

6 WORLD

8 NATION

- UN nuclear agency chief says inspectors will visit Iran
- 'Russia and India working on increasing bilateral trade volumes'
- Oppn trying to defame me, says Mann; claims his fake videos being released
- BJP striving for 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority in LS as 'real target' is to end reservation: Cong

### Assam medical colleges secure NABH accreditation

**Staff Reporter**  
GUWAHATI, June 24: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said several government medical colleges and hospitals in the state have secured accreditation from the National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH).

In a post on X, the Chief Minister said the state government had directed all medical colleges in Assam to obtain NABH accreditation to ensure uniform standards of healthcare delivery and improve patient care across government hospitals.

Sarma said five major medical institutions have already received NABH accreditation. These include Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH), Tezpur Medical College and Hospital, Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH), Fakhrudin Ali Ahmed Medical College and Hospital (FAAMCH), Barpeta, and Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH).

"With an aim to offer standardised healthcare across Assam's public hospitals, I had asked all (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Heavy rain triggers landslides, flash floods in Arunachal

### ● NEEPCO starts releasing water from reservoir of Panyor project

# Nature's fury claims one, 4 go missing; 17 hurt



**ITANAGAR, June 24:** Incessant rain triggered flash floods in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district on Wednesday, leaving one dead and four others missing, injuring 17 others and damaging at least 18 residential units, while landslides disrupted road connectivity and stranded travellers, officials said.

The body of Nirmala Gupta (35), a teacher at Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya (VKV) on NEEPCO campus at Yazali, was found during search and rescue operations following the devastating flash floods, Keyi Panyor Superintendent of Police Angad Mehta said. The search and rescue operations were suspended for the day, and would resume at the break of dawn on Thursday, Mehta said.

### Assam keeping watch on Arunachal situation

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** The Assam government is closely monitoring the flash flood situation in parts of neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh.

In view of the heavy rainfall in the upper catchments, a substantial rise in water levels and flow velocity is anticipated in the Brahmaputra river and its tributaries in the downstream areas of Assam.

The flood wave is expected to affect Dhemaji, Lakhimpur, Biswanath and Sonitpur before moving further downstream through other districts and eventually traversing Dhubri over the next one or two days, an official statement said. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma directed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Gupta was among the five persons who went missing from NEEPCO project colony near Poosa under Yazali circle. The remaining missing persons were identified as Elesh Marak (13), Balari Marak (30), Tao Anjina (46) and Sourav Kumar, State Disaster Management secretary Dani Sulu

said. Of the 17 injured, three were in a critical condition and were evacuated to Ziro in Lower Subansiri district for treatment, Sulu said.

An under-construction retaining wall collapsed due to the heavy downpour, leading to waterlogging in low-lying residential areas in and around the colony, he said, adding at least 18 residential units were damaged in the incident.

District police and State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel rescued one Bishu Sinha from Yazali reservoir, while a scientist of the Geological Survey of India (GSI) was rescued from a stretch of National Highway 13 affected by the calamity, police said.

The administration has directed the additional deputy commissioner, deputy superintendent of police and circle officer concerned to rush to the affected site for assessment and coordination of rescue operations.

"A team of SDRF has been deployed, while the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) has been alerted and is moving towards the area to assist in relief and rescue efforts," Sulu said.

An IAF helicopter dropped SDRF personnel and a rubber boat near Pitapool, and all available reserve personnel and vehicles in Yazali area (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Assam eyes six-hour travel radius with new expressways, high-speed corridors

**Staff Reporter**  
GUWAHATI, June 24: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday said the state is developing a network of expressways and high-speed corridors aimed at drastically reducing travel time across the Northeast while boosting regional connectivity, trade and tourism.

In a post on X, the Chief Minister said the government's vision is to bring every region of Assam within a six-hour travel radius, significantly reducing journey durations that currently range between 13 and 15 hours.

Highlighting one of the flagship infrastructure projects, Sarma said work on the proposed Shillong-



Silchar High-Speed Corridor has already commenced as part of the larger Shillong-Silchar Expressway vision. The Chief Minister said the Shillong-Silchar corridor will be developed at an estimated cost of ₹ 22,864 crore. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Assam CS discusses FTA impact on UK envoy

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota on Wednesday said he has met British Deputy High Commissioner Andrew Fleming and discussed with him a strategic roadmap to boost cooperation against the backdrop of the India-UK Free Trade Agreement.

Among other issues, they also discussed the proposed Assam-UK Infrastructure Roundtable and UK-India Sovereign AI Partnership, the chief secretary said in a post on X.

"Delighted to meet Dr Andrew Fleming, British Deputy High Commissioner to East and Northeast India, alongside Haimanti Poddar, Senior Climate and Energy Adviser and Sustainable Mobility Policy Lead (India), UK FCDO.

"In the context of the India-UK Free Trade Agreement coming into force on July 15, 2026, we discussed a strategic roadmap to strengthen Assam-UK cooperation across investment promotion, export growth, technology



integration, infrastructure development and skills enhancement, leveraging Assam's rapidly evolving economic ecosystem," Kota said.

The delegation presented the UK PACT-supported Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Need Assessment and Analysis Report for Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), which provides recommendations to strengthen grid reliability, accelerate renewable energy integration and support Assam's clean energy transition, he added.

"We also deliberated on the proposed Assam-UK Infrastructure

Roundtable in Guwahati to facilitate partnerships in sustainable urbanisation, transport, flood resilience, climate-resilient infrastructure and project delivery, including potential engagement with UK Export Finance (UKEF)," the chief secretary said.

He said that the discussions further explored opportunities under the proposed UK-India Sovereign AI Partnership, including trusted AI infrastructure, sovereign cloud capabilities, advanced computing and AI governance frameworks to support Assam's digital transformation agenda.

"The meeting reaffirmed our shared commitment to translating the opportunities emerging from the India-UK FTA into tangible outcomes through enhanced trade, investment, technology partnerships and institutional cooperation, supporting Assam's long-term growth and global competitiveness," Kota said. Commenting on the meeting, Fleming said it was a timely discussion (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Japanese Encephalitis, Acute Encephalitis Syndrome claim 60 lives in Assam this year: Official

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** Japanese Encephalitis (JE) and Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES) have claimed at least 60 lives in Assam this year, an official said on Wednesday.

The National Health Mission, Assam official told PTI that 15 people have lost their lives due to JE and 45 died because of AES in different districts of the state since January.

The JE deaths were reported from Baksa, Cachar, Chirang, Kamrup Metropolitan, Tamulpur, Barpeta, Jorhat, Lakhimpur and Kamrup districts, he added.

"On the other hand, the AES deaths have taken place in Baksa, Cachar, Chirang, Goalpara, Morigaon, Sivasagar, Tamulpur, Udalguri, West Karbi Anglong, Darrang, Dhubri, Kokrajhar, South Salmara-Mankachar, Tinsukia, Charaideo, Kamrup Metropolitan, Barpeta, Jorhat, Kamrup and Lakhimpur," the official said.

In this season, 56 people have tested positive for Japanese Encephalitis, while the number of AES cases is around 500, he added.

When contacted, NHM Assam Executive Director Abhijit Sarma said, "AES and JE are two different clinical entities. While JE is one of the causes of AES, not all AES cases are JE cases." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### NIA to probe killing of three church leaders in Manipur

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has registered a case to probe the killing of three church leaders in Manipur last month, officials said on Wednesday.

Suspected militants had shot three church leaders dead and injured four others in Kangpokpi district in the strife-torn state on May 13. The deceased, members of the Thadou Baptist Association (TBA), were returning from Churachandpur after attending a religious congregation.

Armed miscreants carried out ambush on two vehicles at Zero Point (between Kotzim and Kotlern area) while coming from Churachandpur and proceeding to-



wards Kangpokpi, according to the NIA's First Information Report (FIR) dated June 8.

In the incident, three individuals of the Kuki community, succumbed to the injuries at the spot and four other occupants of the vehicles sustained bullet injuries, it

said. The Manipur Police had filed a case in this regard on the day of the incident.

The NIA has recently registered a case and started its investigation following a directive by the Union Home Ministry in this regard.

In its directive to the anti-terror agency, the Union Home Ministry said that the "case is related to ambush by armed miscreants to cause damage to life and property of civilians and to create fear and terror in the society and having regard to the gravity of the offence, its national ramifications and the need to unearth the larger conspiracy, it is required to be investigated by the National Investigation Agency". (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

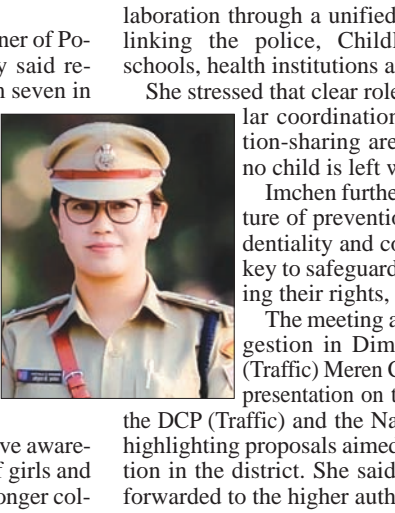
### POCSO cases in Nagaland rise to 15 in 2025: Police Commissioner

**HT Correspondent**  
**DIMAPUR, June 24:** Dimapur Commissioner of Police (CP) Aotula T. Imchen on Wednesday said reported POCSO cases in Nagaland rose from seven in 2022 to 15 in 2025, while the number of traced missing children reached 216 this year.

Addressing the monthly Dimapur District Planning and Development Board meeting at the Deputy Commissioner's conference hall, Imchen said many missing-child cases were linked to children running away from home or elopement.

She urged stakeholders to identify early warning signs such as absenteeism, school dropouts and behavioural changes to prevent children from becoming vulnerable.

Highlighting police initiatives on preventive awareness and coordinated action for the safety of girls and children in the district, Imchen called for stronger col-



laboration through a unified child protection system linking the police, Childline, welfare agencies, schools, health institutions and community leaders.

She stressed that clear roles, timely referrals, regular coordination and effective information-sharing are essential to ensure that no child is left without support.

Imchen further said that building a culture of prevention, accountability, confidentiality and collective responsibility is key to safeguarding children and protecting their rights, dignity and well-being.

The meeting also discussed traffic congestion in Dimapur, during which DCP (Traffic) Meren Chenth made a PowerPoint presentation on the issue. Imchen thanked the DCP (Traffic) and the Naga Council Dimapur for highlighting proposals aimed at easing traffic congestion in the district. She said the proposals would be forwarded to the higher authorities for approval.

### Assam: Drugs worth ₹ 1.5 cr seized, two held

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday that two persons were arrested from Nalbari district after narcotic substances worth nearly ₹ 1.5 crore were seized from their possession.

"Kudos to @nalbaripolice for recovering 211.5 gms of suspected heroin concealed in 16 soap boxes, valued at ₹ 1.48 crore. 2 apprehended," Sarma said in a post on X. The state's fight against the drug menace will continue with full force, he said.

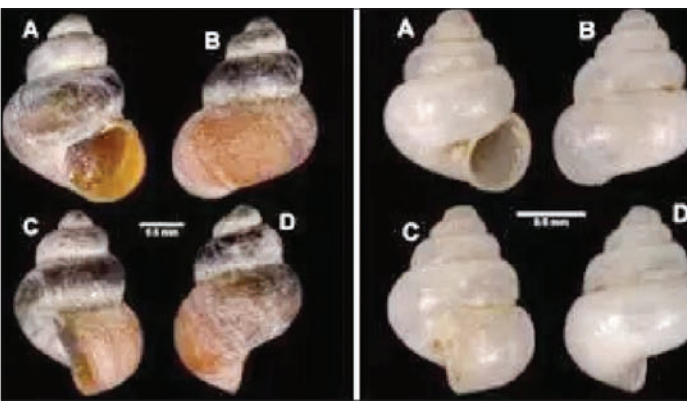
"Another consignment intercepted before it could poison our communities... Beware, @assampolice is watching," the CM said. (PTI)

## Two new microscopic snail species discovered in Meghalaya's limestone caves

The newly identified molluscs are extremely small and can easily escape notice

**SHILLONG, June 24:** Scientists have discovered two new species of microscopic, vividly coloured snails in Meghalaya's limestone caves, officials said on Wednesday. The finding sheds light on the region's largely unexplored underground ecosystems, even as experts warn of threats from mining and increasing tourist activity, they said.

The discovery, published in the European Journal of Taxonomy recently, was made by researchers Nipu Kumar Das and Neelavar Ananthram Aravind of the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology and the Environment (ATREE), who named the species as Georissa meghalayaensis and Acmeilla bensoni from the Krem Puri and Arwah cave systems, respectively. The newly identified molluscs



are extremely small and can easily escape notice without microscopic examination.

Georissa meghalayaensis, found near the entrance of Krem Puri cave earlier this year, is distinguished by its orangish-red shell and intricate mesh-like ridges, setting it apart from closely related species that typically possess yellowish shells with widely spaced spiral lines.

The species has been named after Meghalaya, where it is known

to occur exclusively.

The Acmeilla bensoni, on the other hand, was discovered deeper inside the Krem Puri and Arwah caves.

It is characterised by a small, slightly translucent whitish shell with deeply impressed grooves and densely packed fine ribs, giving it an almost smooth appearance.

The researchers named it in honour of 19th-century naturalist William H Benson, regarded as a pioneer of Indian malacology, or the study of molluscs.

Meghalaya forms part of the Indo-Burma biodiversity hotspot, one of the world's richest ecological regions, and is home to more than 1,200 limestone caves that provide ideal habitats for shell-bearing organisms, the researchers noted. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### Nirav Modi must pay up over USD 11 million to Bank of India, UK court rules

**LONDON, June 24:** Fugitive diamond merchant Nirav Modi is liable to pay Bank of India over USD 11.5 million, including accruing interest on a personal loan guarantee, the High Court in London has ruled.

The 55-year-old jeweller, who remains in prison fighting extradition to India in a separate USD 2 billion Punjab National Bank (PNB) fraud and money laundering case, had disputed the enforceability of the personal guarantee related to a loan to a Dubai-incorporated firm, Firestar Diamond FZE, associated with him.

In a judgment handed down at the London Circuit Commercial Court on Tuesday, Justice Simon Tinkler found in favour of the Bank of India after a lengthy legal process complicated by paperwork transfer delays within the UK prison service.

"Mr Modi was validly served with the October 2025 Modi Demand. That was a valid demand for a liability to the Bank under the Personal Guarantee," Justice Tinkler ruled.

"The Personal Guarantee is not, as a matter of Indian law, void/unenforceable. Mr Modi is therefore liable under the Personal Guarantee to the Bank for the principal amount due of USD 4,105,189.34," he said.

The judge also pointed to "the interest on that sum for which Mr Modi is liable", which adds up to an estimated USD 11.5 million until March 2026, with further interest accruing following that date.



"The interest calculated on the basis set out by the bank is to be added to the principal sum in calculating the total amount due," the judge concluded.

Bank of India, represented by Milan Kapadia of Fladgate LLP, had been pursuing the case since 2018 when allegations began to circulate regarding companies associated with Modi.

"This case is a commercial banking recovery claim by Bank of India against Mr Modi as guarantor. It does not concern, and makes no findings in respect of, the wider fraud allegations against Mr Modi or the Punjab National Bank fraud," Fladgate clarified, following this week's judgment. There were three main issues before the judge (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## India, US review trade pact progress as tariff deadline nears

# No clarity on interim deal

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** India and the United States reviewed the progress on an interim bilateral trade agreement during the two-day ministerial meeting, discussing issues, including market access, digital trade and non-tariff barriers, but gave no indication that all differences were resolved ahead of a key tariff deadline next month.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and visiting US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer held discussions on the first phase of a proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA), which both sides have been negotiating since reaching a framework understanding earlier this year.

In a statement at the conclusion of talks on Wednesday, the Commerce Ministry said the two ministers conducted a "comprehensive review" of key elements of the proposed pact, including enhanced market access, digital trade, supply chain resilience, reduction of non-tariff barriers and cooperation in strategic sectors.

The ministry said both countries discussed pathways to conclude an interim agreement and reaffirmed their commitment to a deal that is "balanced and commercially meaningful".

Greer's June 22-24 visit comes at a time when New Delhi and Washington race to finalise an interim arrangement before the expiration of a temporary 10 per cent US tariff regime on July 24, a deadline that has added urgency to negotiations.

While the statement said 'substantial' progress has been made, the two sides did not say if outstanding issues had been resolved.

"Discussions focused on pathways to conclude an interim agreement as an important milestone toward a comprehensive BTA," the ministry said, adding that the two ministers reaffirmed their commitment to a trade agreement that is balanced, commercially meaningful, and delivers tangible benefits for businesses, farmers, workers, and consumers in both countries.

"Recognizing the growing significance of the India-US economic partnership amid evolving global trade dynamics, both sides reiterated their shared goal of expanding bilateral trade, fostering innovation, and building resilient, trusted supply chains," it added.

Earlier in the day, Goyal said in a social media post that the two sides reviewed the progress of the ongoing India-US trade discussions.

"I appreciate Ambassador Greer's leadership and the sustained efforts of both teams in advancing our discussions in a constructive and forward-looking manner," Goyal said.

Meanwhile, the USTR said that India has a



long history of agriculture and manufacturing, and they are moving forward in technology.

"They want to move forward in AI. They want to cooperate and collaborate with the United States on the technologies of the future and trade of the future. And that's some of the exciting opportunities that we'll have between the United States and India is to capitalise on that," he said.

Greer added that President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi have an "amazing" relationship that they have nurtured over many years.

"Just last week, they met at G7 in Evian, France, and I was there, and they agreed to take the relationship to the next level. This includes the trade deal that we're working on, but it includes every aspect of the relationship, and we expect the relationship to continue developing and only going to a higher and higher level with every passing week," he added.

The two countries aim to salvage and recalibrate the proposed agreement after changes in the US tariff policy upended a framework deal finalised earlier this year.

Greer's visit followed Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump's first meeting in more than a year on the sidelines of the G7 summit in France on June 17, injecting fresh momentum into trade negotiations that both sides see as critical to strengthening economic ties.

The ministerial-level meeting follows chief negotiator-level discussions held in New Delhi earlier this month (June 2-4).

Securing preferential tariff treatment in the pact has become a central objective for New Delhi after changes in the US tariff landscape eroded an advantage India had expected to enjoy over regional competitors such as Vietnam and other ASEAN economies.

Under the February 7 framework, the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on Indian goods to 18 per cent from 25 per cent, lower than duties facing several competing exporting nations.

However, the subsequent US Supreme Court ruling striking down President Donald Trump's

sweeping tariffs and Washington's move to impose a temporary 10 per cent tariff on imports from all countries prompted the two countries to revisit key elements of the proposed framework.

According to one of the clauses of that framework, "In the event of any changes to the agreed upon tariffs of either country, the United States and India agree that the other country may modify its commitments."

India and the US formally launched BTA negotiations on February 13, 2025. Meanwhile, to retain bargaining leverage, the US Trade Representative launched two Section 301 investigations on March 11 and 12, covering about 60 economies.

One focused on alleged excess industrial capacity, while the other examined forced-labour concerns in global supply chains. India was included in both investigations.

After expiry of the temporary tariff, the US has only this mechanism (Section 301 probes) to impose tariffs of any magnitude on its trading partners, including India.

In February this year, the two sides announced the contours of the first phase. It was based on the 50 per cent tariff imposed by the US on Indian goods.

However, on February 20, the US Supreme Court struck down these sweeping tariffs. It forced the Trump administration to impose 10 per cent tariffs under Section 122 of the Trade Act on all countries for 150 days from February 24. It will expire on July 24 this year.

Both sides are aiming to finalise the pact before that, as after July 24, most US imports will again face normal MFN tariff rates, restoring the pre-April 2025 tariff framework.

Under the agreed framework, India proposed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of food and agricultural products, including Dried Distillers' Grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.

New Delhi has also expressed its intentions to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

The US was the second-largest trading partner of India in 2025-26.

India's outbound shipments to the US grew marginally by 0.92 per cent to USD 87.3 billion during the last fiscal year despite high tariffs, while imports increased 15.95 per cent to USD 52.9 billion. The trade surplus declined to USD 34.4 billion in 2025-26 from USD 40.89 billion in 2024-25. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Assam medical colleges secure

Medical Colleges to secure @NABH\_QCI accreditation. Happy to share that @gmchgauhati, @TezpurH, @AmcDibrugarh, @FAAMCHbarpeta and @JmchOfficial have received it till date." Sarma wrote on X.

The Chief Minister said the accreditation reflects adherence to nationally recognised benchmarks in areas such as patient safety, quality of care, hospital management, clinical protocols and healthcare infrastructure.

He further stated that inspections have been completed at Silchar Medical College and Hospital and that the institution is awaiting the outcome of the accreditation process.

Apart from the medical colleges, two Critical Care Assam Centres located in Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur have also secured NABH certification, Sarma said, adding that more healthcare facilities are expected to be added to the list in the coming months.

"And inspections are completed at @SilcharH, where we await the results. Apart from these, two @Care-Assam centres at Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur have also received the NABH certification. We are expecting this list to grow in the coming days," he added.

The Assam government has been focusing on expanding healthcare infrastructure while improving service quality in public hospitals. Over the past few years, the state has established new medical colleges, increased MBBS seats and strengthened specialised healthcare facilities across districts.

Sarma said wider NABH accreditation among government hospitals would enhance public confidence in the healthcare system and contribute to the state's goal of providing accessible, affordable and high-quality healthcare services.

## Assam keeping watch on Arunachal

chief secretary Ravi Kota and other officials to remain on maximum alert and ensure all necessary preparedness measures, it said.

District administrations in potentially affected areas have been asked to maintain close vigilance and take timely preventive and response measures, the statement said.

Teams of SDRF, NDRF and other emergency response agencies are ready for deployment, and field-level officers have been directed to closely monitor river conditions and vulnerable locations, the statement said.

People residing in low-lying and flood-prone areas have been advised to remain vigilant and move to safer places.

Citizens are requested not to venture into inundated areas and to avoid travelling by country boats and other small vessels on the Brahmaputra and other rivers during this period, as river currents are expected to increase considerably, it said. (PTI)

## Nature's fury claims one, 4 go

have been mobilised, while ex-servicemen have also been called in to support emergency operations, he said. The state Civil Aviation Department had requested the IAF to undertake rescue operations and airlift SDRF men and material from Itanagar to Keyi Panyor, Sulu said.

"The IAF air support team, despite difficult weather conditions, reached Hollongi and took off for Pitapool to drop the SDRF force and materials. Further air support exercises have been planned for succeeding requirements," he said.

The North Eastern Electric Power Corporation (NEEPCO) has begun releasing water from the reservoir of the Panyor Lower Hydropower Project as a precautionary measure, and power generation at the project has been temporarily suspended, the secretary said.

Heavy rainfall also disrupted road connectivity in the district, with three stretches of NH-13 near Potin and Hoj blocked by landslides, leaving several people stranded, he said.

As many six districts -- Keyi Panyor, Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey, Lower Subansiri, Kamle and Upper Subansiri -- have been cut off due to monsoon-related disruptions triggered by heavy rainfall, SP Angad Mehta said in a statement. Major landslides occurred along the Kimin-Ziro route, while damage assessment is underway, he said.

The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) has intensified restoration efforts, and connectivity through the Kimin route is expected to be restored by Thursday afternoon, Mehta added. Landslides have also been reported on the Itanagar-Hoj-Yazali stretch of NH-13.

The road connecting Mepsoro and the Hoj Highway Junction has been completely cut off due to massive landslides at several locations, disrupting vehicular movement.

Restoration work is being carried out on a war footing, though officials said it was too early to estimate when the road would be reopened.

Travellers from East Kameng, Pakke Kessang, West Kameng and Tawang districts were advised to avoid the route until further notice.

Arunachal Pradesh has been witnessing heavy rainfall over the past several days, resulting in landslides, flash floods and damage to infrastructure across several districts. Disaster management authorities have urged people living in vulnerable areas and along riverbanks to remain alert and avoid unnecessary travel. (PTI)

## Assam eyes six-hour travel

The project envisages a 166.8-km greenfield corridor designed as a four-lane access-controlled highway aimed at ensuring faster, safer and more efficient transportation across the region.

The corridor will strengthen connectivity between Guwahati, Shillong and Silchar while serving as a key transportation link for several northeastern states, including Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, Mizoram and Manipur.

According to the Chief Minister, the project will significantly improve the movement of goods and passengers, lower logistics costs and facilitate faster access to markets.

He said the corridor is also expected to provide a major boost to tourism by improving road connectivity to several popular destinations across the Northeast.

The Chief Minister further noted that the high-speed road network forms part of a broader infrastructure transformation agenda being pursued by the state government in collaboration with the Centre. The objective is to create seamless transportation corridors that can support economic growth, industrial development and regional integration.

According to the state government's vision, the Shillong-Silchar corridor, once completed, is expected to strengthen inter-state connectivity, facilitate trade and mobility, and contribute to the long-term economic development of the Northeast.

## Assam CS discusses FTA

since the UK-India FTA is due to come into force soon. "We discussed opportunities in a variety of sectors and sub-sectors, including infrastructure, agriculture-tech, AI, skilling, sports, MSMEs, climate and energy," he added. (PTI)

## Japanese Encephalitis, Acute

The Assam government has been proactively undertaking extensive preparedness measures for the AES-JE season, which generally extends from June to August every year, he added.

"Since February 2026, multiple initiatives have been implemented to strengthen surveillance, case management, hospital preparedness, vaccination activities and inter-departmental coordination across the state," Sarma said.

The NHM has identified and trained nodal medical officers, deployed district coordinators, disseminated guidelines and SOPs, strengthened referral mechanisms, ensured availability of essential medicines and expanded JE vaccination coverage, he added. (PTI)

## NIA to probe killing

Manipur has witnessed the killing of at least 260 people and the displacement of thousands due to violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023. (PTI)

## Two new microscopic snail

Despite this, the cave-dwelling micro-fauna of the region has remained poorly documented, they added. In addition to the two new species, the researchers recorded several other micro-snails from neighbouring Manipur and Mizoram, expanding knowledge of the distribution of these little-known organisms across Northeast India.

