it said.

With the ramp-up, BALCO will contribute over 20 per cent of India's total aluminium production, positioning itself at the forefront of the nation's industrial progress, the statement said.

"With our entry into the Million Tonne Club, BALCO is scripting a new chapter in India's journey of self-reliance," BALCO's Chief Executive Officer and Director Rajesh Kumar said.

Aluminium is a metal of na-

tional importance, with applications spanning strategic sectors and everyday life, Kumar said.

"Through this expansion, we are not only boosting domestic capacity but also generating new avenues of employment, spurring allied industries, and driving economic growth in Chhattisgarh and beyond, reinforcing our commitment to nation-building with responsibility, efficiency, and innovation," he said.

With BALCO's capacity expansion to 1 MTPA, Vedanta Aluminium will scale up to 2.8 MTPA, positioning it as the world's largest aluminium producer and a key enabler of India's industrial self-reliance, the statement said.

This milestone is made possible through close collaboration with leading global and domestic partners, including Larsen & Toubro (L&T), Asea Brown Boveri (ABB), Siemens, and Guiyang Aluminium Magnesium Design & Research Institute Co. Ltd (GAMI), who have brought in advanced engineering, automation, and efficiency-driven systems, it said. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Over 1 lakh single-teacher

7,217, West Bengal 6,482, Rajasthan 6,117, Chhattisgarh 5,973 and Telangana (5,001). Delhi has nine single-teacher schools. There are no single-teacher schools in the Union Territories of Puducherry, Ladakh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu and Chandigarh. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands have just four single-teacher schools.

In terms of student enrolments in single-teacher schools, Uttar Pradesh leads with 6,24,327 students taking lessons in such schools, followed by Jharkhand with 4,36,480 students, West Bengal 2,35,494, Madhya Pradesh 2,29,095, Karnataka 2,23,142, Andhra Pradesh 1,97,113, and Rajasthan 1,72,071, among others.

When it comes to average student enrolments per school, Chandigarh and Delhi have the highest number of students per school, at 1,222 and 808, respectively. Ladakh, Mizoram, Meghalaya, and Himachal Pradesh, on the other hand, have significantly lower enrolments per school, at 59, 70, 73, and 82, respectively.

"High number of students per school indicates optimum utilisation of school infrastructure and schools with low enrolments are currently being merged to ensure optimal utilisation," the official explained. (PTI)

Swabhimani rally reflects

Rashtriya Kritisayata Aur Jagrookta Yojana," which aims to share the inspiring stories of veterans with students in schools and colleges to instil national pride and gratitude among the youth.

He congratulated the Rajyik Sainik Board, Assam, for receiving a national award from Defence Minister Rajnath Singh for its contribution to veteran welfare.

As part of the rally, financial aid was extended to Veer Naris and needy veterans, along with welfare assistance such as motorized wheelchairs, mobility scooters and medical beds for the physically challenged.

Service stalls offering medical support, pension and financial counselling, and skill development assistance were also set up at the venue.

Describing the rally as a celebration of the nation's strength and unity, Governor Acharya said, "The relationship between soldiers and citizens is integral to the strength and soul of the nation."

The event was attended by a large number of veterans, serving personnel and dignitaries, including Lt Gen Sanjay Malik, GOC 101 Area; Maj Gen A K Sharma, GOC 51 Sub Area; Lt Gen R P Kalita (Retd); Air Marshal Anjan Kumar Gogoi (Retd), and senior civil and military officials.

Afghanistan will not

with people and politicians of Pakistan, but added that certain elements in that country are trying to "spoil" the environment.

Pakistan has been accusing the Taliban regime of giving shelter to Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists, blaming the group for a series of attacks inside the country. Kabul has rejected the charges.

"We have no difficulties with Pakistani people and politicians. There are some specific elements in Pakistan who are trying to spoil the situation," Muttaqi said.

"Afghanistan will maintain the security of its territory and airspace. There have been violations and we have given immediate responses to them. In the night, there were retaliatory operations in which we achieved our objectives," he said.

Muttaqi said Afghanistan has the capacity to defend its territory and airspace, adding Kabul wants to peacefully resolve all issues through dialogue and understanding.

"If some people don't want to resolve this episode, Afghanistan has the capacity to protect its territory and airspace. The people and forces of Afghanistan are united to defend the country."

"Afghanistan has another great speciality that even if we have internal differences, when the issue of external interference comes up, then all the Afghan people, government and clerics get united to confront it and defend the country," he said.

"Even in the future, our people and the government will unite and defend the country," he said.

The Afghan foreign minister said several friendly countries including Qatar and Saudi Arabia contacted Kabul and conveyed that the fighting should stop.

"From our side, we have stopped the fighting and the situation is under control. We want good relations. Our doors for talks are open. We brought peace to Afghanistan. We want peace in the entire region," he said.

Muttaqi also cited Afghanistan's recent history to assert that the country is determined to defeat external forces.

"We have a policy of wanting good relations with all countries. There was fighting in Afghanistan for more than 40 years. The Soviet Union came and it was defeated.

"The troops of more than 50 countries came with the US and NATO and there was fighting for 20 years and now Afghanistan is independent and standing on its own feet," he said.

"There have been no bad incidents in Afghanistan for four years. From East to West and North to South, people are united and standing with the Islamic Emirate," he said. (PTI)

Bokajan observes shutdown

visited the residence of the deceased, expressed condolences to the bereaved family, and handed over a cheque of ₹ 10 lakh as ex-gratia on behalf of the KAAC.

Assam govt launches

candidates. He also said the final cost for the course has been significantly reduced, with the Assam government and the Government of Japan bearing a major portion of the expenses.

Sarma said while Japan has always been a "steadfast and all-weather friend" of India, discussions are also underway to explore potential collaborations with other international partners.

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO), also in a post on the social media site, said the candidates will "undergo Japanese language training (JFT-Basic/JLPT N4) in the first batch through three international partners - ASEAN ONE Co. Ltd., Jaceex Ventures LLP, and Meiko Career Partners Co. Ltd."

The initiative aims to equip Assam's youth with foreign language and workplace readiness skills to enhance employability in global sectors like construction, nursing care and food service, it added. (PTI)

Custodial death of youth

Bhogdoi police outpost personnel who had taken his son into custody, seeking a thorough probe into the circumstances leading to his death and punitive action against those responsible.

He also admitted that Pritam had earlier been booked in several criminal cases.

A police official said an inquiry has been initiated into the death, which occurred inside the lock-up.

The official stated that Pritam was found hanging inside a toilet with a blanket reportedly used by detainees as a mattress.

He added that CCTV footage from the police station will be examined as part of the investigation.

The official further said that Pritam was a repeat offender and had been arrested seven times earlier in connection with different offences.

Fact-finding team in

leading to a situation where Singh had to nearly flee from the spot.

The Sonitpur district administration later ordered a magisterial probe against the university authority for allegedly disrespecting Garg. The teachers' association of the varsity had also submitted a memorandum to the governor and the chief minister, demanding removal of Singh, alleging grave financial and administrative irregularities against him. (PTI)

President's rule in

that a popular government will be installed soon. The extended term of President's rule for six months will not be further extended."

President's rule was imposed on February 13 and was later extended on August 13. (PTI)

CM backs Centre's

Sarma claimed on Friday that 'Miya-Muslims' (Bengali-speaking Muslims) will emerge as the largest community in the state in the next census, constituting more than 38 per cent of population.

'Miya' is originally a pejorative term used for Bengali-speaking Muslims in Assam and the non-Bengali speaking people generally identify them as Bangladeshi immigrants.

In recent years, activists from the community have started adopting this term as a gesture of defiance. (PTI)

Info sought by

and Assam Police DSP Sandipan Garg was arrested on Wednesday in connection with the singer's death.

The singer's PSOs Nandeswar Bora and Prabin Baishya were also arrested on Friday, after police found huge financial transactions, worth over Rs 1.1 crore, from their accounts.

All the arrested are in police custody.

Meanwhile, Zubeen Garg's close associate Arun on Sunday appeared before CID's Special Investigating Team (SIT).

They, however, did not divulge details of Arun's visit to the CID office here.

Arun, whom Garg considered as family and was among the four persons who had lit his funeral pyre, demanded speedy justice for the deceased icon while talking to reporters later.

The youth had been with Zubeen's family for several years and had even forsaken his family surname and identified himself as 'Arun Garg'.

"We want justice for Dada (elder brother). There has been so much delay," Arun said.

Asked about the alleged financial and other irregularities committed by other close associates of Garg, Arun said, "I don't know of all those things. I work mainly with 'Bou' (sister-in-law, referring to Garg's wife Garima)."

"The only thing I know is that we need justice. Why is it taking so much time?" he questioned.

On Assam-origin residents in Singapore not appearing before the CID even after being summoned twice, Arun said, "Those who are in Singapore should be brought here, they should be dragged here. I don't understand why they are not coming." (PTI)

Pastor appreciation day

The speaker Hanse in his gospel message spoke about the evolution of Pastor Appreciation Day celebration and its significance.

Taking reference from the bible verse John 10:11 as Jesus himself said, "I am the good shepherd" laid stress on the role and responsibilities by clergies and pastors of becoming a good shepherd in taking care of the flock (faithful) of Christ.

Torrent Group's UNM Foundation launches advanced neuro-rehabilitation centre in Ahmedabad

AHMEDABAD, Oct 12: The Torrent Group-backed UNM Foundation on Sunday inaugurated 'Sankalan', a 30,000 sq ft advanced neuro-rehabilitation centre in Ahmedabad, aimed at providing holistic, affordable care for patients with neurological disorders, particularly from underprivileged backgrounds.

Combining science, technology, and compassion, Sankalan offers individualised, multi-disciplinary therapy programs to help patients recover from conditions such as stroke, brain and spinal cord injuries, and degenerative diseases, the group said in a statement.

The centre features cutting-edge tools like functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS), non-invasive brain stimulation, and robotic rehabilitation aids.

"The name of this Centre - Sankalan - signifies an assemblage of different disciplines working in unison towards a shared objective. This is the beginning of a new chapter in neurological rehabilitation at Sankalan," said Dr. Chaitanya Dutt, Head of Healthcare Initiatives at UNM Foundation.

The pilot project is part of a broader plan to expand similar centres across Gujarat, including Surat, Vadodara, and Rajkot, and eventually nationwide, according to Torrent Group Director Jinal Mehta.

Staffed by a 63-member multidisciplinary team, Sankalan integrates evidence-based treatments with family involvement and socio-emotional support, setting a new benchmark in neuro-rehabilitation care in India.

Designed to redefine the future of neuro rehabilitation, Sankalan fol-

lows a unique model that integrates multiple therapies, approaches and disciplines into a unified framework for holistic treatment, recovery and care," the statement said.

Neuro Rehabilitation is a specialised form of therapy to help individuals recover from neurological ailments arising due to dysfunction of the brain and the resultant difficulty in performing coordinated and integrated, sensory and motor functions. Neuro-Rehabilitation attempts to fully or partially restore these functions through the process of re-learning and rewiring of the brain.

Sankalan aspires to create an ecosystem where individuals with neurological challenges regain mobility, communication, and cognitive skills, while also rediscovering joy, dignity, and the possibility of returning to work and community life.

The inauguration was graced by the presence of Sudhir Mehta, Chairman Emeritus, Torrent Group and eminent senior doctors and experts from the field of neurology.

Commenting on the inauguration, Jinal Mehta, Director, Torrent Group, said, "Sankalan combines science, compassion and technology and endeavours to help individuals with neurological challenges to reclaim their independence and dignity. This advanced holistic neuro-rehabilitation centre is a pilot project for what we intend to do in the field of neuro-rehabilitation. It is envisaged that this facility will cater to in-patients (IPD) as well."

"Eventually, we plan to replicate the model in other cities of Gujarat including Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot and eventually to other parts of the country," he further added. (PTI)

Jawa Yezdi motorcycles launches ₹ 999 festive pre-booking offer

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: Jawa Yezdi Motorcycles has announced an industry-first festive season offer, allowing customers to pre-book their favourite Jawa or Yezdi motorcycle online for just ₹ 999.

The company has also become the first in the country to pass on 100 per cent of the GST 2.0 benefits to buyers of its sub-350cc performance classic motorcycles.

Following the implementation of GST 2.0, which reduced the tax rate on motorcycles below 350cc from 28 per cent to 18 per cent, Jawa Yezdi Motorcycles recalibrated its prices to make its range more affordable.

The company, which offers eight performance motorcycles under 350cc, said the revision has helped bring authentic heritage motorcycling within the reach of a wider riding community.

Sharad Agarwal, Chief Business Officer of Jawa Yezdi Motorcycles, said the revised GST rate has made most of the brand's motorcycles start from around ₹ 1.5 lakh, giving young riders an opportunity to own a world-class classic motorcycle.

"The combination of design, technology and performance has resonated strongly with the youth, and the overwhelming response seen this festive season has encouraged us to introduce the ₹ 999 online pre-booking offer," he said.

The company said that since the introduction of the revised GST rates and the subsequent price cuts, bookings across dealerships have surged.

Customers can now reserve their motorcycles online at jawayezdi-motorcycles.com to improve their chances of getting early delivery during the festive period.

According to the new price structure announced by the company, models such as the Jawa 42, Jawa 350, 42 Bobber, 42 FJ, Yezdi Roadster, Yezdi Adventure and Yezdi Scrambler are now priced between ₹ 1.59 lakh and ₹ 1.98 lakh, reflecting savings ranging from ₹ 13,000 to ₹ 17,000 depending on the variant.

The company said it remains committed to offering genuine performance classics at an accessible price point following the GST 2.0 reforms. All Jawa and Yezdi motorcycles come under the 'Jawa Yezdi BSA Ownership Assurance Programme', which provides riders with a four-year or 50,000 km standard warranty, extendable up to six years.

The plan also includes a two-year anytime warranty within six years of ownership, one year of complimentary roadside assistance extendable up to eight years, and a five-year comprehensive annual maintenance package to ensure a worry-free ownership experience.

With the new pricing, customer assurance programme and the ₹ 999 festive pre-booking offer, Jawa Yezdi Motorcycles aims to strengthen its presence in India's mid-capacity motorcycle segment and make the festive season more rewarding for enthusiasts seeking timeless design and performance.

Philippines wooing Indian tourists with visa-free entry

AHMEDABAD, Oct 12: The Philippines is pitching to become a leading tourist destination in South-East Asia for Indians, with initiatives like visa-free travel and direct flights, a senior Philippine official has said. In a significant step towards enhancing regional connectivity between India and the Philippines, Air India's direct flights from Delhi to Manila commenced operations from October 1, the official said. The Philippines launched visa-free travel for Indians in June, allowing for a 14-day stay for tourism. "Together with our visa-free regime for Indian tourists and resumption of direct flights between India and the Philippines after 10 years, we are ready to welcome you," Philippines Ambassador to India Josef F Ignacio said.

"This ease of travel with direct flight means that you do not lose a day. This will be an incentive for more Indians to travel to the Philippines," the senior diplomat told reporters. (PTI)

NAME CHANGE

I, Kafiluddin, (Old Name) S/O- Falu Sheikh (Father's Name) Residing at Chukabahi, PO-Daipam, Darrang (Assam), 784514 (Address) shall henceforth be known as Kukil Ali (New Name) as declared before the Notary Public/first class Judicial Magistrate, Darrang Court (Darrang, Assam) vide Affidavit No. 4275/25, Dated 07/10/2025 Kafiluddin (Old Name) and Kukil Ali (New Name) both are the same and identical person.

