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Aadhaar issuance to above 18 yrs barred in Assam

Step taken to ensure that no illegal B'deshis get Aadhaar cards: CM

GUWAHATI, June 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said his cabinet has decided that Aadhaar cards would not be issued to those aged over 18 years to ensure illegal immigrants don't acquire the document.

In exceptional cases, the district commissioner will have to send a proposal to the state government seeking permission for issuing the card, he said at a press conference here after chairing a cabinet meeting.

The government will then decide whether the applicant is eligible for the card, the chief minister said.

Remarking that Aadhaar card issuance has reached a saturation point in the state, Sarma said, "In some districts, it has crossed the 100 per cent mark, and we must ascertain who these people are who are taking the additional Aadhaar cards."

The step is being taken to ensure that no illegal Bangladeshis get Aadhaar cards, he said.

Aadhaar cards will, however, continue to be issued to people from the Tea Tribe community, the Scheduled Tribes, the Scheduled Castes and the differently abled, as many are yet to receive the cards.

"The ban will, however, be absolute from April 1, 2027, and people from these communities above the



age of 18 will also stop receiving it from that date," the chief minister said.

Aadhaar cards, however, will continue to be issued to those below the age of 18.

Sarma had earlier said the state government would be "very strict" in issuing Aadhaar cards, and it would not be easy to get the document in Assam.

Last year, he had said the Assam government was mulling stricter rules for the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Court of inquiry ordered ascertain cause of accident

5 IAF personnel killed in crash at Jorhat airbase

HT Correspondent
Jorhat, June 13: Five Indian Air Force (IAF) personnel, including two officers, were killed when an AN-32 transport aircraft crashed while attempting to land at the Jorhat Air Force Station in Assam on Saturday morning.

The co-pilot survived the crash with injuries and is undergoing treatment at a military hospital.

According to the IAF, the Russian-origin Antonov AN-32 aircraft, operated by the 43 Squadron, was carrying cargo and was on a routine operational sortie when the accident occurred at around 10 am during its landing approach at the Rowrah-based airbase.

The deceased personnel have been identified as Squadron Leader Prashant Singh, Flight Lieutenant Shubham Kumar, Sergeant Jitendra Sharma, Agniveervayu Khemaram Kumawat and Agniveervayu Danish Alam.



Sources said six personnel were on board the aircraft.

The plane was reportedly scheduled to fly from Jorhat to the Chabua Air Force Station but sought to return shortly after take-off.

During landing, the aircraft allegedly lost control, skidded off the

runway, crossed a parallel taxiway and broke into two sections before being engulfed in flames.

Rescue and emergency teams, including fire service personnel, rushed to the crash site and launched immediate response operations.

In a statement, the IAF said it

deeply regretted the loss of its personnel and extended condolences to the bereaved families. "Sqn Ldr Prashant Singh, Flt Lt Shubham Kumar, Sgt Jitendra Sharma, Agniveervayu Khemaram Kumawat and Agniveervayu Danish Alam made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty," the statement said.

The Air Force has constituted a Court of Inquiry to ascertain the exact cause of the accident.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh expressed deep anguish over the tragedy and paid tribute to the deceased air warriors.

He said their courage and service to the nation would always be remembered with pride and gratitude.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also condoled the deaths and said the loss of the five brave air warriors was deeply saddening.

He stated that the Assam Government (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM congratulates DRDO on maiden flight-test of ballistic missiles

GUWAHATI, June 13: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday congratulated the Defence Research and Development Organisation on the successful maiden flight-test of the Naval Anti-Ship Missile-Medium Range ballistic missile.

In a social media post, Sarma said with these successful trials, India now has a phenomenal ballistic missile defence shield that can intercept and neutralise 5,000-km-class enemy missiles at the exo-atmospheric level.

"This is really a huge achievement, Team @DRDO India! Well done", he said in a post on 'X'.

"In short, we now have an interception capability far beyond what conventional 'Iron Dome' systems can achieve. And what makes this even more (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India successfully demonstrates BMD capability to take down hostile ballistic missiles

NEW DELHI, June 13: India has successfully carried out flight-tests of key platforms this week to demonstrate its multi-layered Ballistic Missile Defence system's power to intercept intercontinental missiles, joining an elite group of nations with this capability.

The BMDs are capable of intercepting incoming long-range nuclear missiles and hostile aircraft including AWACS (airborne warning and control systems). A very few countries including the US, Russia and China are known to have Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) capabilities.

Three consecutive flight-tests were conducted on June 10 and 11 to demonstrate multi-layered BMD against incoming missiles, according to the defence ministry.

The tests were conducted to check the capability to take down incoming ballistic missiles, both



inside and outside the Earth's atmospheric limits.

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) successfully demonstrated multiple crucial technologies bolstering the nation's defence capabilities against different types of enemy threats, the ministry said on Saturday.

It said multi-layered BMD capability was successfully demonstrated through these flight-tests.

"The interceptors successfully engaged their respective targets. The systems are designed and developed with the latest technologies to address emerging missile threats," it said.

"These tests have put the country in the elite group of nations having BMD capability to engage up to intercontinental ballistic missiles," the ministry said.

It also said the maiden flight-test of the Naval Anti-Ship Missile-Medium Range (NASM-MR) was carried out successfully.

Under the BMD programme, India has been developing the capability to intercept hostile missiles at both endo-atmospheric and exo-atmospheric levels.

The endo-atmospheric missiles are the ones (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC to distribute appointment letters to 198 LP teachers on Foundation Day

Recruitment aimed at strengthening primary education in remote areas

HT Bureau
DIPHU, June 13: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) will distribute appointment letters to 198 Assistant Teachers for Lower Primary (LP) schools in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong on June 23, coinciding with the observance of KAAC Foundation Day.

Announcing the development, KAAC Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang said the merit list for the recruitment of TET-qualified teachers has already been finalised and published.

In a Facebook post, Ronghang stated that the appointments are being made under the Notified Special Focus Area Schools of Karbi Anglong as part of the council's ongoing efforts to strengthen the education sector and improve access to quality primary education in remote and underserved areas.