However, the scientists have cautioned that growing tourist activity in popular caves, including heavy foot traffic, installation of artificial lighting and construction of stairways, could disturb the fragile subterranean ecosystems.

They also warned that limestone mining and habitat alteration pose significant risks to these specialised species, underscoring the need for conservation measures to protect the region's unique underground biodiversity. (PTI)

## Nirav Modi must pay up

to determine: whether Modi had been validly served with a demand; whether that demand related to a liability he owed to the bank; and whether the personal guarantee was enforceable.

On all fronts, Justice Tinkler found in favour of Bank of India after the court also heard from Indian law experts in a case Modi had largely chosen to represent himself as a "Litigant in Person".

At several hearings over the past year, he sought adjournments on the grounds of suffering from severe vision loss, clinical depression and prison constraints.

The judgment records "significant disruption" caused when Modi was moved from HMP Thameside in south London to HMP Pentonville in the north of the city last October, without arrangements being made to transfer his case papers. The prison authorities at Pentonville also failed on two occasions to produce Modi to court despite valid court orders.

"The (prison) governor provided a full statement that recognised, and apologised for, the errors made. It also identified changes to training and processes that the governor would put in place to ensure that these incidents were not repeated," Justice Tinkler's ruling notes.

Modi, meanwhile, remains behind bars wanted in connection with three sets of criminal proceedings in India -- the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) case of PNB fraud, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) case relating to the alleged laundering of the proceeds of that fraud and a third set of criminal proceedings involving alleged interference with evidence and witnesses in the CBI proceedings.

In April 2021, then UK home secretary Priti Patel had ordered his extradition to face these charges in the Indian courts after a prima facie case was established against him. Since then, the businessman went on to submit several unsuccessful bail applications as well as appeals in the UK courts.

In March, he lost a last-ditch attempt to reopen his extradition case alleging "real risk of torture" in India. Since then, he is believed to have applied to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in France for an injunction, with confidential proceedings ongoing. (PTI)

## Kenya pitches itself as entry point to African market for Indian companies

**KOLKATA, June 24:** Kenya will serve as a gateway to the entire African market for Indian products, a diplomat said on Wednesday, pitching for greater investment from Indian companies in the East African nation.

Addressing a special session organised by the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) here, High Commissioner Peter Muniyiri said Kenya has

adopted pro-investment foreign exchange rules and offers the rule of law under its constitution.

"Investments in Kenya are treated in perpetuity. Entering Kenya will give access to the entire African market. The Kenyan Investments Authority will guide Indian investments," he said, adding that Indian products already enjoy good acceptance in the country.

The envoy said tariffs are harmonised in East Africa, and road connectivity in the region is improving. Kenya has three seaports that offer maritime connectivity with India.

He said the Kenyan population is highly literate, and Indian firms operating there would find good talent. Nearly three lakh Indians are currently living in the African nation, he added.

Muniyiri also called on India to allow the entry of agricultural produce from East Africa.

Bilateral trade between India and Kenya crossed USD 4.3 billion in 2025-26, with the India-Kenya Joint Trade Committee identifying new areas of cooperation in manufacturing, agriculture, digital infrastructure, logistics, energy and investment promotion, officials said. (PTI)

## Lollibop Season 7 concludes on a high note in Guwahati

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** JCI Guwahati Princess, Zone 25, successfully organised Lollibop -- The Kids Carnival Season 7, bringing together children and families for a day filled with creativity, entertainment and fun.

The carnival witnessed enthusiastic participation in a range of competitions, including dance, drawing, talent hunt, an online cute baby photo contest and Mega Tambola. Young participants displayed remarkable talent, confidence and creativity, making the event a memorable experience for attendees.

The programme was graced by Zone President JFS Sumit Poddar as the Chief Guest.

Guests of Honour included Immediate Past Zone President JC Gunjan Harialka and Past Zone President JC Sweta Somani, who is also the owner of GD Goenka School.

JC Priya G Tiwari attended the event as a Special Invitee. The event was organised under the leadership of JCI Guwahati Princess President JC Asha Agarwalla and chaired by JC Bhawna Beriwal.

Past Presidents, the Immediate Past President and members of the chapter were present throughout the programme, extending support and encouragement to the participants. Several business stalls were also set up at the venue, offering a variety of products and services and providing additional engagement opportunities for parents and visitors.

Speaking on the occasion, the dignitaries appreciated the efforts of JCI Guwahati Princess in creating a platform for children to discover, nurture and showcase their talents. The carnival concluded with a prize distribution ceremony, where winners of the various competitions were felicitated.

## Riders across India celebrate World Motorcycle Day with guardian bell initiative

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** Classic Legends celebrated World Motorcycle Day by bringing together riders from the Jawa, Yezdi and BSA communities for a nationwide event highlighting the spirit of motorcycling, adventure and fellowship.

Observed globally on June 21, World Motorcycle Day honours the freedom, exploration and sense of belonging that motorcycles inspire.

Marking the occasion, more than 2,000 riders from 19 states and 59 cities participated in coordinated rides, reflecting a shared passion that transcends brands, backgrounds and generations.

A major highlight of this year's celebration was the launch of the Guardian Bell Initiative, aimed at promoting awareness about one of motorcycling's most cherished traditions.

Across riding communities worldwide, a Guardian Bell is often gifted by a fellow rider, friend or loved one as a symbol of goodwill, protection and companionship during journeys.

Through the initiative, riders



were encouraged to exchange Guardian Bells with one another, reinforcing the values of brotherhood, care and mutual support that define the motorcycling community.

Guardian Bells were also distributed during the celebrations, enabling participants to become part of the tradition.

Speaking on the occasion, Anupam Thareja, Co-founder of Classic Legends, said motorcycling has always been about much more than machines.

"Motorcycling is about people,

**SLEWING AND PUTTING BACK OF OHE**  
Tender Notice No.: TRD/LMG/16 of 2026-27; Dated: 22-06-2026; E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Tender No. : EL-TRD-NFR-LMG-OHE-MOD-69; Name of work:** Slew and putting back of OHE in connection to the rebuilding of minor bridges (Br no. 33, 34, 36, 80 & 86) RCC box of span (1x2x2.0m) in Narangaj-Kampur section under Lumding Division. **Advised Value:** ₹89,86,449/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹1,79,700/-; Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on **15-07-2026**. Complete information along with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in the website [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)  
Sr. DEE/TRD, Lumding  
**NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY**  
Serving Customers With A Smile

**AFFIDAVIT**  
Through a court affidavit Dtd on June 23, 2026 at Nagaon court, I declare that my actual name is Shikha Saikia Kalita, born on 24-12-1988 is recorded in all official and non official documents including the Aadhar card vide no 3401-5744-0081. But my name as well as my date of birth has been recorded as Arshana Saikia instead of Shikha Saikia Kalita and date of birth as on 24-12-1987 instead of 24-12-1988.  
Hence, Shikha Saikia Kalita and Arshana Saikia is the name of one and the same person who born on 24-12-1988 i.e. myself.  
Shikha Saikia Kalita  
Village & PO: Ranga Gara Huzgaon, PS: Sadar, Nagaon (Assam).

**AFFIDAVIT**  
By an affidavit before Notary Tamulpur on 22/01/2026, I, Jalal Uddin Ahmed, son of Safur Ali, resident of Vill. No.4 Kalipur, P.O. Kalipur, P.S. Tamulpur, Dist. Tamulpur (Assam) Pin-781360 do hereby declare that my name has been changed from Mohammad Jalaluddin Ahmed to Jalal Uddin Ahmed and my DOB has been changed from 01/03/1982 to 01/01/1984. Henceforth, I shall be known as to Jalal Uddin Ahmed for all purposes.

# Karbi folk legend Pokhila Lektheipi receives Padma Shri from President Murmu

Veteran singer dedicates nation's fourth-highest civilian honour to the people of Karbi Anglong

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, June 24:** Renowned Karbi folk singer Pokhila Lektheipi, fondly known as the "Queen of Melody," was conferred the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian award, by President Droupadi Murmu at a glittering ceremony held at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi recently.

Lektheipi received the prestigious honour in the field of Arts in recognition of her outstanding contribution to music and her lifelong efforts to preserve and promote Karbi traditional culture and folk heritage.

She was named among the Padma awardees by the Government of India earlier this year.

Receiving the award, the veteran singer dedicated the honour to the people of Karbi Anglong and Assam, expressing gratitude for the love, encouragement and support she has received throughout her remarkable career.

Congratulating Lektheipi on the achievement, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council



(KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, described the recognition as a historic moment for the district.

"A truly golden moment for Karbi Anglong. On the occasion of the 75th Foundation Day of KAAC, we celebrated the incredible Smt. Pokhila Lektheipi for being conferred the prestigious Padma Shri Award in Arts," Rong-

hang stated in a social media post.

With the honour, Lektheipi becomes the third recipient from the Karbi community to receive the Padma Shri. The first was eminent writer and former Asam Sahitya Sabha president Rongbong Terang, who was honoured in 1989 for his contribution to literature and education.

Celebrated poet and author Dhaneswar Engti became the second recipient in 2022.

The recognition comes shortly after the inauguration of 'Runmeso', a newly constructed house built for Lektheipi through contributions from well-wishers under the initiative of the KAAC.

The house was formally handed over to her family during the 75th KAAC Foundation Day celebrations at Taralango on June 23.

"To honour her lifelong dedication to our culture, it was my privilege to present her with the keys to her newly constructed home. Her legacy is our pride," Ronghang said.

Over a career spanning more than five decades, Lektheipi has composed and rendered over 300 songs and has played a pivotal role in preserving Karbi folk music and cultural traditions.

Her rich repertoire includes several iconic songs that remain popular among generations of listeners.

She was also closely associated with the late Assamese music icon Zubeen Garg, with whom she per-

formed on numerous stages and recorded several memorable Assamese and Karbi duets.

Songs such as "Paipai Mo Nangklang" from the album Jontro and "Jojoi Penle Koansi Mir Jangthu Chepachoi" and "Chuli Kachetongchong Lasa Along" from the album Manai became widely popular among music lovers.

Apart from her musical achievements, Lektheipi has actively contributed to cultural preservation through her involvement with the Karbi Cultural Society and participation in the Karbi Youth Festival over the years.

Her contributions have previously been recognised through several honours, including the Cultures of Resistance Award, the Assam Silpi Award and Pension in 2023, and the prestigious Assam Gaurav Award in 2024.

The Padma Shri recognition marks another milestone in the life of the veteran artist, whose music and dedication have helped preserve and promote the rich cultural identity of the Karbi community for generations.

## Three Bodoland University professors ranked among world's top 5% scientists

Global recognition highlights university's growing research excellence and international academic standing



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, June 24:** In a significant achievement for Bodoland University, three of its senior faculty members have been ranked among the World's Top 5% Scientists 2025 in the Global Scientist Index & Researcher Ranking prepared by SciRank Global, based on data drawn from more than eight million active researcher profiles and over 20 million scholarly publications available through the OpenAlex research database.

The distinguished academics who earned the recognition are Prof. Heremba Bailing of the Department of Physics, Prof. Sanjay Basumatary of the Department of Chemistry and Prof. Hemen Sarma of the Department of Botany.

The university felicitated the three professors at a special ceremony held at its Conference Hall in recognition of their outstanding contributions to scientific research and academic excellence.

The programme was attended by Vice-Chancellor Prof. BL Ahuja, Rector Prof. Jatin Samah, Dean of Social Sciences Prof. Sanghamitra Choudhury, Dean of Commerce and Management Prof. A Ibemcha Chanu and Secretary of the Bodoland Science Congress Dr. Prince Mochahary.

The awardees were honoured with traditional Aronai and mementos.

Prof. Hemen Sarma and Prof. Sanjay Basumatary had earlier featured in the prestigious World's Top 2% Scientists list published by Stanford University and Elsevier on the basis of citation impact and research performance.

This year, Prof. Heremba Bailing joined the list of globally recognised researchers by securing a place among the World's Top 5% Scientists.

The felicitation programme was

convened by Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology, Prof. Hilloljyoti Singha.

Academic Registrar Dr. Manjil Basumatary expressed satisfaction over the achievement and hoped that more faculty members would attain similar recognition in the future.

Speaking on the occasion, Rector Prof. Jatin Samah congratulated the awardees and observed that their achievements would further enhance the visibility and reputation of Bodoland University in the global scientific community.

Several faculty members, including Dr. Rustam Brahma, Dr. Gayatri Deka Doloi and Dr. Prince Mochahary, also lauded the accomplishment and described it as a proud moment for the university.

Sharing their experiences, Prof. Bailing highlighted the importance of innovative thinking and perseverance in conducting quality research even with limited resources.

Prof. Sanjay Basumatary emphasised the role of collaboration among researchers, while Prof. Hemen Sarma credited research projects, student participation and national and international collaborations for strengthening his academic work.

Vice-Chancellor Prof. BL Ahuja praised the professors for bringing global recognition to the university and said their success reflected the high-quality research being undertaken at Bodoland University.

He encouraged faculty members across disciplines to pursue excellence in research and contribute towards creating a vibrant academic and research ecosystem.

The programme concluded with a vote of thanks by Prof. Hilloljyoti Singha, who acknowledged the support of faculty members and university officials in making the event successful.

## Government Model College to observe Anti-Drug Day

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, June 24:** Government Model College, Deithor, in collaboration with the Assam State AIDS Control Society (ASACS), will observe the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDA-DIT) 2026 on June 26 and 27 at the Moniram Langneh Auditorium, Deithor. The two-day programme will be organised under the theme, "World Drug Problem: Persisting Issues, New Challenges, Innovative Responses," with the objective of creating awareness among students and youth about the harmful effects of substance abuse, its connection with HIV/AIDS and the importance of adopting healthy and responsible lifestyles.

The inaugural session will be held on June 26 at 10 am, followed by a series of competitions, including a speech contest on "Consequences and Solutions of Drug Abuse," a poster-making competition on "Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking," and an open quiz competition.

The speech competition will be

conducted in Assamese, English and Hindi, allowing participants to present their views in the language of their choice. Students from Class IX onwards are eligible to participate in all the competitions.

Organisers have informed that no registration fee will be charged.

Participants have been asked to carry their school or college identity cards, while those taking part in the poster-making competition will have to bring their own materials and drawing tools.

On June 27, an Anti-Drug Awareness Rally will be taken out at 9 am, followed by an open meeting and awareness programme at 11 am.

The event will conclude with a prize distribution ceremony and closing session. The organisers have appealed to students, educational institutions, youth organisations and members of the public to actively participate in the programme and contribute towards creating a drug-free society through awareness, education and collective action against substance abuse and illicit trafficking.

## Simlitola Tea Garden reopens after two years, bringing relief to workers

**HT Correspondent**

**GOALPARA, June 24:** Simlitola Tea Garden in Assam's Goalpara district reopened recently after remaining closed for nearly two years, bringing renewed hope and relief to hundreds of workers and their families.

The reopening is expected to directly benefit around 300 labourers and staff members who had been affected by the prolonged closure. During the shutdown period, many workers reportedly migrated to southern states in search of alternative employment and daily wage opportunities.

A reopening ceremony was held at the tea estate in the presence of Duddhnoi MLA Tankeswar Rabha, government officials, tea garden workers, local residents and representatives of labour organisations.

Addressing the gathering, MLA Tankeswar Rabha expressed gratitude to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and Labour Minister

Rameswar Teli for their efforts in facilitating the reopening of the garden.

He said the revival of the estate would significantly improve the livelihood and socio-economic condition of the people dependent on it.

Spread over 389 hectares, Simlitola Tea Garden has the capacity to produce green tea leaves valued at nearly ₹ 6 crore annually. The reopening is being viewed as a major boost for both the local tea industry and the regional economy.

Tea entrepreneur Santanu Duwarah has taken over the management of the garden on lease. Duwarah had earlier managed the estate during 2015-16 and is expected to oversee the restoration of production activities.

Workers and local leaders expressed optimism that operations would resume smoothly under the new management and thanked the Chief Minister, MLA Tankeswar

Rabha, the Goalpara district administration and officials of the Labour Department for their role in reviving the garden.

Prior to the reopening, a meeting was held at the office of the District Commissioner, Goalpara, under the chairmanship of District Commissioner Prodig Timung to discuss the modalities for restarting operations and restoring normal functioning of the estate.

Rabha urged all stakeholders to set aside differences and work collectively towards the successful revival of the tea garden.

Local residents also welcomed the initiative, describing it as a significant step towards restoring employment opportunities and economic stability in the area.

The reopening of Simlitola Tea Garden is being seen as an important development for Goalpara's tea sector and a fresh source of hope for hundreds of families dependent on the industry.

## NFR completes key electrification milestone in Lumding-Badarpur Hill section

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 24:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has achieved a major milestone in its railway electrification drive with the successful energisation of the 132 KV transmission line connecting the Haf-long Grid Sub-Station (GSS) and the New Haf-long Traction Sub-Station (NHLG TSS).

According to NFR officials, the transmission line was energised at 2:22 pm on June 17, marking the completion of a crucial component of the railway electrification project in the strategically important Lumding-Badarpur Hill section.

The development is expected to significantly advance the commissioning of electric train operations on the challenging hill route, which serves as a vital rail corridor linking the Barak Valley and several northeastern states with the rest of the country.

Officials stated that with the successful energisation of the transmission line, all major physical works related to the traction power supply infrastructure have now been completed. The project has entered its final phase and the section is likely to be commissioned for electric train operations in

the coming weeks after the completion of mandatory testing, inspections and trial runs.

The electrification of the Lumding-Badarpur Hill section is expected to enhance operational efficiency, improve hauling capacity and reduce dependence on fossil fuels. It will also help lower maintenance costs and contribute to environmentally sustainable railway operations.

NFR officials noted that the project forms part of the Railways' broader effort to modernise infrastructure and expand green transportation initiatives across the region.

The successful completion of the traction power infrastructure is being viewed as a significant achievement for railway connectivity in the Northeast, with electric operations expected to provide faster, cleaner and more efficient services on one of the region's most important rail routes.

Northeast Frontier Railway reiterated its commitment to infrastructure modernisation and sustainable transportation, aimed at improving passenger and freight movement while supporting the region's long-term development.

## AIDSO submits memorandum to Bodoland University over four-year degree programme concerns

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, June 24:** The Assam State Council of the All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO) on Wednesday submitted a four-point memorandum to the Vice-Chancellor of Bodoland University, expressing concern over the implementation of the four-year undergraduate degree programme in affiliated colleges without adequate teaching staff and infrastructure.

The delegation was led by AIDSO State Secretary Hemanta Pegu and included State Council members Kushal Pegu, Shahnaaz Khan and Malati Basumatary.

In the memorandum, the organisation demanded that students who completed the three-year undergraduate programme with a major subject should have their certificates clearly mention "Passed with Major."

It also called for the creation of an adequate number of postgraduate seats to accommodate graduates from the existing three-year programme.

The student organisation further

urged the university to reintroduce the three-year undergraduate programme from the upcoming academic session, citing the lack of adequate infrastructure in Assam.

It pointed out that several other states continue to follow the three-year degree structure.

AIDSO also demanded that the issue be resolved through discussions involving education experts, academicians, teachers, college principals, student organisations and other stakeholders, and proposed that the four-year degree programme be offered only as an optional course for willing students.

The memorandum highlighted the shortage of teachers, classrooms and laboratory facilities in colleges across the state, noting that many teaching and non-teaching posts remain vacant.

According to the organisation, even the existing three-year undergraduate programme is facing challenges due to inadequate infrastructure.

The organisation alleged that under the multidisciplinary curriculum

framework, students are being compelled to study subjects unrelated to their core disciplines despite the absence of sufficient facilities and faculty support.

It argued that such an approach places an unnecessary academic burden on students and hampers in-depth learning in their chosen fields.

AIDSO also drew attention to the situation in rural colleges, where severe shortages of classrooms and faculty persist, with some institutions reportedly functioning with only one or two tutors.

The organisation appealed to Bodoland University and the Assam Government to take urgent measures to prevent any deterioration in the quality of higher education and to address the concerns arising from the implementation of the new curriculum framework.

Following a detailed discussion with the delegation, the Vice-Chancellor assured the student representatives that efforts would be made to address the issues raised in the memorandum.

## Class VII student killed in road mishap in Jorhat

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, June 24:** A Class VII student of Shemford Futuristic School, Jorhat, was killed in a tragic road accident in the Bahona area of the town on Wednesday.

The deceased has been identified as Ayan Ashish Saikia.

According to sources, the incident occurred in front of the boy's residence when he was riding a bicycle. A scooter, allegedly being ridden by two higher secondary girl students, reportedly struck the bicycle, resulting in the fatal accident.

The impact of the collision left the schoolboy critically injured.

He succumbed to his injuries following the mishap, sources said. The two girls travelling on the scooter also sustained injuries in the accident.

One of them, who suffered serious injuries, was admitted to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) of Jorhat Medical College and Hospital (JMCH), while the other was shifted to a private hospital for treatment.

The incident has cast a pall of gloom over the locality, with residents expressing shock over the untimely death of the young student. Police have initiated an investigation into the circumstances leading to the accident. Further details are awaited.

## FROM VEGETABLE VENDOR TO TRAILBLAZER

# Mekri Tissopi honoured with KAAC Lifetime Achievement Award

Karbi entrepreneur who empowered over 500 rural women recognised for five decades of perseverance and community leadership

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, June 24:** In recognition of her extraordinary contribution to women's entrepreneurship and community empowerment, Mekri Tissopi of Kakoti Ronghang village on the outskirts of Diphu was conferred the CEM Lifetime Achievement Award during the 75th Foundation Day celebration of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) at Rangina Sarpo Ahongjai on June 23.

The award was presented by KAAC Chief Executive Member Dr. Tuliram Ronghang as part of a ceremony honouring 12 distinguished individuals for their outstanding contributions to society.

Born on January 1, 1959, in Sam Tisso village of Disama in Karbi Anglong, Mekri Tissopi is the daughter of late Him Tisso

and late Kakrung Bepi and the wife of Kehai Kathar.

Raised in a financially struggling family, she was unable to receive formal education and began working from a young age to support her household.

Determined to improve her family's livelihood, Tissopi started selling maize, vegetables and other produce grown in jhum fields.

Carrying baskets of farm products, she travelled more than 10 kilometres daily on foot to sell them in villages and localities such as Rongtheang, Rongnihang, Sarthe Colony and Rongkhehan.

What began as a struggle for survival gradually evolved into a remarkable entrepreneurial journey.

Through years of perseverance



and hard work, she improved her family's economic condition and

inspired many women from neighbouring villages to join her in col-

lecting and marketing wild vegetables.

Her success became a source of motivation for rural women, demonstrating that determination and self-reliance could overcome even the harshest circumstances.

As the availability of wild vegetables declined due to growing demand, Tissopi adapted by shifting her business operations to Diphu Market.

Despite poor transportation facilities and the daily challenge of travelling from Kakoti Ronghang village to the town market, she continued her trade with unwavering commitment.

Over time, she secured a permanent space in Diphu Market and established herself as a respected greengrocer.

Her small business not only sus-

tained her family but also became a platform for empowering other women.

By encouraging and guiding women from neighbouring villages to engage in vegetable trading and small-scale businesses, she helped create new livelihood opportunities across the region.

Her efforts transformed the lives of hundreds of women. Through her leadership and example, more than 500 rural women were encouraged to become economically independent, enabling them to support their families, educate their children and improve their standard of living.

Tissopi's contributions have earned her widespread recognition over the years. In 2017, she was honoured by the Journalists Association and Federation of Assam

(JAFA) at the Guwahati Press Club for her pioneering role in promoting women's entrepreneurship.

She was also felicitated by the Karbi Anglong district administration during the 78th Independence Day celebrations in 2024 in recognition of her service to society.

Having remained dedicated to her profession since beginning her greengrocer business in 1976, Tissopi today stands as one of the pioneering women entrepreneurs of the Karbi community.

At the age of 67, she continues to run her business with the same determination and enthusiasm that have defined her life's journey, inspiring generations of women through her resilience, hard work and commitment to community upliftment.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Change is the end result of all true learning. - Leo Buscaglia

Three years of INDIA bloc

The opposition INDIA bloc which completed its three years on June 23 is passing through a critical period when the very foundation of this alliance, the strong regional parties, are shattered by defections and splits backed by the ruling party BJP. Mamata Banerjee who gave the name of the alliance at the founding conclave in Patna on June 23, 2023, is out of power from West Bengal in the recent state assembly elections. What is more damaging is that most of the MPs and MLAs of her Trinamool Congress have disowned her, virtually making her a non-entity in politics. TMC with its 28 Lok Sabha members in Lok Sabha was a major regional party engaged in fighting the BJP at the national level. The marginalization of Mamata and her TMC has immensely affected the power of the INDIA bloc vis a vis BJP at national level. Both the dissident MPs and the legislators of TMC are presently being guided by the BJP. They are expected to function as the B team of the BJP in both Lok Sabha and in the West Bengal assembly. Along with marginalization of Mamata, UBT Shiv Sena supremo Uddhav Thackeray is also facing a similar situation as six rebel MPs of his party joined the Eknath Shinde led Shiv Sena on Monday reducing his party's number in Parliament to three. Shinde's Sena is a part of NDA, so the BJP will get the support of another six members in Parliament.

In 2027, seven states are going for assembly elections. Out of this seven, excepting in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, in all other five states, the Congress is the principal INDIA bloc party taking on the BJP and NDA. These states are Goa, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Himachal and Gujarat. In UP, the Congress has to arrive at an electoral understanding with the SP recognizing that SP is the major partner and the seat sharing will be made on the basis of ground reality. As regards Punjab, AAP is the dominant player followed by the Congress. Here there is no threat from the BJP. So it can be a contest between AAP and the Congress.