Beyond 'Jigarhandanda': How GI tag 'rescues' lesser known products from obscurity

CHENNAI, Oct 12: Geographical Indication (GI) tag filed for the lip-smacking Madurai 'Jigarhandanda', a cold drink made from condensed milk, may grab headlines, but it is relatively obscure products like 'kuliyaadichan sivappu arisi' (parboiled red rice) that gain the most from the certification, said stakeholders.

Ask C Natarajan from Kallakurichi, who has been carving wood for 44 years now, having come into the craft when he was a mere 12 year old, and he'll tell you of a time when middle men ruled the roost.

"They paid us a pittance," added 56-year-old Natarajan.

Things improved marginally with the involvement of the Department of Handicrafts, Tamil Nadu government, according to him.

"We could earn a bit better, but we were expected to go to those exhibitions that were organised across the country. It cut into our production time," Natarajan told PTI over the phone.

All that changed in 2021, when Kallakurichi wood carving, a specialised technique of wood carving that is traced back to Chola period, and yet languishing for lack of market, was awarded the GI tag.

"Earlier, only a handful of us were able to support ourselves fully with our craft. But after the GI tag, all of us — about 200 families in Kallakurichi — make a comfortable living now. More importantly, the customers come to

us, giving us time to concentrate on our craft," said Natarajan.

Although not as enthusiastic as Natarajan, third generation Thanjavur Veenai manufacturer Venkatesan said after the GI tag, which was awarded this year, his customer base has certainly expanded.

"Until recently, outside of Tamil Nadu, we used to get occasional customers from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, at the most. Now we are getting many outside enquiries. More people, not just from India, but also abroad, seem to know what a Thanjavur Veenai is," added Venkatesan.

Incidentally, Thanjavur Veenai holds the distinction of being the first musical instrument to get the GI tag.

This is possible because of enhanced brand visibility, said S Vincent, Member Secretary, Tamil Nadu State Council for Science and Technology (TNSCST), which plays an important role in the identification and protection of potential GI products in Tamil Nadu.

"It didn't happen overnight, but in the last two years we were more successful than when we started in the early 2000s. We are able to get the younger generation involved," added Vincent. In Natarajan's case, for instance, his son is fully involved in marketing their wood carvings online through various social media pages, especially Instagram reels.

Vishnupriya, project scientist at TNSCST, who is leading the GI

ABSU urges centre to expedite Bodo Accord implementation

Student body to hold rallies, Delhi protest, demands constitutional amendment and special TET

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Oct 12: The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has urged the Government of India to expedite the implementation of the Bodo Peace Accord, 2020, by convening a joint discussion with the Centre, the Government of Assam, and ABSU representatives. The student body has expressed concern over the slow progress and demanded immediate steps to execute the pending clauses of the accord.

Addressing the media at Bodofa House in Kokrajhar on Sunday, ABSU president Dipen Boro said the union had adopted several important resolutions during its extended executive meeting held on October 10 at Haradatta-Biradatta Community Hall in Rangia. As part of its movement, ABSU will organise rallies across all district headquarters during October to press for implementation of the accord.



Boro also announced that ABSU will stage a protest demonstration in New Delhi in the first week of November, demanding the passage of the 125th Amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. He said the amendment is

crucial to safeguarding the political and land rights of the Bodo people and other tribal communities under the Sixth Schedule.

Among other resolutions, the union decided to conduct the 10th Central Talent Search Examination

2025 on December 14 for students of Classes IX and X. It will also organise career counselling and motivation programmes across schools and colleges as part of its Mission Quality Education Movement.

Reiterating its long-standing demand, ABSU called for a special TET examination for Bodo medium teachers in Sixth Schedule areas, a matter that has been discussed with the Assam Education Minister. The union also announced the organisation of an Under-13 Boys and Under-15 Girls Football Tournament in the Chirang and Udalguri zones during October and November.

Boro stated that the student body is committed to continuing its efforts in the fields of education, sports, and socio-political awareness, and will intensify its movement until the full implementation of the Bodo Accord is achieved.

Gorlosa urges for a cleaner, Greener Dima Hasao

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: In a strong push towards cleanliness and environmental sustainability, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), Debolal Gorlosa, convened a crucial meeting at his residence in Haflong to discuss a district-wide cleanliness initiative. The meeting saw participation from the Chairman of the Haflong Municipality Board, representatives of the Haflong Merchants' Association, School Management Committees (SMCs), NCHAC Executive Members, MACs, and other key stakeholders.



CEM Gorlosa drew inspiration from the Swachh Bharat Mission and announced plans to launch a similar campaign across Dima Hasao. He stressed that cleanliness is essential not only for public health but also for enhancing tourism and the district's image.

Gorlosa urged the Municipal Board, Auto Association, and Merchant Association to take collective responsibility. He proposed that shopkeepers form small groups to conduct monthly cleaning drives and warned of trade li-

cence penalties for non-compliance. Addressing schools, he called on authorities and SMCs to keep premises clean, particularly washrooms, and announced that NCHAC's Education Department would conduct awareness drives and monthly meetings with parents and students.

He also urged auto drivers to keep parking areas clean and maintain tourist-friendly behavior to improve the district's tourism appeal. Calling for broad community participation, Gorlosa asked every citizen—from students to shopkeepers—to contribute to keeping

areas clean from Jatinga to Lower Haflong, and other towns like Umrangso and Maibang. He noted that tourist spots littered with plastic waste damage the region's natural beauty. CEM Gorlosa further encouraged villagers to avoid using tin sheet fencing, suggesting bamboo or green hedges instead. He praised Jatinga's efforts in cleanliness and cited Mawlynnong in Meghalaya as a model for community-driven success. He concluded by stating that cleanliness is everyone's responsibility and crucial for building a healthier, more prosperous Dima Hasao.

State level debating competition at Morigaon College

HT Correspondent

MORIGAO, Oct 12: A State Level Debating Competition was successfully organised by the Morigaon College Students' Union at Morigaon College on Saturday. The event brought together some of the finest young minds from various universities and colleges across Assam.

The programme was inaugurated by Dr Lila Kanta Barthakur, Principal of Morigaon College (Auto), who highlighted the importance of debate in fostering critical thinking and communication skills among students. The event's

chief speaker was Dr Nilamoni Phukan, while the session was anchored by Dr Bhudhen Kumar Saikia.

A total of 13 participants representing renowned institutions such as Gauhati University, Tezpur University, J B University, Nagaon University, Sonapur College, and Morigaon College took part in the competition. Their performances were evaluated by an expert panel of judges comprising Umi Deka Barua, Bigit Kalita, and Dalim Phukan.

After a series of engaging and intellectually stimulating ex-

changes, Tezpur University was declared the Best Team, while Gauhati University secured the Second Best Team position. Tezpur University also clinched the title of Best Debater, followed by Morigaon College as the Second Best Debater and Nagaon University as the Third Best Debater.

The competition concluded with a vote of thanks, marking a day of spirited dialogue and academic excellence. The event not only encouraged the art of debating but also strengthened inter-collegiate interaction and cooperation among students.

NFR achieved a 3.5% rise in freight loading

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) is tirelessly working round the clock to serve its customers and ensure the prompt delivery of essential commodities to end users. During this fiscal year upto September, 2025 the zone successfully loaded 5.557 million tonnes (MT), reflecting a 3.5% increase compared to the same period in the previous fiscal year. In September, 2025, several commodities recorded significant growth in freight loading compared to the same period last year. Cement loading recorded a 48.1% increase, while coal loading rose by 133.3%, container loading increase by 21.4% and POL loading increased by 20.1%. Additionally, in other segments, stone chips registered a notable rise of 100% as compared to the previous fiscal year. The consistent growth in freight loading reflects the rising economic activity in the region. This upward trend has not only strengthened the region's economic landscape but also contributed significantly to NFR's revenue. Moving forward, NFR remains committed to technical advancements aimed at enhancing service reliability and efficiency, ensuring sustained growth in freight transportation.

Flight of Dreams: 12 Underprivileged Kids Fly to Singapore

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: In a heartwarming and visionary initiative, 12 underprivileged students from Assam have embarked on their first-ever international trip to Singapore, organised by Area 14 of Round Table India. Accompanied by two teachers, the students took off from Guwahati on October 11 for a four-day educational and cultural tour, returning on October 14.



This initiative, part of Round Table India's flagship 'Freedom Through Education' program, aims to broaden the horizons of children from economically challenged backgrounds by offering them a life-changing travel experience. The children were selected from schools built by Round Table India

across Kamrup (Rural), Darrang, and North Lakhimpur districts.

The tour includes visits to prominent educational institutions, cultural landmarks, and interactive learning sessions, all designed to inspire the children and expose them to global perspectives.

The effort was led by conveners Tabler Ayush Jalan, Tabler Sangeet Jalan, and Sq. Leg Sunny Sethia.

From samosa stall to Assam Police

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Oct 12: Manoj Sah, a resident of Konwar Dehingia Gaon in Demow, has successfully cleared the Constable (AB/UB) and equivalent posts exam in Assam Police and allied departments, the final results of which were declared on Saturday.

Son of Ranjit Sah and Minu Sah, Manoj completed his graduation from Sivasagar Commerce College. Despite challenging financial conditions, Manoj balanced his studies while assisting his father in their small hotel near Demow Bridge, where they sold samosas and rice. His mother works as a mid-day meal cook at a local school.

Speaking to the media, Manoj expressed happiness over his achievement, sharing that he had been preparing for the exam for the past three years. He said that after returning from college each day, he would help at the family stall and dedicate time to his studies and physical training. His success has brought joy to his family and well-wishers, with many congratulating him for his hard-earned accomplishment.

Mising Kitchen opens new branch in Jagiroad

HT Correspondent

JAGIROAD, Oct 12: A new branch of the popular Guwahati-based restaurant 'Mising Kitchen' was officially inaugurated on Sunday at Jagiroad by former minister (independent) and Dhakuakhana MLA.

Known for its traditional and modern cuisine, Mising Kitchen aims to cater to people from diverse communities in the area. The new outlet is located on the first floor of Jio Smart Bazar at Bhomoraguri, along NH-27. The MLA expressed hope that the restaurant will serve as a welcome stop for travellers on the highway.

Restaurant owner Yein Nivedita Pegu sought support and cooperation from the public for the venture's success. Her husband, engineer and cultural worker Laxminandan Pegu, along with several dignitaries, attended the inauguration event.

Forest mafia's rampage continues in Bilasipara

HT Correspondent

BILASIPARA, Oct 12: The menace of illegal tree felling by forest mafias continues unabated in Bilasipara. According to reports, large-scale deforestation was taking place inside the Tokorabandha Hill Reserved Forest area under the jurisdiction of the Shalkocha Forest Range. Acting on a tip-off, a team from the Shalkocha Forest Department carried out a surprise raid in the area. During the operation, a youth was caught red-handed while cutting down trees. The arrested individual has been identified as Shahannur Alam, a resident of Tokorabandha village.

Sources informed that the forest officials apprehended the accused and produced him before the court after completing necessary legal procedures. Local residents have expressed concern over the rampant destruction of forest resources, urging the Forest Department to take strict and immediate action against those involved in the illegal activity.

Call to boycott Shyamkanu

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Oct 12: The Asomiya Yuva Mancha, Sivasagar unit, and Sangrami Sena Asom, two leading social organisations, have called for a social boycott of the Festival (Shyamkanu) Mahanta family here in his hometown due to his alleged role in pushing the iconic singer Zubeen Garg to death in mysterious circumstances in the sea off Singapore. The organisation's presidents, Jadov Gogoi and Pankaj Khound, told HT correspondent that Zubeen's death in such circumstances cannot be taken lightly, and the role of Mahanta as the chief of the event management team neglected his prime responsibility in protecting the singing legend, and it is a blot on the cultural heritage of Sivasagar and Konwarpur. Both organisations organised rallies also in the town demanding speedy trial of the main accused, Shyamkanu Mahant and Siddharth Sharma in the Zubeen Garg Death case recently.

ZFC to plant 40000 Nahar saplings

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Oct 12: To keep alive the memory of their soul-stirring guiding angel, singing legend, iconic actor film producer, and social activist Zubeen Garg who passed away under mysterious circumstances in Singapore on Sept 19, the Zubeen Fan Club (ZFC), Sivasagar committee on Sunday launched their 40000 Nahar sapling plantation mission on the western bank of the historic Jaysagar Borpukhuri in the presence of hundreds of ZFC members and Zubeen admirers. Undertaken as part of the "Justice for Zubeen Garg" campaign, the plantation was ceremoniously inaugurated by the chairman of the Urban Sewage Board and former MLA Kushal Dworoi, social worker Hari Prasanna Hazarika, Zubeen Garg's Uncle Manoj Kumar Borthakur, and ZFC president Rimpul Deori.

Rishikesh Dworoi, and Manoshjyoti Dutta, its secretaries, ZFC, explained the objectives of the organisation to re-green Assam to turn Zubeen's dream into a reality. Rishikesh, with tears in his eyes, said that Zubeen expressed his wishes to inaugurate the Nahar plantation programme himself during his last visit to the historic town, but that did not happen as he is no more. ZFC will now plant Nahar saplings around all historical places and relics, which will be the sincerest tribute to the man who wanted to see a green and clean Assam.

Sonowal Kachari students form Tinsukia committee

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, Oct 12: The All Assam Sonowal Kachari Student Union has formed its full-fledged Tinsukia District Committee, with Babul Sonowal selected as president and Biplob Sonowal as general secretary. The new committee comprises 21 executive members.

The announcement was made during a press conference attended by a large number of members from various regional committees under the Tinsukia district. Present at the event were Budhin Sonowal, general secretary of the central executive committee, Partho Jyoti Saikia, chief organising secretary, Manash Jyoti Cheleng, president of Dibrugarh District Committee, and Abhijit Sonowal, president of Margherita Regional Committee, among others.

Speaking to the media, newly appointed president Babul Sonowal said the union has decided to organise a large public meeting concerning the land rights of the Sonowal Kachari community in Jagun Nampai Sonowal village under Margherita Co-District. The union also plans to push for the inclusion of community members in the voter list ahead of the Sonowal Kachari Autonomous Council elections.

Additionally, the union demanded a judicial enquiry into alleged embezzlement of funds by certain leaders in the name of deceased persons in Dirok Sunami village under Tinsukia district.

Babul Sonowal stated that several important resolutions were adopted to address the challenges faced by the indigenous Sonowal Kachari community in the district.



Rubi Barua lighting the inaugural lamp of Dipandita a pre Diwali Pop Up at Zoo Road in Guwahati on Sunday. HT Photos

Asam Sahitya Sabha's two-day plenary executive session

'A message of harmony from Barak reflects the pride of language and literature'

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Oct 12: "This is not merely a session of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, it is a festival of harmony, a bridge between the two valleys. This session will make the hearts of Barak and Brahmaputra one," said Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami, President of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, as the full-fledged Executive Session (2025-27) of the Sabha commenced on Saturday at Banga Bhawan, Silchar, with a two-day programme.