He said the recruitment of the 198 teachers would help address teacher shortages and enhance the learning environment in schools across the twin hill districts.

"Teachers are the foundation of a strong educational system, and these appointments will significantly en-



hance the learning environment in our schools," Ronghang said while congratulating the selected candidates.

Expressing confidence in the newly recruited teachers, he said they would play a vital role in shaping the future of children through dedicated and sincere service.

The CEM also informed that recruitment for the remaining 131 sanctioned posts of Assistant Teachers (Lower Primary) would be (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Jaishankar raises Indian mariners' killing with Rubio; calls US strike on commercial shipping unjustified

NEW DELHI, June 13: External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Saturday raised with US Secretary of State Marco Rubio the killing of three Indian mariners in a US military strike on a merchant vessel in the Gulf of Oman.

Jaishankar, currently on a visit to Europe, spoke to the US Secretary of State on phone.

Following the conversation, the external affairs minister described the "lethal" actions by the US military against commercial shipping as unjustified.

"Spoke to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio this evening. I reiterated India's strong protest at the attacks by the US Navy in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners," Jaishankar said on social media.

"Such lethal actions against commercial shipping are not justified," he said.

India on Friday summoned US Charge d' Affaires Jason Meeks and told him that the American military's lethal strikes on commercial vessels with Indian crew members off the coast of Oman are unacceptable.

The senior diplomat was summoned on Wednesday night as well.

A Palau-flagged oil tanker, Marivex, carrying 24 Indian seafarers, was disabled by US forces on June 8. All crew members were safely rescued.

On June 10, the US struck another Palau-flagged tanker, Settebello, killing three out of the 24 Indian



sailors on board.

Another vessel, Jalveer, a Guinea-Bissau-flagged tanker with 20 Indians, was attacked on Thursday.

Following the attack on Jalveer, India said three merchant ships with Indian crew members came under attack from American military off the coast of Oman this week resulting in the death of three nationals.

It was New Delhi's first public acknowledgement that US Navy targeted the three ships with Indian crew members.

After Meeks was summoned on Friday, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said a "strong protest" was lodged with him regarding the continuing attacks by US naval forces on (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Shah directs committee on demographic change to study border districts

NEW DELHI, June 13: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday directed the high-level committee on demographic change to study the shift in population structure in border districts, officials said.

Chairing the meeting of the committee, Shah also asked it to visit border areas, metro cities and industrial towns for an assessment of changes because of illegal migration and other unnatural causes, they said.

The Home Ministry had formed the high-level committee to assess demographic changes across India due to "illegal immigration and other unnatural causes" and suggest measures to address these challenges.

The Committee is headed by retired Supreme Court judge Justice Prakash Prabhakar Naolekar and includes the census commissioner, along with retired IAS officer Durga Shankar Mishra, ex-IPS of-

ficer Balaji Srivastava and Dr Shamika Ravi as members.

The joint secretary (foreigners-1), Ministry of Home Affairs, is the member secretary of this committee.

Announcing the formation of the committee last month, Shah had emphasised that demographic change is a serious issue linked not only to the country's sovereignty but also to national security, law and order, profound changes in social structure and the preservation of tribal society.

"This committee will conduct a comprehensive assessment of demographic changes occurring across India due to illegal immigration and other unnatural causes, analyse patterns of abnormal population shifts at the levels of religious and social communities, and present a planned and time-bound solution for the same," he had said.

The high-level committee will conduct a scientific evaluation of

the demographic changes taking place in different regions of the country due to illegal immigration and other unusual factors, examine their causes, and suggest suitable policy, legislative and administrative interventions, a government statement had said.

According to the Terms of Reference of the committee, it will comprehensively deliberate upon the challenges arising from demographic changes, including illegal immigration.

It will also study the possible causes of demographic changes, such as cross-border activities (including illegal immigration), economic opportunities, and other socio-environmental factors, the statement said.

The panel will also identify the underlying factors behind these changes, which include illegal immigration, abnormal settlement patterns and orchestrated migration, it said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Excise (Amendment) Rules, 2026 notified

GUWAHATI, June 13: The Assam government has notified the Assam Excise (Amendment) Rules, 2026, introducing major changes in liquor sales, licensing, location of liquor outlets, revenue collection, and the promotion of heritage alcoholic beverages.

The new rules mandate minimum guaranteed revenue payments for liquor license holders, impose stricter distance norms for retail outlets, and regulate liquor sales and license transfers.

The rules notified by the Assam Governor on Friday will come into effect across the state with immediate effect.

The reforms also provide significant support to indigenous communities through exclusive manufacturing rights and reduced fees for heritage alcoholic beverages.

Additionally, the state created a new category called "Assam Made Liquor" to promote locally produced (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

At least 55 greater hog badgers estimated to be present in Assam's Kaziranga: Officials

GUWAHATI, June 13: At least 55 greater hog badgers are estimated to be present in Assam's Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve (KNPTR), indicating a healthy and potentially viable population of the globally vulnerable species across the protected landscape, park officials said on Saturday.

The first scientific assessment of the greater hog badger, a nocturnal burrowing mammal called 'Mati Gahori' in Assamese, has confirmed that the species, protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, is thriving in Kaziranga's diverse habitats, they said.

The study was conducted recently by Kaziranga's Tiger Cell in collaboration with the Wildlife Conservation Trust and Tiasa Adhya of The Fishing Cat Project.



The objective was to estimate the density and habitat occupancy of greater hog badgers within the tiger reserve.

Assam Forest and Environment Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, in

Badgers in the Park. The healthy presence of this elusive, nocturnal burrower across diverse habitats reflects the strength of Kaziranga's ecosystems."

Every species, big or small, plays a vital role in maintaining ecological balance and biodiversity, he added.

Globally, there are three extant species of hog badgers -- the greater hog badger, northern hog badger and Sumatran hog badger -- of which the first two are found in India.