In 2028, state polls will be held in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chattisgarh, and Karnataka among others. These are the states the Congress has to improve its performance. The win of INDIA bloc partners in the state assembly elections can only generate the necessary momentum for the Lok Sabha polls in April/May 2029. That way, the Congress and to some extent SP will have to lead the INDIA Bloc during this crucial period. The five-point programme adopted at the June 8 meeting, has to be followed up in true spirit.

Emergency 1975: When democracy was put behind bars

Fifty years ago, on the midnight of June 25, 1975, the largest democracy on earth was plunged into darkness. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, facing the imminent loss of her own Parliament seat after the Allahabad High Court declared her election void on grounds of corrupt electoral practices, chose not the path of law but the path of tyranny. She chose herself over Bharat. She chose power over the people. In doing so, she committed the gravest crime any elected leader can commit against the nation that elected them, she murdered democracy by imposing emergency. For 21 months, from June 25, 1975 to March 21, 1977, Bharat ceased to be a free nation. The Constitution was suspended with fundamental rights were abrogated. The press was gagged into silence. Political opponents were thrown into prisons without trial. The judiciary was humiliated and bent. Elections were postponed indefinitely. And at the centre of this constitutional catastrophe sat one woman and one family, drunk on absolute power, proving to the world what Bharatiya thinkers and our civilizational wisdom have always known: that power without dharma is destruction.

The Emergency did not emerge from a national crisis. There was no war threatening India's borders. There was no economic catastrophe of civilizational proportions. The "internal disturbance" that Indira Gandhi invoked under Article 352 was, in truth, a personal political crisis of her own making. The misdeeds of the Congress party during the Emergency were not isolated incidents or administrative excesses. They were a systematic, coordinated, and deliberate campaign to dismantle every pillar of Indian democracy, one institution at a time, one right at a time, one citizen at a time.

The first and most fundamental crime was the subversion of the Constitution itself. The 42nd Constitutional Amendment, pushed through a Parliament from which all meaningful opposition had been jailed or intimidated, was a brazen power grab. It curtailed the power of the Supreme Court to review constitutional amendments, extended the term of the Lok Sabha from five to six years (effectively postponing elections indefinitely), made the President bound by the advice of the Cabinet (stripping away a crucial check on executive power), and subordinated the Directive Principles of State Policy over Fundamental Rights, a change that could be used to justify virtually any repression in the name of state

policy. This single amendment was the Congress party's attempt to make its Emergency-era power permanent.

The MISA — Maintenance of Internal Security Act, became the weapon of mass political imprisonment. Under this draconian law, tens of thousands of Indians were arrested and imprisoned without trial, without charge, and without any right of appeal. No court could question their detention. No lawyer could challenge their imprisonment. Leaders of the Bharatiya Lok Dal, the Congress (O), the Jana Sangh, the CPI (Marxist), the Socialists, trade union leaders, student activists, journalists, lawyers, teachers anyone who had ever raised their voice against Indira Gandhi was fair game for the MISA dragnet. Estimates suggest that over 110,000 people were imprisoned under MISA and the Defence of India Rules during the Emergency, making it one of the largest episodes of political imprisonment in post-war democratic history.

The judiciary which was the last fortress of the citizen against state oppression was systematically neutralised. Judges who gave inconvenient verdicts found themselves superseded in promotions, a practice that Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer later described as the "committal of the judiciary to the Executive." Elections, the very heartbeat of democracy were suspended. The terms of state assemblies were extended by Presidential proclamation.

Local body elections were cancelled. The entire electoral machinery was shut down, and Congress party functionaries ran the country with the confidence of men who knew they would never face the verdict of the people.

If the constitutional crimes of the Emergency were its face, then the atrocities visited upon ordinary Bharatiyas, the poor, the working class, the residents of urban slums, the rural peasant were its body. And it was here, in the daily lives of Bharat's most vulnerable citizens, that the Congress party's contempt for the common man was most hideously displayed. The forced sterilization programme, driven by Sanjay Gandhi with neither democratic mandate nor legislative authority, stands as one of the darkest chapters in post-independence Indian history. Targeting poor men, rickshaw pullers, daily wage labourers, slum dwellers, villagers government officials were given sterilization quotas. Those who could not meet their quotas faced salary cuts and punishments. The Turkman Gate demolitions of April 1976 remain a symbol of the Emer-



gency regime's utter disregard for the lives and dignity of the poor. In the old quarters of Delhi, thousands of families were forcibly evicted from their homes as part of Sanjay Gandhi's grandiose "beautification" plan for Delhi. Entire neighbourhoods were razed to the ground. When residents protested the demolition of their homes and their livelihoods, the police opened fire. People were killed. Of all the instruments of democracy that the Congress party dismantled during the Emergency, none was more deliberately and completely destroyed than the freedom of the press. In a functioning democracy, the press is the oxygen of public life — it informs citizens, holds power accountable, amplifies dissent, and ensures that the government cannot operate in secrecy. Indira Gandhi understood this perfectly. That is precisely why she moved to extinguish it within hours of declaring the Emergency.

On the night of June 25-26, 1975, electricity supply to the press areas of Delhi was deliberately cut off, preventing newspapers from printing their editions. It was a calculated act of sabotage against the fourth estate, designed to prevent the Indian public from learning what had just been done to their Constitution. When morning newspapers did eventually appear, many carried blank editorial spaces — silent white rectangles where opinions and analysis would have been a powerful visual protest by editors who refused to write what the government told them to write but also dared not write what they actually thought. All India Radio and Doordarshan, the government-controlled broadcast media became pure instruments of state propaganda.

The underground press small mimeographed sheets and pamphlets produced at great personal risk by RSS workers, socialist activists, and democratic journalists — became the only source of real news for many Indians. People who were found distributing these underground publications faced imprisonment under MISA. The Press Council of India, which existed to defend press freedom

and journalistic ethics, was abolished in 1975 by the Congress government an act that symbolically as well as practically removed any institutional voice for the rights of the press.

The Emergency also revealed the indestructible spirit of Indian democracy. Even in the darkest hours of state repression, thousands of ordinary Indians chose resistance over submission. Nowhere was this more visible than in the extraordinary contribution of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, whose workers became the backbone of the underground resistance movement. The RSS was banned during the Emergency a fact that speaks volumes about who Indira Gandhi truly feared. She did not fear effete drawing-room liberals or armchair intellectuals. She feared organised, disciplined, ideologically rooted nationalism. RSS workers were imprisoned by the tens of thousands, yet they continued their work underground, distributed pamphlets, maintained resistance networks, and kept the flame of democratic opposition burning.

The Emergency was not an accident. It was the logical conclusion of a particular political philosophy the philosophy that power belongs to a family, that institutions exist to serve leaders rather than citizens, and that the voice of the people can be silenced when it becomes inconvenient. This philosophy dynastic, centralising, and inherently anti-democratic is the very antithesis of the right-wing nationalist vision for India. It is no coincidence that the Congress party has never truly reckoned with this crime. It has never offered a full-throated apology to the Indian people. The dynasty that caused the Emergency continues to present itself as the protector of democracy — an irony so dark it would be laughable if it were not so dangerous. Those who have not confronted their authoritarian past cannot be trusted as guardians of India's democratic future.

June 25, 1975 was the date on which one family decided that India existed for them, rather than they for India. The Emergency was the starkest possible expression of the belief that dynasty matters more than democracy, that one person's power matters more than the rights of a billion people. And the Congress party calls itself democratic. But India answered. In 1977, in the greatest repudiation of authoritarian rule in democratic history, the people of this ancient civilisation gave the world the concept of Sabka Mangal, the well-being of all, reclaimed their democracy. They did so not with violence but with ballots. Not with hatred but with determination. (The author is Ward Councillor, Guwahati Municipal Corporation)

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Saurav Jhunjunwala

Constitutional safeguards for indigenous people

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The question of constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people has, in the present social and political context of Assam, become a life-and-death struggle for the survival of the nation and the only legal shield for the future generations to continue their existence. If we analyze the current trend of demographic change and the process of political power transfer with complete objectivity and realism, it becomes evident that the indigenous people of Assam are steadily moving towards a frightening state of uncertainty within their own homeland. The Foreigners' Expulsion Movement carried out over several decades, the demand for implementation of the Assam Accord, and the recent anti-CAA movement—all of these were fundamentally struggles to protect the identity and rights of the indigenous people. Yet, what have we actually gained from these movements, and how far have we advanced in securing legal protections? That remains a serious question. A nation cannot be protected merely through slogans on the streets or emotional speeches; it requires a strong constitutional wall that cannot be broken by political conspiracies or the force of numbers. There are examples in other Northeastern states showing that it is possible to secure one's existence while remaining within the framework of the Indian Constitution. However, due to the absence of political will and the lack of foresight among indigenous leadership, Assam remains trapped in committee reports and assurances. Protection of indigenous people does not merely mean preserving language and culture; it means safeguarding land rights, securing access to government employment, and, above all, retaining the authority to make political decisions in their own hands.

Whenever the issue of constitutional safeguards is discussed, the first challenge that emerges is the complex puzzle of defining who qualifies as an "indigenous person" or an "Assamese." Until this issue is resolved, no form of protection can be effectively implemented in reality. The primary reason why the report submitted by the Biplab Sharma Committee remains confined to government files is the legal conflict between the years 1951 and 1971. Under the Assam Accord, individuals who entered Assam up to 24 March 1971 were granted citizenship. However, constitutional safeguards require a standard that is higher than citizenship alone, and such safeguards are generally expected to be determined on the basis of the 1951 NRC or electoral rolls. Here lies a serious legal and social dilemma—those who arrived in Assam between 1951 and 1971 and obtained citizenship would be recognized as citizens, but they could be excluded from the special benefits reserved for indigenous people. Such an arrangement carries a strong possibility of being challenged in court. Nevertheless, we must accept the reality that citizenship and indigenous rights are two different matters. Even in countries such as the United States and



Australia, indigenous populations enjoy certain special rights that are not available to citizens who arrived later. Assam similarly requires a legal framework where all citizens are equal in terms of citizenship, but indigenous people, as the sons and daughters of the soil, receive priority in matters such as land ownership, business opportunities, and access to government benefits. Until the government demonstrates the courage to clearly define the cut-off year or foundational benchmark, discussions regarding Clause 6 or safeguards for indigenous people will remain little more than a strategy for delaying action. In the present context, it appears that the process of defining indigenous status is being unnecessarily prolonged so that demographic changes continue and, eventually, the very issue of indigenous safeguards loses its relevance.

The greatest threat to the existence of Assam's indigenous people lies in the loss of land rights, and in this regard the necessity of constitutional safeguards cannot be overstated. If we examine the pattern of land transactions in Assam over the past ten to fifteen years, it becomes clear that significant urban centres, including Guwahati, along with vast stretches of fertile agricultural land, are gradually passing out of indigenous hands and into the control of outside investors or individuals whose citizenship status often remains questionable. The provisions concerning Tribal Belts and Blocks under Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, have, for all practical purposes, become ineffective. Through legal loopholes and administrative corruption, land transfers continue freely even in protected areas. Through constitutional safeguards, Assam must adopt stringent land laws similar to those in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, or Meghalaya, clearly stipulating that agricultural land and, particularly, rural land can be bought and sold only among the indigenous people of Assam. Although the government speaks of distributing land pattas through

schemes such as Mission Basundhara, there is no effective mechanism to monitor who acquires the land that indigenous families are compelled to sell because of economic hardship. A nation loses its roots when it loses its land. When an indigenous farmer loses a piece of land, he does not merely lose property; he contributes to the erosion of the demographic balance of that region. Therefore, the central demand of constitutional safeguards must be a legal framework that guarantees complete protection of indigenous land rights. Just as it is necessary to free char and riverine lands from encroachment, it is equally important to ensure that land in urban and commercial centres does not pass into non-indigenous hands. Without secure land rights, political reservations and language rights will ultimately become meaningless.

When discussing political protection for indigenous people, the focus generally falls upon constituency delimitation. However, the recent delimitation exercise demonstrated that merely redrawing constituency boundaries cannot protect a people from demographic domination. Such a process may facilitate the election of indigenous candidates for a few electoral cycles, but in the long term it is bound to fail if the composition of the electorate continues to change. The true meaning of constitutional safeguards would be the reservation of at least 100 to 110 of the 126 seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly exclusively for indigenous people, much like the reservations provided for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Yet, within the existing constitutional framework of India, there is no direct provision for reserving constituencies on the basis of language or community within the general category. Therefore, such an arrangement would require constitutional amendment or a special constitutional provision. It is already evident that in several districts of the Barak Valley and Lower Assam, indigenous people have become political minorities, and they have lost the ability to elect representatives of their own

choice. Under such circumstances, instead of relying solely on the arithmetic of electoral numbers, the demand should be that the Assam Legislative Assembly be granted a special status whereby decisions concerning the future of Assam's indigenous people remain in the hands of indigenous representatives alone. Another possible alternative would be the formation of a Legislative Council comprising representatives from various indigenous communities. Without political power, who will enact laws to protect our language, culture, and land? If external forces gain political control, they will inevitably alter laws according to their own interests, and that will mark the beginning of disaster for the indigenous people. Political reservation, therefore, is not merely an emotional demand; it is a strategic necessity for maintaining control over the mechanisms of governance.

Any discussion of constitutional safeguards for indigenous people remains incomplete without addressing economic security and employment, because no community can focus on protecting its identity while struggling for basic livelihood. Government jobs in Assam are steadily declining, while the private sector is becoming increasingly dominant. Yet the participation of local or indigenous youth in this private sector remains minimal. Companies arriving from outside the state generally prefer to recruit employees from elsewhere, often arguing that local youth lack the necessary skills or willingness to work hard. In reality, such arguments frequently serve as excuses. If states such as Andhra Pradesh and Haryana can enact laws providing seventy-five percent reservation for local residents in the private sector, why should Assam not be able to do the same? A package of constitutional safeguards should clearly require that any company operating or establishing industries in Assam must reserve one hundred percent of Class III and Class IV jobs and at least eighty percent of higher-level positions for local indigenous people. Furthermore, legal provisions should ensure priority

for indigenous youth in government contracts, market leases, and commercial licenses. Whether one looks at Fancy Bazar in Guwahati or weekly rural markets, everyone knows who controls the economic lifeline. No nation can stand upright without economic self-reliance. Rather than reducing indigenous people to beneficiaries dependent on welfare schemes, constitutional safeguards should provide special economic opportunities that integrate them into the productive economy and ensure that the benefits derived from Assam's resources remain largely in the hands of its own people.

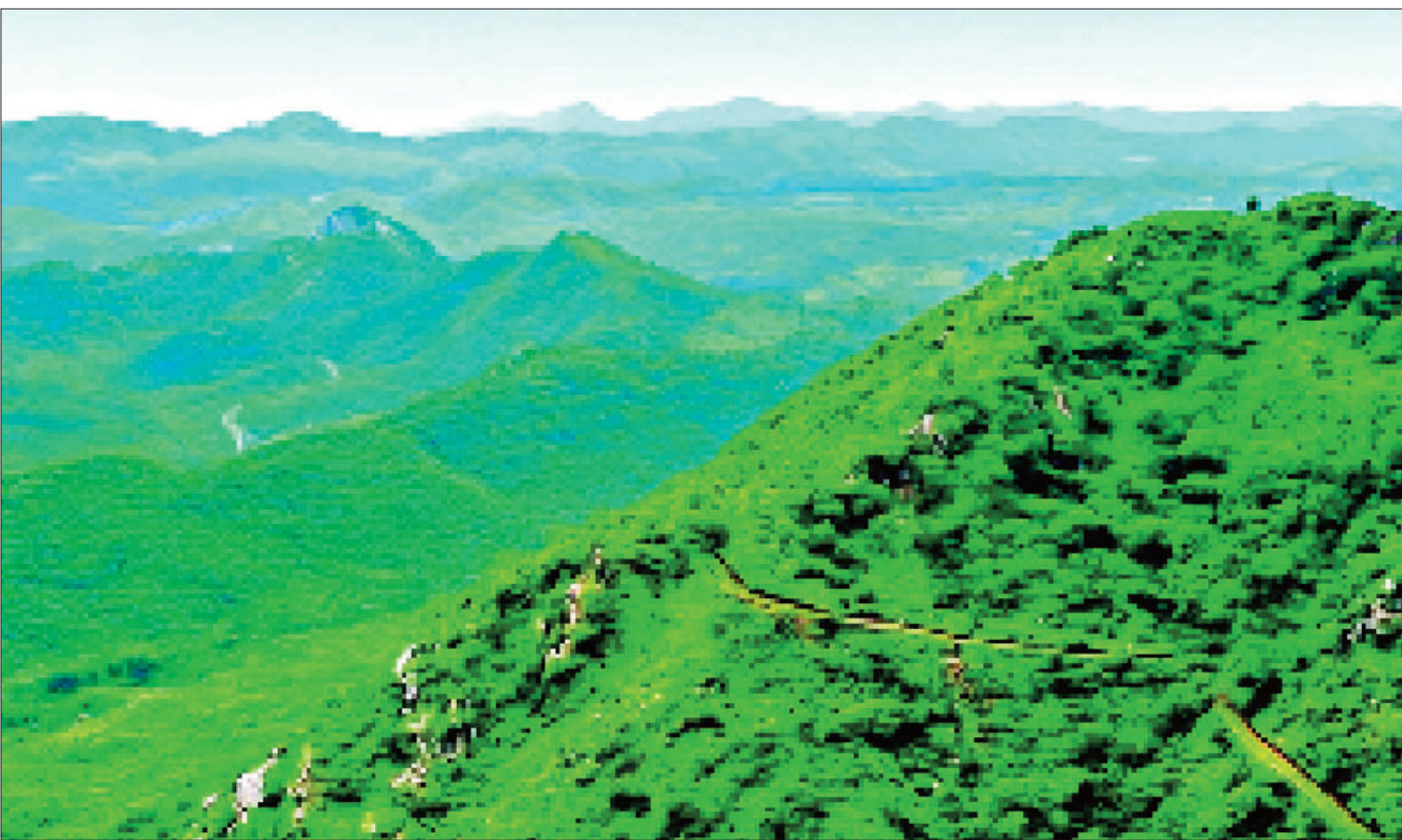
The crisis of language and culture may appear ordinary on the surface, but its depth is alarming, and it is gradually consuming the very soul of society. Among contemporary Assamese society, particularly among the younger generation, the declining attachment to the Assamese language and the growing attraction towards Hindi and English are not merely signs of modernity; they are symptoms of cultural domination. Whenever demographics change, the character of language inevitably changes as well. Through constitutional safeguards, the Assamese language should not only function as the official language within government offices but should also be made mandatory in markets, commercial establishments, signboards, and private institutions. Article 350A of the Constitution provides for primary education in the mother tongue, yet Assamese-medium schools are steadily declining under the pressure of English-medium private institutions. This situation demands strong policies that make education in local languages and cultures compulsory. At the same time, caution is necessary. Indigenous people in Assam are not limited to Assamese-speaking communities alone. The state is home to Bodos, Mishings, Karbis, Dimasas, Rabhas, and numerous other indigenous groups with their own distinct languages and cultural traditions. Therefore, the formula for constitutional safeguards must ensure that while As-

samese is recognized as the link language and official language of the state, the development and protection of indigenous tribal languages are not hindered in any way. Instead, all indigenous languages and cultures should be brought under a common protective framework, creating a collective cultural defence mechanism. When a nation loses its language, it loses its ability to think independently. A people deprived of that intellectual strength inevitably become subordinate to others.

In conclusion, the struggle for constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people of Assam is a long and complex process in which emotion alone has no place. It must be understood that, for the Central Government and national political parties, the existential concerns of Assam's indigenous people are often not as significant as electoral calculations. The failure of the NRC and the forceful implementation of the CAA have taught us one lesson: the responsibility for safeguarding our future ultimately rests upon ourselves. This requires iron-like unity among all indigenous communities and a common strategy. We cannot remain dependent solely on Clause 6; rather, we must assert our rights through amendments to Article 371 or through the creation of new constitutional arrangements. Indigenous tribal and non-tribal communities must remain vigilant so that divisions among them are not exploited by external forces seeking to weaken their collective strength. The present moment is critical. If we make mistakes now or remain silent, then within the next two or three decades the indigenous people of Assam may survive only as a chapter in history. Therefore, the demand for constitutional safeguards must evolve not only into a mass movement but also into a powerful legal struggle. The only weapons available to us are reason, unity, and the demand for the proper implementation of constitutional principles. Only through the convergence of these three forces can we hope to overcome this existential crisis.



# The Aravalli green shield: India's living defence against the desert



By: Vivek Saxena

Every year on 17 June, the world observes the UN Day to Combat Desertification and Drought under the UNCCD Convention - a reminder that healthy land is the quiet foundation of our food, our water, our biodiversity and our resilience to a changing climate. This year's theme, "Restore the Land. Unlock.", carries a hopeful message: restoring degraded landscapes is not merely an ecological duty but an investment in livelihoods, water security and a sustainable future.

The challenge is sobering. Nearly 40 per cent of the Earth's land is now degraded, affecting billions of lives and threatening economic and ecological stability. India faces its own pressures - declining groundwater, biodiversity loss, expanding aridity and growing climate variability. Yet India has also emerged as a global leader in land restoration, and one of its most ambitious efforts is unfolding along an ancient line of hills: the Aravalli Green Wall.

**A green wall, or a green shield?**

The phrase "green wall" entered the global vocabulary through Africa. Launched in 2007 by the African Union, the Great Green Wall set out to restore degraded land across the full width of the continent, stretching some 8,000 kilometres from Senegal on the Atlantic to Djibouti on the Horn of Africa. Originally conceived across eleven core Sahel countries and since expanded to many more, it aims to restore 100 million hectares of land, sequester 250 million tonnes of carbon and create 10 million green jobs by 2030.

Africa's experience taught the world an important lesson. A rigid line of planted trees marching across deserts could not survive on its own; the most enduring insight from the Sahel is that the initiative evolved from a tree-planting drive into a mosaic of activities - a comprehensive effort blending water harvesting, soil conservation, grasslands and community livelihoods. The "wall" was never really a wall.

This is why, in spirit, we should understand these initiatives not as walls but as shields. The

Aravalli Green Wall, properly understood, is India's green shield against the advancing desert - not a barrier of bricks, but a breathing, regenerating landscape.

**Reviving an ancient ecological shield**

Stretching across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi, the Aravalli Range is among the oldest mountain systems on Earth. For millennia, it has shielded the subcontinent from the eastward march of the Thar Desert while recharging aquifers, regulating local climate and sheltering rich biodiversity. Decades of deforestation, mining, encroachment and unsustainable land use have worn this shield thin - and the consequences reach far beyond the hills.

Recognising this, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav launched the Aravalli Green Wall Project in 2023, one of India's most ambitious landscape-restoration programmes, blending afforestation, watershed development, groundwater recharge, the revival of water bodies, dust-storm mitigation, carbon sequestration and community livelihoods.

The Aravalli Green Wall is the on-ground expression of a commitment India has made repeatedly at the highest global forums. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has placed land restoration at the centre of its climate diplomacy. When India hosted the 14th Conference of Parties to the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP14) in 2019, the Prime Minister raised India's ambition to restore degraded land from 21 million to 26 million hectares by 2030 - a pledge carried forward in the Delhi Declaration adopted at the close of that conference.

This sits within a wider arc of leadership: India's commitment to Land Degradation Neutrality and the Bonn Challenge; its pledge of net-zero emissions by 2070, announced at Glasgow; and Mission LiFE (Lifestyle for Environment), which the Prime Minister has championed from the G20 to the United Nations as a model for sustainable living. The Aravalli Green Wall translates these global commitments into restored watersheds, regenerated forests and revived water bodies on Indian soil.

If restoration rebuilds the shield, the law defends it - and here the judiciary has been a steadfast guardian of the Aravallis. The Supreme Court banned mining in Gurugram, Faridabad and Nuh as far back as 2009, and has intervened repeatedly against illegal mining and encroachment across the range. Yet a deeper problem persisted: the four Aravalli states followed inconsistent criteria for what even counts as an "Aravalli", leaving regulatory gaps that illegal mining exploited. To close those gaps, the Court constituted a committee in May 2024 to recommend a uniform definition. In November 2025, it accepted that committee's formulation - defining an Aravalli hill as a landform rising 100 metres or more above the local relief, and a range as two or more such hills within 500 metres - froze new mining leases and mandated a plan for sustainable mining.

The definition, however, drew sharp criticism: ecologists and citizen groups warned that a purely height-based threshold could exclude vast tracts of the range from protection, endangering groundwater recharge, biodiversity and the very desertification control the Aravallis exist to provide.

Responding to these concerns, the Supreme Court took suo motu cognisance, kept its November judgment and the committee's report in abeyance, and ordered a fresh, independent expert review. In June 2026, it constituted a high-powered committee headed by the Director General of the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to re-examine the definition and demarcation, resolve the "critical ambiguities" in the earlier findings, and submit a comprehensive

report by 31 August 2026. Much now rests on this committee. A definition is not a technicality; it draws the line between what is protected and what may be quarried. The expectation - shared by conservationists, scientists and administrators alike - is for a definition that is scientifically rigorous and map-verifiable, yet ecologically precautionary: one that protects not merely the tallest peaks but the connected system of foothills, valleys, recharge zones and ridgelines that make the Aravallis a functioning ecological barrier. Where the science is uncertain, the definition must err on the side of protection. Crucially, the legal boundary of the Aravallis and the restoration ambition of the Green Wall must speak to each other - for it makes little sense to plant a shield on one hand while leaving it legally exposed on the other.

The stakes are highest, and most immediate, for the National Capital Region. The Aravallis are the single most significant natural barrier shielding the NCR from the dust and aridity of the Thar. A healthy Aravalli landscape means cleaner air and fewer dust storms over Delhi and its satellite cities, recharged aquifers beneath one of the world's most water-stressed urban regions, and a cooler, more stable microclimate for tens of millions of residents. The environmental fate of the capital region is, quite literally, tied to the health of these ancient hills.