Highlighting the importance of holding the session in the Barak Valley, Dr Goswami added, "The executive session held in Barak with the message of harmony has showcased the pride and dignity of our language and literature." Aimed at fostering unity, peace, and integration between the Barak and Brahmaputra Valleys, the session began at 11 AM in the presence of Dr Goswami, Vice President Padum Rajkhowa, and General Secretary Debajit Bora. Delegates from across the state were warmly welcomed by the Reception Committee led by Secretary Dipayan Chakraborty.

The inaugural session opened with the ceremonial lighting of

lamps before the portraits of Dr Bhupen Hazarika, Zubeen Garg, and Kalika Prasad Bhattacharya by Dr Goswami, along with Minister Kaushik Roy, MLA Dipayan Chakraborty, and Cachar SP Numal Mahatta. This was followed by renditions of the songs "Chiro Senehi Mor Bhasha Janani" and the emotional number "Mayabini Ratir Bukut" by the late Zubeen Garg.

Welcoming the guests, Minister and Executive President of the Reception Committee Kaushik Roy described the event as a historic moment. "This is more than just a session of the Asam Sahitya Sabha—it is a grand festival of harmony, a bridge of cultural and emotional integration," he said. He also proposed a central celebration of Dr Bhupen Hazarika's birth centenary. In response, Dr Goswami announced plans to erect a statue of Dr Hazarika and establish a Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan in the Barak Valley under the Sabha's initiative.

Outlining the objectives of the session, Principal Secretary Debajit Bora said, "For the first time, the Sabha's full-fledged executive session is being held in Barak Val-



ley. This historic event will strengthen bonds of goodwill and harmony among all ethnic communities of both valleys."

Presiding over the session, Dr Goswami emphasised that the gathering symbolised linguistic and cultural unity. During the event, three publications—Barak Vaibhav (edited by SP Numal Mahatta), Asam Sahitya Sabha Patrika (edited by Dr Arabinda Rajkhowa), and Asam Sahitya Sabha Barta (edited by publicity convener Shankusiddha Nath)—were released jointly by Dr Goswami and Padum Rajkhowa. Speaking at the launch, Dr Goswami said, "The book

Barak Vaibhav will be a milestone in preserving the language and culture of the Barak region." Several landmark resolutions were adopted during the session after thorough discussions. The Sabha expressed deep grief over the untimely demise of artist Zubeen Garg and conveyed condolences to his family. While appreciating the government's decision to initiate an inquiry into his death, it called for a swift and impartial investigation and urged the public not to politicise the tragedy or spread hatred.

The Sabha also demanded the installation of a full-fledged statue of 19th-century industrial pioneer

Saud Bholanath Baruah at the Guwahati Trade Centre and proposed incorporating his biography into school curricula. It recommended celebrating May 23 as Commerce Day in his honour and naming the proposed Entrepreneurship Development University after him.

Expressing concern over ongoing border disputes with neighbouring states, the Sabha urged the government to take immediate and effective steps to resolve them. While thanking the government for implementing Assamese as an administrative language from April 1, 2025, it expressed disappointment that many officers had not yet enforced it and called for strict implementation.

The Sabha also urged the government to take over the century-old Tocklai Tea Research Institute to protect it from decline. It called for resolution of the Scheduled Tribe status issue for six communities under the Panchsheel Policy and announced the establishment of a Research Centre in Silchar under the Asam Tatva Gobeshona Sansthan for language and literary research.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The finest steel has to go through the hottest fire.
—Richard M Nixon

Israel-Hamas deal has lessons

The agreement reached between Israel and Hamas has raised a ray of hope that the massacre of Palestinian children and women, being carried out by the Israeli army for nearly two years, might finally stop. However, reports continue to emerge that Israel has not ceased its bombings even after the agreement. Still, there is some hope that these attacks may subside in the coming days. This massacre, however, has revealed many important truths. Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu declared that his country would "eliminate Hamas," but the war waged was not limited to Hamas. On one side stood children and women, and on the other, heavily armed Israeli soldiers. Starving and displaced, children were shot dead even while trying to fetch water. According to reports, over 65,000 people have been killed, 60% of them women and children. Some reports estimate that if those buried under the rubble are included, the death toll could exceed 100,000. During the same period, Israel's ambitions became even clearer — it launched attacks not only on Syria, Lebanon, Iran, and Yemen, but also continued expanding illegal settlements in the West Bank, driving Palestinians from their homes and dividing their territory into disconnected enclaves.

Movement between these areas now requires passing through Israeli checkpoints, making daily life of Palestinians extremely difficult. It has now become evident that American imperialism aims to erase Palestine entirely and rebuild Gaza as a modern city for tourism, corporate and strategic interests. Major multinational corporations and construction lobbies are already eyeing profits from rebuilding Gaza — but where will Palestinians go? Clause 12 of the agreement says that no one will be forced to leave Gaza, and those who wish to leave will be free to do so and free to return. We will encourage people to stay and offer them the opportunity to build a better Gaza. There is nothing about returning to their original homes, which is an indication that Palestinians no longer have a place in Gaza. The Palestinians will not have full control in governance.

The United States has played a central role in maintaining and strengthening Israel's military might by continuously supplying advanced weapons and bombs used in Gaza. Even when Israel faced difficulties in its war against Iran, the U.S. provided intelligence and support. There were even attempts to assassinate Hamas leaders in Qatar. Western nations largely stood by Israel throughout this massacre even though people in these countries held several protests against Israeli action. These developments have raised serious questions about the future of global geopolitics and how imperialist and neo-colonial powers are again attempting to dominate other nations.

Reclaiming the Road: Safeguarding Gen Z from the tyranny of technological distraction

By: Bishal Debnath

In the corridors of governance, where policy is forged and public interest deliberated, a silent yet devastating crisis continues to unravel on our roads. India's streets arteries of its economic and social dynamism have morphed into sites of preventable tragedies. According to the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH, 2023), 17 lives are lost every hour to road accidents. Behind this chilling figure lies a harrowing truth: Generation Z, India's youngest, most digitally immersed population, is becoming the foremost casualty in this unfolding national emergency.

As a Motor Vehicle Inspector entrusted with the statutory responsibility of ensuring road discipline and vehicular safety, I have observed often with growing concern the hazardous interplay between youthful overconfidence and digital distraction. A disconcerting paradox confronts us: never before have had we had so much access to information, and yet, never before have we been so inattentive.

The Virtual Overpowers the Real

Perpetually tethered to smartphones, scrolling through reels, posting stories, and responding to pings, this generation navigates the real world through a dangerously blurred virtual lens. For many, the vehicle is no longer a mode of transport it has become a moving pedestal for digital performance. Roads are now backdrops for selfies, not symbols of civic responsibility.

This fatal entanglement of connectivity and carelessness has led to distracted driving becoming not an aberration but an entrenched behavioural norm. Philosopher Marshall McLuhan once remarked, "We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us." Nowhere is this truer than in the way mobile devices have reshaped Gen Z's relationship with risk, mobility, and mortality.

A Nation on the Move, But at What Cost?

India recorded 1,68,491 road fatalities in 2023, the highest in the world. MoRTH data shows that nearly 67% of these deaths occurred in the 18–35 age group, predominantly Gen Z and young millennials. Crucially, while speeding and alcohol remain contributory factors, a growing proportion of deaths are linked to digital distractions behind the wheel.

The World Bank, in its India Road Safety Report (2021), estimated that road crashes cost India between 3% to 5% of its GDP annually, translating to over ₹5 lakh crore in economic losses. But what

cannot be measured is the human toll the dreams deferred, families devastated, and futures erased.

Screen Over Steering: A Pandemic of Distraction

A 2022 pan-India survey by SaveLIFE Foundation, in partnership with Mahindra Rise, found that:

38% of young drivers admitted to using their mobile phones while driving.

21% confessed to actively checking social media even while negotiating congested urban roads.

This isn't just anecdotal, it's a crisis.

A 2023 study by NIMHANS (National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences) showed that texting while driving increases reaction time by over 42%, drastically impairing a driver's ability to respond to sudden changes or hazards. This cognitive lag can mean the difference between a safe stop and a fatal crash.

A Technological Addiction Meets a Cultural Apathy

Gen Z, raised in an age of infinite scroll and instant gratification, often conflates digital urgency with real-world invincibility. But this over-reliance on multitasking is a cognitive myth. Neurological research confirms that the human brain cannot simultaneously process multiple high-stakes tasks it simply switches back and forth, degrading performance and focus in the process.

What exacerbates this is our wider cultural indifference to road discipline. Traffic rules are viewed not as safety protocols but as negotiable inconveniences. Helmets are bypassed for aesthetics. Pedestrian crossings are ignored. The idea of defensive driving taught rigorously in countries like Sweden and Japan is virtually absent from our public consciousness.

Legislation Exists, but Enforcement Falters

India's legal architecture, particularly post the Motor Vehicles (Amendment) Act, 2019, is robust on paper. The Act introduced a ₹5,000 fine for mobile phone use while driving and provisions for license suspension. However, implementation remains inconsistent.

A 2024 audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) flagged stark inter-state disparities. States like Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra showed higher compliance through automated e-challan systems and CCTV surveillance. In contrast, districts across the North-East, including parts of Assam, still grapple with manual systems, outdated tools, and staff shortages.

Lessons from Abroad

The Global Status Report on Road Safety 2023 (WHO) ranked India among the top five countries in road fatalities, behind China and the United States. But countries

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Economic self-reliance is a concept that plays a vital role in fostering independence and stability in the lives of individuals, societies, and nations. This concept refers not only to the ability to meet one's needs in the economic sphere but also to paving the way for sustenance through one's resources, labor, and skills. In today's globalized world, where nations are increasingly interdependent, the importance of economic self-reliance has grown even more significant.

The foundation of economic self-reliance lies in the proper utilization of resources and productivity. When an individual or society can fulfill their essential needs through their labor, knowledge, and resources, a sense of security emerges in their lives. This security is not confined to the economic domain; it profoundly impacts mental and social well-being as well. When an individual can reap the fruits of their hard work, it instills a sense of confidence. This confidence makes them bolder and more creative in various aspects of life. Similarly, when a society can meet its needs through its production, a sense of unity and self-respect awakens among its people. This self-respect is the greatest strength of economic self-reliance. It teaches individuals to trust in their abilities and frees them from external dependence.

At the individual level, economic self-reliance means the ability to sustain oneself through education, skills, and effort. When a person can meet their needs using their knowledge and expertise, it not only brings economic stability but also enhances their social standing. This stability makes them more responsible toward their family and society. For instance, if an individual secures a good job through their education or earns a livelihood by producing something with their skills, it brings satisfaction and peace to their life. This satisfaction positively affects their mental health. Moreover, when every individual in a society progresses in this direction, the economic foundation of that society strengthens. This robust foundation liberates the society from external dependence and helps build a self-reliant community.

At the societal level, economic self-reliance emphasizes the proper use of local resources. Every society has its own resources, culture, and heritage. By focus-

ing on these resources for productive activities, the society's economy becomes stronger. Through local production, people's livelihoods are sustained, and dependence on external imports decreases. This process not only brings economic stability but also helps preserve local culture and heritage. Local production fosters a sense of self-respect among the people, uniting them and building a stronger society. For example, if a society can meet its food needs through its agricultural resources, it creates a sense of food security among its people. This security makes the society more stable and prosperous.

At the national level, the importance of economic self-reliance is even greater. If a country can meet its needs through its resources, labor, and technology, its economy becomes independent and robust. In today's globalized economy, where nations are interdependent, economic self-reliance strengthens a country's independence and sovereignty. Excessive reliance on imports from other countries can weaken a nation's economy. During global market fluctuations, wars, or natural disasters, economies heavily dependent on imports can easily fall into crisis. Therefore, by enhancing its production capacity, a country can safeguard its economy. Additionally, local production creates new employment opportunities for the people, making the economy more dynamic.

Another significant aspect of economic self-reliance is its connection to social justice. When a society or nation becomes self-reliant, wealth distribution becomes more equitable. Economic self-reliance creates equal opportunities for all sections of society. If a society increases production by properly utilizing its resources, the benefits of that wealth can reach all strata of society. This process reduces poverty and mitigates social inequalities. Furthermore, in a self-reliant society, a sense of cooperation among people grows, making the society more cohesive. For example, if a society creates employment opportunities for all through its agriculture or industry, the living standards of the poorer sections improve, making the society more prosperous and just. The relevance of economic self-reliance has become crucial in today's globalized world. While globalization has increased trade and economic ties between nations, it has also heightened external dependence. During global economic crises,

wars, or natural disasters, economies reliant on imports can easily face risks. Therefore, by strengthening its production capacity, a country can protect itself from such crises. Moreover, local production creates new job opportunities, making the economy more dynamic. For instance, if a country can meet its food and essential goods needs through its agriculture or industry, its economy remains relatively safe from global crises.

Through the proper use of local resources, pressure on the environment can also be reduced. Importing goods from abroad requires more fuel for transportation, which adversely affects the environment. However, local production can mitigate this issue. Additionally, sustainable use of local resources aids in environmental conservation. For example, if a society meets its food needs through its agricultural resources, fuel consumption for transportation decreases, reducing environmental strain. Thus, economic self-reliance plays a vital role not only in economic terms but also in environmental protection.

When an individual can sustain their life through their labor and skills, it fosters confidence and self-respect. This feeling strengthens them mentally. Similarly, when a society or nation becomes self-reliant, a sense of pride emerges among its people. This pride instills positive energy, making them more productive and creative. For instance, when an individual can meet their family's needs through their efforts, it brings a sense of peace and satisfaction, leading to positive changes in their life.

Education makes people aware of their potential and equips them with skills. Through these skills, individuals find ways to sustain their livelihoods. Therefore, education and skill development are essential for economic self-reliance. If a society or nation prioritizes the education and skills of its people, its economic foundation strengthens. This strong foundation helps make the society or nation self-reliant. For example, if a country invests in the education and skills of its youth, they contribute to the economy through their expertise, making it stronger and more self-reliant.

Another important aspect of economic self-reliance is its cultural value. When a society becomes self-reliant through its resources and labor, its culture and heritage are preserved. Local production fosters the development of traditional arts and crafts,

strengthening the society's identity. Moreover, it instills a sense of pride in the local culture, making the society more cohesive and robust. For example, if a society increases production through its traditional handicrafts, it preserves those crafts while strengthening the economy.

While discussing the relevance of economic self-reliance, its limitations must also be acknowledged. In today's globalized world, complete economic self-reliance is not feasible. Trade and interdependence between nations are integral parts of the economy. Therefore, economic self-reliance does not mean severing all ties with the outside world. Instead, it means strengthening the economy by prioritizing local resources and labor. This balance makes economic self-reliance more practical and effective. For instance, if a country produces most of its essential goods locally and imports only specific items, it can maintain economic balance.

Modern technology has paved the way for economic self-reliance. Technology has increased productivity and enabled the proper use of local resources. Moreover, it has created new employment opportunities, helping people become self-reliant. Therefore, technological development and its proper use are crucial for economic self-reliance. For example, through modern agricultural technology, farmers can increase production, ensuring food security for society. If people lack awareness of their resources and labor, achieving economic self-reliance becomes challenging. Therefore, there is a need to foster awareness about the importance of self-reliance at all levels of society. This awareness will guide people toward the proper use of their skills and resources. For example, if society understands the importance of using local products, local production will increase, strengthening the economy.