The species is distributed across parts of South, Central and South-east Asia. Its range extends from Bangladesh and northeastern India eastwards through Myanmar, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, and southwards to Cambodia and peninsular Thailand. According to the International (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

RPF recovers contraband worth ₹ 62 lakh, rescues eight minors in major NFR operations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 13: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) conducted a series of successful operations between June 9 and 10, leading to the recovery of contraband worth over ₹ 62.45 lakh, the rescue of eight minors and the apprehension of seven offenders across multiple states.

According to NFR, the operations were carried out across railway stations and trains in Assam, Bihar, Tripura, Nagaland and West Bengal as part of efforts to strengthen railway security, curb illegal activities and ensure passenger safety.

During the two-day drive, RPF personnel detected 19 cases and recovered 12,666 kg of ganja valued at over ₹ 6.33 lakh, 279.21 grams of brown sugar worth more than ₹ 55.84 lakh and 155 bottles of illicit liquor valued at approximately ₹



28,000. The force also recovered three stolen mobile phones worth around ₹ 45,000.

In addition to the seizure of contraband, RPF personnel rescued eight minors, including five boys and three girls, and apprehended seven individuals in connection with various offences.

One of the most significant

achievements was the seizure of 279.21 grams of brown sugar at Badarpur Railway Station. Acting in coordination with the Government Railway Police (GRP) and the Special Intelligence Branch (SIB), RPF personnel apprehended one person and recovered the narcotic substance valued at more than (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IDBI Bank launches 'IDBI Innovate 2026' hackathon

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 13: IDBI Bank has launched its flagship hackathon, "IDBI Innovate 2026," aimed at fostering innovation and accelerating digital transformation across the banking sector.

The hackathon was formally inaugurated by IDBI Bank Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Rakesh Sharma, marking a significant step in the bank's efforts to embrace emerging technologies and strengthen customer-centric digital solutions.

Build around the theme "Build. Integrate. Transform.", the initiative seeks to bring together startups, fintech companies, developers and innovators from across the country to develop practical solutions for real-world challenges faced by the banking industry.

The hackathon is designed to harness technological expertise and creative thinking to drive innovation in banking services, operational efficiency and customer experience.

Speaking on the occasion, Rakesh Sharma said the initiative aims to create a dynamic platform where innovative ideas and talented minds can collaborate to redefine banking solutions for the future.

GRID India seeks fallback mechanism, ring-fencing in CERC market-coupling draft

NEW DELHI, June 13: Grid Controller of India Ltd (GRID India) has sought a fallback mechanism and institutional ring-fencing of market-coupling operations in its comments on draft regulations proposed by the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC), while broadly supporting the rollout of market coupling in India's power exchanges.

In a representation submitted on June 8 on the draft CERC (Power Market) (Second Amendment) Regulations, 2026, GRID India said the proposed designation of the state-owned grid operator as the sole Market Coupling Operator (MCO) would simplify implementation and enable faster rollout of market coupling, but could also create a single point of failure for electricity market clearing.

The draft regulations designate GRID India as the MCO responsible for unified price discovery across power exchanges.

While backing the proposal, GRID India said a regulatory fallback mechanism should be introduced to allow power exchanges to undertake price discovery in the event of a technical disruption at the MCO.

A single MCO design introduces a single point of failure. In case of any disruption, the entire market clearing function would be affected," it said, citing instances in Europe where technical issues led to partial decoupling of electricity markets.

GRID India also proposed that the market-clearing function be institutionally separated from its other operations. It suggested creating a dedicated cell within the organisation initially and, at a later



stage, considering a wholly owned subsidiary to undertake MCO functions.

It said the regulations should retain provisions allowing CERC to notify the Market Coupling Operator through a regulatory order rather than permanently designating a specific entity in the regulations, which would provide flexibility if a separate subsidiary is created in future.

GRID India further recommended the creation of a Market Coupling Steering Committee comprising CERC, GRID India, power exchanges and external auditors or market monitors to oversee implementation, drawing on governance models used in European electricity markets.

It also called for a regulatory framework governing inter-exchange financial settlements, noting that payment schedules currently embedded in exchange bye-laws would need to be aligned with market-coupling processes.

In addition, GRID India urged CERC to mandate stakeholder consultation before finalising the Power Market Coupling Procedure, which will govern bid formats, operational timelines, encryption standards and settlement processes. It also sought provisions for parallel runs and transition arrangements before market coupling goes live.

On fee determination, GRID India said charges for MCO services should be notified by CERC through a regulatory order rather than being prescribed through the Power Market Coupling Procedure, arguing that fee-setting for regulatory functions requires a more formal legal framework.

Market coupling seeks to aggregate buy and sell bids from multiple power exchanges into a single market-clearing process, resulting in a uniform electricity price across exchanges and potentially improving market efficiency and liquidity. (PTI)

Civil society platform seeks Suwendu help to stop SBI from shifting key centres from Kolkata

KOLKATA, June 13: A civil society organisation has urged West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari to intervene against SBI's reported move to shift key centralised processing centres from Kolkata to Mumbai, claiming the relocation would adversely impact employment and weaken the city's status as a banking hub.

In a letter to the Adhikari, Bank Bachao Desh Bachao Manch sought immediate intervention to prevent the proposed shifting of SBI's Loan Central Processing Centre (LCPC), Centralised Cheque Processing Centre (CCPC) and Centralised Pension Processing Centre (CPPC) from the city.

SBI has internally decided to centralise these operations and vacate the Kolkata premises from where the activities are currently being carried out.

This is the first letter by the Manch to the BJP-led state government. Earlier, the forum had approached the Mamata Banerjee government regarding the shifting of SBI's Global Market Unit from Kolkata, but no effective intervention followed.

According to the representation, the LCPC and CPPC together support around 160 permanent employees, while nearly 50 outsourced workers, over 50 vendors and service providers, and more than 30 other personnel are directly dependent on their functioning, joint convenors Biswaranjan Ray and Soumya Dutta said in the letter.

The Manch argued that the pro-



posed relocation was part of a broader trend of banking operations moving away from West Bengal, citing the merger of the erstwhile United Bank of India and Allahabad Bank, the shifting of SBI's registered office to Mumbai and the relocation of other banking functions.