At the landscape scale, the case is just as compelling. Restoration knits together a continuous ecological corridor from Gujarat through Rajasthan and Haryana to Delhi - reconnecting fragmented wildlife habitats, stabilising watersheds across the basin, and rebuilding the resilience of all north-western India.

**A people's shield**

The Sahel's experience confirms a simple truth: where communities are excluded, walls crumble; where they are made stewards, shields endure. Through Mission LiFE, the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam campaign and the Amrit Sarovar Mission, restoration in India has become a people's movement - the work of citizens, schools, civil society and the private sector as much as of government. Every restored hectare, every revived pond, and every nurtured tree adds a fibre to the living shield that guards our water, our biodiversity and our climate. As the world marks World Desertification and Drought Day 2026, the Aravalli Green Wall stands as a powerful symbol of India's resolve - a resolve that must now be matched by a definition strong enough to hold the line. Reviving the Aravallis is not about building a wall of trees; it is about restoring, and defending, an ancient living shield for the generations to come. The time to act is now - for the land, for the climate, and for the future. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

## Learning heat from a qualitative perspective



By: Maitreya S. S.

The intersectionality approach introduced by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw is very important in various discourses because a person faces different forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, class and caste (in Indian context) at the same time which shapes their everyday struggles and experiences.

The whole globe is suffering from the rising heat crisis. Even if everyone is getting affected, everyone does not face the same experience about heatwaves because these experiences are shaped by factors such as class, caste, gender, occupation, race, geographical location, culture, etc. Hence, the discussions on climate change discourse should be based on the intersectionality approach.

While discussing climate change, the emphasis is often put more on quantitative aspects such as rising temperature, everyday numerical changes in temperature, everyday weather forecasting. These quantitative findings are important as they give a clear picture about the environmental crisis but along with the quantitative analysis of temperature metrics, we also need to equally focus on qualitative aspects of climate change.

Everyday lived experiences of people belonging to all socioeconomic backgrounds need to be equally addressed.

The lived experiences provide great insights regarding how people face heat, deal with heat, adapt various practices to deal with heat, and how they develop coping mechanisms. Such knowledge can't be treated as secondary knowledge or some abstract stories. These qualitative insights should be equally included in the analysis, and studies of climate change along with quantitative data in order to make the understanding of climate change more comprehensive.

Both approaches cannot be studied separately and hence, integration of both qualitative and quantitative approaches need to be considered when we study about rising heatwaves.

There is a dire need to increase the sensitivity about climate change because sensitivity is important in order to develop an in-depth understanding of climate change. This means not only making people aware about the climate change crisis but also making them aware as well as sensitive about socioeconomic inequalities that shape the experiences of heat and accessibility towards the methods about getting protection from heat.

Usually climate change discourse is usually perceived as a complex and difficult topic. Therefore, sensitization is important because it is one of the ways which can make the climate change discourse more 'humane' as well 'intersectional'.

The role of researchers, policymakers, educators, writers is very significant in increasing the sensitization among people through various ways.

As a citizen, it is our responsibility to be mindful and sympathetic to vulnerable socioeconomic marginalised people and make efforts to address their struggles of experiencing heatwaves.

The Heatstories writing programme is also one such creative way of sensitization which has helped me to learn a more sensitised and comprehensive understanding about the climate change crisis. Each week's story assignment added new perspectives and dimensions. These learnings deepened my understanding of climate change and made it more humane which is not only about numbers and descriptions but also about social realities. (Courtesy: Youth ki Awaaz)

## Conflict in the backyard: In Kashmir, bear attacks rise as orchards expand and habitats shrink

By: Aliya Bashir, Deepanwita Gita Nivogi

In the summer of 2024, Bashir Ahmed Chopan, 26, was working in his apple orchard in Watsan Manigam, a rural area in Ganderbal district of central Kashmir, when a black bear attacked him.

The bear's claws tore through his face, slashing his cheeks and forehead. His lips were split and bleeding. Chopan collapsed and was taken to the emergency ward of Sher-i-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences in Srinagar. He underwent multiple surgeries, including plastic surgery to repair injuries to his face, left eye and right thigh.

Shabir Ahmed Choudhary, 50, a shepherd from Anderwan village in Ganderbal, survived a similar attack. He needed more than 20 stitches in his right foot after trying to save his herd from a bear near a forest. "It is no longer about whether we wander near forests or not," Choudhary says.

"Bears have made our lives a nightmare. They killed five of my goats, leaving me with nothing."

He says bears lurk in apple orchards in the mornings and evenings and attack livestock at night outside homes. "We live in fear, unable to sleep or work in our fields. Even the women in my family are too terrified to fetch firewood for cooking," he tells Down To Earth.

**A deadly problem**  
Researchers and conservationists say human-bear encounters are increasing across Kashmir as habitats shrink and land use changes.

Farhan Nazir, a local researcher who has documented the intensifying human-bear conflict in Ganderbal district, says the rising frequency of attacks is linked to habitat loss and disruption of the region's ecological balance.

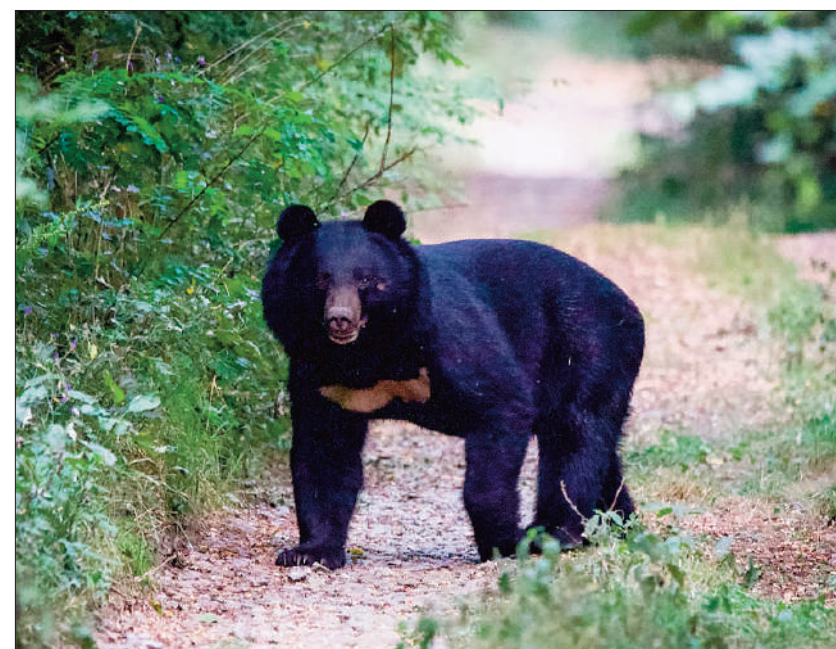
"When we push into the wild, we break the boundaries that keep both animals and humans safe. Unfortunately, those lines have all but vanished in places where human-bear conflict is rampant," says Nazir.

He says the expansion of horticulture, along with homes built in traditional wildlife corridors, has turned once-stable landscapes into conflict hotspots.

"Every encounter we see in our fields is a sign of a habitat in distress, turning a shared landscape into a place of growing fear for both local families and wildlife," he adds.

The impact on survivors is long-lasting. Kalas Irshad Ahmad, 38, from Wangat village in central Kashmir, was mauled by a bear. The attack left him with a twisted nose, damaged lips and scars that have made it difficult for him to speak normally. He is now fully disabled and unable to return to the farm labour that supported his family.

"I am crippled for life with the shame of not being able to do anything for my family due to my physical disability," he says. Ahmad received Rs 5 lakh in compensation from the Wildlife Protection Department of Jammu and Kashmir. But he says



the amount is not enough to rebuild a livelihood.

There is also a gendered pattern to the attacks. Most victims are men because they are more likely to enter forests and orchards for work.

"The attacks are male-centric as more men enter forests and apple orchards for heavy tasks like spraying pesticides," says Mehreen Khaleel, a researcher based in Srinagar who studied human-wildlife conflict while at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology in 2021-22.

"Women focus more on vegetables or apple-picking. The risk is even higher for elderly men," says Khaleel, who also runs the non-profit Wildlife Research and Conservation Foundation.

**Warmer winters, changing bear behaviour**

The Asiatic black bear usually hibernates from November, when temperatures fall, snow becomes heavy and forest food such as rosehip seeds becomes scarce. The animals usually emerge in spring.

But conservationists say that pattern is changing. In recent winters, some bears have remained active, and the hibernation period has reduced from about six months to two or three in some areas.

Wildlife conservationist Kashif Bhat, based in Srinagar, says he has seen signs of bear activity in December in Dachigam National Park, including scat, pugmarks and direct sightings.

According to Bhat, bears are coming down even in peak winter and entering human settlements, increasing the risk of conflict.

Land-use change is also playing a role. Bhat says many farmers in Kashmir have shifted from traditional crops such as paddy and maize to apple cultivation. Land close to protected areas, including Dachigam National Park, is now dominated by apple orchards.

"This attracts the bears. The nearest village is only half a kilometre away from

Dachigam," he says.

Waste from apple orchards is another problem. Dumped apples, thrown away after sorting, attract black bears towards settlements.

Shabir Hussain Bhatt, a naturalist hired by the Jammu and Kashmir Wildlife Department, has worked in Dachigam for nearly 17 years. "The hibernation of bears depends on snowfall. It should ideally start in December, but lately it is either late or lighter. Without it, bears raid villages, even distant ones, for easy food," he says.

There are about 100 black bears in Dachigam, according to Bhatt.

**Injuries, compensation and control rooms**

Jammu and Kashmir's Department of Wildlife Protection reported 67 deaths and 940 injuries from bear attacks over five years, according to 2023 records analysed in the Journal of Threatened Taxa and cited in a 2025 media feature, Life in the Shadow of the Kashmir Human-Bear Conflict.

The wildlife department says 25 control rooms have been set up at strategic points. These are equipped with tranquiliser guns, medicines, capture nets and cages. The department also runs awareness and sensitisation programmes.

Departmental data from the office of Tawheed Ahmad Deva, regional wildlife warden for the Kashmir division, shows that four people died in bear attacks in 2024-25 and three in 2025-26. During the same period, 134 bear attacks on humans were recorded.

In 2024-25, Rs 20 lakh was paid as compensation for deaths and Rs 72 lakh for injuries. In 2025-26, compensation for injuries stood at Rs 97 lakh.

The compensation amount is Rs 5 lakh in cases of death or permanent incapacitation and Rs 2 lakh for grievous injury. Aaliya Mir, programme manager at Wildlife SOS in Kashmir, says while human-bear interactions have increased due to changing land use, expanding hor-

ticulture, and poor waste management that attracts bears into human-dominated landscapes, the severity of conflict (human deaths or injuries or animal deaths or injuries) has declined.

"Through multidisciplinary interventions, habitat management, public outreach, and rapid response efforts, we have been able to significantly reduce human injuries and fatalities associated with these encounters," she adds.

She says distress calls to Wildlife SOS have increased because of better communication and greater public trust, which has helped prevent vigilante action. But the conflicts themselves have also risen.

Crop losses are a major concern. "Bears destroy entire apple trees, wiping out five years' fruit yields all at once. Human deaths and injuries spark anger in people. Garbage mismanagement, like dumped apples, worsens the issue," Mir says.

She says most conflicts occur in Kashmir's southern division, where orchards dominate.

**Apple economy and conflict**

Government officials say apple cultivation is central to Kashmir's rural economy. Syed Muddassar Hussain Shah, a subject matter specialist and district officer in the horticulture department in Poonch, says 90% of apple cultivation is in the Kashmir division, compared with the Jammu division.

He says government schemes subsidise horticulture across the region, not only apples but also citrus fruits, grapes, almonds, walnuts, kiwis, dragon fruit and cherries. But farmers mostly prefer apples because it is an established industry.

Mohammad Amin Bhat, technical officer in the directorate of horticulture in Kashmir, says apples bring higher profits than other crops.

He says the government is also promoting high-density apple orchards, which offer greater resilience to climate change, along with training, technical guidance and irrigation facilities.

"The bear attacks are mostly in the higher regions of Kashmir where traditional apple orchards dominate. High-density orchards are mostly established in lower altitudes due to better water availability," he says.

Bhat adds that government incentives are not driving the conflict, as most farmers in Kashmir have been growing apples for the past four to five decades.

For families living close to forests and orchards, however, the risk is now part of daily life.

As bear encounters continue in this ecologically sensitive Himalayan region, experts say conservation and rural planning must take account of changing climate, shrinking habitats, waste management and the spread of orchards near forests.

For survivors like Ahmad, the damage is both physical and psychological. "When the bear left, it took more than just my face," he says. "It took away the man I used to be, who could look at the sunrise without trembling." (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

# UN nuclear agency chief says inspectors will visit Iran's nuclear sites under Iran-US interim deal

**TOKYO, June 24:** The head of the UN's nuclear agency signalled Wednesday that Iranian nuclear enrichment sites would be visited by his inspectors, a key component in the interim deal between the United States and Iran to reach an end to the war.

The comment by International Atomic Energy Agency head Rafael Mariano Grossi was the firmest yet from the United Nations agency, which is viewed as key in determining the status of Iran's nuclear stockpile.

Since Israel launched a 12-day war on Iran in 2025, the IAEA has been blocked by Tehran from visiting enrichment sites where the Islamic Republic is believed to store enough highly enriched uranium to potentially build as many as 10 nuclear weapons, should it choose to rush for the bomb. Iran long has maintained that its programme is peaceful, though it is the only country in the world to have uranium enriched up to 60 per cent purity without a weapons program.

The US and Iran offered contradictory remarks Tuesday about whether those sites would be inspected.

"I can understand political statements, they are part of the re-



ality, but the fundamental thing I would like to remind you and draw your attention to is that there has been a Memorandum of Understanding, signed by both presidents," Grossi told journalists at a news conference at the tsunami-hit Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

The accord "says explicitly that the nuclear activities that are going to be carried out with the regards to the nuclear material facilities will be supervised by the IAEA — in all letters," he said.

Grossi added: "Obviously, to do that, we will have to inspect.

Whether this happens the day after tomorrow or in one week or in 10 days, it's important, but not essential. This is going to happen."

Those inspections are key for the deal, which calls for Iran's stockpile of uranium to be "down-blended" from highly enriched levels.

There was no immediate reaction from Iran.

On Tuesday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei told reporters in Tehran that UN inspectors were not scheduled to examine nuclear

sites bombed by the US last year, rejecting comments made a day before by US Vice President JD Vance.

The IAEA has been allowed to visit other nuclear sites in Iran since the 12-day war in 2025, such as the Bushehr nuclear power plant.

But without accessing the enrichment sites, the IAEA says it is unable to verify the status of Iran's stockpile or check the cascades of centrifuges used to enrich uranium.

Both Iran and the IAEA say Tehran hasn't been enriching uranium, but nonproliferation experts worry that the Islamic Republic may be moving its stockpile to undeclared areas.

The US and Iran agreed to a deal last week that calls for Tehran to dilute its stockpile of enriched uranium and waives US-backed sanctions on the country while giving each side 60 days to hammer out broader agreements.

But the uneasy ceasefire already has been tested by Iran saying it closed the strait again over fighting between Israel and the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah in Lebanon. Violence again broke out in Lebanon on Tuesday, but it did not escalate. (AP)

# Senate for first time approves war powers resolution in rebuke to Trump over Iran conflict

**WASHINGTON, June 24:** The Senate for the first time approved a war powers resolution, seeking to block US military action against Iran, as lawmakers warily watch President Donald Trump's efforts to resolve a conflict that the administration launched on its own and now needs Congress to fund.

It was the 10th time the Senate has tried to stop the war, and the outcome, on a vote of 50-48 on Tuesday, was a stunning turnaround from past efforts.

While the resolution is largely symbolic, and does not carry the full force of law, it reflects the growing concerns from a number of Republican lawmakers in both the House and Senate over both the war and the deal Trump struck with Iran to end it. The House approved the resolution earlier this month.

Trump responded angrily Tuesday night on his Truth Social platform, calling the vote "poorly timed and meaningless" and saying it "provided aid and comfort" to Iran.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said, "Time after time, the vast majority of Senate Republicans sided with Trump and his war instead of the American people."

Schumer said Americans have paid the price for "Trump's historic blunder in Iran. It'll go down in the history books as one of the worst foreign policy forays America has ever made."

In the past, as many as four GOP senators have voted for the war powers resolutions, and they did so Tuesday — Republicans Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Susan Collins of Maine, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Bill Cassidy of Louisiana. One Democrat, Sen John Fetterman of Pennsylvania, voted against.

Trump bashed the four Republicans as losers, saying, "These senators have made my job more difficult."

On this vote, the absence of two Republicans, including Sen Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, who was admitted to the hospital recently for an undisclosed matter, left the GOP without a full majority to halt the effort. Sen Dave McCormick also missed the vote.

The vote comes as the Pentagon is seeking USD 80 billion for the Iran war as it backfills munitions and stockpiles.

Trump himself is headed to the Capitol on Wednesday to meet with GOP senators after Vice President



JD Vance was overseas working to negotiate with Iran to end its nuclear ambitions — which had been among the stated rationales for the war.

The president is not pleased with the Republicans who have been critical of the deal he struck with Iran, according to one GOP senator granted anonymity to discuss the private dynamics.

The terms of the Iran deal are spelled out in a memorandum of understanding that Trump signed last week, starting a 60-day clock for the sides to reach a broader agreement over ending Iran's nuclear programme.

But Republicans have particularly objected to the \$300 billion fund to help Iran rebuild, which is far greater than the USD 1.7 billion then-President Barack Obama re-funded the country under his administration's 2015 Iran deal.

"I believe President Trump is getting very poor advice on Iran," Senator Ted Cruz said last week on his podcast after the deal was made public.

Over and again, Democrats have been forcing votes on the Iran war, almost since the US and Israel launched missile strikes on Iran on Feb 28.

Nearly each week they're in session, the Senate Democrats have put forward war powers resolutions, but they have failed to amass the majority needed for passage in the narrowly split chamber, where Trump's Republican Party holds the majority. Trump would almost certainly veto any measure that passed.

The House pushed its own version to passage earlier this month, with four Republicans joining all Democrats in approving the war powers resolution, over the objections of House Speaker Mike Johnson and the GOP leadership.

While the House- and Senate-

passed resolution does not go to the president for his signature, passage stands as a powerful, if symbolic, statement from Congress and a rebuke of the administration's military actions.

Sen Tim Kaine, the Democrat from Virginia who has led his party's efforts, said the pause in warfighting, as Trump's team works to shore up a fragile ceasefire, provides the perfect time for Congress to step back and assess "what should the next chapter be".

Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth is on Capitol Hill this week, seeking roughly USD 80 billion in supplemental funding to shore up defense supplies in the aftermath of the Iran war, which is drawing scrutiny when many Americans are reeling from high gas prices and costs of living.

The Pentagon early on had estimated the war cost USD 11.3 billion during its first week, and senators said experts put the overall price tag of Operation Epic Fury higher, at some USD 100 billion.

The Defence Department's funding request is part of a broader beef-up of military money the White House wants as part of its budget request this year.

House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries said Tuesday, "We should not spend another dime of taxpayer dollars on Operation Epic Failure."

The Trump administration is seeking USD 1.5 trillion in defense funding this year — a nearly 50% increase — including USD 350 billion that it wants in a so-called budget reconciliation package. Johnson and GOP leaders are working to pass that package on their own, over the objections of Democrats, much the way they approved Trump's big tax cuts bill last year.

The 2025 tax cuts package also included a sizable increase for the military. (AP)

# Russia and India working on increasing bilateral trade volumes: Kremlin



**MOSCOW, June 24:** Russia and India are working on increasing bilateral trade volumes, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said on Wednesday, as the two countries pursue a trade target of USD 100 billion by 2030 from USD 60 billion now.

Peskov, who attended the 12th Primakov Readings international academic and expert forum, also said that Russia and India share a notably privileged partnership.

He said that Russia and India are working to expand trade and economic relations. "We are pleased to note that this volume is showing a steady uptrend. We will keep working along these lines."

During President Vladimir Putin's visit to India in December last year, the two countries set the bilateral trade target of USD 100 billion by 2030.

"India is the world's most populous country, one of the fastest-growing economies, and a nation brimming with potential across all sectors," Peskov was quoted as saying by the state-run TASS news agency.

"Our relationship is further reinforced by our joint participation in various international organisations. We highly value this partnership and are dedicated to enhancing our cooperation and exploring new horizons together," he said.

Later, he called India "one of the biggest countries," which shows a very high development pace.

"The country which over the last 25 years has covered a big gap when it comes to economic and social development. And Mr (Narendra) Modi, the prime minister, has been very successful," he told Russia Today. (PTI)

# Iranian agents lived in Australia before directing attacks on Sydney and Melbourne, spy chief says

**MELBOURNE, June 24:** Iran's Revolutionary Guard used two agents who once lived in Australia to direct arson attacks against Jewish targets in Sydney and Melbourne, the head of Australia's domestic spy agency said on Wednesday.

"Iran continues to view Australia as a legitimate target for covertly directed acts of violence," Mike Burgess, director-general of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO), said.

Australia last year blamed Iran for fires that damaged Lewis' Continental Kitchen, a kosher eatery in Sydney, and Melbourne's Adass Israel Synagogue two months apart in 2024.

A major diplomatic rift led to Iran's ambassador being expelled. Tehran denies the allegations.

Burgess, presenting his annual update on national security threats, said that an Australian citizen based in Iran directed the Sydney firebombing, while a former Australian resident living in Iraq had directed the Melbourne attack.

He did not name the suspects to protect ongoing investigations and criminal prosecutions.

The Australian citizen was a Revolutionary Guard senior agent running its networks around the world, Burgess said.

Iran had recruited the former Australian resident through Iraqi-based militia groups. The Revolutionary Guard had valued his criminal connections and supported his continuing crimes, Burgess said.

"That changed dramatically after ASIO publicly named Iran's

involvement in the arsons," Burgess said.

"This person's Iranian backers lost their enthusiasm and after further pressure from Australian and local law enforcement, they threw him in prison," he added.

Burgess described the investigation into the Sydney and Melbourne attacks as "one of the most difficult and detailed in recent ASIO history."

He had previously said that the Revolutionary Guard was suspected as being behind other anti-semitic crimes in Australia since the start of Israel's war against Hamas in 2023.

Several people are facing charges in connection with the arson attacks. It remains unclear whether they were aware who they were working for. (AP)

# Jaishankar meets South Korean FM, stresses shared responsibility to advance ties

**SEOUL, June 24:** External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday held talks with his South Korean counterpart Cho Hyun, focusing on bilateral cooperation and the rapidly changing global situation, the leaders said.

Jaishankar is currently in South Korea on a two-day visit — the second leg of an ongoing foreign tour — after having visited Mongolia.

"It is a great pleasure to be back in Seoul and to meet you and your team today for our discussions," Jaishankar said in his opening remarks, noting that the meeting was timely, given the state of the world and the importance of the bilateral relationship.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung's visit to India in April and Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with Lee at the G7 in Evian, France last week, have provided guidance on how to advance

the bilateral ties, Jaishankar said.

The talks focused on follow-up measures in the key areas of trade, investment and finance.

"As foreign ministers it is clearly our responsibility to take this relationship forward, to oversee what different parts of the government and different parts of our economy of our country do with each other in their interaction," Jaishankar added.

Jaishankar said India was fully committed to realising the potential of the bilateral relationship, which both sides acknowledged had significant room for growth.

After the meeting, the external affairs minister in a social media post said: "We reviewed our cooperation across political, shipbuilding, trade, investments, defence, technology, clean energy, culture and P2P (people-to-people) domains."

Jaishankar also said the two of them discussed opportunities in areas like startups, fintech and multilateral forums, and exchanged views on developments in their respective regions and around the world.

The discussions, held in Seoul, continued through lunch and went on for around three hours.

Cho said President Lee's visit to India in April marked a turning point for elevating Korea-India relations to a new dimension.

"I welcome swift follow-up progress in areas such as trade, investment and finance and discussed how to build on these achievements," he said in a post on X after the meeting.

Cho highlighted India's hosting of "Korea Week" this week, and how it fulfilled Modi's commitment to directly address challenges faced by Korean businesses in

India. "I am grateful for India's strong support, and Korea will soon host a similar dialogue for Indian companies in Korea," he said.

The two foreign ministers also had an in-depth discussion on the rapidly changing global landscape and agreed to maintain close communication in responding to economic implications stemming from developments in West Asia, said Cho.

Later in the day, Jaishankar also met South Korea's Director of National Security Wi Sung-lac.

"Had a useful exchange of strategic assessments on global developments and the Indo-Pacific," Jaishankar said in a post on X.

Jaishankar and FM Cho are scheduled to meet again on Thursday at the Jeju Forum for Peace and Prosperity, where the former will deliver the keynote speech. (PTI)

# India slams Pakistan for 'unwarranted' remarks on J&K at UNSC meeting

**UNITED NATIONS, June 24:** India slammed Pakistan for making "unwarranted" remarks on Jammu and Kashmir at an informal UN Security Council meeting organised by Beijing and Islamabad, asserting that the union territory is a matter "strictly internal" to the country.

India's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, made the remarks on Tuesday at an Arria-formula meeting of the Security Council on 'Bridging the Implementation Gap: Security Council Resolutions and the Maintenance of International Peace and Security'.

"I also refer to the unwarranted remarks made by the representative of Pakistan. It is incredible that a co-chair expected to be balanced and unbiased in conduct has chosen to politicise this forum," Harish said.

"I would only like to stress, for brevity of time, that the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir is a matter strictly internal to India. It has always been, is, and will remain so," he said.

Harish's remarks came after Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Asim Iftikhar Ahmad, raised the Jammu and Kashmir issue during his intervention at the meeting, which was organised by the Permanent Missions of Pakistan and China to the United Nations.

Pakistan is currently serving an elected two-year term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) for 2025 and 2026. India has consistently maintained that the entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are and will always remain an integral and inalienable part of the country.