In conclusion, the concept of economic self-reliance is not limited to the economic sphere. Its impact extends to all aspects of society. From individual lives to the progress of societies and nations, economic self-reliance plays a vital role. It not only speaks of economic stability and independence but also fosters confidence, self-respect, and pride among people. Therefore, the relevance of economic self-reliance is immensely significant in today's world, and achieving it requires collective effort.

Bhaona: Assam's living tradition

By: Satyabrata Borah

Bhaona, a vibrant and cherished traditional performing art of Assam, stands as a radiant symbol of the region's rich cultural heritage. Rooted in the spiritual and artistic vision of the 16th-century Vaishnavite saint and reformer Srimanta Sankardeva, Bhaona is much more than a theatrical performance; it is a profound expression of devotion, community spirit, and artistic excellence. This unique art form blends music, dance, drama, and spiritual teachings, creating a captivating experience that has enthralled audiences for centuries. Bhaona is not merely entertainment; it is a cultural institution that reflects the soul of Assamese society, fostering unity, imparting moral values, and preserving the region's traditions.

The origins of Bhaona are deeply intertwined with the neo-Vaishnavite movement initiated by Sankardeva. In the 16th century, Assam was a land of diverse religious practices and social complexities. Sankardeva sought to unify the people through devotion to Lord Krishna and a simplified form of worship that transcended caste and creed. To spread his teachings, he devised Bhaona as a medium to communicate spiritual and moral messages to the masses in an accessible and engaging way. Through his Ankiya Nats, or one-act plays, such as Parijat Haran, Keli Gopal, and Rukmini Haran, Sankardeva wove stories of Krishna's divine leelas (pastimes) and ethical lessons into performances that resonated with both the learned and the common folk. These plays, written in Brajavali, a poetic language blending Assamese and Maithili, were designed to be easily understood, making spiritual teachings relatable to all.

Bhaona's enduring appeal lies in its simplicity and versatility. Unlike modern theatre, which often requires elaborate stages and technical equipment, Bhaona can be performed in the humblest of settings—be it a village namghar (prayer house), an open field, or a simple platform. This accessibility has allowed Bhaona to thrive in rural Assam, where communities come together to organize and participate in these performances. The essence of Bhaona lies in its ability to entertain while imparting profound spiritual and moral insights. It is a celebration of devotion, where the audience is not just a passive observer but an active participant in a shared spiritual journey. At the heart of Bhaona is its seamless integration of music, dance, and drama. The musical component is one of its most distinctive features, drawing heavily from Borgeets, the devotional songs composed by Sankardeva and his disciple Madhavdeva. These songs, steeped in Bhakti rasa (devotional sentiment), narrate tales of Krishna's divine acts and the importance of leading a righteous life. Accompanied by traditional instruments like the khol (a two-sided drum), taal (cymbals), nagara (a large drum), and flute, the music creates an enchanting atmosphere that elevates the performance. The melodies are soulful, and their rhythmic patterns are carefully crafted to complement the narrative, making the experience immersive for the audience.

Dance is another integral element of Bhaona, with Sattriya dance, also introduced by Sankardeva, playing a central role. Recognized as one of India's classical dance forms, Sattriya is characterized by its graceful movements, intricate footwork, and expressive gestures. In Bhaona, Sattriya dance is used to depict key moments in the narrative, bringing

characters and emotions to life. Whether it is the playful antics of young Krishna or the intense devotion of his devotees, the dance sequences add a visual richness to the performance, captivating viewers and deepening their connection to the story.

The dramatic structure of Bhaona is equally compelling. The plays are typically centered around mythological themes, particularly stories from the life of Krishna or episodes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The sutradhar, or narrator, is a pivotal figure in Bhaona, guiding the audience through the story, introducing characters, and providing context. The sutradhar's role is not just functional but also artistic, as they engage the audience with poetic recitations and witty commentary, creating a bond between the performers and the spectators. The dialogues, delivered in a stylized manner, are interspersed with songs and dances, ensuring that the performance remains dynamic and engaging.

One of the most striking aspects of Bhaona is its use of traditional costumes and masks, known as mukha. These elaborate costumes, adorned with vibrant colors and intricate designs, enhance the visual appeal of the per-



formance. The masks, often used to depict mythological characters or demons, add an element of mystique, allowing actors to fully embody their roles. The craftsmanship involved in creating these costumes and masks is a testament to the skill and dedication of Assamese artisans, who have preserved these techniques through generations.

Bhaona serves as a powerful instrument of social cohesion. In rural Assam, organizing a Bhaona performance is a collective effort that brings entire communities together. Villagers of all ages and backgrounds contribute in various ways—some take on acting roles, others play musical instruments, while many help with stage setup, costume preparation, or logistical arrangements. This collaborative spirit fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose, reinforcing the social fabric of the community. Bhaona performances are often held during religious festivals, harvest celebrations, or other significant occasions, making them a focal point for communal gatherings.

The moral and spiritual teachings embedded in Bhaona are another reason for its enduring significance. The stories depicted in these performances emphasize values such as truth, compassion, devotion, and righteousness. Through the triumphs and trials of divine figures like Krishna, the audience is reminded of the importance of leading a virtuous life. For children and young adults, Bhaona serves as an educational tool, introducing them to their cultural and religious heritage in an engaging manner. The narratives often carry timeless lessons that remain relevant across generations, encouraging viewers to reflect on their own lives and choices.

In the modern era, Bhaona continues to hold a special place in Assamese culture, despite the rise of contemporary forms of entertainment like television, cinema, and digital

media. While these modern mediums have undoubtedly influenced the preferences of younger audiences, Bhaona retains its charm, particularly in rural areas where it remains a cherished tradition. Performances are still a highlight of festivals like Bihu, Janmashtami, and other religious events, drawing large crowds who come to experience the magic of this art form. Moreover, efforts are being made to adapt Bhaona to contemporary contexts, with some performances incorporating modern themes such as environmental conservation, social harmony, or gender equality. This adaptability ensures that Bhaona remains relevant while staying true to its roots.

The preservation of Bhaona owes much to the efforts of cultural institutions, Sattras (Vaishnavite monasteries), and dedicated artists. Sattras, established by Sankardeva and his followers, have been the custodians of this art form, nurturing its practice and passing it down through generations. These institutions continue to train young artists in the techniques of Sattriya dance, Borgeet singing, and Bhaona performance, ensuring that the tradition remains alive. Additionally, cultural organizations and educational institutions in Assam have taken steps to promote Bhaona through workshops, festivals, and performances in urban centers. The recognition of Sattriya as a classical dance form by the Sangeet Natak Akademi has further elevated the status of Bhaona, bringing it to national and international audiences. The growing interest among the younger generation is a promising sign for the future of Bhaona. Many young artists are embracing this art form, blending traditional techniques with innovative approaches to appeal to modern sensibilities. Social media platforms and digital archives have also played a role in spreading awareness about Bhaona, allowing it to reach a global audience. Short films, documentaries, and online performances have introduced this art form to people beyond Assam, fostering a deeper appreciation for its cultural and artistic value.

Bhaona's beauty lies in its ability to transcend time and space, connecting the past with the present and the spiritual with the artistic. It is a living testament to the genius of Sankardeva, who envisioned a medium that could unite people through shared faith and creativity. As a cultural practice, Bhaona embodies the spirit of Assam—its devotion, its resilience, and its love for art. It is a bridge between generations, a mirror reflecting the values of Assamese society, and a celebration of the divine through human expression.

To ensure that Bhaona continues to thrive, it is essential for both communities and institutions to invest in its preservation and promotion. Encouraging young people to learn and participate in Bhaona, documenting its various forms, and integrating it into educational curricula can help sustain this tradition. At the same time, performers and artists must be supported through patronage and opportunities to showcase their talents. By nurturing this art form, Assam can ensure that Bhaona remains a vibrant part of its cultural identity for generations to come.

Bhaona is more than a performance; it is the heartbeat of Assamese culture. It encapsulates the region's spiritual depth, artistic brilliance, and communal harmony. As a golden edifice of Assam's heritage, Bhaona stands tall, radiating the timeless values of devotion, unity, and creativity. Its legacy is a reminder of the power of art to inspire, uplift, and unite, making it a treasure that deserves to be cherished and celebrated by all.

Why sleep is essential for health

By: Thomas Johnson

Modern-day living in the United States and many other countries does not always embrace the necessity for adequate sleep. Yet, it is important that people make an effort to get enough sleep regularly.

The following are some of the many benefits health professionals associate with getting a good night's rest.

1. Better memory and performance

A 2017 study Trusted Source looked into the short and long-term health consequences of sleep disruption.

Researchers noted that sleep has links to several brain functions, including:

- Memory: Sleep disruption may affect memory processing and formation.

- Performance: People's performance at work, school, and other settings is affected by sleep disruption. This includes focus, emotional reactivity, decision-making, risk-taking behavior, and judgment.

- Cognition: By affecting stress hormones, sleep disruption may affect cognition.

A 2015 study in the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry Trusted Source showed that children's sleep patterns could directly impact their behavior and academic performance.

2. Lower weight gain risk

The link between weight gain and obesity and short sleep patterns is unclear.

There have been several studies throughout the years that have linked obesity and poor sleep patterns.

A 2018 study Trusted Source suggests that people who regularly sleep less than seven hours a night are more likely to have a higher body mass index (BMI) and develop obesity than those who sleep more.

Researchers suggested sleep deprivation is associated with higher levels of ghrelin (the hunger hormone), salt retention and inflammatory markers. They also noted that decreased sleep results in increased fatigue, which may affect a person's desire or ability to exercise and maintain a healthful lifestyle.

More research is needed to better understand the links between poor sleep and weight gain.

Resources for healthy sleep

To discover more evidence-based information and resources on the science of healthy sleep, visit our dedicated hub.

3. Better calorie regulation

Similarly to gaining weight, there is evidence to suggest that getting a good night's sleep can help a person's body take in fewer calories.

For example, a 2022 clinical trial found that overweight adults who increased their sleep duration took in fewer calories compared with a

control group.

The adults increased their sleep by 1.2 hours on average, and took in around 270 calories fewer than the control group. The researchers suggested that improving and maintaining healthy sleep duration could help with weight loss and obesity prevention.

4. Greater athletic performance

Adults need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep a night, but recent studies have suggested that athletes may need more.

Sleep is important for athletes and people participating in sport because the body heals during sleep. Other benefits include:

- Better endurance
- More energy
- Better accuracy and reaction time
- Faster speed
- Better mental functioning

5. Lower risk of heart disease

One risk factor for heart disease is high blood pressure. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Trusted Source, getting adequate rest each night allows the body's blood pressure to regulate itself.

Getting a good night's sleep can also reduce the chances of sleep-related conditions such as apnea and promote better overall heart health.

6. More emotional and social intelligence

Sleep has links to people's emotional and social intelligence. Someone who does not get adequate sleep is more likely to have issues with recognizing other people's emotions and expressions.

For example, a 2022 study looked into the relationship between sleep quality and duration and emotional intelligence.

477 participants were asked to complete questionnaires about sleep habits and emotional intelligence. People who routinely experienced higher quality sleep tended to perceive themselves as having better emotional intelligence, such as doing well in social interactions, maintaining relationships, feeling positive and controlling impulses.

7. Preventing depression

The association between sleep and mental health has been the subject of research for a long time. A 2016 meta-analysis Trusted Source concluded that insomnia is significantly associated with an increased risk of depression.

The review suggests that sleep loss may result in cognitive alterations that lead to depression risk.

Sleep disturbance may also impair emotional regulation and stability, as well as altering neural processes, which may all lead to symptoms of depression.

8. Lower inflammation

There is a link between getting adequate sleep



and reducing inflammation in the body.

For example, a 2019 study found a significant positive association between greater sleep consistency and higher levels of inflammation, particularly in women.

The study suggested that inconsistent sleep, where a person goes to bed at inconsistent times or wakes up at different times each night, can disturb the body's process of regulating inflammation during sleep.

9. Stronger immune system

Sleep helps the body repair, regenerate, and recover. The immune system is no exception to this relationship. Some research suggests that deep sleep is necessary Trusted Source for the body to repair itself and strengthen the immune system.

However, scientists still need to do further research into the exact mechanisms of sleep in regards to its impact on the body's immune system.

Stages of sleep

When people sleep, their body goes through four stages Trusted Source of sleep.

Three of these stages are non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep, with each stage a progressively deeper sleep. The final stage is rapid eye movement (REM) sleep, where dreaming mostly occurs.

The body cycles through each stage around four to six times Trusted Source over the course of a night.

Read on to find out more about each stage of sleep.

Stage 1 NREM (Light sleep)

This is the lightest stage of NREM sleep, where a person transitions from wakefulness to sleep.

In this stage, a person's brain waves, heart-beat, breathing, and eye movements slow. Their muscles also relax, with occasional twitching.

A person usually spends only 5% Trusted Source of their total sleep time in stage 1, which typically lasts several minutes Trusted Source at a time.

Stage 2 NREM (Deeper sleep)

In this stage, a person's heart rate slows Trusted Source and muscles relax further. Their body temperature drops and eye movements stop.

A person's brain-wave activity slows but they experience brief bursts of electrical activity, known as sleep spindles. Studies suggest sleep spindles help with memory consolidation.

People spend most of their total sleep time in stage 2 (about 45%). This stage typically lasts around 25 minutes in the first cycle, with time increasing in each cycle.

Stage 3 NREM (Deepest sleep)

This is the deepest stage of sleep, also known as slow-wave sleep (SWS), and accounts for about 25% Trusted Source of total sleep time.

A person's heart rate, breathing, and brain waves slow to their lowest levels, and muscles completely relax. This stage is the hardest to awaken from, and when sleepwalking, bedwetting, and night terrors occur.

In this stage, a person's body repairs itself, re-grows tissues, strengthens the immune system, and builds bone and muscle. A person needs this

stage of sleep to wake up feeling refreshed.

Stage 4 REM (Dreaming)

This is the stage of sleep where dreaming and nightmares mostly occur. It usually begins about 90 minutes Trusted Source after a person falls asleep.

A person's eyes move rapidly from side to side with eyelids closed during this stage, and heart rate and breathing increase.

Brain activity becomes closer Trusted Source to that seen in wakefulness, but arm and leg muscles become paralyzed to stop a person from acting out their dreams. Experts believe a person needs some REM and non-REM sleep for memory consolidation.

People spend around 25% of total sleep time in REM sleep, with each cycle lasting from 10 minutes to an hour.

Learn more about sleep stages here.

How much sleep do we need?

Sleep needs vary from person to person, depending on their age. As a person ages, they typically require less sleep to function properly.

According to the CDC Trusted Source, the breakdown is as follows:

- Newborns (0–3 months): 14–17 hours
- Infants (4–12 months): 12–16 hours
- Toddler (1–2 years): 11–14 hours
- Preschool (3–5 years): 10–13 hours
- School age (6–12 years): 9–12 hours
- Teen (13–18 years): 8–10 hours
- Adult (18–60 years): 7–plus hours
- Adult (61–64 years): 7–9 hours
- Adult (65+ years): 7–8 hours

As well as the number of hours, the quality of sleep is also important. Signs of poor sleep quality include:

- Waking in the middle of the night.
- Still not feeling rested after an adequate number of hours sleep.