Sources indicated that it is almost impossible for a state government to ask SBI to halt the relocation process once it is nearing completion, if not already completed.

Recalling the earlier transfer of SBI's Central Accounts Office from Kolkata, the organisation claimed that the move had resulted in the loss of nearly 400 jobs. It also alleged that the relocation of the Global Market Unit had led to a reduction of around 150 positions and a loss of GST-generating activity for the state. The platform requested the chief minister to take up the matter with SBI, the Department of Financial Services and the government of India to ensure that the processing centres continue to operate from Kolkata and that no further erosion of the state's banking infrastructure takes place. (PTI)

Tax Bar Association holds study circle on NPO taxation and GST adjudication

Experts discuss compliance challenges under new Income Tax regime and key aspects of GST litigation before tax professionals

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 13: The Tax Bar Association, Guwahati, organised a Study Circle Meeting at The Ornate Hotel, Ulubari, on Thursday, focusing on the taxation of non-profit organisations under the Income Tax Act and the evolving framework of GST adjudication and litigation.

The programme featured discussions on "Taxation of Non-Profit Organisations under the Income Tax Act, 1961 vis-à-vis the Income Tax Act, 2025: Practical Challenges, Navigating ITR-7 and Emerging Interpretational Issues" and "GST Adjudication - The Starting Point of GST Litigation."

The meeting began with a welcome address by the Chairman of the Study Circle Committee, CA Rakesh Kumar Agarwala. The session was chaired by Tax Bar Association President CA Pankaj Khandelia, who highlighted the relevance of the topics for tax professionals dealing with compli-

ance and litigation matters.

In his address, Khandelia expressed confidence that the deliberations would help participants better understand the complexities associated with compliance requirements of registered non-profit organisations as well as the legal and procedural aspects of GST disputes.

CA Gaurab Garodia, one of the resource persons, delivered a detailed presentation on the compliance framework applicable to non-profit organisations. He explained various provisions of the Income Tax Act, 1961 and the Income Tax Act, 2025, while drawing comparisons between the two legislations. He also discussed practical challenges and interpretational issues faced by professionals in handling ITR-7 filings and regulatory compliance for non-profit entities.

The second technical session was conducted by CA Omprakash Agarwala, who provided insights

into GST adjudication and litigation. He discussed important provisions of GST law, judicial pronouncements and landmark case laws relevant to tax practitioners. The session also examined various procedural and legal challenges commonly encountered during GST proceedings.

Both speakers used detailed presentations to explain the subjects, making the sessions highly interactive and informative for participants.

The Association also distributed new membership and life membership certificates to newly enrolled members during the programme.

A large number of Chartered Accountants, Company Secretaries, Cost Accountants, Advocates and Tax Consultants attended the event. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by Association Secretary CS Chandra Shekhar Sharma.

Contd. from Page 1...

5 IAF personnel

was in touch with the concerned authorities and stood ready to provide all necessary support and assistance. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi also expressed grief over the incident and conveyed his condolences to the families of the personnel who lost their lives in the crash.

Residents living near the airbase reported hearing a loud explosion followed by thick plumes of smoke rising from the crash site.

The accident has once again brought attention to the ageing AN-32 fleet, which has served as the backbone of the IAF's transport operations for decades, carrying personnel and supplies to some of the country's most challenging terrains.

The IAF currently operates around 90 AN-32 aircraft, although plans are underway to replace the ageing fleet along with its IL-76 transport aircraft.

The crash also revives memories of previous AN-32 tragedies. In June 2009, an AN-32 crashed in Arunachal Pradesh, killing all 13 persons on board.

Another AN-32 carrying 13 personnel disappeared after taking off from Jorhat in June 2019, with the wreckage later found in Arunachal Pradesh.

In 2016, an AN-32 with 29 personnel on board went missing over the Bay of Bengal, with its wreckage being located only in 2024.

Saturday's crash is also the latest military aviation accident in Assam, coming months after a Sukhoi Su-30MKI fighter aircraft crashed in Karbi Anglong district during a routine mission, killing both pilots on board. (With inputs from PTI)

Aadhaar issuance to

issuance of Aadhaar cards for adults as part of its efforts to curb illegal immigration from Bangladesh. The Supreme Court had said in a ruling on May 4 that the issuance of new Aadhaar cards only to citizens up to the age of six years require legislative intervention and appropriate amendments in the existing legal framework.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice Joymalya Bagchi gave the ruling after hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) seeking direction to the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) to issue new Aadhaar cards only to citizens up to the age of six years.

The bench said the appropriate recourse for the petitioner would be to bring all these issues to the notice of the state and other stakeholders to enable them to take cognisance of them.

In Assam, the biometrics of over 9 lakh people for issuing Aadhaar card were locked during the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC).

A petition was filed by then TMC MP Sushmita Dev for unlocking of the biometrics in 2022 and in September 2024, the Centre had unlocked the biometrics of these people so that they could get their Aadhaar cards.

The chief minister had then said the Centre had instructed the UIDAI to issue the cards as it has been established that there is "no correlation between inclusion of name in NRC and Aadhaar registration".

Sarma on Saturday said the cabinet has also approved the implementation of a framework for the VB-G RAM G Act in the state. He said it would be implemented from July 1.

The budgetary allocation is Rs 2,000 crore, and 125 man-days will be created for direct wage employment under the new rural employment generation law, he said.

Besides providing employment, importance will be given to creating assets, Sarma added.

The cabinet also approved the establishment of Guwahati Satellite Cities Development Authority (GSCDA) to plan, finance, and develop satellite cities in and around the city.

This will be within the jurisdiction of the Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority.

It was also decided in the meeting that cabinet approval will now be required for issuing 'no objection certificates' to officers of All India Services like IAS for central and inter-state deputation, the chief minister said.

Sarma said the budget session of the Assam Assembly will be convened on July 6, and the exact date for the budget presentation will be announced soon. (PTI)

KAAC to distribute

undertaken in a second phase. He said the necessary Staff Inspection Unit (SIU) approval for the posts is currently under process.