Relations between India and Pakistan have remained strained over the Kashmir issue, with New Delhi firmly rejecting any third-party mediation and maintaining that Jammu and Kashmir is an internal matter.

Arria-formula meetings are informal and confidential gatherings that allow Security Council members and invited participants to exchange views in a flexible setting. The format is named after former Venezuelan ambassador Diego Arria, who initiated the practice in 1992.

Elaborating on the broader subject under discussion, Harish said

the UN Security Council is entrusted with the maintenance of international peace and security and that the UN Charter provides distinct mechanisms for addressing conflicts under Chapters VI and VII. He noted that these two Chapters are distinct in nature and their applicability varies.

Harish said Chapter VII measures are "aimed at maintenance or restoration of international peace and security" in situations involving threats to peace, breaches of peace and acts of aggression, and their non-implementation could lead to "serious consequences".

Chapter VI, the envoy said, is "fundamentally different" and offers a wide-ranging set of options to deal with situations whose continuation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security. The proposed tools that could be considered include negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, and arbitration after taking into account any procedures that may have already been adopted bilaterally by the parties concerned.

"These interventions are drawn up in order to address the prevailing realities and do not have perpetual validity. They warrant a review in accordance with changing circumstances and contexts," Harish said.

"Multi-decadal issues on the UNSC agenda offer valuable lessons in this regard. A case in point is the Palestine issue, wherein a defining feature is the constant churn of mediation frameworks in tune with the changing circumstances of the conflict.

"There exists an undeniable case for reviewing outdated mediation frameworks. Any assumption of the perpetual applicability of a Chapter VI mediation intervention is erroneous to say the least," he said.

India also underlined that, as member states undertake reviews of UN General Assembly mandates under the UN80 initiative to improve efficiency, there is no reason why Security Council mandates should remain outside the scope of such reviews. India has long been pressing for permanent membership in a reformed and expanded Security Council, contending that the current structure of the 15-member body is outdated and does not adequately reflect contemporary global realities. (PTI)

# European heat wave triggers health warnings from London to Milan as temperatures rise even higher

**LONDON, June 24:** People in large parts of the UK are being warned that high temperatures will present a risk to life on Wednesday as a "heat-dome" over Western Europe brings extreme conditions to the continent.

The "red heat health" alert for much of central and southern England, as well as Wales, is only the second such warning ever issued by UK authorities. The first was in July 2022, when temperatures exceeded 40 degrees C (104 F).

Authorities in France, Italy and Spain have also issued warnings about the risks of extreme heat for tens of millions of people.

The UK is braced for the highest ever June temperatures, with the Met Office forecasting a high of 38 degrees in southern England. Temperatures reached 34.6 degrees C on Tuesday in Wisely, southwest of London.

"Red warnings are reserved for the most severe events and we're expecting severe and significant impacts from this heat wave, with health impacts likely for many, even beyond those who are normally more vulnerable to the heat," said Mark Sidaway, deputy chief forecaster for the UK Met Office.

Some schools in England are closed due to the heat and many train services have been cancelled with passengers urged to avoid non-es-



sential travel in areas covered by the red warning.

Network Rail, which operates Britain's rail-road network, warned of "significant disruption" across England and Wales as it imposes speed restrictions to minimise the risk from heat-related issues such as buckled tracks and

sagging overhead electric wires.

Eurostar said it cancelled four trains planned between London and Paris on Wednesday and Thursday "due to expected adverse weather".

France recorded its hottest day ever on Tuesday, prompting the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre museum to restrict visiting hours while

schools and transportation schedules were upended.

The record of 29.8 C (85.6 F) for France's national thermal indicator — an average of temperatures measured at 30 weather stations — was only the latest in a series of never-before-registered highs heaped on Europe's largest country.

Italy's Health Ministry issued "red alerts" for 16 cities on Wednesday with major cities such as Rome, Milan, Florence and Turin affected. The "bollino rosso" red alert signals emergency conditions that can affect not only vulnerable people but also healthy adults.

Temperatures could reach highs of 41 C (105 F) in Florence and 38 C (104 F) in Milan, while Rome and Naples are forecast to remain below 36 C (96.8 F).

Britain's heat advisory remains in effect through Thursday, with overnight temperatures remaining well above average.

It's so hot in the tradition-bound seat of British democracy that male journalists covering Parliament are being allowed to remove their jackets in the press gallery of the House of Commons on Wednesday. "If you think it's hot already, well, we ain't seen nothing yet," Met Office meteorologist Alex Burkill said on Wednesday morning. (AP)

## Mizoram CM rejects claim of ZPM-NDA alliance, stresses regional party model with national outlook

*'Even now, right from the first day we met after forming the government, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister have constantly invited us to join them. However, we usually part on good terms by saying -- Let us maintain a good working relationship; we are practically on your side. So, is it really necessary for us to officially align right now?'*

**AIZAWL, June 24:** Mizoram Chief Minister and Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) leader Lalduhoma on Wednesday ruled out a formal alliance with the BJP-led NDA at the Centre and said that joining that coalition is not, and has never been, on the party's agenda.

His declaration came amid claims that the ruling ZPM has formally joined the NDA alliance.

Speaking at a press conference here, Lalduhoma said the party values cordial relations with the Centre but sees no immediate need for a formal alliance with the NDA.

He asserted that the ZPM remains committed to its identity as a regional political force with a national outlook.

Lalduhoma revealed that national leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, have repeatedly invited the party to join the alliance, but the ZPM has preferred to maintain a cooperative relationship without formal affiliation.

"Even now, right from the first day we met after forming the government, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister have constantly invited us to join them. However, we usually part on good terms by saying -- Let us maintain a good working relationship; we are practically on



your side. So, is it really necessary for us to officially align right now?" the chief minister said.

"We have not joined the NDA. While other parties have, we choose a different path. We want to maintain a very good relationship with the Centre, but an official alignment is not on our table," Lalduhoma added.

He said that the issue of joining NDA has never been tabled in any meeting of the party's Political Affairs Committee (PAC).

Lalduhoma argued that Mizoram has historically benefited from a political culture in which

tive ties with successive governments at the Centre.

Lalduhoma said that former chief minister Brig T Sailo's vision of a "regional party with a national outlook" remained the guiding principle of the ZPM too.

On the recent alliance between the ZPM and the BJP in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC), Lalduhoma said that the arrangement was driven by political necessity rather than ideology.

He pointed out that no single group possessed the numbers required to form an executive council independently, making cooperation unavoidable.

Lalduhoma said that it was a local arrangement, which was approved by the party headquarters.

On Tuesday, the ZPM and BJP had formally forged an alliance and formed the Chakma Democratic Alliance Legislature Party, headed by Nirupam Chakma of the saffron party, to stake claim to form an executive body in the CADC.

At present, the BJP has 10 members and the ZPM 9 in the CADC.

The council was placed under a Governor's rule for the second consecutive time in January this year due to constant political instability. The Governor's rule is scheduled to end by early July. (PTI)

regional parties worked closely with whichever party was in power at the Centre.

Recalling the days of the Mizo Union party when Mizoram was part of Assam and then a Union Territory, the CM said that local leaders often aligned themselves with ruling parties in Assam and New Delhi to secure benefits for the state.

He also alleged that the entry of national parties into Mizoram altered the state's political dynamic, which reduced the flexibility regional parties once enjoyed in maintaining construc-

## Mizoram govt intensifying reforms to boost ease of doing business: CM



**AIZAWL, June 24:** Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Wednesday said the government has intensified efforts to make the state more business-friendly through sweeping regulatory reforms aimed at reducing red tape, attracting investment, and generating employment opportunities.

Speaking to reporters during a press conference here, Lalduhoma highlighted the progress of the state's compliance reduction and deregulation reforms programme, describing it as a key initiative to strengthen Mizoram's economy and improve ease of doing business.

According to the CM, the programme seeks to reduce unnecessary and overly burdensome laws and regulations, simplify procedures, promote governance based on trust, and strengthen trust be-

tween the government and the people.

In addition, it aims to create a more conducive environment for business, investment, entrepreneurship, and economic growth, enabling development activities to be carried out more easily and efficiently, he said.

To support these goals, Mizoram has already implemented the Right to Public Service Act, which came operational in 2015, he said.

During Phase I (February-December 2025) of the programme, the state implemented a series of reforms focusing on regulatory simplification, digital governance and improved public service delivery, Lalduhoma said.

He said to make government services more accessible and eliminate the need for citizens to visit offices in person, around 40 new

portals have been developed.

Due to its performance, Mizoram has earned 12th rank among Indian states in an assessment conducted by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), the CM said.

Lalduhoma also said the Centre has launched phase-II in January this year with a stronger focus on reviewing and modernising existing laws, regulations and administrative procedures.

Of the 23 priority reform areas identified for Mizoram, five proposals -- power, environment, tourism, healthcare and education sectors -- have already been approved by the Centre, he said.

The Phase II reforms cover a broad range of sectors, including land use and industrial development, building and infrastructure approvals, utility services and business permissions, logistics, environmental governance, tourism, education, healthcare and broader administrative and legislative reforms.

According to the CM, the reforms are expected to significantly reduce the time and cost involved in setting up and operating businesses, remove procedural bottlenecks, encourage

entrepreneurship, attract greater private investment and create new employment opportunities across the state. (PTI)

## IAF airlifts SDRF team to flash flood-hit Keyi Panyor

*Civil Aviation Department coordinates emergency air support as rescue operations intensify in Poosa area*

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, June 24:** The Arunachal Pradesh Department of Civil Aviation swiftly mobilised emergency response measures following reports of flash floods in the Poosa area of Keyi Panyor district and coordinated with the Indian Air Force (IAF) to facilitate urgent rescue operations.

According to official sources, the department was immediately activated and kept in readiness for relief and rescue efforts after receiving information about the flood situation.

Acting on a requisition from Keyi Panyor Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta, the department sought air support from the Indian Air Force through the Eastern Air Command (EAC), Shillong, for the transportation of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) personnel and rescue materials from the Itanagar Capital Region to Pitapool in Keyi Panyor district.

Despite adverse weather conditions, the IAF air support team successfully reached Hollongi and subsequently flew to Pitapool, carrying SDRF personnel and essential rescue equipment to strengthen ground-level emergency response oper-

ations. The operation was conducted under the guidance of Col R Malhotra of the Ministry of Defence and Group.

Officials said additional air support operations are being planned to meet further requirements arising from the evolving flood situation in the district.

The Department of Civil Aviation, along with Secretary of the Department of Disaster Management Dani Salu, expressed gratitude to the Indian Air Force, SDRF and Airport Directorate officials at Hollongi for ensuring the swift deployment of air support during the critical situation.

The department also acknowledged the efforts of Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta, the Superintendent of Police and the District Disaster Management team of Keyi Panyor for their support and coordination on the ground despite challenging circumstances.

Secretary of Civil Aviation M Riba said the coordinated response reflects the commitment of all agencies involved in ensuring timely rescue and relief assistance reaches affected areas during emergencies. (PTI)

## CM Conrad Sangma hails PM Modi

**SHILLONG, June 24:** Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Wednesday hailed Prime Minister Narendra Modi for showcasing the state's GI-tagged Lakadong turmeric at the G7 Summit held in France recently.

He said the gesture brought global attention to Meghalaya's rich agricultural heritage and the efforts of its farmers.

"Thank you, Hon'ble Prime Minister, for showcasing Meghalaya's golden spice to the world and highlighting the rich agricultural heritage and potential of our farmers," the chief minister posted on X.

He said the internationally acclaimed spice from Meghalaya had found a place on the world stage after being presented by the prime minister to global leaders.

Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia also welcomed the recognition, posting on X that Lakadong turmeric's presence at the G7 Summit reflected the growing global appreciation for premium products from India's Northeast and underscored the potential of Meghalaya's farming community.

Lakadong turmeric, cultivated mainly by women in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district, is prized for its exceptionally high curcumin content and has earned Geographical Indication (GI) status, making it one of the state's most celebrated agricultural products. (PTI)

## Nagaland receives commitments for ₹ 30 cr CSR initiatives

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, June 24:** The Nagaland Connect 2026, a CSR conclave organised by the Investment & Development Authority of Nagaland (IDAN), secured commitments for ₹ 30 crore corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Nagaland.

During the conclave held at India Habitat Centre in New Delhi on Tuesday, various companies handed over 15 letters of interest and commitments to the IDAN in the presence of chief minister Neiphiu Rio and deputy chief ministers TR Zeliang and Y Paton.

The roundtable themed "Forging Partnerships, Creating Impact", organised by the IDAN, in collaboration with CSRBox, brought together more than 40 companies to formalise CSR part-

nerships, with several memoranda of understanding, letters of intent and statements of commitment signed in the CM's presence.

Addressing the conclave, CM Rio called on India's corporate sector to treat Nagaland as "a destination for opportunity".

He described CSR as "an instrument of equity" rather than a compliance obligation, and pressed corporates to look beyond conventional investment hubs.

"Nagaland today is not merely a destination for assistance, it is a destination for opportunity," Rio said, pointing to the state's young population, its position under India's Act East Policy, and initiatives such as the Nagaki Incubation City as evidence of a state "positioning itself as a frontier of growth and enterprise".

He listed education, liveli-

hoods, healthcare, sports, environmental sustainability, women's empowerment and youth development as the government's priority areas, saying the state had built a "single-window platform" through IDAN to facilitate, support and monitor CSR partnerships.

"Today, I invite you not merely to invest in projects, but to invest in people and possibilities," he said.

The roundtable's objectives included building a structured dialogue between corporates and the state government, identifying opportunities for multi-company and multi-sector convergence, exploring CSR co-investment alongside central and state government schemes, and developing a pipeline of investment-ready projects curated by the IDAN.

## Former militants withdraw indefinite rail-road blockade

**AGARTALA, June 24:** Two organ-

isations of surrendered militants in Tripura withdrew their call for an indefinite rail and road blockade on Wednesday after being assured by the government that their demands, including that for proper rehabilitation, would be looked into, police said.

"Traffic movement on the national highway and railway service is normal since the morning after the withdrawal of the blockade. No untoward incident is reported so far," police spokesperson Rajdeep Deb said.

The Joint Action Rehabilitation Committee (JARC) and the Joint Action Committee (JAC) had announced the agitation after alleging that a large number of surrendered militants were yet to receive rehabilitation benefits despite laying down arms decades ago.

They have been pressing for a nine-point charter of demands, including proper rehabilitation and withdrawal of pending cases against them. (PTI)

## Tripura govt bars doctors at Agartala hospital

**AGARTALA, June 24:** The Tripura government has decided to bar doctors at the state-run GBP-AGMC hospital from private practice to improve services at the health facility, a minister said. A 20 per cent hike on basic salary will be given as a non-practice allowance to faculty members and medical officers of GB Pant Hospital and Agartala Government Medical College, state Minister Sushanta Chowdhury said on Tuesday.

He said the council of ministers, in its last meeting held on Monday, passed a proposal to bar the faculty members and medical officers of GBP Pant Hospital & AGMC from private practice.

"In exchange, they will get a 20 per cent hike in basic salary as a non-practice allowance. A notification will be issued soon in this regard," he said. The decision, the minister said, was taken to improve services at the state's premier healthcare institution.

"Chief Minister Manik Saha views that despite the strengthening of infrastructure, complaints are being received when it comes to the satisfaction of patients. The authorities concerned have consulted with the doctors' body before taking the decision," he said. Chowdhury said the faculty members and medical officers of the state-run hospital have the liberty to resign if they want to continue to attend private clinics. (PTI)

## Arunachal govt for impartial probe into NERIST 'rowdyism'; talks to home minister

**ITANAGAR, June 24:** Arunachal Pradesh governor Lt Gen K T Parnaik (Retd) on Wednesday expressed deep anguish over the recent incident of "rowdyism, threats, and intimidation" directed at the director of NERIST, a deemed university, and called for an impartial inquiry into the matter.

During a meeting with Home Minister Mama Natung at the Lok Bhavan here, the governor discussed the prevailing law and order situation in the state, with a specific focus on the recent developments at the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST).

The institute has been witnessing turbulence in recent weeks following controversies related to administrative and recruitment matters.

Expressing concern over the incident at one of the premier technical and higher educational institutions of the Northeast, Parnaik emphasised that educational campuses must remain safe, secure, and conducive to learning, a Lok Bhavan statement said.



"The management and administration of educational institutions should be guided by merit, integrity, dignity, discipline, transparency, and accountability," the governor said, adding that acts of coercion against institutional heads set a bad example for the youth.

He further stressed that any act undermining the functioning, credibility, or harmony of educational institutions must be dealt with firmly

in accordance with the law to reinforce public confidence in the state's educational ecosystem.

The home minister assured the governor that the state government is treating the matter with "utmost seriousness" and will take appropriate action against those found responsible.

Natung reaffirmed the government's commitment to maintaining law and order, protecting educational institutions, and ensuring a secure environment for students, teachers, and staff across Arunachal Pradesh, an official release said.

The developments culminated in the resignation of Director Prof Narendranath S earlier this month amid an ongoing dispute over recruitment-related issues and disciplinary actions against certain officials.

The episode triggered protests and concerns over governance and institutional autonomy, prompting calls from various quarters for the restoration of a peaceful academic atmosphere and uninterrupted academic activities. (PTI)

## BJP delegation seeks greater central support for Sikkim tourism

**GANGTOK, June 24:** A delegation of the Sikkim unit of the BJP on Wednesday met Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat in New Delhi and sought enhanced support from the Centre to further strengthen the state's tourism sector. The delegation, led by state BJP president DR Thapa, held detailed discussions with the Union Minister on the growing prospects and emerging opportunities in Sikkim's tourism industry, according to a party statement.

During the meeting, the BJP leaders highlighted what they described as the positive impact of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Sikkim, stating that it had significantly enhanced the state's visibility as a tourist destination. The delegation informed the minister that Sikkim is witnessing a record influx of tourists this season, reflecting increasing interest among both domestic and international travellers.

Emphasising the sector's importance to the state's economy, Thapa told Shekhawat that tourism remains one of the largest sources of livelihood for the people of Sikkim. The BJP team urged the Ministry of Tourism to provide greater assistance for the development of tourism infrastructure, promotion of new destinations, improvement of visitor amenities and implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives.

"The delegation requested the Ministry to formulate forward-looking strategies and extend enhanced support to strengthen Sikkim's tourism ecosystem so that the state can effectively attract, accommodate and manage a growing number of visitors in the years ahead," the statement read. (PTI)

## Sikkim woman dies of burn injuries, husband held



**GANGTOK, June 24:** A man was arrested on the charge of murdering his wife, who died due to burns in Namchi district of south Sikkim, police said on Wednesday.

He was apprehended after medical and forensic findings contradicted his account of how she sustained the burn injuries.

The 44-year-old woman died on June 22, and her husband was arrested the next day, police said.

"During the course of investigation, material evidence emerged indicating the involvement of the husband in the death of the deceased. His conduct and statements were found to be misleading and contradictory," a police officer said.

An inquest revealed multiple burn injuries across the victim's body, including her neck, hands, legs, thighs, abdomen and back. Investigators also recovered partially burnt clothing, including a shirt and pants believed to belong to the deceased, from outside the residence.

Police said the post-mortem examination found the preliminary cause of death to be pulmonary oedema resulting from

burn injuries caused by hot liquid.

During questioning, her husband reportedly told investigators that his wife had accidentally poured hot water on herself inside her bedroom on the night of June 20 and sustained burn injuries, and she on the morning of June 22.

However, medical findings cast doubt on that version.

"The doctor who conducted the post-mortem stated that the burn injuries were fresh and had been inflicted shortly before death on the morning of June 22. This directly contradicted the account provided by the husband," a police official said.

Investigators further stated that medical experts found the pattern and distribution of the burns inconsistent with accidental injuries, self-infliction or suicide.

Based on the medical evidence, forensic observations and contradictions in the accused's statements, police concluded there were sufficient grounds to suspect that the victim had been intentionally killed and that efforts had been made to conceal evidence and mislead investigators.

Police said that the husband was arrested on Tuesday and a court remanded him to police custody.

Following completion of the autopsy, the body was handed over to family members for the last rites. (PTI)

## BJP striving for 2/3<sup>rd</sup> majority in LS as 'real target' is to end reservation: Congress

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** The Congress on Wednesday alleged that the BJP is striving for a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha as its "real and ultimate target" is to be able to amend the Constitution for ending reservation.

In an exclusive interview with PTI Videos, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh claimed that the ruling party first wants to push delimitation in the garb of women's reservation with the ultimate objective being of ending reservation altogether. Ramesh said if the government is really concerned about women's reservation it should implement the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam on the current strength of the Lok Sabha -- 543 -- for the next general elections in 2029.

He alleged that Home Minister Amit Shah's efforts to split the TMC and Shiv Sena (UBT) vindicate the 2024 campaign of the Congress that the BJP wanted '400 paar' so that they can "amend the Constitution and finish off reservation".

Asked about the spate of defections in the opposition ranks, Ramesh said, "The single cause for this is the humiliation that the self-styled Chanakya of Indian politics suffered on the 17th of April in the Lok Sabha. He promised prime minister (Narendra Modi) that he would get the three delimitation bills passed. He could not muster more than 298 votes in the Lok Sabha."

Shah thought he could brazen it out and could bamboozle and bulldoze his

way through but his bluff was called, Ramesh said.

"I think he decided to take revenge on that day for that humiliation he had been forced to suffer and now he is busy with the 'todd-phod ki rajniti'. He broke the TMC, he's breaking the Shiv Sena, all in his search for a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha - you're seeing the truth of our 2024 campaign. They were asking for '400 paar' so that they can amend the Constitution to finish off reservation," the Congress general secretary in-charge communications said.

"That was the whole logic of '400 paar' and now you are seeing why he is splitting all these parties, he is splitting up parties in his search for a two-thirds majority to amend the Constitution," Ramesh claimed.

Asked if the BJP is striving for a two-thirds majority to target reservations, the Congress leader said the ruling party's immediate target is the delimitation bill but the real target is ending reservation.

"You look that in 2024 it was very clear what was happening. I mean the ultimate objective is to end reservation as the Constitution has provided and in spite of what the prime minister (Narendra Modi) says, you know the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh is on record as having said that reservation should be done away with, RSS leaders have weighed in against reservation," he said.

So, delimitation is the first milestone



they want to pass but ultimately there are three years more left for this government, he said.

"They (BJP) want to amend the Constitution in diverse ways and one fundamental way they want to... they have always been uncomfortable with this Constitution. Remember on the 26th of November, 1949 when this Constitution was adopted by the constituent assembly, the Organiser attacked it," he said.

"The effigies of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Dr. BR Ambedkar, Mahatma Gandhi, were burnt. Of course, Gandhi by then had passed away, but then you know he was also criticised for having inspired Dr. Ambedkar in joining the constituent assembly," he said.

So, all these founding fathers were attacked for having given us this Constitution, Ramesh said.

"The vote by the opposition in Parliament, bringing down the bills was against delimitation and not against women's reservation," the Congress leader said.

"All opposition parties unitedly voted against it. The home minister was humiliated. The PM was angry and it showed on his face. He criticised the Congress that it is because of the Congress that women's reservation is not being delivered. What had the Congress stated - that you should give women reservation on 543 seats," Ramesh said.

But the BJP's intention is not that, their intention is delimitation and the other target is that after getting two-thirds majority, they will end reservation, he alleged.

"Their real target is to remove reservation (for SCs, STs and OBCs) and not grant women's reservations," he claimed.

On whether the opposition would ac-

cept the formula of 50 per cent increase in Lok Sabha seats for every state if it is part of the bill, Ramesh said the issue is about how they are doing the delimitation.

"They did delimitation in Assam. They did delimitation in J-K. Will Gyanesh Kumar do delimitation? You have seen the 'jugabandi' between the government and the Election Commission. The way the EC works, everyone knows that it does what the Home Minister says. Will you get the delimitation done by the EC which has a big blot on it in Bihar, West Bengal and UP," Ramesh said.

He said the Congress opposition was not just about the 50 per cent increase, it was also about what 800 MPs would do.

"In 500 odd MPs, they do not get a chance to speak and you want to get 815 MPs. For whom are you doing this? And what happens to the Rajya Sabha? There are questions about that and the government is silent," he said.

"We want that after the caste census, delimitation be done and the next Lok Sabha should be conducted on 543 seats with one-third reserved for women," he asserted.

"The Home Minister thinks he's going to get 348 which is the minimum required under various permutations and combinations - you require 2/3 of those presented voting. So even if you assume certain parties may not be present, in the worst case scenario, you still require 348

so far," he said.

Asked if the DMK would abstain, Ramesh said he is not going to predict what parties are going to do.

"All I know is that he (Shah) has broken the TMC. He's broken the Shiv Sena. He's gone from 298 to 26 more. That means he's reached 324. He still has a long way to go. I don't think he's going to get a two-thirds majority in this Lok Sabha. They will not get two thirds majority in future polls as well because the people -- Dalits, backward and adivasis -- know that they want a two-thirds majority to change the Constitution. Their (BJP's) advisors were themselves saying that they need a new Constitution," Ramesh said.

On April 17, the Constitution amendment bill to implement reservation for women in legislatures in 2029, and an increase in the number of seats of the Lok Sabha, was defeated in the Lower House.

While 298 members voted in support of the Bill, 230 MPs voted against it. Of 528 members who voted, the bill required 352 votes for a two-thirds majority. The Shiv Sena (UBT) suffered another split this week with six of its nine Lok Sabha MPs pledging allegiance to Shiv Sena led by Eknath Shinde. Also, 20 rebel TMC MPs have met Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and announced their merger with the NCP, a Tripura-based registered unrecognised political party. (PTI)

## Oppn trying to defame me, says Mann; claims his fake videos being released

**CHANDIGARH, June 24:** Amid the video row, Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Wednesday rejected allegations that the forensic report that gave a clean chit to him was fabricated and lashed out at the opposition parties, alleging that they have joined hands to defame him.

Mann's remarks came a day after the Haryana Police arrested two men on a complaint regarding alleged procurement of a fabricated forensic report related to a viral video linked to the controversy involving him.