Tips for improving sleep
Some things a person can do to improve sleep quality are:

- Avoiding sleeping in when you have had enough sleep.
- Going to bed around the same time each night.
- Spending more time outside and being more active during the day.
- Reducing stress through exercise, therapy, or other means.

Summary

Sleep is a vital, often neglected, component of every person's overall health and well-being. Sleep is important because it enables the body to repair and be fit and ready for another day.

Getting adequate rest may also help prevent excess weight gain, heart disease, and increased illness duration. (MNT)

Pay-to-Play visas, human-capital stakes: The H-1B fee's India effect

By: Soumya Bhowmik

The contemporary global economy stands at a pivotal juncture where talent mobility has become a defining determinant of national competitiveness. US President Donald Trump's imposition of a US\$100,000 selection fee on H-1B visas is more than a policy adjustment; it signals a structural shift in how nations compete for human capital in the digital age. From a macroeconomic perspective, the measure risks underestimating the contribution of skilled migration to growth in interconnected economies. With India-born professionals accounting for roughly 71 percent of H-1B beneficiaries, and median compensation rising from US\$108,000 (FY2021) to US\$118,000 (FY2022–FY2023), these workers typically fill specialised, complementary roles rather than substituting domestic talent.

Economic theory is clear that constraining factor mobility can misallocate human capital and lower aggregate productivity; however, the distribution of near-term costs for India deserves attention. A pay-to-play filter favours incumbents over start-ups, raising the risk that Indian founders face slower access to US customer discovery, venture networks, and enterprise sales learning. Tacit knowledge that historically diffused through on-site stints—such as product-management norms, compliance practices, and client embeddedness—may accumulate more slowly if fewer teams sit with customers. Firms could experience redeployment and bench costs, temporary margin pressure during contract renegotiations, and additional legal/compliance overhead while exploring alternative pathways.

Domestically, absorbing more returning or retained talent can tighten urban infrastructure and managerial bandwidth, potentially compressing salaries in some segments before new demand absorbs the supply. These are transitional but material frictions; they call for tighter programme management, faster skilling upgrades, and active support for market access. Set against these adjustments, the case for India's strategic pivot—from dependence to capability—rests on converting short-run disruption into durable advantage and provides a natural bridge to self-reliance and innovation at scale.

India's Strategic Pivot: From Dependence to Self-Reliance

This policy shift unfolds alongside India's digital economy transformation—projected to contribute around US\$1 trillion to the GDP in the mid-2020s—driven by robust technological infrastructure and a rapidly expanding base of digitally skilled professionals. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's assertion that dependence on other countries is India's "real enemy" and his call for "Atmanirbharta" (self-reliance) signal a deliberate re-orientation of development strategy.

Indian IT services companies, which derive 50–60 percent of their revenues from the US, are already adapting. Major firms, such as Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, and Wipro, have reduced their dependence on H-1B visas in recent years, relying more on offshore delivery, local hiring, and global capability centres (GCCs). This positions them to capture larger shares of the technology value chain as American clients seek cost-effective alternatives to on-site deployments. The implications extend beyond individual firms to India's innovation system. The start-up landscape has expanded rapidly, with over 100 unicorns in recent years, and cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune continue to deepen their roles as technology hubs, attracting investment and fostering indigenous innovation.

India's educational infrastructure provides the foundation for this trajectory. The country produces millions of STEM graduates annually, a deep pipeline by global standards. Government initiatives such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for semiconductors are creating frameworks for advanced technological development within India's borders. Research and development (R&D) spending has grown significantly since 2020, with domestic firms and international corporations establishing major innovation centres. Companies, including Google, Microsoft, and Amazon, are investing billions in Indian engineering and R&D, recognising the Indian market as a source of innovation rather than merely a destination for outsourced services.

As this base deepens, the ongoing rebalancing away from US on-site roles can also improve how India matches skills with demand at home. As global capability centres and product firms scale domestically, they reveal granular needs—specific stacks, compliance requirements, and domain expertise—earlier and more clearly. Universities and training providers can adjust their curricula more quickly, hiring cycles can be shortened, and relocation/visa frictions can be decreased. Niche capabilities in chip design, cloud security, data engineering, and product management find buyers without waiting for overseas assignment windows. Wage signals normalise across cities and firm tiers, retention improves, and apprenticeships and industry certifications connect more directly to live roles. These gains depend on better labour-market data, portable credentials, and policies that support interstate mobility.

Geopolitical Realignments and Labour-Market Dynamics

As the US adopts more protectionist measures, other destinations are competing more actively for global talent—Canada's Express Entry categories, the UK's Global Talent Visa, and Australia's skilled migration reforms are prominent

examples. For India, these developments open space for diversified partnerships—the country is deepening technological cooperation with European partners and engaging selectively in other regional and supply-chain frameworks, thereby reducing its overreliance on the US markets.

The transformation of global labour markets is one of the salient economic shifts of the early twenty-first century. "Reverse brain drain" is increasingly visible as domestic ecosystems mature to retain and attract top talent. The return of Indian professionals to establish start-ups in Bengaluru, as well as the rise of India-based unicorns competing globally, illustrates this change. The digital nature of modern work further enables cross-border collaboration that bypasses traditional immigration constraints. Indian firms can now serve global clients at scale while keeping their core teams in India, capturing value that once required a physical presence in client countries.

The economic literature on skilled migration consistently shows that restrictions on high-skilled labour mobility tend to harm receiving economies in the long run, while source countries may benefit if they effectively absorb and deploy retained talent. Historical examples from South Korea, Taiwan, and Israel demonstrate how domestic innovation capacity can be accelerated when human capital remains local and institutions effectively bridge research with market applications. India's own experience follows a similar trajectory. The software industry has evolved from cost-efficient service delivery to a sophisticated innovation ecosystem, driving global advancements in fintech, health tech, and agri-tech. Firms such as Flipkart, Paytm, and Ola have developed business models suited to Indian conditions that are now exported internationally. Going forward, the durability of this trajectory will depend on sustained investment in education quality, research infrastructure, and institutional mechanisms that foster innovation.

Finally, Trump's restrictive H-1B fee risks dulling US innovation by taxing high-skill mobility, while nudging talent, investment, and ideas toward competitors. India can convert this disruption into an advantage by deepening self-reliance, strengthening domestic innovation capacity, and expanding external partnerships. Durable prosperity will hinge on building independent capabilities and resilient human-capital systems, not on access to foreign labour markets alone. A migration realignment is underway that shifts where teams form and intellectual property is created, potentially accelerating India's move from services dependence to innovation leadership. Those that adapt fastest to this human-capital competition are likely to define tomorrow's global economy. (Courtesy: ORF)

Vaccines and motherhood: Are AI generated health messages working in Kenya and Nigeria?

By: Yewande O Addie

An artificial intelligence (AI) system creates a bright, youth-focused social media post for young Kenyans, complete with local slang and the phrase "YOUNG, LIT and VAXXED!" This message tackles the fear that vaccination will affect fertility—a fear that has serious health consequences. But something feels off about an algorithm trying to sound cool while discussing reproductive health.

This scenario is one of dozens of health messages analysed in a recent study of health campaign communication in Nigeria and Kenya.

Our research team analysed and compared 120 health messages: 80 from traditional sources like health ministries and non-government organisations and 40 generated by AI systems.

We focused on two critical health topics: vaccine hesitancy and maternal healthcare.

The results reveal a surprising twist in the global rush to use AI for health communication: neither approach proved superior. AI was more creative but error-prone. Traditional campaigns were authoritative but rigid. This underscores the real challenge: designing health communication that is accurate and culturally responsive.

Health systems riding the technology wave

Kenya and Nigeria aren't newcomers to health technology innovation. Both have consistently adapted their health communication as new technologies emerged.

In the 1980s and 1990s, health campaigns relied on printed posters, radio jingles and clinic-based education. By the 2010s, mobile phones and platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook were transforming health messaging. Text message alerts and WhatsApp groups became essential tools for organisations and health ministries. They shared updates on HIV, maternal health and COVID-19. In Nigeria, Igbo-language radio campaigns like "Kill Moko, Stop Malaria" improved message understanding among rural women.

Now AI represents the next wave. The World Health Organization has launched S.A.R.A.H (Smart AI Resource Assistant for Health), designed specifically for health communication. Meanwhile, general AI tools like ChatGPT (Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer) are being used to craft vaccination campaigns and maternal health advice.

Kenya has developed a national AI strategy for healthcare. Nigeria too is exploring AI tools to strengthen health systems.

The appeal is obvious: AI can produce messages quickly, in multiple languages and at scale. This efficiency matters especially as global health funding faces uncertainty. It requires health systems to do more with potentially fewer resources.

So our research asks: when AI creates health messages for these contexts, does it understand what really matters to local communities?

What we discovered

The results surprised us. AI-generated messages actually included more cultural references than traditional campaigns. Where human-created materials often stuck to clinical, western medical language, AI systems attempted to use local metaphors, farming analogies and community-centred language.

But there's a catch. These cultural references were often shallow and sometimes inaccurate. AI might reference local customs without truly understanding them. It could also use agricultural metaphors that work for rural audiences but alienate urban readers. In some cases, AI-generated images produced warped, distorted faces. AI generation of images of people of colour tends to be a per-

sistent problem. This is because these systems haven't been trained on enough diverse examples.

The WHO's health-focused AI tool, S.A.R.A.H, often produced incomplete responses and sometimes required resets to function properly. Its use of a white female avatar also raises questions about representation in global health AI design.

Traditional health campaigns had their own problems too. Despite being created by organisations with substantial resources and local presence, they often reinforced western medical expertise. They gave limited space to community knowledge and traditional health practices.

This reflects a broader pattern. International organisations can inadvertently replicate colonial-era patterns of external "experts" telling local communities what to do. We saw this during the COVID-19 pandemic, when high-income countries blocked efforts to waive intellectual property rules and hoarded vaccine doses. This left many low- and middle-income countries struggling to secure access. It reinforced a hierarchy of whose health and expertise mattered most in global decision-making.

Most striking was what both approaches missed: genuine community empowerment. Across nearly all the messages we analysed, people were positioned as passive recipients of expert knowledge rather than active participants in their own health decisions.

Why this matters now

These findings matter because AI adoption in African health systems is accelerating rapidly. In sub-Saharan Africa, surveys suggest that 31.7 percent of AI deployments in health are in telemedicine, 20 percent in sexual and reproductive health and 16.7 percent in operations.

Success stories are emerging, like Kenya's AI Consult platform reducing diagnostic errors. Another is AI tools changing healthcare access in Nigeria.

But our research suggests that without careful attention to cultural context and community engagement, AI health messaging could run into the same old problems: outsiders creating messages for communities without genuinely understanding or involving them.

The stakes are particularly high for vaccine hesitancy and maternal health. These are two areas where trust, cultural sensitivity and community buy-in can literally mean the difference between life and death. When people trust health guidance, more lives are saved. Vaccines protect communities from preventable diseases and maternal health support lowers the risk of mothers and infants dying during childbirth.

A path forward

The solution isn't to abandon AI in health communication.

Instead, these tools need to be developed with local communities from the ground up. This means training AI systems using locally relevant data and knowledge systems.

Health organisations should also build community feedback loops into AI message development. Test AI-generated health content with the communities it's meant to serve. Include local health workers, traditional leaders and community members in validating accuracy, cultural appropriateness and emotional resonance.

There's also an opportunity to invest in homegrown AI development. African-led platforms like the digital healthcare assistant AwaDoc demonstrate how locally developed AI can better understand cultural context while maintaining medical accuracy.

AI's future in global health communication will be determined not just by how smart these systems become, but by how well they learn to genuinely listen to and learn from the communities they aim to serve. (Courtesy: Down to Earth)

Operation Blue Star a mistake, Indira Gandhi paid for it with her life: Chidambaram



SHIMLA, Oct 12: Congress leader P Chidambaram said Operation Blue Star was not the right way to capture militants holed up in the Golden Temple in 1984, due to which the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, "paid with her life".

"There was a way to retrieve and capture all militants but Operation Blue Star was the wrong way and I agree that Mrs Gandhi paid with her life for the mistake but the mistake was cumulative decision of the Army, intelligence, police and civil defence and you cannot completely blame (just) Mrs Gandhi," the former home minister said during a book launch in Himachal Pradesh's Kasauli

on Saturday.

Chidambaram made the remarks during a conversation with journalist and author Harinder Baweja on her memoir 'They Will Shoot You Madam: My Life Through Conflict' at the Khushwant Singh Literary Festival.

Operation Blue Star was a military operation held between June 1-10, 1984, to remove Damdami Taksal leader Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his militants from the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest site among Sikhs.

Later that year, Indira Gandhi, the prime minister at the time, was assassinated.

Chidambaram said, "No disrespect to any serv-

ice or military officer, but Operation Blue Star was not the right way to retrieve the Golden Temple and about 3-4 years later we showed the right way by keeping the Army out in Operation Black Thunder." Operation Black Thunder was carried out in 1986 and 1988 to flush out militants hiding in the Golden Temple.

Baweja said that Operation Blue Star led to the next chapter of violence in Punjab. She added that Indira Gandhi "mixed religion with politics and engaged Bhindranwale to help control the Akalis", which she said was a "supremely bad idea".

Chidambaram objected to the suggestion that Bhindranwale was "created" by Gandhi. "I am not

sure whether that accusation against Mrs Gandhi is correct that she created Bhindranwala."

The Kashmir issue was also discussed at length at the book launch. Baweja, who has covered several conflicts in the Valley, said, "I think Kashmiris very early understood that Pakistan was using them but somehow New Delhi never seized the opportunity to reduce the trust deficit with people of the Valley.

"We are talking about the wounds conflicts inflict on the population", she said.

Chidambaram said there is an alternative story of Kashmir that the one "seen on television every evening". (PTI)

But that mistake was a cumulative decision of the Army, the police, the intelligence and the civil service: Chidambaram Chidambaram has exposed Cong's false narrative on Operation Blue Star: BJP

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: The BJP hit out at the Congress after former Union home minister P Chidambaram's remarks on 'Operation Blue Star' and said history must record the truth that it was not a national necessity but a "political misadventure" by Indira Gandhi.

Will the Congress now act against Chidambaram "for speaking the truth and exposing their false narrative?" the ruling party asked.

This came after Chidambaram, while speaking at a literary event in Kasauli on Saturday, said that Operation Blue Star, which was launched in June 1984 to clear the Golden Temple of armed terrorists led by Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, was "wrong" and the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi "paid the price with her life for the mistake".

"No disrespect to any military officers here, but that (Blue Star) was the wrong way to retrieve the Golden Temple. A few years later, we showed the right way to retrieve the Golden Temple by keeping out the Army," he said.

"Blue Star was the wrong way, and I agree that Mrs Gandhi paid with her life for that mistake. But that mistake was a cumulative decision of the Army, the police, the intelligence and the civil service. You cannot blame it only on Mrs Gandhi," Chidambaram said and asked, "Would you?"

Indira Gandhi was assassinated on October 31, 1984, at her residence by her two Sikh bodyguards.