Reiterating the council's commitment to strengthening education, Ronghang said the KAAC would continue to focus on improving educational infrastructure, enhancing learning outcomes and creating greater opportunities for the younger generation.

He also extended his best wishes to the successful candidates and their families.

India successfully

that operate within the earth's atmosphere that covers an altitude below 100 km. The exo-atmospheric missiles are capable of completing missions in the upper-most region of the earth's atmosphere.

The latest flight-tests were witnessed by senior officials of DRDO and defence forces.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh congratulated the DRDO on successfully demonstrating these crucial technologies. "Multi-layered BMD capability was successfully demonstrated. The interceptors successfully engaged their respective targets. The systems are designed and developed with the latest technologies to address emerging missile threats," he said.

Singh said these tests have put India in the "elite group" of nations having BMD capabilities to engage missiles including ICBMs (Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles).

"Congratulations to DRDO on successfully demonstrating these crucial technologies," he posted on social media. (PTI)

CM congratulates DRDO

special is that we are now among an elite group of nations to have indigenously developed this superb system. Kudos!!", he said. The DRDO has successfully demonstrated a multi-layered Ballistic Missile Defence system and conducted the maiden flight-test of the Naval Anti-Ship Missile-Medium Range, marking a major boost to India's defence capabilities. The achievement places India among a select group of nations with advanced BMD capabilities, the DRDO said in a post on 'X'. (PTI)

Jaishankar raises Indian

commercial vessels carrying Indian mariners in the Gulf of Oman. The ministry said it once again "conveyed its deep concern over the use of lethal and deadly force against civilian shipping". (PTI)

Shah directs committee

Further, the committee will analyse structural population changes at the level of religious or social communities, particularly where they deviate from broader trends.

It will recommend a streamlined and permanent operational mechanism for the legal, fair, and time-bound identification, detention, and deportation of illegal immigrants already residing in the country, the statement had said. (PTI)

Assam Excise (Amendment)

alcoholic products while strengthening regulation and revenue collection across the sector. Revenue will be collected in four quarters at rates of 22 per cent, 25 per cent, 27 per cent, and 26 per cent, respectively.

Failure to pay the designated revenue will attract a 10 per cent penalty on the outstanding amount, along with an additional interest rate of 1.5 per cent per month for delayed payments.

Under the revised rules, liquor shops must follow new packaging and serving guidelines.

The amendment also brings changes in license shifting rules and introduces special provisions to protect and promote Assam's traditional heritage alcoholic beverages.

Manufacturing rights will be reserved for indigenous communities, with reduced license fees and a production limit of 1,000 litres per day. (PTI)

RPF recovers contraband

₹ 55.84 lakh. The accused was subsequently handed over to the GRP for legal action under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

Apart from enforcement activities, RPF personnel also provided timely medical assistance to three passengers at New Jalpaiguri, Araria and Tinsukia railway stations. Through prompt coordination with railway medical teams and local healthcare facilities, the passengers received immediate first aid and necessary treatment.

NFR officials stated that the operations underscore the RPF's commitment to combating crime, protecting vulnerable individuals and ensuring a safe and secure environment for railway passengers.

The railway authorities said the successful drives reflect the force's continued focus on maintaining a passenger-centric railway ecosystem while strengthening vigilance against illegal activities across the Northeast Frontier Railway network.

At least 55 greater

Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), while an exact global population estimate is unavailable, the population trend is declining due to habitat loss and intense poaching pressure. The species is therefore classified as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List. Officials said the greater hog badger is an ecologically important meso-carnivore whose conservation has implications beyond the survival of a single species.

As an omnivorous and highly fossorial mammal, it contributes to ecosystem functioning through soil disturbance, nutrient redistribution and the turnover of leaf litter during foraging activities.

The species is particularly sensitive to hunting and has suffered sharp declines across much of its Southeast Asian range. India and Thailand are believed to harbour the healthiest remaining populations, making conservation efforts in Assam and the Northeast especially important, officials said. (PTI)

REPAIRING AND RENOVATION OF RAILWAY SCHOOL

E-Tender Notice No. LMG/Engg/45

of 2026. Works tenders through "E"

Tendering system for and on behalf of

the president of India are invited for the

works as detailed below:- **Brief**

Description of Item: Repairing and

renovation of Railway School (H.S. &

Primary Block) & Nursery School By

repairing and Replacement of

damaged doors, Windows, repairing of

toilet blocks and other ancillary

development works at Lumding

under the jurisdiction of SSE/Works/

North/Lumding. **Tender Value:**

₹94,61,600.49/- **Earnest Money:**

₹1,89,200/- **Date & time of Closing**

of tender: At 15.00 hrs. on 06-07-

2026 & opening at 15.00 hrs. on 07-

07-2026. The complete information

with tender documents of above

e-tender will be available upto 15.00

hrs. on 06-07-2026 in the website

www.ireps.gov.in

DRM (W), Lumding

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Tender Notice No. CON/2026/MAY/

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from experienced and reputed contractor

(s/firm/s) for the following works. **Tender**

No. CE-CON-DK-PW-2026-03. Name of

work: Earthwork in cutting including

Slope protection CH-44.300 km to

CH-44.500 km in connection with

Dimapur (Dhansiri)-Kohima (Zuba) New

BG Railway Line project. **Approximate**

Value: ₹90,96,65,517.51/-; E-tender will

be closed at 14.30 hrs. on 14-07-2026

and opened at 15.30 hrs. on 14-07-2026.

For details of Tender please visit

www.ireps.gov.in

Chief Engineer/Con/ML Project/

Malgaon

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

(Construction Organisation)

"Serving Customers with a smile"

OPERATION OF IRON

REMOVAL PLANTS & VALVES

IN TINSUKIA DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: TSK/Engg/27

of 2026. Dated: 10-06-2026; E-

Tender are invited by the

undersigned for the following work:

Item No. 1: Brief Description of

Item: At Tinsukia Division-

Operation of Iron Removal plants

and valves under the jurisdiction of

SSE/WIC/Dibrugarh Town

(Total IRP=21 nos.). **Tender**

Value: ₹4,59,19,510/-; **Earnest**

Money: ₹9,18,400/-; **Item No. 2:**

Brief Description of Item: At

Tinsukia Division-Operation of Iron

Removal plants and valves under

the jurisdiction of DEN/III/

Tinsukia (Total IRP=18nos.).