In a video message, the AAP leader said for the past several days, his fake videos were being released. "When they could not find anything, they are trying to defame me on the religious front," he said, targeting the Congress, BJP and the Akali Dal.

He reiterated his stance that it was not him in the purported objectionable video, claiming that the person who is seen in the clip does not match his height and physique.

"By making that video viral, I was declared guilty," he said.

Mann said he received calls from many people who are convinced that it was a fake video.

The CM claimed the forensic examination of the purported video had been done. "The BJP has now attacked the owners of these forensic labs as Akali, Congress and the BJP



have joined hands," he said while referring to the Gurugram police action.

"By scaring the lab owners with the registration of FIR and torturing or threatening them, they want to get a statement from them to claim that money was taken for preparing fabricated reports," claimed Mann.

He alleged that the Congress, Akalis and the BJP have come together with a sole motive of defaming him.

"Neither they are able to show their faces socially nor politically in Punjab. They have now decided to defame me on religious grounds," he said, claiming that

every day, his fake videos were being released on their social media handles.

"I am your person and I will continue to work this way," he said and listed measures taken by his government like free electricity, water and giving jobs.

"It does not affect me as long as you are with me," he said.

Lashing out at the Congress, Akali Dal and the BJP, he said these parties have a formed "sanjha morcha" as they cannot compete him politically.

Accusing the opposition of being arrogant, he said they have no issue against him and cannot tolerate the huge gatherings at his

public interaction programmes.

"You (the public) have to decide. I firmly stand by Punjab," he asserted.

The Haryana Police on Tuesday arrested two men after registering a case on a complaint by a person who alleged that he was approached for procuring a fabricated forensic report of a viral video linked to the controversy involving the Punjab chief minister.

The development came amid a political storm triggered by the alleged objectionable video over which the Akal Takht, the supreme temporal body of Sikhs, had issued an edict against Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on June 15.

The edict came as Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj claimed that the video -- purportedly showing a man resembling Mann -- was found to be "authentic" by the two forensic laboratories.

Mann has already rejected the video, saying it was "false propaganda" aimed at defaming him.

According to the FIR registered in Gurugram, complainant Jaspreet, a resident of Sirsa in Haryana, has alleged that he was pressured, threatened and coerced into getting forensic reports related to the video with a predetermined conclusion that the video in question was created and manipulated by artificial intelligence and that the person seen in the video was not the Punjab CM. (PTI)

## BJP has 'anti-Dalit' mindset, alleges Punjab minister Cheema

**CHANDIGARH, June 24:** Punjab Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema on Tuesday alleged that the BJP's "anti-Dalit" mindset has been exposed during its president Nitin Nabin's recent state visit.

Referring to a recent BJP event, Cheema claimed that senior Dalit leaders such as former Union ministers Vijay Sampla and Som Parkash were made to stand among the audience while others were seated on stage, alleging clear discrimination.

Nabin's three-day visit to Punjab concluded on Monday. Cheema alleged that the BJP respects only an "elite" class while Dalits, workers and the poor are "systematically sidelined and humiliated".

The senior AAP leader emphasised that the Scheduled Caste community, forming nearly 34 per cent of Punjab's population, has witnessed this approach firsthand, and claimed that the BJP is "anti-Punjab, anti-farmer" and its "anti-Dalit face" has now been fully exposed, adding that the people of Punjab will respond firmly to such politics.

Cheema said, "According to National Crime Records Bureau 2024 data, nearly 65 per cent of crimes against Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the country were reported from four BJP-ruled states including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. This reflects the BJP government's failure to protect Dalits and demonstrates the party's deep-rooted prejudice against marginalized communities."

"During a recent party event in Punjab, senior SC leaders such as former Union minister Vijay Sampla and former Union minister Som Parkash were made to stand among the audience while top leadership was seated on stage. This incident has exposed the BJP's real face before the people of Punjab. (PTI)

## Kharge hits out at Pradhan for his 'terrorist' remark against protesting students

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday hit out at Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan for his "terrorist" remark against protesting students, asserting that Pradhan will have to resign.

"Ninety paper leaks have occurred, the futures of millions of students have been ruined, 20 children have taken their own lives due to the NEET paper leak, families have been devastated..." Kharge said.

He said the Education Minister of the Modi government, Dharmendra Pradhan, is clinging to his chair, and while giving interviews, he is calling the "students' echo" as that of "terrorists".

"The country has not forgotten that Prime Minister Modi himself, in Parliament, had insultingly labelled the farmer benefactors 'andolan-jeevi' and 'parjeevi' (parasites). Whoever questions this government is called an anti-national," the Congress president said.

"#ChhatronKiGoonj will echo loudly across the entire country; Modi's Minister Pradhan will have to resign," the Congress chief said in a post on X.

CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke had also attacked Pradhan over his alleged remark calling the group a "B team of terrorists". Dipke had also shared a video clip on X showing Pradhan making the alleged remarks about the students' protest.

Dipke said, "Imagine what Pradhan said. While we are demanding justice for students who committed suicide, he said CJP is a B team of terrorists. The education minister is calling the youth of this country terrorists."

"Sir, we are not terrorists. We don't need a certificate of patriotism from people like you who are responsible for the deaths of innocent students," he said. (PTI)

## BJP govt trying to impose vegetarianism in Bengal: O'Brien

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** Trinamool Congress (TMC) joint secretary Derek O'Brien on Wednesday targeted the BJP over reports that eggs might be excluded from midday meals in West Bengal, alleging that the new government was depriving children of nutrition and trying to "impose vegetarianism" in the state.

Presenting the BJP government's maiden budget on Monday, West Bengal Finance Minister Swapna Dasgupta said ISKCON was expected to assist in food preparation and distribution under the midday meal scheme.

According to reports, ISKCON's new menu would replace eggs with sources of plant-based protein.

"After the fish-eating tamasha during the election campaign, the Gujarat Gymkhana finally reveals itself. New BJP govt at work in Bengal," O'Brien said in a post on X. (PTI)

## BJP alleges conspiracy to procure fake forensic report in Mann video row, seeks action

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** The BJP on Wednesday accused Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) of orchestrating a conspiracy to procure a fake forensic report to counter findings of the Akal Takht in a controversial video case and demanded action against him and police officials allegedly involved in the matter.

Addressing a press conference here, Delhi minister Manjinder Singh Sirsa alleged that Punjab Police officers and persons linked to a private forensic laboratory colluded to produce a report declaring the video fake in an attempt to undermine the authority of the Akal Takht. On Tuesday, Haryana Police had arrested two men after registering a case on a complaint

by a person who alleged he was approached for procuring a fabricated forensic report of the video linked to the controversy involving the Punjab chief minister.

Mann and AAP have rejected the claims that the forensic report was fabricated and have accused the opposition parties of colluding to defame him.

Earlier this month, the Akal Takht declared Mann "guru dokhi" (anti-guru) and "Khalsa panth virodhi" (anti-Khalsa panth) over the video purportedly showing a man resembling him indulging in objectionable activities with pictures of Sikh gurus and slain militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Sirsa alleged that AAP leaders sought to discredit the findings of the highest temporal seat of the

Sikhs instead of expressing remorse.

"Instead of repenting for this sin he committed, their minister Harpal Cheema held a press conference on June 18 and said that this video is fake," Sirsa alleged.

He claimed that Cheema had cited a forensic report based on the examination of 1,191 frames of the video and argued that it was not authentic. The BJP leader alleged that inquiries pointed to the involvement of Ludhiana Commissioner Swapna Sharma and SP Jashandeep Singh in getting the forensic reports changed.

Sirsa claimed that as the investigation progressed, it emerged that "Bhagwant Mann's blue-eyed boy, Swapna Sharma, and SP Jashandeep Singh, through a person named

Jaspreet Singh in Haryana, arranged a meeting at a hotel in Gurugram with a forensic laboratory".

"Money (Rs 10 lakh) was exchanged during the meeting and the video was heavily edited to make it appear as if Bhagwant Mann was not present in it and that the video was fake," he alleged.

"They used the Aam Aadmi Party's black money and money from corruption to get this forensic report prepared," he alleged.

"The people who supposedly conducted the examination are themselves saying that they never even had the expertise for forensic examination. They said that they were document forensics experts, that they were given money, and that this work was got done through them," he alleged. (PTI)

## Dipke to appear before MeitY panel over withholding of CJP's account



**NEW DELHI, June 24:** Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke on Wednesday said he would appear before a committee of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) regarding the withholding of the group's X account.

According to reports, the MeitY had earlier asked Dipke to appear in person at its headquarters on Wednesday for a hearing on the government's blocking of the CJP's account.

"Today at 3 PM, I will personally appear before the Review Committee of the Ministry of Electronics and

Information Technology regarding the withholding of our account, @CJP\_2029," Dipke said in a post on X.

This is significant as Dipke has been leading a CJP sit-in, which entered the fifth day on Wednesday, at Jantar Mantar to demand the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged irregularities in exams and the NEET paper-leak controversy, and has refused to leave the protest site.

The CJP took social media by storm soon after its launch on May 16, following a controversy over remarks made by Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant, which were widely interpreted as him likening unemployed youths to "cockroaches".

The original X handle of the digital satirical outfit was withheld in India on May 21, following which the group resurfaced with a new handle, 'Cockroach is Back'.

On Tuesday, the protesters at Jantar Mantar held a "diaper donation drive" as part of the campaign to demand Pradhan's resignation.

In the evening, Dipke shared a video of the protest, with protesters waving diapers and chanting "Go Pradhan Go".

The CJP has maintained that the protest will continue until Pradhan resigns. (PTI)

## Odisha CM Majhi bats for AI, advanced technologies for maritime security

**BHUBANESWAR, June 24:** Emphasising the use of AI and other advanced technologies to safeguard the country's coastline, Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Wednesday said maritime security is crucial not only for national security but also for economic development and the livelihoods of millions dependent on the sea.

Addressing the inaugural session of the 14th Multi-Agency Maritime Security Group (Policy) meeting here, being held outside New Delhi for the first time, Majhi said, "The use of AI, unmanned systems and modern monitoring networks in the field of maritime security is the need of the hour."

He said the installation of 'NABHMITRA' transponders in fishing boats and initiatives such as the Coastal Vibrant Village Pro-



gramme were important steps towards strengthening maritime security.

The chief minister lauded the efforts of the Indian Navy, Coast Guard, Odisha Police and other agencies engaged in maritime border security.

Stating that the 21st century is widely regarded as the Indo-Pa-

acific century, Majhi said India is emerging as a major maritime power.

"This high-level national meeting is being held in Odisha for the first time. It reflects Prime Minister Narendra Modi's commitment to cooperative federalism and the country's federal structure," he said.

Describing seas, ports, fisheries and the blue economy as vital national assets, Majhi said their protection was essential. "Their protection is not only essential for the security of the country, but also for economic development and the well-being of the livelihoods of millions of coastal people who depend on the sea," he said.

He said maritime security was no longer confined to traditional law-and-order issues and now encompassed challenges such as protection of critical infrastructure, cyber security, disaster management, environmental conservation and maritime awareness.

Highlighting Odisha's rich maritime heritage, the chief minister said the state's 575-km-long coastline along the Bay of Bengal was a valuable asset. (PTI)

# CRPF suspends DIG for sharing messages opposing CAPF bill

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** The CRPF has suspended a senior DIG-rank officer for sharing content allegedly "against" the government during the recent passage of the CAPF bill, which the cadre officers of these forces had called discriminatory.

This is the first case among the approximately 15,000 cadre officers entrusted with leadership roles in the country's 10-lakh-strong Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs).

Officials identified the officer who faced action as Deputy Inspector General (DIG) B C Patra, posted at the force's Tripura Sector headquarters in Agartala.

The 1994-batch CRPF cadre officer returned to the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in April after completing a deputation posting with the federal counter-terrorist commando force NSG.

Officials said Patra was suspended a few days ago under Sub-Rule (1) of Rule 10 of the CCS (CCA) Rules, 1965 pending a preliminary enquiry.

They said the charges involve sharing audio-visual and pictorial content on social media platforms that allegedly called for "changing" the country's lawfully elected government during the passage of the Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill 2026.

The bill is now an Act after it received presidential assent in April.

CRPF Director General (DG) G P Singh confirmed the development to PTI.

"All serving and uniformed officers of the CRPF are bound by the rules and statutes and the oath taken.

"Any word(s)- written or spoken or action contravening the same would be



dealt appropriately in consonance with the law of the land," the DG said.

Patra could not be contacted for comment. However, officers privy to the case said the action against the DIG was "mala fide" and "unjustified".

They said the officer (Patra) is being targeted because he was the lead petitioner among the CAPF cadre officers

who fought cases related to their promotions and service parity with the IPS up to the Supreme Court.

"The DIG is being unfairly treated and punished by the CRPF headquarters because he led the legal battle for the rightful claims of the cadre officers on par

with the Indian Police Service (IPS) officers who join the CAPFs on deputation," a senior officer said on the condition of anonymity.

He claimed that about two dozen other officers of the force who prominently fought court cases were recently issued "hasty" posting orders.

An association of ex-CAPF officers has also called a press conference on July 2 against the "hasty and illegal" suspension of the DIG, in addition to targeting CAPF personnel whose families protested the CAPF Bill at the Rajghat in the national capital in April.

"DIG Patra is an outstanding officer who has been commended with multiple awards," said Ranbir Singh, general secretary of the Alliance of All Ex Paramilitary Forces Welfare Association

(AAPWA) said.

In their representations sent to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), serving cadre officers stated that the Bill's provisions were "oppressive" and "discriminatory" and that they would continue to stagnate in their current ranks if IPS deputations were not curtailed as directed by the Supreme Court in an order issued last year.

The Centre filed an appeal against this order which the apex court rejected.

The government said the bill seeks to create a unified legal framework governing the service conditions of personnel across the CAPFs, replacing the current patchwork of separate service rule regimes for cadre officers and those coming on deputation from the Indian Police Service (IPS). (PTI)

## Threatens gherao of Bihar CM if demand not met

# Bhojpur encounter: PK seeks probe by sitting judge

**PATNA, June 24:** Jan Suraj Party founder Prashant Kishor on Wednesday demanded that the judicial inquiry into the death of a man in the recent police encounter in Bihar's Bhojpur district be conducted by a sitting judge.

Addressing a 'maha panchayat' (a huge public meeting) at Bilauti, the village to which the deceased Bharat Tiwari belonged, Kishor said the role played by "top officials sitting in Patna" must also be probed and warned of "a gherao of the Chief Minister's residence" if the demands were not met in 15 days.

The political strategist-turned-activist addressed the 'maha panchayat' after visiting the residence of Tiwari and meeting the bereaved family members.

The deceased's kin had met him and sought his help days after the man, described as "mentally stable" by the Bhojpur administration, had been shot dead on June 17.

The Samrat Choudhary government in Bihar, which has been facing the charge that it was a "fake encounter", has ordered a judicial inquiry, to be conducted by a retired judge of the high court.

However, Kishor insisted "the judicial inquiry should be conducted by a sitting judge and not a retired judge, and it must be ensured that the probe is complete within three months".

"The scope of the inquiry should extend beyond Bhojpur district and accountability must be fixed at the highest level," he said.

"The deceased's family members have made it clear that they want no compensation, no gov-



ernment jobs on compassionate grounds. All they seek is justice. That is the sentiment I, too, express," said Kishor.

The Jan Suraj Party founder said the judicial inquiry must "not stop at probing the role of police officials involved in the encounter or even those posted in Bhojpur. Nothing would be achieved if small fry in the local police and administration is punished".

"It must be investigated as to whether the police personnel in Bhojpur had pulled the trigger of their own accord, or were they acting under instructions from top officials in Patna. The role of big shots in the state headquarters... the DGP, the Home department, all must be looked into," said Kishor.

He warned of gheraoing the CM's residence if the demand is not met within 15 days.

"If our demands are not met in 15 days, I call upon all present here to join me in Patna, where we shall seek an appointment with the chief minister. If he refuses to meet, we shall gherao

his residence," Kishor said.

Notably, family members of Tiwari, whose death has triggered social media outrage, have debunked the claim of the police that he was "mentally unstable".

They, however, admitted that the jobless youngster had become a social and political activist, and many of his social media posts had provoked the local administration, causing the police to turn up at their place on the fateful day.

Kishor, who also interacted with journalists present at the village situated about 100 kms from the state capital, said, "From what I gather, Bharat Tiwari was not a deranged person but a man committed to ensuring that residents of this area get basic facilities like electricity."

He claimed that Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary might have ordered a judicial probe as an afterthought, but his initial reaction to the encounter was "proof of his lack of sensitivity".

"Choudhary believes that the job of the police is to be trigger-happy. We will make him realise that power rests with the people and he cannot behave like an emperor by letting the police loose as if they were predators (bhakshak) and not protectors (rakshak)," Kishor alleged.

"I have Bharat Tiwari's mother by my side. She says many have approached them with an offer of money, which she has turned down, as all she wants is justice. Let me tell all those who have suddenly become well-wishers of the bereaved family that the community (samaj) will take care of their needs," the Jan Suraj Party founder said. (PTI)

## Heavy rains flood low-lying areas, disrupt trains in Mumbai

**MUMBAI, June 24:** Heavy overnight showers a day after the monsoon's arrival in Mumbai disrupted road and rail traffic, flooded low lying zones, and left commuters stranded on Wednesday as some areas received over 300 mm of rainfall in 24 hours.

During Mayor Ritu Tawde's inspection of waterlogged Gandhi Market in King's Circle, a Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) supervisor fell into an open water channel but was quickly rescued without any serious injuries, officials said.

The area witnessed severe waterlogging, disrupting traffic for hours, even as the IMD issued an 'orange alert', forecasting heavy to

very heavy showers in Mumbai. Congress MP Varsha Gaikwad shared a video of the incident on X and targeted the mayor, alleging, "This man has fallen into the pit of your inaction and corruption. This is not an accident; your corruption has been caught red-handed."

Ruling Shiv Sena MLC Manisha Kayande urged Tawde to intensify efforts for the cleaning of drains and removal of dry waste to prevent waterlogging and traffic disruptions during the monsoon.

Kayande, whose party is a constituent of the BJP-led Mahayuti government, also said the issue should not be viewed through a political lens and stressed the focus must remain on resolving prob-

lems faced by people.

"It is not about politics but solving people's problems," she told reporters. The BMC is controlled by the BJP and Shiv Sena.

Municipal Commissioner Ashwini Bhide appealed to people to follow weather advisories and contact civic control rooms in case of emergencies.

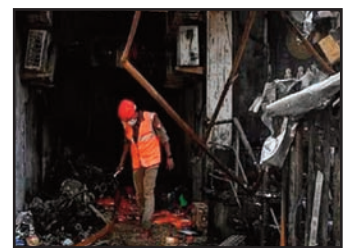
She said all departments had been directed to remain vigilant as heavy rainfall was likely to persist, and the administration was continuously monitoring the situation.

Mayor Tawde and former mayor Kishori Pednekar visited some areas to review the ground situation and reasons for the waterlogging. (PTI)

## Smoke inhalation, not flames, killed all 15 in Lucknow fire

**LUCKNOW, June 24:** The 15 people killed in the fire that tore through a building in Lucknow's Aliganj didn't have major burn injuries and suffocated to death after inhaling large quantities of smoke, according to the post-mortem report.

There was no clear evidence of extensive burn injuries or deep wounds that could directly explain the deaths, doctors associated with the post-mortem told PTI. However, the doctors observed swelling around the faces and eyes of several victims and detected soot and smoke particles inside their nasal



passages -- an indication that they had inhaled large quantities of smoke before their deaths.

"The post-mortem examination has revealed that all 15 victims died due to suffocation caused by smoke

inhalation. No major burn injuries or grievous external wounds were found that could be attributed as the direct cause of death," a senior doctor involved in the examinations told PTI on condition of anonymity. Based on the findings, doctors concluded that all 15 victims died due to asphyxiation caused by smoke inhalation.

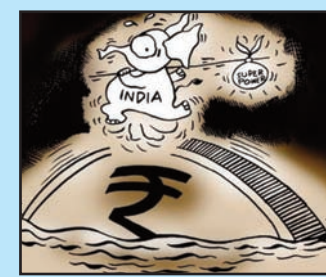
The post-mortem findings of severe smoke inhalation matched survivors' accounts of the choking conditions inside the burning building.

"Smoke was everywhere," 32-year-old Mohd Aasif, a survivor of

the Aliganj inferno, told PTI on Tuesday.

"When we moved towards the staircase, we saw thick smoke coming from there. We then moved towards the front side, but smoke was coming from there too," he had said. The observations of the post-mortem report have been shared with investigating authorities.

Explaining the findings of the autopsies, the doctor said fires in enclosed spaces often turn deadly because of smoke and toxic gases rather than direct exposure to flames. (PTI)



## India has ₹ 95,000 cr addressable market for assistive tech by 2030: NCPEDP

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** India has an addressable market of ₹75,000-95,000 crore for assistive technologies for persons with disabilities by 2030 with the right policy framework, and needs a National Assistive Technology Policy to address gaps in access and service delivery, experts said on Wednesday.

The remarks were made at the launch of a White Paper titled "Assistive Technology in India: A Systems and Investment Approach for Inclusion, Independence, and Economic Participation of Persons with Disabilities", prepared by the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People (NCPEDP) in partnership with Mphasis.

A robust assistive technology ecosystem can not only improve inclusion and independence for millions of Indians but also emerge as a major driver of innovation, entrepreneurship and job

creation, the experts said.

They noted that the need for assistive technology extends far beyond persons with disabilities, with their estimated number likely to be 5-8 crore, according to NCPEDP, a cross-disability advocacy group.

"Millions of elderly people and those living with long-term health conditions such as diabetes, dementia, vision impairment and hearing loss also rely on products and services such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, spectacles, white canes and speech recognition soft-

ware to live independently and participate fully in society," the NCPEDP said in a statement.

"Experts called for a National Assistive Technology Policy to address existing gaps in access and service delivery, while unlocking a market estimated to reach USD 8-10 billion (₹ 75,000-95,000 crore) by 2030," it said.

Launching the White Paper, Dr Manmeet Kaur Nanda, Additional Secretary, Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD), said India has a unique opportunity to build a globally competitive and inclusive assistive technology ecosystem.

"Assistive technology is central to enabling independence, dignity and equal participation. The recommendations in this White Paper provide an important roadmap for future action," she said. (PTI)

## Senior IPS officer Anand Jain takes charge as Ladakh DGP



**LEH/JAMMU, June 24:** Senior IPS officer Anand Jain on Wednesday assumed charge as the director general of police (DGP) of the Union territory of Ladakh.

Jain, a 1999-batch IPS officer of the AGMUT cadre, was recently transferred from Jammu and Kashmir to Ladakh by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and appointed as the head of the Ladakh Police.

Before taking over his new assignment, he was serving as additional director general of police (ADGP), Armed Police, Jammu and Kashmir. He succeeds Mukesh Singh, a 1996-batch IPS officer, who had taken over as Ladakh DGP on January 16 and has now been transferred to Manipur.

With nearly three decades of policing experience, Jain has held several key positions in Jammu and Kashmir, including ADGP (Armed Police) and inspector general of police, Jammu Zone. (PTI)

## Under-construction warehouse collapses in west Kolkata

**KOLKATA, June 24:** A three-storey under-construction warehouse in the Taratala area of west Kolkata collapsed on Wednesday afternoon, trapping several people underneath the rubble, police said.

A Kolkata Police official said 13 people have so far been rescued. The warehouse was being built on a leasehold property owned by the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in the city. Of those injured, 10 were admitted to the Trauma Care Centre of the state-run SSKM hospital. Among them, four were stated to be in a critical state, hospital authorities said.

"The roof of the warehouse located on the Transport Depot Road near Brace Bridge in the Taratala area collapsed around noon. Our officers have reached the spot.

"Some people were working at the

site at the time of the incident. We fear that quite a few people may still be trapped under the debris," the officer said. Massive chunks of iron beams and concrete crumbled when several people were engaged in the construction work. Eyewitnesses said they heard trapped victims crying out for help from beneath the debris.

"Construction activities were taking place on the ground floor while the RCC structure for the first and second floors had been completed. Suddenly, the entire structure came crashing down," an eyewitness said.

According to a fire department official, the roof of the three-storey under-construction warehouse collapsed during casting work. He also alleged that substandard materials were being used in the construction of the warehouse. (PTI)

## J-K: Shia community takes out Muharram procession to mark eighth day of mourning

**SRINAGAR, June 24:** Thousands of members of the Shia community in Kashmir took out a Muharram procession on Wednesday here to mark the eighth day of mourning amidst tight security arrangements, officials said.

The procession was taken out in a peaceful manner as authorities had made adequate security and other arrangements.

However, commuters faced difficulties due to restrictions on the movement of traffic in some parts of the city.

This is the fourth consecutive year that the administration allowed the Muharram procession to be taken out on the traditional route through the heart of the city

here. The procession began from Guru Bazar locality in the city early in the day and passed through the designated route via Jehangir Chowk and Maulana Azad Road. It would culminate at Dalgate.

Thousands of mourners assembled at Guru Bazar early Wednesday as the authorities had granted a limited time window for the procession so that normal life does not get affected.

The traffic department had issued an advisory to residents of the city on the routes to be followed during the Muharram procession, the officials said.

At several places, volunteers were seen offering water to the



professionists, while water sprinklers were also used at some places to provide relief from the heat.

The procession was banned after the eruption of militancy in Kashmir as authorities were apprehen-

## 11-year-old raped, strangled, buried near Haryana border; cab driver arrested

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** A 11-year-old girl sleeping beside her family on a pavement in south Delhi was allegedly kidnapped, raped and murdered by a cab driver in the early hours of June 22, police said on Tuesday.

The accused, under the influence of marijuana, allegedly took the child to an isolated stretch near the Faridabad-Gurgaon border, sexually assaulted her, strangled her with a piece of cloth and then smashed her chest with a stone, before covering the body with a pile of stones in an apparent attempt to conceal the crime and destroy evidence.