Reacting to the former home minister's remarks, Union minister Kiren Rijju said in a post on X, "Chidambaram Ji admits the Congress blunders too late!"

"After revealing that India could not respond to Pakistan terror attacks in Mumbai, due to high pressure from USA & foreign powers, now he admits Operation Blue Star in Golden Temple was also a mistake," the minister said.

Latching onto Chidambaram's comments, BJP national spokesperson R P Singh slammed the Congress and said, "History must record the truth."

Operation Blue Star was not a national necessity; it was a political misadventure, he charged. "As a nationalist, I strongly be-

lieve that Operation Blue Star was completely avoidable, as rightly mentioned by former Home Minister P Chidambaram," the BJP spokesperson said.

Singh alleged that the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi, chose the path of confrontation for "political reasons and electoral gain", seeking to ignite nationalist fervour before the 1984 parliamentary elections by portraying the "most patriotic community of India, the Sikhs, as anti-national".

"In doing so, she got trapped in her own political web and ultimately paid for it with her life," he said.

"But the real tragedy was borne by my community. Over 3,000 Sikhs were brutally massacred in Delhi and more than 30,000

killed across Punjab, victims of a calculated political design that tore apart the social fabric of the nation," Singh added.

The BJP spokesperson said that a more strategic approach like Operation Black Thunder, where electricity and water supply to the Golden Temple was cut off and militants were compelled to surrender, could have achieved the objective without "desecrating the sanctity of Sri Harmandir Sahib and the Akal Takht, and without the tragic loss of innocent devotees' lives".

Reacting to Chidambaram's comments, BJP IT department head Amit Malviya said the Congress never misses a chance to claim that Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were "martyrs".

"But senior Congress leader P Chidambaram has now busted that myth, calling Operation Blue Star a mistake for which Indira Gandhi paid with her life," he said.

"By the same logic, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination too was a consequence of his disastrous handling of the situation in India's neighbourhood," he said and asked, "Will the Congress now act against Chidambaram for speaking the truth and exposing their false narrative?"

According to sources, the Congress leadership is "very upset" with Chidambaram for his remarks on 'Operation Blue Star', and is of the view that senior leaders should be careful before making public statements that create embarrassment for the party. (PTI)

Congress accuses Modi govt of 'systematically killing', 'weakening' RTI Act

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: The Congress on Sunday accused the Modi government of "systematically killing" and "weakening" the Right to Information Act, which was brought by its UPA government two decades ago with an aim to bring in transparency and accountability in governance.

On the 20th anniversary of Right to Information (RTI) Act, the Congress alleged that for the BJP, RTI means "Right to Intimidate", and claimed that the ruling dispensation also made the Central Information Commission a "toothless" body with its top post as well as posts of seven information commissioners lying vacant for a long-time.

"For the BJP, RTI means Right to Intimidate," AICC general secretary (communications), Jairam Ramesh, said at a press conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the Act, which was introduced on October 12, 2005.

Ramesh said the purpose and intention behind the revolutionary law was to bring transparency in the functioning of the government

minister wrong when he claimed that there were crores of fake ration cards in the country.

The information obtained through the RTI Act revealed that Modi's claims were wrong, he said.

The third reason, Ramesh said, was the information revealed through RTI that just four hours prior to the demonetisation announcement by Prime Minister Modi, the Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India concluded that the move will not help curb black money or fake currency.

Citing the fourth reason, Ramesh said that under the RTI Act, somebody sought the list of 20 top willful loan defaulters of the country, and the CIC said the list had been submitted by the then-RBI governor to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

The fifth reason, the Congress leader claimed, was the revelation through RTI that no black money had come back from abroad as had been promised by Prime Minister Modi ahead of the 2014 Lok Sabha elections.



The Congress leader also warned that the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, if implemented in its current form, will prove to be the final death knell for the RTI.

Section 44(3) of the Act says that no personal information of any individual will be accessible under the RTI Act, Ramesh

and make it accountable.

However, the Modi government brought amendments to the Act in 2019 to weaken it and turn the CIC into a "toothless organisation", he alleged.

He also claimed the Modi government brought the Digital Personal Data Protection Act to amend the provisions of the RTI Act to effectively dismantle the RTI.

The CIC is being run by just two members and the post of chief information commissioner and seven other commissioners in the body are lying vacant for the past two years, Ramesh said.

"The CIC headquarter looks like a ghost house," Ramesh said, referring to the "deep aversion" of the Modi government towards the RTI.

Ramesh also listed five reasons behind the Modi government acting against the RTI Act to weaken it.

He said an order by the chief information commissioner to provide information about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's MA degree in "entire political science" under the RTI Act was the first reason, while the second was RTI information proving the prime

and make it accountable.

"This provision can be misused to deny important information on the pretext of it being 'personal information'. People holding public offices and public positions cannot hold back information on this pretext," he asserted.

Ramesh also said that he had written to the information technology minister, seeking an amendment to the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, lest it can become the final death knell for the RTI.

"What is personal about activities conducted in public life," he asked.

Ramesh recalled that RTI was the first of the several "transformative rights-based legislations" by the Congress-led UPA government headed by Manmohan Singh, which included bringing in MGN-REGA, Forest Rights Act 2006, Right to Education 2009, Food Security Act 2013, and the Land Acquisition Act 2013.

The senior Congress leader claimed that even though he challenged the amendments to the RTI Act on December 17, 2019, in the Supreme Court, the matter is still pending in the apex court even after the passage of about six years. (PTI)

Mamata terms Durgapur 'gangrape' shocking, says no accused will be spared

KOLKATA, Oct 12: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday termed the alleged gangrape of a medical student in Durgapur in Paschim Bardhaman district as "shocking" and said that no accused would be spared.

Speaking to reporters at Kolkata airport before leaving for natural disaster-hit north Bengal to oversee relief and rehabilitation work, Banerjee said her government has zero tolerance for such incidents.

"This is a shocking incident... We have zero tolerance for such crimes. Three accused have been arrested and police are conducting search for others. Nobody will be spared," she said in her first reaction to the incident.

The medical college student, hailing from Jaleswar in Odisha's Balasore district, was allegedly gangraped in Durgapur, police said on Saturday.

The incident took place outside the campus of the private medical college on Friday night when the second-year student went out with one of her friends for dinner.

Banerjee said the medical institution concerned also bears responsibility for the incident. (PTI)

Mamata begins north Bengal visit; announces financial relief for affected people

KOLKATA, Oct 12: Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday commenced her visit to disaster-hit areas in north Bengal, announcing ₹ 1.2 lakh for those whose houses have been affected, and awards for personnel involved in relief operations.

At least 32 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in floods and landslides due to heavy rain in the northern districts of West Bengal earlier this month.

She also reiterated her announcement of Rs 5 lakh ex gratia for the next of kin of those killed in the disaster and home guard jobs for one person from each family.

Speaking to reporters at Kolkata airport before embarking on the visit, which will continue till Friday, Banerjee said she would first visit Hasimara in Alipurduar district for a high-level review meeting with officials to assess ongoing relief and rehabilitation operations. She will stay the night at Hasimara and on Monday, she would visit Nagrakata and nearby areas, followed by Mirik in Darjeeling hills.

Banerjee said she will then proceed to Darjeeling town, from where she would also review the relief operations in Kalimpong as well. She would return to Kolkata on Friday to inaugurate Kali Puja celebrations.

The CM praised the dedication of administrative officials overseeing relief work and reiterated the government's commitment to prompt assistance and infrastructure restoration.

"Work at the Rohini landslide site is ex-

pected to be completed in five to six days, while the temporary bridge in Mirik is expected to be ready in seven to eight days," she said. The CM also highlighted the 'Amader Para Amader Samadhan' (APAS) programme, aimed at providing financial assistance to disaster-affected residents.

Under APAS, ₹ 10 lakh has been allocated per booth, with a total outlay of ₹ 8,000 crore. So far, 28,300 of 31,700 targeted booth-wise camps have been completed, covering nearly 90 per cent of the planned outreach. The programme has covered 2.5 crore people, she said.

Since October 4, heavy rain in north Bengal has triggered landslides and floods, leaving at least 32 people dead and thousands homeless. Unconfirmed initial reports indicate that around 12,000 houses were damaged, with nearly 6,000 completely collapsed. Relief camps have been set up in multiple areas, and road connectivity has been restored in most disrupted locations.

Banerjee was in north Bengal for four days since October 5 to oversee the relief work.

Opposition parties have criticised the CM's visits, alleging they are leisure trips aimed at gaining political mileage.

Leader of the Opposition in the state assembly, Suvendu Adhikari, shared a video alleging that police were busy arranging party flags instead of relief work. Senior CPI(M) leader Biman Bose attributed the scale of the disaster to "unregulated construction" in the hills. (PTI)

BSF air wing gets first woman flight engineer

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: The Border Security Force (BSF) air wing has got its first woman flight engineer in its over 50 years history following completion of a first in-house training capsule.

Inspector Bhawna Chaudhary along with four male subordinate officers were recently awarded their flying badges by BSF director general Daljit Singh Chawdhary.

The border force is tasked to operate the aviation unit of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) since 1969 and it caters to the operational requirements of all the paramilitary forces and special forces like the NSG and the NDRF.

Officials told PTI that five subordinate officers were "trained ab-initio by the instructors of the BSF air wing and they recently completed their two-month long training."

The five personnel were skilled for 130 hours during the two months in-house training starting August and they also had real exposure to the work as various assets of the BSF air wing flew operational sorties including during the recent floods in Punjab and other states.

"The BSF air wing has been facing a critical shortage of flight engineers in its Mi-17 helicopters fleet."

"The Indian Air Force (IAF) trained the first batch of 3 subordinate officers but the second batch of five personnel could not get a training slot there due to various constraints," an official said.

The BSF then approached the MHA to allow it to conduct an in-house training for preparing flight engineers for its air wing and the five personnel including Inspector Chaudhary recently completed their training, the official said.

Inspector Chaudhary is the first woman flight engineer of the BSF air wing, he said. (PTI)

UP CM is an infiltrator, should be sent back to Uttarakhand: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, Oct 12: Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday likened Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath to an infiltrator, saying he is from Uttarakhand and should be sent back to the state.

Speaking to reporters at Lohia Park in Lucknow on Sunday, on the death anniversary of Ram Manohar Lohia, Yadav said the BJP has fake statistics. "If one is to believe their statistics, they would be lost," he added.

"People who are giving the statistics of exodus... We also have infiltrators in UP. The chief minister is from Uttarakhand. We want him to be sent to Uttarakhand. He is not the only infiltrator; he is also an infiltrator from the ideological point of view," Yadav claimed.

The SP chief added, "He (Adityanath) was not a member of the BJP; he was a member of another (party). So, when will these infiltrators be removed?" Yadav's remarks come days after Union Home Minister Amit Shah claimed some political parties treat infiltrators as a vote bank and questioned why infiltration does not take place along the Gujarat and Rajasthan borders.

Shah made the remarks on Friday while delivering a lecture in memory of Dainik Jagran's former editor-in-chief Narendra Mohan on the topic 'Infiltration (ghuspath), demographic change and democracy'.

Meanwhile, when asked to comment on Yadav's remarks, UP Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak told PTI that he would respond soon.

Yadav had come to Lohia Park to pay tributes to Ram Manohar Lohia on his death anniversary. He said that Dr Lohia fought against injustice and irresponsibility throughout his life.

"Today, we take a pledge to reach out to the people on the issues he raised, to make them aware, and to ensure economic and social dignity for everyone by walking on the path he showed. Dr Lohia had called for the caste system to be abolished," Yadav said. (PTI)

Finance tensions are central to what delegates will debate Bhupender Yadav heads to Brazil for key pre-COP talks as India gears up for COP30

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav will attend the pre-COP meeting in Brasilia on October 13 and 14 as India steps up preparations for the UN climate summit COP30, which will be held in Belém, Brazil, in November.

The minister confirmed his travel on his X account.

The two-day pre-COP brings together environment and climate ministers, senior negotiators and observers to narrow differences on politically sensitive topics and try to build ministerial consensus ahead of the UN climate conference in Belém.

The COP30 presidency earlier said that the Brasilia meeting is expected to host between 30 and 50 delegations and roughly 800 participants. Ministers use pre-COPs to test negotiating text, identify shared ground on sensitive matters and prepare ministerial positions so that negotiations at the main COP can advance faster.

Pre-COPs are not formal UNFCCC events but have become routine host-country instruments to focus ministerial attention on a short list of political questions that negotiators otherwise take weeks to resolve.

COP30 is taking place against a complex



geopolitical backdrop, with the United States withdrawing from the Paris Agreement and several developed countries reassessing their climate strategies amid economic and energy security pressures.

In the run-up to the annual climate meeting, disagreements over climate finance, the pace and responsibility for the energy transi-

tion and burdens on developing countries remain sharp.

Trust between developed and developing countries remains weak after COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, where many in the Global South said the finance outcome fell short of needs and expectations.

At the core of this divide are disagreements over the scale and nature of climate finance, whether it should be provided as grants or loans and how predictable and usable new funds will be for adaptation and loss and damage. These finance tensions are central to what delegates will debate in Brasilia and later in Belém.

Practical logistics are also adding strain to the politics. Reports have highlighted shortages of hotel beds and steep room rates in Belém, raising fears that smaller delegations and vulnerable countries could face barriers to full participation.

Observers warn that if attendance is skewed towards wealthier parties, negotiating dynamics could be affected and the legitimacy of outcomes may be questioned.

Observers also expect heated work on climate finance and the post-2025 collective finance goal, debate over rules and integrity for

international carbon trading under Article 6, stronger attention to adaptation including national adaptation plans and discussions on how to translate the Global Stocktake into timebound action.

Loss and damage finance and how to make it predictable and accessible will also be high on the agenda. These are the issues that ministers are likely to try and narrow in Brasilia.

Ahead of COP30, India has emphasised equity and differentiated responsibilities, pressed developed countries to meet their Article 9 obligations on finance, sought predictable and concessional support for adaptation and loss and damage and flagged that technology transfer and capacity building must respect national circumstances.

India has also underlined the need for a just energy transition that keeps space for development.

The most populous country and the third largest carbon emitter plans to submit two important documents ahead of or at COP30: an updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) (or national climate plan to meet Paris Agreement goals) extending commitments to 2035 and India's first national adaptation plan (NAP). (PTI)

APCC demands implementation of RTI and Whistle Blowers Protection Acts

'RTI is one of most effective tools to curb corruption and promote accountability'

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, Oct 12: The Arunachal Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC) on Sunday demanded the implementation of all enacted Right to Information (RTI) laws, including the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, across the state and the country.

Addressing a press conference at the Arunachal Press Club (APC), APCC vice president and former RTI commissioner Abraham Kaya Techi said that India is celebrating 20 years of the RTI Act, which has empowered citizens to access information held by public authorities and made government functioning more transparent and accountable.

Techi recalled that several landmark legislations were enacted during the UPA government led by Dr Manmohan Singh, including the RTI Act (2005), MGNREGA (2005), Forest Rights Act (2006), Right to Education Act (2009), Fair Compensation and Land Acquisition Act (2013), and National Food Security Act (2013).

"The RTI has been a lifeline for marginalized sections of society, helping citizens secure their rightful ration entitlements, pensions, unpaid wages, and scholarships. It has ensured that the poorest are not denied basic necessities, turning information into a tool for justice



and dignity," he said.