Tender Value: ₹4,82,98,619/-;

Earnest Money: ₹9,66,000/-;

Date & time of closing of both

tenders at 15:00 hrs. and opening

of tender at 16:00 hrs. on

02-07-2026. For complete

information alongwith the tender

document of above e-tender will

be available up to 15:00 hrs

on 02-07-2026 in website http://

www.ireps.gov.in.

DRM (Works), Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

Serving Customers With A Smile

LOST

I. SHINA CHAKRABORTY daughter of BABUL KUMAR CHAKRABORTY resident of Lumding lost my original CBSE Mark sheet cum certificate bearing Roll No 16130809 some-where in Lumding

AFFIDAVIT

By an affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Diphu Judicial Court, I have declared and affirmed that my name is "Soni Kumari Chauhan" which is recorded in birth certificate vide Registration no. 120 . But in Aadhaar Vide No. 3480 4199 4157 where my name is wrongly recorded as "Soni Devi" instead of Soni Kumari Chauhan . The name of "Soni Kumari Chauhan" and "Soni Devi" is the same and single person but not different individual.Soni Kumari Chauhan Vill-Majhavar Basti.P.O.- Pub-Silputa.P.S.- BakaliaDistrict-Karbi Anglong

Electoral roll revision process begins for Silchar Municipal Corporation polls

Draft voter list to be published on June 29; final electoral rolls scheduled for release on July 15

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, June 13: The Assam State Election Commission has notified the schedule for the preparation, updation and publication of ward-wise electoral rolls for the forthcoming Silchar Municipal Corporation election.

The notification follows the constitution of the Silchar Municipal Corporation by the Government of Assam under the Assam Municipal Corporation Act, 2022.

The corporation comprises 42 wards, and the electoral roll preparation process will be undertaken for all wards in accordance with the Assam Municipal Corporation Election Rules, 2022.

According to the schedule, the draft electoral rolls will be published on June 29, 2026. Claims and objections regarding the draft rolls can be submitted up to July 6, while the disposal of claims and objections has been scheduled for



completion by July 13.

The final electoral rolls for all 42 wards will be published on July 15, 2026.

Meanwhile, a training programme for Registration Officers (ROs) was conducted at the Old Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Silchar on Friday as part of preparations

for the municipal election.

The training sessions were conducted by Cachar District Development Commissioner Rajib Roy and Election Officer Masi Topno.

The officers provided detailed guidance on the legal provisions, prescribed procedures and responsibilities associated with the preparation and revision of electoral

rolls, stressing the importance of maintaining a transparent, accurate and error-free voter database.

Officials informed that the electoral rolls will be prepared on the basis of the Assembly Electoral Roll in force, with January 1, 2026, as the qualifying date.

The process will be carried out in accordance with Rules 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 of the Assam Municipal Corporation Election Rules, 2022.

The Assam State Election Commission has also notified the appointment of Registration Officers for the respective wards of the Silchar Municipal Corporation.

Citizens have been urged to verify their details in the draft electoral rolls and submit claims or objections, if necessary, within the stipulated period to ensure the preparation of an accurate and updated voter list for the upcoming municipal election.

Food safety inspection in Demow Hotels given 15 days to improve hygiene

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 13: A surprise inspection conducted by the Demow Co-District Administration in coordination with the Demow Municipal Board and the Food Safety Officer revealed several hygiene and food safety deficiencies at three hotels in Demow on Friday evening.

The inspection team, led by Sivasagar Food Safety Officer Moyurakhi Gogoi and Demow Municipal Board Executive Officer Mrityunjay Bhargali, along with the Officer-in-Charge of Demow Police Station, visited Hotel Ghisa, Hotel Nimai and Hotel Binay to assess food quality, kitchen cleanliness, sanitation, food handling practices and overall compliance with food safety standards. During the inspection, officials found highly unsatisfactory hygiene and sanitation conditions as well as several lapses in food safety and maintenance practices.

Taking serious note of the deficiencies, the team directed the hotel authorities to undertake immediate corrective measures.

The establishments have been given 15 days to rectify all shortcomings and ensure full compliance with prescribed food safety and hygiene norms. The Food Safety Officer also strictly prohibited the use of newspapers for wrapping, covering or serving food items, stating that the practice poses potential health risks.

The establishments were instructed to use butter paper or other approved food-grade materials for food packaging and handling.

The Demow Co-District Administration warned that failure to comply with the prescribed standards within the stipulated period could invite appropriate action under the relevant provisions of law.

Officials stated that the administration remains committed to ensuring safe, hygienic and quality food for the public and will continue regular inspections and monitoring of food establishments across the co-district.

Governor mourns death of five IAF personnel in Jorhat AN-32 crash

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 13: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya has expressed deep grief over the death of five Indian Air Force personnel in the AN-32 aircraft crash at the Air Force Station in Jorhat on Saturday. In a condolence message, the Governor described the loss of the five air warriors as deeply saddening and a matter of profound sorrow for the nation.

Paying tribute to the deceased personnel, Acharya said their selfless service, dedication and sacrifice in safeguarding the country would always be remembered with gratitude and pride.

The Governor conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for strength and courage to help them endure the irreparable loss.

He also offered prayers for the eternal peace of the departed souls and acknowledged the invaluable contribution of the air force personnel in serving the nation.

Young Botany lecturer Monika Mushahary succumbs to cancer

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 13: Monika Mushahary, a young lecturer in the Department of Botany at Bodofa UN Brahma College passed away recently after a prolonged battle with breast cancer, leaving the academic community and residents of the region in deep mourning.

A native of the Serfanguri-Ramfalbi area, Monika was widely respected for her dedication to teaching, humility and commitment to academic excellence.