What has left investigators and the victim's family horrified is the accused's conduct after the crime. Police said he showed no remorse, remained largely unemotional during interrogation and resumed his routine as if nothing had happened, even picking up another passenger before he was arrested hours later. (PTI)

Special Director General of Police, Coordination, SJM Gillani, Inspector General of Police, Kashmir, V K Birdi, Divisional Commissioner, Kashmir, Anshul Garg and other senior officers from the police and the CRPF also served water and juices to the mourners.

Speaking to reporters, the IGP Kashmir said elaborate security arrangements have been made to ensure that the mourners do not face any problems.

"Elaborate arrangements have been made. The Jammu and Kashmir Police has also made arrangements, including traffic-related, for the mourners coming from different parts of the city and adjoining areas," Birdi said. (PTI)

# Daemon is most interesting when pushed to the edge: 'House of the Dragon' star Matt Smith

“House of the Dragon” star Matt Smith says he is not interested in defining Daemon Targaryen as either a villain or a hero and instead prefers to explore the darker edges of the character’s personality.

Smith, the star of popular shows “Doctor Who” and “The Crown”, returns as the fiercely ambitious and volatile Targaryen prince in the third season of the “Game of Thrones” spin-off series, which started streaming on JioHotstar from Monday.

The British actor said his aim with the character has always been to push the character as far as possible and see whether he can find a way back.

“It’s quite an odd thing, an audience should look and judge and label. But to do it inside of it and go, ‘Well, is he a villain? Is he not a villain? Is he a hero? Is he an anti-hero?’” Smith told PTI in a virtual group interview.

“My real main interest with him has been... let’s get this character to be the worst version of himself. Push him as far as you can towards the precipice, the edge of the cliff, the things that you think are impossible for a character to come back from. So whether that makes him a villain, an anti-hero, I don’t know. It’s for other people to decipher. But I think that’s where he’s most interesting,” he added.

Based on parts of “Fire & Blood” novel by celebrated author George R R Martin, “House of the Dragon” is set nearly 200 years before the events of “Game of Thrones”, the blockbuster series which ran for eight seasons on HBO from 2011 to 2019.

The prequel show chronicles the rise and fall of House Targaryen and centres on a bitter succession struggle known as the Dance of the Dragons, a devastating civil war that pits rival factions of the ruling family against each other in a battle for the Iron Throne.

Smith’s Daemon Targaryen, a

skilled warrior and dragonrider known for his charisma, impulsiveness and ruthless streak, is one of the most unpredictable and compelling figures in the show.

He is younger brother of King Viserys I Targaryen and later the husband of Rhaenyra Targaryen, played by actor Emma D’Arcy.

Smith said he missed sharing the screen space with D’Arcy in the show’s second season as their characters were based in different locations and had few scenes together.

“I was campaigning in season two to get back on the floor with Emma and with Daemon and Rhaenyra because, both from a character perspective, but also from an acting perspective... my admiration knows no bounds really,” he said.

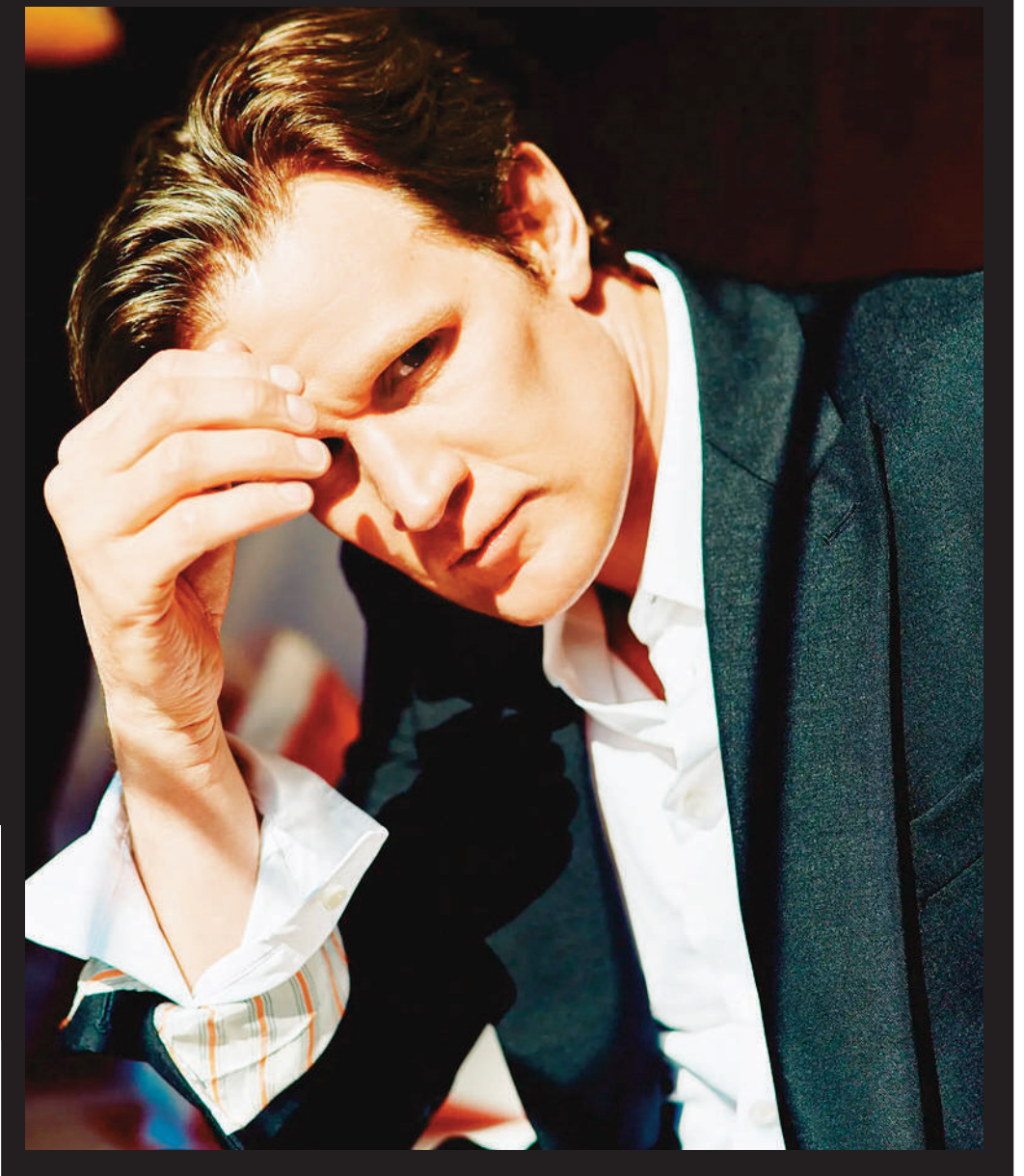
“What’s been really amazing over the last four or five years is seeing Emma approach the craft and the journey of that in just the most incredible detailed way. It’s been something to behold,” he said.

Smith also spoke about his love for fantasy storytelling.

The actor said he enjoys genres such as magical realism and horror as a viewer and believes large-scale fantasy productions offer audiences a welcome escape.

“What I do as a punter and as a consumer, I love in literature, I love magic realism. And the last couple of years of my life, I’ve got really into horror, like sort of consuming horror movies at every level as well. So when it’s done on scale, when this type of thing is done well, I think it’s a good way to transport an audience out of their everyday lives into somewhere interesting for a couple of hours,” he said.

Season three of “House of the Dragon” also stars Steve Toussaint, Rhys Ifans, Fabien Frankel, Ewan Mitchell, Tom Glynn-Carney, Harry Collett, Bethany Antonia, Phoebe Campbell, James Norton, Tom Bennett, Freddie Fox, Clinton Liberty, Gayle Rankin, Abubakar Salim and Tom Cullen. (PTI)



## IN THE AGE OF MEMES AND REELS, COMEDY HAS BECOME MORE CHALLENGING: AKSHAY KUMAR

Superstar Akshay Kumar says it has been always challenging to make people laugh, but the job has become tougher in the social media age where everyone is exposed to funny reels, memes and stand up acts.

After “Bhooth Bangla”, Akshay is gearing up for the release of comedy film “Welcome To The Jungle”. The new film is part of the “Welcome” franchise and set to be released in theatres in Friday.

“It has become much more challenging. Today there are reels, memes and comedy content everywhere. But comedy is like a huge river, it never dries up. There are so many forms of comedy, there’s physical comedy, situational comedy, slapstick comedy, dark humour,” Akshay told PTI in an interview.

The 58-year-old actor said today movies are not the only source of entertainment for people.

“There are countless ways of making people laugh. If you open Instagram, you’ll find endless memes and funny videos. People consume comedy every day. There are so many comedy shows and talented stand-up comedians creating fresh material. But making people laugh remains one of the most difficult things to do. People often underestimate comedy. I have tremendous respect for stand-up comedians. Standing alone in front of an audience and making people laugh is incredibly difficult.”

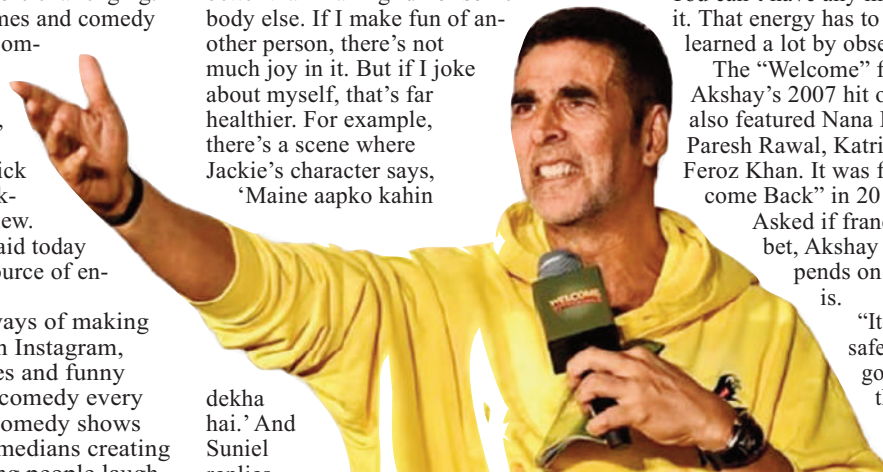
“Welcome To The Jungle” revolves around a group of gangsters, criminals and quirky characters whose paths cross in a border-area jungle. What begins as a film-

shoot-like operation turns into a series of absurd misadventures involving crime, confusion and action-packed situations.

It will see Akshay leading a cast that includes over 30 actors, including Suniel Shetty, Paresh Rawal, Raveena Tandon, Arshad Warsi, Lara Dutta and many more.

The recently released trailer features several self-deprecating moments, and Akshay said he enjoys being the centre of the joke.

“I think making fun of yourself is much better than making fun of somebody else. If I make fun of another person, there’s not much joy in it. But if I joke about myself, that’s far healthier. For example, there’s a scene where Jackie’s character says, ‘Maine apko kahin



dekha hai.’ And Suniel replies, ‘Aap flop filmein bhi dekhte hain?’

“When the director and writer narrated that line to me, I immediately said, ‘It’s lovely. Do it.’ Why should I have a problem with it? Haven’t I given flop films? Everyone has. There’s nothing wrong in accepting it. That’s why the joke worked so well.”

Akshay said he had a lot of fun playing the role of a faded star from Bhojpuri cinema.

“I really enjoyed preparing for it. Before shooting the song, I watched around 30 to 40 Bhojpuri songs. I watched songs featuring Ravi Kishan ji, Pawan ji and many others.”

“I wanted to understand their style, their rhythm and the way they perform. What I realised was that Bhojpuri performers bring tremendous energy to their work. There’s a sense of freedom in the way they perform. You can’t have any inhibitions while doing it. That energy has to flow naturally. I learned a lot by observing them.”

The “Welcome” franchise started with Akshay’s 2007 hit of the same name that also featured Nana Patekar, Anil Kapoor, Paresh Rawal, Katrina Kaif and the late Feroz Khan. It was followed by “Welcome Back” in 2015.

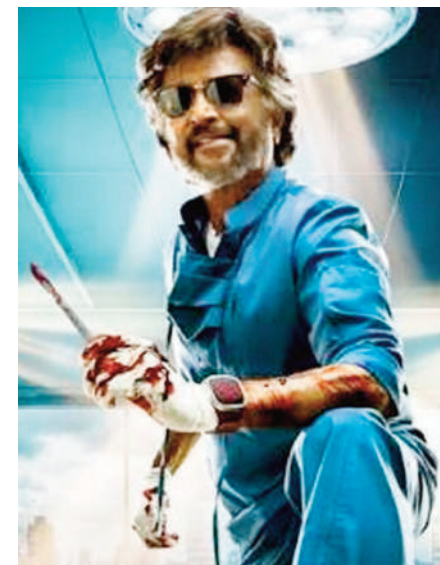
Asked if franchise films are a safe bet, Akshay said everything depends on how good the movie is.

“It’s neither a risk nor a safe bet. If the film is good, it’s a good thing. If the film is not good, then being a franchise doesn’t matter. Recently, my film ‘Bhooth Bangla’ was released. It wasn’t a franchise. God was kind and people liked it. Ultimately, it all depends on the film itself.”

“People do remember the earlier films and there is a lot of recall value attached to them. But a film will only run if it is good,” he said.

“Welcome To The Jungle” is directed by Ahmed Khan and produced by Star Studio18, Base Industries Group, Cape of Good Films and Seeta Films. (PTI)

## Rajinikanth’s next Tamil film is titled ‘Dharman’, makers unveil first-look poster



Tamil superstar Rajinikanth’s much-awaited film with actor-producer Kamal Haasan’s production banner has been titled “Dharman”, the makers announced on Wednesday.

The film’s first-look poster was unveiled during a pooja ceremony held in Chennai. Backed by Kamal Haasan’s Raaj Kamal Films International, the film will be directed by filmmaker Ashwath Marimuthu of “Oh My Kadavule” and “Dragon” fame, confirming reports that he has replaced “Don” director Cibi Chakaravarthi on the project.

The first-look poster features Rajinikanth dressed as a surgeon holding a holding blood-stained scalpel. The tagline on the poster read “The Deadly Doctor”.

The film also stars Simran, Raashi Khanna and Yogi Babu in pivotal roles. Music is composed by Anirudh Ravichander, while Niketh Bommi serves as cinematographer and Pradeep E Ragav as editor.

The film, earlier referred to as “Thalaivar 173”, marks another collaboration between Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan, who are also set to reunite on an upcoming film directed by Nelson. (PTI)

## ‘Slowly finding my way back’: Alka Yagnik opens up on health struggles



Popular playback singer Alka Yagnik, who had been diagnosed with hearing loss in 2024 and was in the capital to receive the Padma Bhushan, says she is slowly finding her way back after stepping away from the spotlight to deal with her health issues.

The “Agar Tum Saath Ho” and “Ek Do Teen” singer received the honour from President Droupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Tuesday.

Seen in public on after a long time, she looked frail and walked with the help of an attendant.

A day later, the 60-year-old opened her heart in a lengthy Instagram post, revealing that she had suffered sensorineural nerve hearing loss caused by a viral attack two years ago.

It is a hearing disorder that happens when there is damage to tiny hair cells within the inner ear or the auditory nerve that transmits sound signals to the brain.

Causes can include genetics, aging, sudden exposure to loud noise and viral fevers.

“For the last two years, I have stayed away from the spotlight, from public appearances, and from sharing much of my journey. Many of you knew I am going through difficult health and through it all, your love, prayers, messages, and unwavering support have stayed

with me every step of the way.

“Today, as I stepped out to receive one of highest civilian honours in the country - the distinguished Padma Bhushan, I did so with a heart full of gratitude,” she wrote.

Yagnik, one of Bollywood’s most successful singers, said she is deeply humbled by the honour.

“While my name may be on it, it belongs just as much to every listener who welcomed my voice into their lives, carried my songs through generations, and stood by me through both the highs and the challenges.”

“This moment feels especially meaningful because it marks not just a recognition of my work, but a reminder of the strength that comes from love, hope, and resilience... I am slowly finding my way back.”

Thanking the president and Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the honour, she said she wanted to be there not just for herself but for each and every one who had been a part of her journey.

“Thank you for your warmth, your kindness, your prayers, and your faith in me over the years. I carry all of it with me. Today, I didn’t just accept an award - I felt the love of millions who have been a part of my journey,” she said. (PTI)

## Delhi HC restrains Sanjay Dutt-backed Cartel Bros from using ‘Godfather’ for whisky

The Delhi High Court has restrained actor Sanjay Dutt-backed Cartel Bros from using the word ‘Godfather’ for its whisky during the pendency of a lawsuit by Devans Modern Breweries.

Justice Tushar Rao Gedela observed that Devans Modern Breweries Ltd has been manufacturing beer under the mark “Godfather” for the last 40 years and the material on record showed that the mark is exclusively associated with it alone.

The judge said that even if Cartel Bros Pvt Ltd has no mala fide in adopting the word, it can obtain unfair advantage from the former’s goodwill and affect the distinctive character or repute of the trademark.

“Thus, on a cumulative and holistic appreciation of facts, prima facie, it appears that the plaintiff is entitled to an ad-interim injunction restraining the defendants from using the mark ‘Godfather’ or other forms like ‘Godfather’s’ in respect of the product -- whisky, manufactured by the defendants during the pendency of the present suit,” the court said in its interim order passed on June 22.

The court directed Cartel Bros to take down all the listings, advertisements, posts and other content bearing the ‘God-

father’ trademark in relation to its whisky or other alcoholic beverages from all websites, e-commerce platforms, mobile applications, social media platforms and other online or digital media.

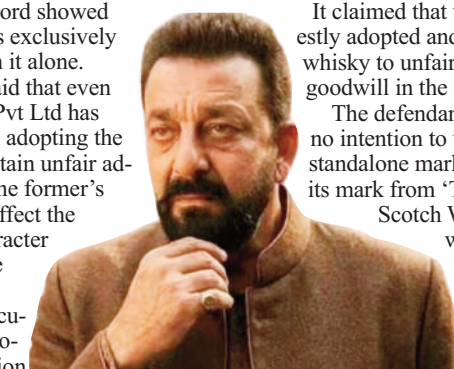
The plaintiff argued that it manufactures world-class alcoholic beverages under various popular brands, including “Godfather” and “Old Vat”, and also holds a registered trademark for “Godfather”.

It claimed that the defendant dishonestly adopted and used “Godfather” for its whisky to unfairly ride its enormous goodwill in the sector.

The defendant submitted that it has no intention to use “Godfather” as a standalone mark and that it has revised its mark from “The Glenwalk Blended Scotch Whisky” to “The Glenwalk Godfather’s” by Sanjay Dutt.

The court, however, observed that “Godfather” was still bold and prominent in the revised mark and an average consumer was likely to believe that the two products were associated with each other.

“Though the defendant has very fairly attempted to downplay the said mark by using a subscript ‘By Sanjay Dutt’, yet the emphasis on the word ‘Godfather’s’ does not get diluted and remains a prominent part when looked at from a general consumer’s point of view,” the court said. (PTI)



# India desperate to overcome middle-order

## Fielding woes against Bangladesh in Women's T20WC

MANCHESTER, June 24: With middle-order batting woes and sloppy fielding threatening to derail their campaign, India will be desperate to address those concerns when they take on Bangladesh in a crucial Women's T20 World Cup Group A clash here on Thursday.

India entered the 12-team tournament with the form of their top order as a concern, but Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma have largely allayed those fears.

Mandhana has scored 159 runs in three matches, while Shafali has contributed 92, with both batters striking at over 154 and consistently providing brisk starts.

However, the inability of the middle order to build on those platforms has emerged as a fresh concern for the team management.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (SR 109.09), Jemimah Rodrigues (94.11) and Yastika Bhatia (105.88) have each been unable to carry on the momentum provided by the openers, and their failure to accelerate invariably has left a lot to do for the likes of Richa Ghosh and Deepti Sharma.

Having played three matches each, both Kaur and Rodrigues have managed just 11 boundaries between them without hitting a single six. Yastika, meanwhile, has struck only three fours in two innings, numbers that are likely to worry the Indian camp heading deeper into the tournament.

On their part, Richa (176.92) and Deepti (159.37) have responded well to the challenge but arriving late in the innings with limited deliveries to face has increased the pressure on the duo.

Despite their lopsided batting, India (4



points in 3 matches, Net Run Rate of 2.511) are reaping the benefits of victories by big margins — by 64 runs against Pakistan and by 95 runs against the Netherlands — as they look to hold on to the second spot in Group A.

Australia, for that matter, have cemented themselves at the top of the group with four wins on the trot giving them a total of 8 points and a superb NRR of 4.724.

The top two teams from each group will advance to the semifinals and India would not want to be in a situation where they are chal-

lenged for that second spot by South Africa (4 points, NRR -0.546) any further.

South Africa rode on a brilliant 81 not out and a two-for from their senior all-rounder Marizanne Kapp to hammer India by six wickets in their last outing, which once again exposed the latter's shortcomings.

Despite leaning on their spin attack to eke out results, India were unable to make the most of the surface even when they had South Africa cornered at 25/2 after the powerplay in Proteas' chase.

Even as Shree Charani provided some

respite with a rare double-wicket- maiden to bring India back in the game, it was undone by some ordinary bowling by the others, but most importantly, the failure in grabbing opportunities.

Radha Yadav, one of the team's best fielders, endured a rare off day as she spilled two regulation chances off Kapp's bat, which proved to be catastrophic.

India would know they cannot allow such mistakes to creep into the game with the business end of the competition approaching fast, and after taking on Bangladesh, they will be up against the red-hot in form Australia.

On their part, impressive victories over Pakistan (by 23 runs) and defending champions New Zealand (by 6 wickets) would give Bangladesh the belief to challenge India.

While none of their players have really imposed themselves in the tournament, Bangladesh have thrived on collective efforts which would keep India on their toes.

**Teams (from):**

**India:** Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Yastika Bhatia (wk), Bharti Fulmali, Richa Ghosh (wk), Shafali Verma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Kranti Gaud, Prema Rawat, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh Thakur, Radha Yadav, Nandini Sharma, Shree Charani.

**Bangladesh:** Nigar Sultana (c&wk), Nahida Akter (vc), Dilara Akter (wk), Juairiya Firdous (wk), Sobhana Mostary, Tej Nehar, Sharmin Akhter, Rabeya Khan, Ritu Moni, Shorna Akter, Fahima Khatun, Faraha Trisna, Marufa Akter, Sanjida Akter Megha, Sultana Khatun.

Match starts at 7:00pm IST. (PTI)

# Ranga Reddy Risers beat Medak Falcons by 5 wickets



HYDERABAD, June 24: Skipper Tanay Thyagarajan's all-round performance powered Ranga Reddy Risers to a five-wicket victory over Medak Falcons in HCA's Sreenidhi University TG20 here.

After restricting Medak Falcons to 164/8, the Risers overcame a mid-innings wobble through a partnership between Nanavath Rakesh and Nitin Sai Yadav, with the latter finishing the chase as the Risers reached the target with 10 balls to spare on Tuesday.

The Risers skipper first registered figures of 3/36 which included the scalps of both openers, before scoring a crucial 11-ball 21.

Falcons got off to a bright start as Purnanand Rao set the tone with a series of boundaries in the opening overs. He kept the scoreboard ticking, but Thyagarajan had struck the first blow, casting Shrunjith Reddy (6 off 5) in his first over.

Purnanand continued to apply pressure on the Risers' bowling attack, but wickets kept falling at the other end. Nitin Sai Yadav then delivered a maiden in the final over of the powerplay as the Falcons reached 51/3.

Vikram Naik then joined forces with Naman Agarwal (37 off 30), and the pair rebuilt the innings through strike rotation and timely boundaries.

However, Thyagarajan returned to break the 76-run stand, taking his third wicket of the evening. Naman's dismissal triggered a collapse and the Falcons eventually closed their innings at 164/8.

Aaron George and Avanish Rao gave the Risers the perfect start to their chase, taking the attack to the

Falcons' bowlers from the outset. Falcons skipper Teja struck back in the third over, ending the opening stand by dismissing Aaron for a brisk 27 off 13 balls.

Avanish continued to score freely and kept the scoreboard moving.

Varun Yerram turned the game on its head with a double strike in the final over of the powerplay, removing Avanish for 25 off 12 balls and Aditya Javvaji (12 off 9) to leave the Risers in a spot of bother at 66/3.

The Falcons' bowlers then tightened their grip on proceedings, restricting the flow of boundaries.

Sensing the need to shift momentum, Thyagarajan counterattacked with two more fours and a six during his quickfire 21 off 11 balls.

However, Ahwinan Ram struck at a crucial juncture to dismiss the Risers captain, reducing them to 117/5.

With 48 runs required from the final seven overs, responsibility fell on Nanavath Rakesh (37 not out off 33) and Nitin Sai Yadav (28 not out off 19).

The finishing touches came in the 19th over as Nitin launched the match-winning six to cap off the chase, guiding the Ranga Reddy Risers to victory with five wickets in hand and 10 balls to spare.

**Brief Scores:**

Medak Falcons 164/8 in 20 overs (Vikram Naik 49, Purnanand Rao 38, Tanay Thyagarajan 3/36)

Ranga Reddy Risers 167/5 in 18.2 overs (Nanavath Rakesh 37\*, Nitin Sai Yadav 28 off 19, Varun Yerram 2/32). (PTI)

## Treesa-Gayatri advance at US Open; Rounak Chouhan enters main draw

FULLERTON (US), June 24: Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand advanced to the second round of the US Open Super 300 badminton tournament after overcoming Spain's Paula Lopez and Lucia Rodriguez in a three-game battle here.

Making her return after an ankle injury layoff, Treesa, partnering Gayatri, defeated the Spanish combination 21-12 14-21 21-13 in a 51-minute opening-round contest.

The Indian duo will next take on Japan's Sumire Nakade and Miyu Takahashi.