He, however, lamented that authorities often deny information to applicants, possibly due to corruption, and that even higher authorities fail to provide proper information despite several appeals. "RTI activists are frequently harassed, threatened, and even killed," he added.

Techi alleged that since 2014, the RTI framework has been consistently weakened through amendments, notably in 2019, which reduced the tenure of information commissioners from five years to three years, thereby diluting their autonomy.

He also criticised provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protec-

tion Act, particularly Section 44(3), which restricts the disclosure of personal information and undermines public audit and scrutiny of data related to schemes such as MGNREGA and MPLAD.

APCC spokesperson Chera Taya said that the situation in the state mirrors that of the Centre, with poor implementation of transparency laws.

"The RTI is one of the most effective tools to curb corruption and promote accountability, but in practice, these Acts are not properly implemented in the interest of public service and national development," he said.

Referring to the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, Taya recalled

the contribution of late Gyamar Padang, whose exposure of irregularities in the Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission (APPSC) examinations led to the recruitment of 140 new officers.

"The Whistle Blowers Protection Act was passed during the UPA regime but has not been implemented, nor have the rules been notified under the present government," he said.

Marking the 20th anniversary of the RTI Act, the APCC reiterated that the law represents constitutional and social empowerment.

The party demanded restoration of the independence of the Information Commissions by undoing the 2019 amendments and reinstating a fixed five-year tenure with secure service conditions.

The APCC also called for a review of the DPDP Act provisions that weaken the RTI, immediate filling of vacancies in central and state information commissions through transparent and time-bound processes, enforcement of performance standards, public reporting of disposal rates, and strong protection for RTI users and whistleblowers.

The party further sought greater diversity in information commissions by including journalists, activists, academics, and women representatives.

TRIPURA INFANT MURDER

Police crack case within hours, arrest Grandfather in Assam hideout



HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Oct 12: In a swift and determined operation, Tripura Police cracked a shocking murder case within hours after a 14-month-old girl's body was found buried in a paddy field in the Padmabil area under the Panisagar sub-division of North Tripura district.

The investigation began late Saturday night when the child was reported missing.

According to officials, the infant had gone out with her maternal grandfather, Joyanal Uddin, and neither returned home for several hours, prompting concern among family members.

"After an extensive search by the family and locals, police were alerted. Our team immediately joined the search operation," said Rahul Balhera, IPS, Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) of Panisagar.

Around midnight, the police team, assisted by villagers, made the grim discovery — the child's body buried beneath a paddy field near the village. The area was quickly cordoned off, and forensic experts were called to the site to collect evidence.

Police registered a case on Sunday morning and launched a coordinated manhunt across district and state borders.

Acting on intelligence inputs, the accused was traced and arrested from Nilambazar in Assam by afternoon.

"This was a highly sensitive case. We activated all units immediately and were able to apprehend the accused within a few hours," SDPO Balhera said.

The horrific crime has left the local community in shock and grief. Residents gathered near the victim's home demanding justice and stricter punishment for such crimes.

The police have begun detailed interrogation of the accused while the North Tripura district administration has assured that the investigation will be pursued with the utmost seriousness.

Manipur: 3 kg of heroin seized, police personnel among 3 arrested

IMPHAL, Oct 12: A Manipur Police rifleman was among three people arrested and 3 kg of heroin, pharmaceutical drugs and around ₹ 9.6 lakh in cash seized from their possession in separate incidents in the northeastern state, an official statement said on Sunday.

Rifleman Md Wahidur Rahman (43) was arrested in Imphal West district on Friday and 544 capsules of pharmaceutical drug Semples+ seized from his possession, the police statement said.

"Manipur Police reiterates its firm stance against erring members who are found indulging in any illegal activities related to drugs. Besides disciplinary action, FIRs incorporating criminal charges are mandatorily filed against such offenders," it said.

Two other drug peddlers were arrested on Friday from Lilong in Thoubal district and Khestrigao in Imphal East district.

Around 3 kg of heroin, eight bottles of psychotropic syrup Tussrex-TR and sale proceeds of drugs amounting to ₹ 9.57 lakh, along with an SBBL gun and two cartridges were seized from their possession, it added. (PTI)

IED found in Meghalaya's Umsning market, defused safely



SHILLONG, Oct 12: An improvised explosive device (IED) was found at Umsning market in Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district and was safely defused, police said on Sunday.

An abandoned bag containing suspected explosives was detected in a compound located in front of Meghalaya Rural Bank in the market on Saturday evening, Superintendent of Police Vivekanand Singh said.

A bomb detection and disposal squad (BDDS) and a K-9 team were requisitioned and, upon examination, they confirmed the presence of explosives.

The IED was later safely defused by the BDDS team.

"On analysis, it was found that the IED was made using 4.7 kg of gelatine, 10 detonators, and around 50 iron rod pieces as splinters," Singh said.

All the materials were seized from the spot as per standard operating procedures, taking all necessary precautions, he said.

There was no loss of life or property during the operation.

A case has been registered and further investigation is underway. One suspect has been identified and efforts are on to arrest him, the SP added. (PTI)

Pakistani woman who escaped Nepal jail detained in Tripura

HT Correspondent

AGARTALA, Oct 12: In a dramatic cross-border development, the Government Railway Police (GRP) at Sabroom Railway Station in South Tripura district have detained a 50-year-old Pakistani woman who allegedly escaped from a prison in Nepal, where she had been serving a sentence for drug trafficking.

According to a senior Tripura Police official the woman was apprehended yesterday after being found loitering suspiciously at the railway station upon arrival on the Kanchanjunga Express.

"The woman, who speaks Hindi, initially identified herself as Saheena Parveen from Purani Basti, Delhi, but was unable to produce any valid identification documents," the official said.

"During a search, several Pakistani contact numbers were recovered from her possession."

Preliminary questioning revealed that she had claimed to be a Pakistani national from Punjab province who entered Bangladesh three years ago, before illegally crossing into India through West Bengal with the help of an agent. She also stated that she had been working as a domestic help in Delhi and was attempting to return to



Pakistan via Bangladesh.

However, during extended interrogation, the woman reportedly confessed that her earlier statements were false.

"She later disclosed her real identity as Louis

Night Akhtar Bhano, wife of Md. Golaf Faraj, a resident of Village Youganabad, Chak No. 371, District Sheikhupura, Pakistan," the official said.

Police sources further revealed that Bhano had traveled to Nepal about 12 years ago using a Pakistani passport to engage in drug trafficking activities. In 2014, she was arrested by Nepal Police for possessing one kilogram of brown sugar and sentenced to 15 years in prison. She had been lodged in Kathmandu Jail until last month, when she allegedly escaped amid unrest in the country.

"About two weeks ago, she reportedly entered India through an illegal route. After receiving guidance from agents, she attempted to reach Bangladesh via Tripura or West Bengal to return to Pakistan," the official added.

When she failed to find a crossing route in West Bengal, Bhano is believed to have traveled to Tripura by train, arriving in Sabroom in an attempt to cross the international border into Bangladesh.

The woman is currently in police custody, and further interrogation is underway to verify her claims and establish possible links with cross-border networks.

3 militants arrested in Manipur All public transport vehicles in Sikkim asked to prominently display slogan 'Be Kind to Animals'

IMPHAL, Oct 12: Security forces arrested three militants belonging to different factions of a banned outfit in Manipur's Bishnupur and Thoubal districts, police said on Sunday.

An active cadre of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) was nabbed in Bishnupur town on Saturday.

The insurgent was identified as Moirangthem Mohen Singh (42), and one SM carbine, three magazines and 24 AK cartridges were seized from his possession, a police statement said.

Another active cadre of the proscribed outfit Kangleipak Communist Party (Apunba) was arrested from

Yairipok Bazar in Thoubal district on Saturday.

Another militant of the KCP (Taibanganba) outfit was arrested on Friday from Omba Hill crossing area in Bishnupur district. Identified as Heisnam Sanathoi (36), he was allegedly involved in extortion from the public in Moirang area.

In a separate operation, security forces seized a cache of arms and ammunition in Imphal West district on Saturday.

Two .303 rifles along with magazines, five pistols, five helmets, four bulletproof vests, eight bulletproof plates, and ten camouflage pants were seized. (PTI)

GANGTOK, Oct 12: All public transport vehicles registered in Sikkim have been asked to prominently display the slogan "Be kind to animals", according to a Transport department notification.

The directive was issued earlier this week in compliance with a national circular from the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH), an official said on Sunday.

The transport department notification is aimed at upholding the fundamental

duty enshrined in Article 51A(g) of the Constitution of India, which mandates showing compassion for living creatures, the Transport Secretary-cum-Commissioner Prabhakar said.

The notification outlines strict compliance standards for the display of the new slogan "Be kind to animals", which must be prominently displayed on every public transport vehicle.

The slogan may be in English, Hindi or the relevant regional language and

must be placed prominently on both the front and back of the vehicle. The slogan must be written in bold and contrasting lettering against the background colour of the vehicle for maximum visibility.

A minimum character height of 150 mm (15 cm) is mandatory, while the display must be executed using durable paint or high-quality, weather-resistant stickers.

All operators and owners of public transport vehicles are directed to ensure immediate compliance with this directive. The concerned authority will monitor and strictly implement the order, Prabhakar added. (PTI)



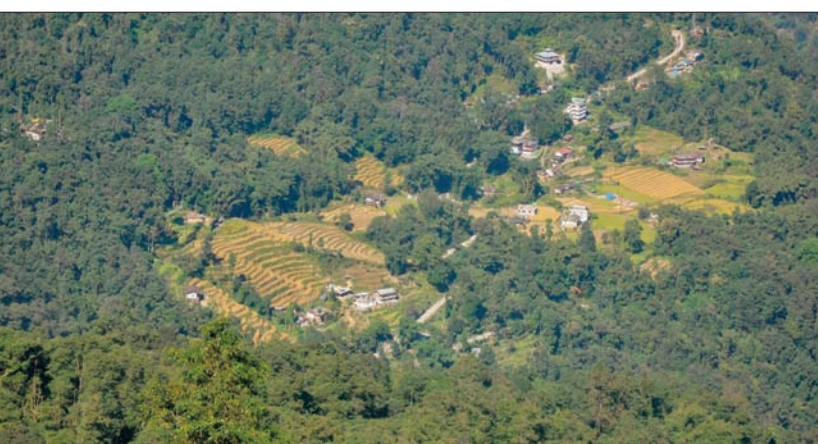
Records show that each family was given around six acres Sikkim plan to recognise traditional forest caretakers awaits clearance from Centre

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: The Sikkim government's bid to recognise the contribution of traditional forest workers known as Taungyadars by regularising their pre-1980 settlements on forest land has been put on hold, with the Centre asking the state to submit more details on land use and layout plans.

The proposal, which seeks diversion of about 57 hectares of forest land to convert old Taungya settlements into revenue villages, was considered by the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) of the environment ministry at its meeting held on September 26.

Officials from the Sikkim Rural Development Department told the committee that the move was aimed at securing the rights and livelihoods of Taungyadars families who for generations worked with the forest department, planting trees, tending to plantations and protecting forests long before the Forest Conservation Act came into force in 1980.

The Taungyadari, or Taungya, system was a traditional forest management practice dating back to the pre-merger era



when Sikkim was a monarchy.

Under this system, families were allotted small forest patches to plant and care for tree saplings for three years. In return, they were allowed to cultivate food crops on part of the land and received a small subsidy or daily wages for their labour.

These Taungyadars lived in forest fringes, growing crops, rearing cattle and

guarding the forests from fires and illegal felling.

Records show that each family was given around six acres, two for tree planting every year and two for homestead use.

Initially, they were paid a "Taungya subsidy" of ₹ 200, later increased to Rs 500, and were employed on daily wages in plantation work, timber cutting and fire-

wood stacking. According to documents presented to the committee, several of these old Taungya settlements still exist in areas such as Yali Reserve Forest in Gangtok, Tumlabong in Singtam and Karthok in Pakyong, as well as Melli Compound, Majhitar, Rayong and Jholungey Reserve Forests.

The Sikkim government has argued that these are not encroachments but legitimate settlements created under the forest department's supervision decades ago.

It said agreements signed between the Taungyadars and the department in the 1970s, along with payment receipts of "Dhuri Khazana" (land tax), prove that these settlements existed well before 1980.

In 2012, the state constituted a committee to identify genuine Taungyadar families for regularisation and to verify that their settlements predated the enactment of the Forest Conservation Act.

The current proposal covers about 9 hectares in Gangtok, 32 hectares in Namchi and 16 hectares in Pakyong districts.

It does not involve felling of trees or affect any protected area, wildlife corridor or eco-sensitive zone. The forest land is classified as reserved forest with very low canopy density.

Officials of the environment ministry's regional office inspected the sites in May this year and supported the plan. They recommended that forest boundaries be properly fenced to avoid future encroachments and that the reserved forest status of the land be maintained.

The Sikkim government has also proposed compensatory afforestation over 28.78 hectares in Song Reserve Forest under Gangtok division and in Amba and Thekabong Khamsal areas under Pakyong division.

However, the FAC said that the state had not submitted a detailed component-wise land use plan specifying how much area would be used for housing, cultivation or common facilities and deferred the proposal until this information is provided. (PTI)

CAMPBELL PRODUCES ATTACKING KNOCK AS WEST INDIES DRAG TEST TO DAY 4

NEW DELHI, Oct 12: John Campbell saved his best for last with a counter-punching unbeaten 87 as the West Indies batters showed rare resilience to live and fight another day after being asked to follow on by India on the third day of the second Test here Saturday.

Riding on a 138 run unbroken stand between Campbell and Shai Hope (66 batting), West Indies reached 173 for two at stumps. These are the only half-centuries that the visitors have managed in this short series, so far.

The West Indies still need 97 runs to force India to bat again and avoid defeat by an innings margin.

Although India's victory is a certainty, the counter-attack from Campbell and Hope would give them renewed confidence before their tour of New Zealand.

In the first two sessions, left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav (5/82) had set the ball rolling for an early finish with his fifth five-for in Test cricket with West Indies folding for 248 in their first essay.

With 270 runs in arrears and history of three back-to-back shoddy batting shows, it was expected that Indian bowlers will make a short work of the Windies line-up.

West Indies went into the tea with scorecard reading 35 for 2 but Campbell altered his strategy by adopting an offensive approach as he took the aerial route against Ravindra Jadeja and Kuldeep.

With occasional deliveries keeping low but pitch offering no significant wear and tear, batting wasn't a difficult proposition.

Seeing Campbell take the attack back to the opposition camp, even



Hope gained in confidence and also muscled Kuldeep and Washington Sundar once each to keep the scoreboard moving.

Once there was a bunch of boundaries, the Indian skipper Shubman Gill was forced to deploy an "in-out" field which helped the two batters farm the strike with ease.

At one point, Kuldeep bowled with a long-on, deep extra cover and deep square leg, which showed his defensive mindset despite first innings heroics.

With no visible bite off the surface, the spinners as pointed by Jadeja, had to use the shoulder

more to get some zip off the surface but after having bowled in 81.5 overs, the fatigue was visible.