She had completed her Master's degree in Botany and was actively involved in providing tuition classes to students in Kokrajhar town.

Known for her outstanding academic record and passion for education, Monika earned the admiration of colleagues, students and well-wishers alike.

According to family members, her parents made every possible effort to save her life, spending nearly ₹ 15-16 lakh on medical treatment.

In their desperate attempt to ensure the best possible care, they reportedly sold land and other properties.

Despite their sacrifices and prolonged treatment, she could not overcome the illness.

Her untimely demise has cast a pall of gloom over Bodofa UN Brahma College and the wider community.

Teachers, students and local residents have expressed profound grief and paid tribute to her contributions as an educator and mentor.

Many described her death as an irreparable loss to society, remembering her as a sincere teacher whose dedication to nurturing young minds will continue to inspire future generations.

Condolences have poured in from various quarters, with colleagues, students and well-wishers extending their sympathies to the bereaved family and praying for the eternal peace of her soul.

World Day Against Child Labour observed

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 12: The Office of the Assistant Commissioner of Labour, Sivasagar, in collaboration with the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), observed World Day Against Child Labour at the Zila Parishad office recently to highlight the need to eradicate child labour and safeguard children's rights. Additional Deputy Commissioner Gauri Priya Deori administered an oath to participants on the occasion and urged citizens to refrain from employing children as labourers.

Addressing the gathering, Deori said that while society remains concerned about the safety and welfare of its own children, it is equally important to ensure that children from other families are not deprived of their childhood through child labour.

She called upon all sections of society to take responsibility for protecting children and encouraging them to pursue education.

The programme focused on issues such as preventing the employment of children below the age of 14, strengthening public awareness against child labour, protecting children's rights and promoting education as a means of securing their future.

Participants were also sensitised about various child protection laws and welfare mechanisms, including the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016, the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act and Child Helpline services.

Salakati Higher Secondary School begins golden jubilee celebrations



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 13: The two-day golden jubilee celebrations of Salakati Higher Secondary School commenced on Saturday with a grand cultural procession showcasing the rich traditions and cultural diversity of the region.

The celebration was formally inaugurated by BTC Executive Member for Sericulture and Soil Conservation, Karmeswar Ray, who flagged off the procession in the presence of students, teachers, alumni and local residents.

Established in 1976, Salakati Higher Secondary School, located near Kokrajhar town, has played a significant role in promoting ed-

ucation in the region over the past five decades.

The colourful procession featured more than a thousand students representing the cultural traditions of various communities, including Bodo, Assamese, Koch-Rajbongshi, Adivasi and Bengali groups.

The vibrant display drew large crowds and was widely appreciated by local residents.

Addressing the gathering, Ray lauded the institution for creating a healthy academic environment and producing numerous educated individuals who have contributed to society.

He expressed confidence that the school would continue to scale

greater heights in the years ahead.

The first day's programme also includes art and quiz competitions, solo and group dance contests, and the ceremonial lighting of 50 lamps in the evening to commemorate the institution's 50-year journey.

The second day of the celebrations will feature an alumni meet, prize distribution ceremony, felicitation of members of the school's first HSLC batch and a public meeting.

The public meeting will be chaired by BTC Executive Member for Health and Family Welfare and President of the Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, Derhasat Basumatary.

BTC Executive Member for Education Rabiram Narzary will attend as the chief guest, while Kokrajhar University Vice-Chancellor Ganesh Chandra Wary will deliver the keynote address.

BTC Director of Education Jagadish Prasad Brahma and NTPC Bongaigaon General Manager Arnav Maitra will attend as guests of honour.

A commemorative souvenir marking the golden jubilee will be unveiled by Kokrajhar MLA Sewli Mohilary.

The two-day celebration will conclude on Saturday evening with a fashion show and cultural programme.

Forged residency certificates used in CAPF recruitment bid unearthed in Jorhat

District administration detects fake PRCs during verification process; police launch investigation into alleged recruitment fraud

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, June 13: The Jorhat district administration has uncovered an alleged case of fraud in which several youths from north Indian states reportedly used forged Permanent Resident Certificates (PRCs) claiming residency in Assam to seek recruitment into the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF).

The forgery came to light during a routine document verification exercise conducted by the district administration.

According to official sources, the individuals had submitted PRCs showing them as residents of Nowcholia village on the western outskirts of Jorhat in an appar-

ent attempt to secure eligibility for recruitment into central security forces. The alleged fraud was detected while verifying documents forwarded by various CAPF units, including two CRPF units in Lucknow and Jalandhar, a CISF unit at NTPC Dadri in Uttar Pradesh, and three recruitment-related cases referred by the Director General of Assam Rifles in Shillong.

During scrutiny of the documents, officials reportedly found that the barcodes and certificate numbers on the submitted PRCs were fake.

Following the discovery, the district administration lodged an FIR at Jorhat Police Station.

A case has been registered as Jorhat Police Station Case No 171/2026 under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, and an investigation has been initiated.

Sources said the concerned CAPF authorities that had forwarded the documents for verification have been informed about the forgery and requested to extend full cooperation to the police during the investigation.

The administration is now examining the extent of the fraud and whether a larger network may have been involved in producing and supplying forged residency documents for recruitment purposes.

Flash flood exposes Sivasagar's drainage woes

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 13: A brief spell of heavy rain on Saturday morning once again exposed the chronic drainage problems of Sivasagar town, with several roads and localities submerged under flash flood waters, disrupting normal life and causing hardship to residents.

According to local residents, unplanned drainage systems, disregard for the town's natural drainage gradient established during the British era, continued encroachment on natural water retention areas and indiscriminate dumping of waste into drains have aggravated the recurring waterlogging problem.

Following nearly an hour of downpour, several important roads, including BG Road, Hospital Road, Boarding Road and parts of the ONGC Colony area, were inundated, leaving commuters stranded and affecting daily activities.



Students, office-goers and pedestrians were forced to wade through waterlogged streets, while overflowing drains mixed with rainwater created unhygienic conditions in several localities.