In the men's singles qualifiers, Rounak Chouhan secured his place in the main draw with two victories. He first beat France's Enogat Roy 21-19 21-16 before rallying past Chinese Taipei's Kuo Kuan Lin 13-21 21-14 21-10.

Chouhan will now face fellow Indian S Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian in the opening round.

Treesa and Gayatri started strongly, racing to an 8-3 lead in the opening game. Although the Spaniards narrowed the gap with a four-point burst, the Indians regained control, moving to 17-11 before comfortably taking the game.

## Saud Shakeel, Muhammad Rizwan racing against time to be fit for WI Tests

LAHORE, June 24: Pakistani selectors are waiting on the fitness reports of senior players, Saud Shakeel and Muhammad Rizwan, before they finalise the Test squad for the tours of West Indies and England between July-September.

Saud, who has remained vice-captain of the Test side to Shan Masood, is suffering from a hand injury while Rizwan has also been unable to take part in the red-ball training camp in Lahore due to an injury. An insider close to the camp which commenced on June 10 said that both Saud and Rizwan were unlikely to be fit in time for the tours.

"The selectors and team management are waiting until 4-5 July when their final medical reports will come in but the nature of their fitness issues is such it will take time for them to recover completely," he said. The Pakistan Cricket Board, which is holding separate camps for red and white ball players. It has called up Test batters Abdullah Shafique and Kamran Ghulam and uncapped Hamza Nazar to the red-ball camp as cover for Saud and Rizwan. (PTI)

# Olympian skier Bode Miller pleads not guilty to Idaho misdemeanor drug charges

BOISE (US), June 24: Olympic gold medalist skier Bode Miller has pleaded not guilty to a pair of misdemeanor drug charges after he was arrested on a charge of possessing psilocybin mushrooms.

Miller was arrested June 6 in eastern Idaho, according to court records, and pleaded not guilty to possession of a controlled substance and possession of drug paraphernalia the following week. Neither his attorney, Jeremy Stafford, nor his longtime representative, Lowell Taub, responded to messages requesting comment. It's unknown if Taub still represents Miller.

The court documents don't include any details about the circumstances surrounding Miller's arrest. But in a probable cause statement, Fremont County Sheriff's Deputy Jacob Hurt wrote that he found Miller with a white dispensary bag containing 4.1 grams of the

psychedelic mushrooms.

Idaho has some of the strictest drug laws in the nation. But Colorado and Oregon have both legalized the use of psilocybin for therapeutic treatments, and the substance has become increasingly popular with some health advocates who believe that microdosing it or using it in therapeutic settings can help ease anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In April, President Donald Trump signed an executive order directing the Food and Drug Administration and other federal agencies to speed up research and loosen restrictions on psychedelics, and in response the FDA said it would offer ultra-fast review to three psychedelic drugs being developed to treat mental health conditions.

The 48-year-old Miller took a gambler's approach to ski racing. His high-risk, high-

reward style resulted in six Olympic medals, including gold in the super-combined at the 2010 Vancouver Games, and numerous crashes.

His last major race was at the 2015 world championships in Beaver Creek, Colorado, when a bad wipeout knocked him out of the super-G. He cut a gate too close and hooked his left arm, sending him spiraling out of control. His skis popped off and he began to somersault down the slope before righting himself. He slowly got up and waited for someone to bring him his skis. Once he clicked back into the skis, he went down the slope and waved to the fans. Miller later underwent surgery to fix a torn right hamstring tendon caused when his ski sliced him.

Miller won 33 World Cup races and a pair of World Cup overall titles. He also captured four gold medals at world championships. (AP)

## India could field same women's squad for World Cup, Asian Games, hints coach Marijne



NEW DELHI, June 24: The Indian women's hockey team is likely to field the same core group of players for both the upcoming World Cup and the Asian Games, with the two marquee events scheduled barely 20 days apart, chief coach Sjoerd Marijne indicated on Wednesday.

The World Cup, both men and women, will be hosted by Belgium and the Netherlands from August 15 to 30, while the Asian Games which is a qualifier for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics is scheduled to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan from September 19 to October 4.

While there are speculations that India might field two different men's teams for the events, Marijne said he is taking the World Cup to prepare his side for the more important Asian Games.

"We have thought about this process. We have experience from 2018, it was the same. So what I see is one tournament is going to help the other one. The Asian Games is the most important for us as it is a direct qualifier for the Olympics," Marijne told PTI.

"But the World Cup in 2018 also

gave us a boost in confidence and that's the same way we are going to approach it now. The approach will be to focus on the World Cup and the learning from the World Cup, we take to the Asian Games and there is nothing better than playing matches under pressure at the World Cup and use that knowledge in the Asian Games.

"In World Cup we will have 20 players and in the Asian Games we will have 18 as only 18 are allowed," he added.

**Taekema to be with Indian women in WC and Asiad**

Dutch legend Taekema, a dragflick specialist who has worked with the Indian women's team on assignment basis, will be with the side in the World Cup and the Asian Games, said Marijne.

Taekema has been roped in by Hockey India to work with the Indian women's team till the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"Yes he (Taekema) will be in both tournaments. Taekema is a specialist coach and we are very happy that we can have him in both World Cup and the Asian Games."

"He has experience of working with the Chinese team. He is bigger than just a specialist coach for me, he is doing the PC attacking, PC defending and also guiding the defenders," Marijne said.

Taekema is a silver medalist at the Athens 2004 Olympics with the Netherlands, and has netted 170 goals in 94 appearances during his career. (PTI)

## PCB working towards format-based contracts; to have separate teams going forward



KARACHI, June 24: The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) and national selectors have started the process to have separate teams for the three different formats of the sport with categorisation of central contracts being the first step.

Aqib Javed, a senior selector and head of development at the PCB's High Performance Centre, said in an interview that the new format based categorisation in the central contracts was the first phase of a plan to have different teams for Test, ODIs and T20 Internationals.

The former pacer told 'Geo News' that due to the demands of modern day cricket it had become to have specialised players for all formats.

"The format-based central con-

tract is the first step towards separating teams for each format. This is only the beginning. Eventually, every format could have its own dedicated squad. We will have to do this, and immediately, Test and T20 teams must be separated because the two formats cannot be played in the same way," he said.

The PCB are yet to announce the list of players who will get the new contracts.

Aqib said a lot of thought has gone into the process and the main aim was to ensure players who are Test match specialists are not at a disadvantage compared to those who play a lot of white ball cricket.

"Now, if a player only plays Test cricket, he will be assessed against other Test players and compen-

sated accordingly. The best performers in the Test category will earn up to PKR 4 million per month, while those with lower performances will receive between PKR 3 million and PKR 3.5 million.

"Similar performance-based categories will apply to Test-ODI and ODI-T20 players," he added.

He said players, in order to qualify for the central contracts, must feature in at least six first-class matches for the Test category central contracts.

Test-category players will be granted No Objection Certificates (NOCs) for overseas four-day competitions, while players in the Test-ODI category may receive permission to participate in one franchise league.

Meanwhile, cricketers in the ODI-T20 category must play at least two List A matches and 10 domestic T20 matches and will be eligible for two NOCs.

Players contracted solely in the T20 category will be required to participate in domestic T20 competitions but may otherwise play franchise cricket.

Aqib stated that salaries in the Test-ODI category could rise to as much as PKR 4.8 million per month.

"You can't expect a player who has had his base in T20 cricket and has been playing the format for 2-3 years to suddenly succeed in Test cricket," he said. (PTI)

# WPL has taught me how to handle pressure and approach situations differently: Nandani Sharma



MUMBAI, June 24: India seamer Nandani Sharma says her maiden stint in the Women's Premier League has taught her how to handle pressure and approach situations differently.

The Delhi Capitals bowler was the joint-highest wicket-taker in last WPL season with 17 wickets in 10 innings, a performance that helped her to find a spot in the Indian squad for the Women's T20 World Cup.

"The WPL has changed me a lot as a cricketer. I have learned so much, from sharing the dressing room with big players to watching how they prepare, how they handle pressure, and how they approach different situations," Nandani

told JioHotstar.

"Now I see cricket in a different way. Earlier, I used to think that if I just bowl, I will get wickets. But now I understand that there is so much more to the game."

"There is planning, reading the batter, adapting to conditions, and communicating with teammates. I have learned a lot, and all of it is helping me in my journey," she added.

Nandani said while Irfan Pathan inspired her to swing the ball while growing up, Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Jasprit Bumrah are the bowlers she looks up to now.

"I grew up watching Irfan Pathan sir

bowl. The way he swung the ball and took wickets, that really made me want to do the same," she said.

"Currently, I look up to Bhuvneshwar and Bumrah. The way they bowl with control and variations is something I try to learn from."

"In women's cricket, I am a huge fan of Marizanne Kapp. She bowls with pace, hits the right areas, and always gives her best. Watching her inspires me to keep pushing myself," added Nandani.

The Chandigarh native revealed even as she was doing well as a seamer coming through the ranks, the idea of becoming a spinner did occur to her.

"At one point, I thought about becoming a spinner. The idea crossed my mind more than once. But things were going well in fast bowling. I was picking up wickets and getting better with every game," Nandani said.

"I didn't pay much attention to that thought. Fast bowling is very difficult. Injuries happen often. You must stay extra fit and take more care of your body. I used to think, should I change, should I try spin bowling?"

"But then I would see myself succeeding with pace, and the thought of switching to spin would fade away. Wickets kept coming, and that gave me confidence," she added. (PTI)

## National record holder Gulveer fails to breach Asian Games qualifying time in 5000m



BHUBANESWAR, June 24: Reigning Asian champion and national record holder Gulveer Singh failed to breach the Asian Games qualifying mark set by the national federation in the men's 5000m race, clocking a mediocre time in the opening event of the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships held on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old Uttar Pradesh athlete, who had clinched a 10,000m bronze medal at the 2022 Asian Games, clocked 13:52.92 to win the race. But his time was well outside the Asian Games qualifying time of 13 minutes and 39.18 seconds set by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI).

Singh's timing was also far below his outdoor national record of 13:03.93 set last month in Los Angeles, USA. In February 2025, he had become the first Indian to run a 5000m race in sub 13 minutes when he clocked 12 minutes 59.77 seconds to set both a national and Asian Indoor record.

The AFI's selection committee may still consider Singh for the Asian Games as he has already breached the qualifying standard earlier in the year in USA.

Singh is currently training at the high-altitude centre in Colorado Springs, USA, under foreign coach Scott Simmons, with full support from the government's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC). This year, he has competed in seven events, all in the USA, and the National Inter-State outing was his first competition in India this season. He has been named for both the 5000m and 10,000m in the 32-member Indian squad for the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland.

"I am not satisfied with the timing, it's a bit warm. Also, it was a new track, there is less grip and more bounce. I had not done continuous speed workout on this track," Singh said later. (PTI)

# Daniel Muñoz scores and Colombia edges Congo 1-0 to reach the knockout stage at the World Cup

**GUADALAJARA, June 24:** Daniel Muñoz helped Colombia break through Congo's stingy defense and advance to the knockout stage of the World Cup with a 1-0 win on Tuesday night.

Muñoz scored in the 76th minute after the Colombians had been held back by a strong performance from Congo goalkeeper Lionel Mpasí, who made five difficult saves in the first 20 minutes.

Mpasí had no chance to stop Muñoz's left-footed strike from inside the area after the ball deflected off a defender. It was Muñoz's second goal in the tournament, and the Crystal Palace fullback was named the man of the match.

"We played with intensity and aggression, and we stuck to our style," Muñoz said. "We earned these three points as a team and for all the fans who came out to support us. This victory gives us a morale boost. We don't want to settle for this."

Congo twice came close to equalizing in stoppage time, with Colombia goalkeeper Camilo Vargas making a superb save of a long-range strike by Nathanael Mbunga and then stopping a header



by Chancel Mbemba off the ensuing corner kick.

"We probably could have scored more goals, but Congo made it difficult and it was tense there until the end," Colombia coach Néstor Lorenzo said. "But I think we were the deserved winners."

Colombia star forward Luis Díaz had two goals called back in

ahead of Portugal and five clear of Congo. Portugal routed Uzbekistan 5-0 behind a pair of goals by Ronaldo earlier Tuesday in Houston.

Colombia needs at least a draw against Portugal on Saturday to win the group. That result would also be enough to send Portugal to the knockout stage.

Colombia, which did not qualify for the 2022 World Cup, is ranked 11th in the world, third best among South American teams behind Brazil and Argentina. Los Cafeteros opened with a 3-1 win over Uzbekistan. Congo, ranked 47th, had its World Cup preparations affected because of an Ebola outbreak.

Many Congo fans were prevented from traveling for the tournament because of restrictions tied to Ebola.

One fan who missed the first game because of quarantine requirements was Michel Nkuka Mboladinga, who gained fame during the Africa Cup of Nations for posing as a statue of Congo's assassinated independence hero Patrice Lumumba. He made it to the game in Guadalajara, maintaining his statue pose throughout the

match.

Colombia had never been involved in a scoreless draw in 23 World Cup appearances.

The team's play improved on Tuesday after Juan Quintero came off the bench to replace James Rodríguez, who joined Colombia greats Freddy Rincón and Carlos Valderrama with 10 World Cup appearances.

It was all Colombia at the start, with Los Cafeteros creating several scoring opportunities that Mpasí turned away.

The goalkeeper saved long-range shots by Rodríguez, Johan Mojica and Gustavo Puerta, and close-range attempts by Díaz and Muñoz. He also came up with a big stop on a close-range strike by Díaz in the 50th minute.

"Our goalkeeper was excellent today, but I'm not surprised. He's been having excellent matches with us," Congo coach Sébastien Desabre said. "Collectively the defense had a hard time but we did defend well overall, except for the goal. We must recognize that Colombia is superior, even though we could have equalized in the end. Now we have a decisive match ahead of us." (AP)

# Australia beats Pakistan by 113 runs to stay unbeaten at the Women's T20 World Cup



**LEEDS, June 24:** Australia swatted aside Pakistan by 113 runs and remained unbeaten in the Women's Twenty20 World Cup at Headingley.

Despite being four from four with one group game left, Australia has not secured a semifinals berth. Group rivals South Africa and India could yet wind up with four wins, too. Australia finishes against India at sold-out Lord's on Sunday. Australia has never missed the semifinals.

Defending champion New Zealand and Sri Lanka held on to their slim semifinals hopes after winning their doubleheader in Bristol. New Zealand overcame Scotland by six wickets and Sri Lanka thumped Ireland by nine wickets.

Sri Lanka's Chamari Athapaththu hit the eighth century in World Cup history, an unbeaten 106 of her side's 134 runs, just two days after saying she felt like "a failure as a captain" following a defeat to the West Indies.

Perry collects 71 and 2-9. Australia posted 199-7 and bowled out Pakistan for 86 in the 14th over.

Australia lost Beth Mooney to the game's first ball but recovered with a 64-1 powerplay — the highest of the tournament — as Ellyse Perry and Georgia Voll battered Pakistan.

Their 100-run stand in 56 balls included 39 by Voll. Perry fell for 71 off 48 and cameos by Annabel Sutherland (27) and Nicola Carey (26) kept the rate up.

Mooney retired hurt on Saturday with a stiff back but kept wicket on Tuesday when she appeared to hurt her right wrist. But she brushed it off and took three catches.

Pakistan self-destructed in three run outs, two of them the fault of opener Muneeba Ali, who top-scored with 32.

Perry claimed two wickets in her only over, and captain Sophie Molineux and Sutherland also got braces. Georgia Wareham got a wicket in two overs including 11 dot balls.

"We've got options, we've got depth, we are in a good position in that space," Molineux said. "We al-

ways review our games and there are things we wanna tick off, and even though we've had a couple of strong wins I don't think we've ticked everything off."

Athapaththu keeps semifinal hopes alive

Athapaththu is a trailblazer for Sri Lanka, playing at her 10th T20 World Cup, and used to spearheading her side's hopes. But scores of 4, 27, and 2 amid one win prompted her to downgrade herself.

Ireland bore the brunt of Athapaththu's rebound. She sent the first delivery past mid-off to the fence and preyed on poor bowling. She scored 50 off 32 balls and needed only 26 more to complete her first World Cup hundred and fourth in T20s, which included 76 off boundaries.

Of course, Athapaththu hit the winning runs from her 17th boundary, and celebrated a massive Sri Lanka win by nine wickets with 4.3 overs remaining.

"I got out early last game. I was disappointed about that but we won today and that's what matters to me as a player, as a captain," Athapaththu said. "I just played my natural game, I always attack. I tried my best to do my best."

Ireland, still trying to win its first ever World Cup match, lost three wickets cheaply in the powerplay but fashioned a comeback thanks to captain Gaby Lewis and Leah Paul. Lewis scored a century when Ireland beat Sri Lanka for the first time in 2024 and made 59 off 50 balls here when she was bowled by Athapaththu.

**New Zealand too Sharp for Scotland**

Izzy Sharp and Brooke Halliday lifted New Zealand from 26-3 in a wretched powerplay with a partnership of 101 that wasn't broken until victory was only five runs away.

Sharp was the aggressor and out for a 43-ball 62, her career-best T20 score, and Halliday was unbeaten on 41 for New Zealand to reach 132-4 with 10 balls to spare and live to fight another day.

New Zealand captain Melie Kerr said of Sharp, "She has the potential to be one of New Zealand's best ever and the best in the world." (AP)

## Off-field issues add to Pakistan's World Cup woes

**LAHORE, June 24:** The Pakistan women's cricket team is going through a harrowing time on the field in the Women's T20 World Cup in England, and to make matters worse, reports have emerged about disagreements and a tense environment in the squad.

Although the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has neither denied nor confirmed them, several posts and reports on social and mainstream media suggest problems within the team. Pakistan suffered its fourth straight defeat in the World Cup against Australia on Tuesday night at Leeds. Since landing in Ireland before the mega event, the team has yet to win a single match, and they were also winless in the triangular series they played against Ireland and West Indies prior to the tournament.

Last year also Pakistan finished at the bottom of the points table in the ICC 50-overs World Cup in India and Sri Lanka where the team played all its games in Sri Lanka.

Reports say that the there was a big disagreement between team mentor and unofficial head coach, Wahab Riaz, and captain Fatima Sana over selection matters. Before the match against Bangladesh, Sana objected to the husband of senior player, Aaliya Riaz, staying in her room in the team hotel.

"It was on Sana's insistence that Ali Younis was asked to vacate the room. Then, on the day before the game against Bangladesh, Aaliya and her husband went out for sightseeing when there was a team practice scheduled," one report said. (PTI)

# Iyer, Gill can help ease Suryansh into international cricket, says mentor Paranjape

**NEW DELHI, June 24:** It's a "lucky break" but Suryansh Shedge can turn his unexpected India call-up into a memorable learning experience by simply being observant inside an experienced dressing room with some help from young captains Shreyas Iyer and Shubman Gill, says his mentor and former national selector Jatin Paranjape.

Paranjape, also a former India player who has guided the Mumbai all-rounder over the last one-and-a-half years, said Iyer's T20 leadership could be particularly reassuring for the 23-year-old Shedge as the two have shared a successful association in Mumbai and Punjab Kings.

"Yeah, I think not only Shreyas but also (ODI captain) Shubman. Because both of them are young captains. And both of them are captains with a lot of empathy," Paranjape told PTI after Shedge's maiden India call-up for the white-ball tour of Ireland and England following the injury-forced withdrawal of Nitish Kumar Reddy.

"And they will understand the pressure Suryansh will be feeling, the nervousness that he will be feeling. Shreyas definitely, because they know each other, Suryansh has played under him. So, there will be a lot of comfort."

With both Hardik Pandya and



Reddy out of the UK tour, Paranjape feels even in ODIs, Gill can guide Shedge.

"Mainly because he is young and he will be able to relate to what's going on inside that debutant's mind, basically."

For the upcoming tour, beginning with two T20Is against Ireland from June 26, Paranjape's advice is simple: absorb as much knowledge as possible.

"If you are able to be a sponge... And my advice to him is to be a sponge around all the champions in that dressing room. So, I think if he is able to adapt to that atmosphere, I think England is a great location," he said.

Paranjape said the opportunity has come through hard work and

should be embraced with humility. "This has come as a lucky break. He accepts it with all humility and he will try to do his best for the team. That's the message. Always be a team-man. Think like a captain and try to win games for your team," he said.

Paranjape said he first met Shedge through a mutual friend and immediately recognised a profile that Indian cricket desperately needs.

"I have been involved with him for probably the last year and a half. And he is a very, very talented cricketer and he has shown glimpses of that talent in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy."

"But what really enthralls me is that here is an all-rounder and we

# It'll be history if Sooryavanshi makes debut in UK: Narasimha Rao

**BENGALURU, June 24:** The Vaibhav Sooryavanshi mania has spread among cricket fans across Europe ahead of his possible debut against Ireland and they are jostling for tickets even at the last minute, says former India and Ireland cricketer MV Narasimha Rao.

The wonder kid could be making his India debut during the two-match T20I series against Ireland, beginning at Belfast on June 26, and Rao like many others can't wait to see him real-time.

"I think they (local organisers) will have to put more seats because this stadium (Stormont ground) has only 7000 seats or something. Already, people from other parts of Europe like Paris etc want to come, hopefully, we can find a way to accommodate them," Rao told PTI from Strabane, Ireland.

"So, I think it will be history, a momentous day if he makes his debut in Ireland. It was unexpected, and in the last 10 days, it's really a big excitement here," he added.

Rao, who played four Tests for India and then for Ireland in the mid 90s before they attained the ICC member status, said Sooryavanshi may enjoy batting at Belfast.

"He's phenomenal, great to watch and I'd watched him on the television during the IPL. He may enjoy batting as the wickets here are generally slow and Ireland doesn't have the same kind of fast



bowlers, you know, with pace," he said.

Rao foresees a bigger challenge for the 15-year-old during the T20I series against England.

"But once he goes to England, it'll be a big test for him because the ball moves there and weather too changes even in the short duration of a T20. But I wish him a good series."

Rao, who has extensive coaching experience with Hyderabad and in Ireland, offered his observations on Sooryavanshi's astonishing success till now.

"He reminds me — from a few of the matches I watched of Gary Sobers — the high backswing and the bat, straight it comes, and he

picks up the ball very quickly. He's so versatile and can play every shot in the game at this young age."

The 71-year-old felt that the biggest challenge for the left-hander will be to keep his feet on the ground amidst the constant rush of adulations.

"He has God-given talent. But my word is that — like Sachin Tendulkar — he should keep his head down and feet on the ground. He should maintain that discipline of fitness and practise hard and adapt to different wickets. It'll be a big test for him because he is a superstar now," he said.

Rao is also eager to meet India vice-captain Tilak Varma, whom he has coached at Hyderabad dur-

ing the batter's Under-16 days.

Rao, who was the first Indian Test cricketer to be awarded an MBE, will ring the Roy Torrens bell ahead of the second T20I on June 28.

"It's a very big honour and emotional as well. The most important thing is that I played for both the countries (India and Ireland)."

"I will cherish it for the rest of my life, because I coached, and put a lot into Irish cricket over the last three and half decades," he said.

**Face off with Ambrose**

The conversation took Rao to his early days in Ireland.

"Basically, Ireland were short of players those days, and wanted me to play against Northamptonshire in 1995. I was a bit hesitant because I was not regularly practicing and all. But I knew the conditions as I had earlier played for Lancashire."

"So, I played against Northants in the NatWest Bank Trophy (60-over-a-side), and they had a strong side, featuring players like Curtly Ambrose, Allan Lamb, Kevin Curran (father of current England players Sam and Tom Curran), Rob Bailey etc. Ambrose bowled like wind that day (12.5-17.2), and some of our batters said they did not even see the ball."

However, Rao, who guided Hyderabad to their lone Ranji Trophy title post Independence in the 1986-87 season, held firm to make an unbeaten 47. (PTI)



**NEW DELHI, June 24:** Rejecting suggestions that she is seeking preferential treatment, star Indian table tennis player Manika Batra on Wednesday threatened to take legal action if she is not provided a "factual explanation" for the "arbitrary decision" to omit her from the Asian Games.

Manika once again sought Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya's intervention in the matter, asserting that she "deserves transparency, consistency, and accountability in the selection process."

Manika was left out of the Asian Games for failing to meet the selection criteria of the Table Tennis Federation of India (TTFI) that demanded participation in national events.

"Over the last few days, I have seen many people say that I am seeking a place in the Asian Games team or that I am asking for special consideration. Let me state this

# Not asking for special treatment; will take legal action if questions not answered: Manika

clearly. I am not asking to be selected. I am not asking anyone to overturn the decision. I am asking for answers," she said in a fresh statement.

"I sincerely hope that a clear and factual explanation is provided. However, if I do not receive satisfactory answers regarding the basis of this decision, I will be left with no option but to explore all remedies available to me, including legal recourse through my legal team," she warned. The former Commonwealth Games gold-medallist and two-time Olympian said the TTFI has not communicated the specific reason for her omission.

"I am currently World No. 51. Rankings in table tennis are updated every week and operate on a rolling points system. That naturally raises important questions. What time-line was considered while evaluating rankings? Was the assessment based

on the previous 12 month, six months, the previous two months, or a single weekly ranking snapshot?" she asked.

"If an athlete who has consistently been around the Top 50 moves from 50 to 51 over a week or two, does that suddenly make her ineligible? These are questions that deserve clear answers," she said.

Responding to criticism of her non-appearance at national level events, Manika said her busy international calendar should have been taken into account by TTFI.

"I have immense respect for national events and have always been proud to compete in them. But athletes competing regularly on the international circuit often have to manage an intense global calendar, recovery periods, travel, visa processing and preparation for major events."

"Domestic participation cannot be viewed in isolation from international commitments. Having said that, I will certainly be more mindful of participating in national events going forward and will continue to do my best to contribute to Indian table tennis at every level," she pointed out.

Describing her international performances this season as strong, Manika said her victories against top Asian players and highly-rated Chinese opponents on the World Table Tennis circuit should have been considered when evaluation was being done by the selection committee. (PTI)