The duo were easily playing the spinners off the backfoot with Hope hitting eight fours and two sixes. Campbell on his part apart from two sixes, hit nine boundaries.

West Indies' second innings performance will certainly give head coach Darren Sammy hope that all is not lost and there are a few players, who still have it in them to play with a purpose and not just make up numbers.

West Indies started the day at 140 for 4 in their first innings and

just after the first half an hour, Kuldeep produced a moment of magic to dismiss an already set Hope (36).

In the post lunch session, it was Siraj and Jasprit Bumrah, who did their bit in cleaning up tail before Kuldeep came in to complete his fifth five-wicket haul in 15th Test match.

For someone who has always been dubbed as a condition based bowler, one five-for in every three games is a phenomenal record.

In the morning, Kuldeep produced a moment of magic to dismiss Shai Hope as the ineptness of the West Indies batting unit was

once again laid bare, with the visitors staring down the barrel.

After Jadeja got rid of the top-order on the second evening, it was Kuldeep who bowled a piece of beauty to dismiss Hope (36) and set the ball rolling for the hosts.

Kuldeep, who was initially bringing his bowling arm down from a wider angle, got one closer to his head and fired it slightly quicker. There was appreciable drift as Hope played inside the line and it beat his outside edge to peg back the off-stump.

Once Hope was dismissed, the hope of a revival was out of the window. Tevin Imlach (21) played a leg-break on the backfoot only to be adjudged leg-before through DRS.

Justin Greaves (17) was never going to survive playing those dangerous reverse sweeps bowled on the stumps.

Mohammed Siraj then got into the act taking the wicket of Jomel Warrican, who played one on.

Hope and Imlach tried to carry out a rescue job when Bumrah did not exactly look menacing in the morning.

In fact both Hope and Imlach negotiated Bumrah comfortably and even Kuldeep was hit for a few fours. However once Kuldeep bowled that delivery to Hope, the floodgates opened. The following batters made a baseline towards the pavilion.

In a space of seven overs, West Indies lost four wickets and were reduced to 175 for 8.

Khary Pierre (23) and Anderson Phillip (24) added 46 runs for the ninth wicket but that was never going to be enough for the visitors to avoid follow-on. (PTI)

South Africa look to keep winning juggernaut rolling against B'desh

VISAKHAPATNAM, Oct 12: Having roared back into contention with twin wins, a confident South African unit will look to keep the juggernaut rolling when they face a spirited Bangladesh in their Women's ODI World Cup clash here on Monday.

After a crushing 10-wicket loss to England in their opener, the Proteas women found their rhythm with convincing wins over New Zealand and hosts India, reigniting their campaign in style. Currently, they sit fourth on the points table with a -0.888 Net Run Rate.

On paper, South Africa, boasting the likes of captain Laura Wolvaardt, Marizanne Kapp, Tazmin Brits, Sune Luus, and Ayabonga Khaka, look the stronger side. After the disastrous 69 all out against England, their top order has been in fine touch, with Brits and Luus firing against New Zealand and Wolvaardt demonstrating her class against India.

Crucial contributions from the lower order, particularly Nadine de Klerk and Khaka, proved pivotal in South Africa's win against India earlier this week.

The Proteas will also be hoping veterans Marizanne Kapp and Anneke Bosch step up to provide additional firepower against Bangladesh.

South Africa enter this clash with the advantage of familiarity with the conditions, having already played two matches at the venue.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, began their tournament on a high, producing a morale-boosting seven-wicket win over Pakistan. However, successive defeats

against England and New Zealand have dented their momentum and exposed some persistent vulnerabilities. Their bowling unit has been the primary positive, led by the promising 20-year-old pacer Marufa Akter, who has claimed five wickets so far, ably supported by the spinners. Despite this, Bangladesh's inconsistent top order remains a significant concern. Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty, who also performs wicketkeeping duties, has struggled for runs, averaging just nine in the tournament.

Reflecting on their batting woes after the defeat to New Zealand, Bangladesh all-rounder Rabeya Khan said, "If the top-order doesn't score runs, whatever the lower order does becomes useless."

"It's really tough for us that way ... our batting has collapsed (in the last two games)," Rabeya had said after their loss to New Zealand.

Teams (From)

South Africa: Laura Wolvaardt (c), Tazmin Brits, Annerie Dercksen, Marizanne Kapp, Anneke Bosch, Sinalo Jafta (wk), Chloe Tryon, Nadine de Klerk, Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Sune Luus, Tumi Sekhukhune, Nondumiso Shangase, Karabo Meso.

Bangladesh: Nigar Sultana Joty (c), Nahida Akter, Farzana Haque, Rubya Haider Jhelik, Sharmin Akter Supta, Sobhana Mostary, Ritu Moni, Shorna Akter, Fahima Khatun, Rabeya Khan, Marufa Akter, Fariha Islam Trisna, Shanjida Akter Maghla, Nishita Akter Nishi, Sumaiya Akter.

Match Starts at 3 pm. (PTI)

Mandhana creates history with 1,000 runs in a year

VISAKHAPATNAM, Oct 12: Indian vice-captain Smriti Mandhana on Sunday became the first player in women's ODIs to score 1,000 runs in a calendar year during India's high-profile Women's World Cup group match against Australia here.

The 29-year-old opener also completed 5,000 runs in women's ODIs, becoming only the fifth and second Indian batter after Mithali Raj to achieve the feat.

She is the youngest and fastest to the milestone, reaching it in 112 innings and 5,569 balls, surpassing Stafanie Taylor's 129 innings and Suzie Bates' 6,182 balls.

The elegant left-hander, who had endured a quiet start to the tournament, roared back to form in style smashing 80 off 66 balls (9x4s, 3x6s) and put together 155 runs opening stand with Pratika Rawal which was also



the first century opening partnership of the competition.

Mandhana, who began the day on 982 runs from 17 matches, reached the 1,000-run landmark in the eighth over when she tore into Australian left-arm spinner Sophie Molineux, smashing her for four, six and four in an over that yielded 16 runs.

Mandhana broke the long-standing record of Australia's Belinda Clark (970 runs in 1997) of the highest run-getter in a calendar year in women's ODIs.

She started her innings positively, opening her account with a boundary off the last ball of the first over from Kim Garth.

But it was Molineux's over that lit up the innings. Mandhana lofted the first ball over mid-on for four, defended the next, then launched the third ball for a six over long-on before pulling another boundary over square leg to seal her place in the record books.

Mandhana, who had scores of 8, 23 and 23 against Sri Lanka, Pakistan and South Africa respectively earlier in the tournament, looked a completely different batter against her favourite opposition after Australia opted to bowl.

She batted with fluency and authority, dissecting the field with precision and using her silky drives and aerial strokes to unsettle the Australian attack. (PTI)

GUWAHATI, Oct 12: Riding high on their historic bronze medal finish in the mixed team event, the Indian contingent will look to carry that momentum into the individual competitions of the BWF World Junior Championships that begin here on Monday. India's best performance in the tournament came 17 years ago in Pune when Saina Nehwal grabbed the girls' singles gold while RMV Guru Sai Dutt clinched the bronze medal in boys' singles.

So far, India has won a total of 11 individual medals in the history of the competition, including four silver.

India's best chance to add another gold medal to their tally in this edition is the girls' singles with junior world number one Tanvi Sharma and China Open quarterfinalist Unnati Hooda.

Both players have been placed in different halves of the draw,

raising hopes of a possible all-India final.

Tanvi, the Asian U-19 bronze medallist, has a bye in the opening round and a potential quarter-final clash against Indonesian seventh seed Thalita Wiryawan could be her first big test in the campaign.

Meanwhile, Unnati, seeded eighth, is likely to kick off her campaign in the second round against Hong Kong's Liu Hoi Kiu Anna and a potential last eight clash against second seed Anyapat Pichitprechasak of Thailand. India's other Asian U-19 bronze medallist Vennala K and world number 41 Rakshita Sree have been placed in the same quarter but would have to come through a few tough matches to stand a chance of reaching the last four stage. Rakshita may face fourth seed Ranithma Liyanage of Sri Lanka in the pre-quarters, while Vennala will have to over-



Rawat are likely to clash against each other in the third round.

In the paired events, the former junior world number one boys' doubles combination of Bhargav Ram Arigela and Viswa Tej Gobburu will open their campaign against Andrej Macek and Andrej Suchy of Slovenia.

The sixth-seeded Indian pairing is likely to face reigning Asian Junior Champions Chen Jun Ting and Liu Jun Rong of China in the last eight stage.

Meanwhile, Bhavya Chhabra and Sumith A R open their campaign against Philip Kryger Boe, nephew of former Danish doubles specialist Mathias Boe, and his partner Salomon Thomsen in the round of 64.

Vishnu Kode and Mithileish P Krishnan have a tough encounter against the seventh-seeded French duo Thibault Gardon and Mady Sow at the same stage of competition. (PTI)

India beat New Zealand 4-2 in Sultan of Johor Cup

JOHOR (MALAYSIA), Oct 12: The Indian junior men's hockey team continued its unbeaten run at the Sultan of Johor Cup with a comfortable 4-2 win against New Zealand, here Sunday.

Arshdeep Singh (2nd minute), PB Sunil (15th), Arajjeet Singh Hundal (26th) and Roman Kumar (47th) scored the goals for India, while Gus Nelson (41st) and Aidan Max (52nd) found the net for New Zealand.

India had earlier defeated Great Britain 3-2 in their opening match of the tournament.

The opening goal for India came as early as in the second minute of the first quarter with Arshdeep scoring from a loose ball after poor defending in the circle by New Zealand. He made a swift run in the circle from the right flank and took a shot on goal but was initially saved by the New Zealand keeper but he managed to convert from the rebound.

India were quick to double their lead in the final minute of the quarter when Sunil scored from a fine penalty corner variation when dragflicker and captain of the side Rohit passed the ball to Sunil.

This was India's fourth attempt after the first three found the foot of the New Zealand first rusher. A low snapshot by Sunil was just about enough to find the back of the net.

With a comfortable 2-0 lead, India started the second quarter using the right combinations to create good attacking chances. (PTI)

Haaland grabs hat trick for Norway but Ronaldo's goalless for Portugal in World Cup qualifying

LONDON, Oct 12: Erling Haaland further enhanced his superstar reputation with a hat trick for Norway in a 5-0 home win against Israel while Cristiano Ronaldo drew a blank as Portugal beat Ireland 1-0 in World Cup qualifying on Saturday.

Haaland moved onto 51 Norway goals in just 46 matches, as Ronaldo failed to increase his all-time international men's scoring record of 141.

Both players missed a penalty — Haaland even missed his retake — on a night when fluffed spot kicks seemed contagious but didn't affect the outcomes. Spain's Ferran Torres and Italy's Mateo Retegui also had theirs saved.

European champion Spain beat Georgia 2-0 while Italy won 3-1 at Estonia to stop goal-hungry Norway getting too far ahead. Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma gifted a sloppy late goal to add to his blunders in recent years. Spain tops Group E with nine points after a third straight win without conceding a goal.

Missing injured Barcelona prodigy Lamine Yamal, Spain took the lead midway through the first half thanks to Jeremy Pino.

Goal-scoring midfielder Mikel Oyarzabal made it 2-0 with a free kick midway through the second half. Spain is three points clear of Turkey, which won 6-1 at Bulgaria



with two goals from Juventus forward Kenan Yildiz.

Portugal's late winner secured a third straight victory and a five-point lead over second-placed Hungary in Group F.

Ruben Neves scored a stoppage-time header to make up for Ronaldo's 75th-minute penalty miss, which came when he blasted his shot straight down the middle and goalkeeper Caoimhin Kelleher stuck out his left foot to balloon the ball upward.

Kelleher then jumped up and punched his right fist in celebration while Ronaldo held his face in his hands. Fans in Lisbon delivered a moment of applause in the 21st minute in memory of Diogo Jota,

who wore that jersey number for Portugal. The former Liverpool forward died in a car accident in July along with his brother.

Neves is now wearing the No. 21 and has a tattoo on his left calf in honor of his late friend.

In the group's other match, Hungary beat Armenia 2-0 with goals from Daniel Lukacs and Zsombor Gruber.

Haaland was the only Norwegian player to score in Oslo with Israel netting two own goals.

Norway has won all six games and is six points ahead of second-placed Italy. Haaland's side have a huge goal difference of +26, with 29 goals scored and three conceded.

Haaland guided in an angled shot in the 27th minute, added a powerful downward header in the 63rd and a back-post header in the 72nd. He was even involved in Norway's third goal when his ominous presence forced a blunder between the goalkeeper and defender Dan Nachmias.

Israel striker Anan Khalilii's own goal had put Norway ahead after 18 minutes.

There were pro-Palestinian protests before the game in Oslo.

By the time Donnarumma dropped a routine catch from a left-wing cross to give Estonia's Rauno Sappinen a tap-in, Italy was already coasting.

Italy had gone ahead early through striker Moise Kean, who plays for Fiorentina in Serie A. But Kean then limped off with what appeared to be a right ankle injury.

Retegui found the net close to halftime and Inter Milan forward Pio Esposito turned in Leonardo Spinazzola's cross in the 74th, moments before Donnarumma's clangor.

Albania's 1-0 win in Serbia moved it past the host into second spot, four points behind England in Group K.

Striker Rey Manaj scored on the stroke of halftime with a neat volley and made a nationalist symbol with his hands as he rushed to the bench to celebrate. (AP)

204th-ranked Vacherot stuns Djokovic and will face cousin in Shanghai final

SHANGHAI, Oct 12: Two cousins will meet in the final of the Shanghai Masters after qualifier Valentin Vacherot stunned a hobbled Novak Djokovic and relative Arthur Rinderknech fought back to beat Daniil Medvedev on Saturday.

The 204th-ranked Vacherot earned the biggest win of his career by downing Djokovic 6-3, 6-4 and becoming the lowest-ranked finalist in ATP Masters 1000 history, the ATP said.

While Djokovic was aiming to add to his 100 career titles, the 26-year-old Vacherot will go for number one — against his cousin and fellow Texas A&M alum.

A couple of hours after beating Djokovic, Vacherot walked back onto the court and hugged Rinderknech to help celebrate his cousin's 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 comeback win over Medvedev and relish the rare moment. Sunday's final will be the first time the cousins have played each other on the ATP circuit.

"In the best dreams, we couldn't have dreamt about this, so I can't even say it's a dream, because I don't think even one person in our family dreamt about it," the 54th-ranked Rinderknech said. "Now we are here, we fought through so many matches and somehow we are the guys standing at the end, so it's just incredible."

Vacherot, of Monaco, was an alternate in qualifying but is having



a career week, which included a quarterfinal win over Holger Rune.

"Is this real? I don't know," the 26-year-old Vacherot said moments after defeating Djokovic. "To have Novak on the other side of the court was, first of all, an unbelievable experience for me."

The 38-year-old Djokovic was slowed throughout the match by a sore hip. He took a medical timeout after falling behind 4-3 in the opening set. He won only one point in the next two games.

But the four-time tournament champion did not make an excuse of his physical struggles.

"It's all about him," Djokovic said. "I wish him all the best in the final, and the better player won today."

"Going from qualifications, it's an amazing story," the 24-time Grand Slam champion added. "I told him at the net that he's had an amazing tournament, but more so his attitude is very good, and his game was amazing as well." (AP)