Residents expressed concern over the recurring nature of the problem and said the situation highlights the urgent need for a

scientific and long-term solution to the town's drainage infrastructure.

Many residents are now looking towards local MLA Akhil Gogoi and the authorities concerned for early intervention to address the long-pending civic issue and prevent similar incidents during the monsoon season.

District-level recitation competition held

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 13: A district-level recitation competition organised by the Biswanath district committee of the Assam Abriti Aaru Sanskriti Parishad was held at Himalay Bibah Bhawan here on Saturday.

The competition was organised as part of the centenary celebrations of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika and the ongoing Abriti Maharan 2026 programme. Participants competed in six categories — Gajali, Kishalay, Jonaki, Ramdhenu, Mukali and Prabin.

'Baby Bhakat' chapter brings national recognition to Nagaon wildlife rescuer and his family

'Udropon' marks 11 years with large-scale plantation drive in Tezpur

HT Bureau

TEZPUR, June 13: Udropon, a unique environmental conservation initiative founded by Darrang College faculty member and noted environmentalist Prof Harendra Nath Marang, celebrated its 11th foundation day on Saturday with the plantation of more than 1,000 Indian cork tree (Ejar) saplings at the playground of Tezpur Collegiate Higher Secondary School.

Founded on June 13, 2015, Udropon aims to enhance Tezpur's urban landscape through the plantation of flowering and indigenous tree species while promoting environmental awareness and ecological sustainability.

Over the past decade, the initiative has planted numerous species, including Sonaru, Ejar, white and pink Kanchan, red Kanchan and Jacaranda, across different parts of Tezpur.

The movement has gradually evolved into a community-driven effort, attracting increasing participation from environmentally conscious youths and citizens.

A distinctive feature of the cam-



paign is the installation of Birikh Behu—protective enclosures around saplings carrying messages on environmental conservation and the importance of trees.

These structures are designed to safeguard young plants while simultaneously creating awareness among the public.

Addressing the gathering, Prof Marang, recipient of the Haren

Bothra Memorial Environment Award, expressed concern over the declining tree cover in India and highlighted the importance of afforestation in combating climate change.

He pointed out that while Canada has nearly 8,953 trees per person, India has an average of only 28 trees per capita.

Stressing the environmental

benefits of tree plantation, he noted that a single tree can absorb approximately 22 kilograms of carbon dioxide annually, helping maintain ecological balance and mitigate the effects of global warming.

Prof Marang also appealed to citizens to actively participate in plantation drives and protect existing trees, particularly at a time when indiscriminate felling of trees continues in many parts of Assam. The anniversary programme was attended by Darrang College Principal Dr Palashmani Saikia, Tezpur Collegiate Higher Secondary School Headmaster Robin Barua, Darrang College Botany Professor Dr Bidhan Bora, Baan Theatre Secretary Pankaj Barua, writer Dilip Kumar Barua and Mising Bane Kebang leader Dinen Pegu, among others.

Students of Tezpur Collegiate Higher Secondary School also participated enthusiastically in the plantation drive, contributing to the initiative's mission of creating a greener and more sustainable future.

International Booker Prize Winner 2026 – ‘Taiwan Travelogue’

The contribution of translator Lin King is also regarded as a major pillar of this success, as rendering the Taiwanese dialects within Mandarin Chinese, Japanese linguistic influences, and culinary terminology into comprehensible English while preserving their original essence was an extremely challenging task. The translator, inspired by the horrors of the war in Ukraine, took upon himself the mission of establishing Taiwanese literature on the global stage. This dedication is truly commendable. In conclusion, ‘Taiwan Travelogue’ is not merely a story of a particular geography or time; it is an eternal protest shaped through words against human emotion, the longing for freedom, and colonial oppression. The international recognition received by this novel has enriched world literature and inspired all oppressed nations struggling for their identity to take pride in their language and culture. This creation, rich in deep human sensitivity and historical consciousness, will remain an invaluable literary treasure for generations

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

The deep crisis of colonial history of the twentieth century, cultural identity, and the inherent complexities of human relationships have been bound within an extraordinary literary tapestry, and through this, the prestigious International Booker Prize for the year 2026 has been awarded to the Taiwanese distinguished writer Yang Shuang-Zi's historical novel 'Taiwan Travelogue'. Through the remarkable English translation by the skilled translator Lin King, this novel has added a new dimension to world literature, as it is the first novel translated from original Mandarin Chinese to win the International Booker Prize. It is portrayed in this novel that literature is the eternal document of a nation's struggle for existence and the political consciousness that grows within its soil. In her acceptance speech, the writer Yang Shuang-Zi clearly stated that literature can never be separated from its native land and politics, because the inner pain and the cry for independence of a nation under colonial rule reverberate on every page of this novel. Especially set against the backdrop of 1930s Japanese-occupied Taiwan, this fictional mirror makes Taiwan's questions of existence

loves food, gradually becomes profoundly attracted to Chizuru's personality and culinary artistry, and this attraction slowly transforms into a silent form of love. However, within this relationship, there always exists an invisible barrier, which is the wall of power inequality between the colonial ruler and the colonized subject, something that Shizuko realizes much later. These tastes of food are not merely for the satisfaction of the tongue; behind them lies the silent struggle of a nation to preserve its culture.

From a sociological and post-colonial theoretical perspective, 'Taiwan Travelogue' is not merely a tragic love story between two women; rather, it is a subtle analysis of language, power, and domination. The way in which Japanese writer Shizuko looked at Taiwan and Chizuru with affection and generosity also unknowingly concealed an imperial arrogance and colonial gaze. Although she considered Chizuru as someone dear and close, for Chizuru, Shizuko represented the ruling class that had subjugated their homeland. Through fictional footnotes and backstories of characters on every page, the writer has created such a multi-layered atmosphere that readers are forced to forget the difference between history and imagination. The transforma-



people. By portraying the terrifying pain of becoming second-class citizens in one's own land through the lens of history, the writer aims to awaken society and express deep faith in literature's slow but powerful transformative force. The novel reminds us that history is not merely the past; it continues to control the present.

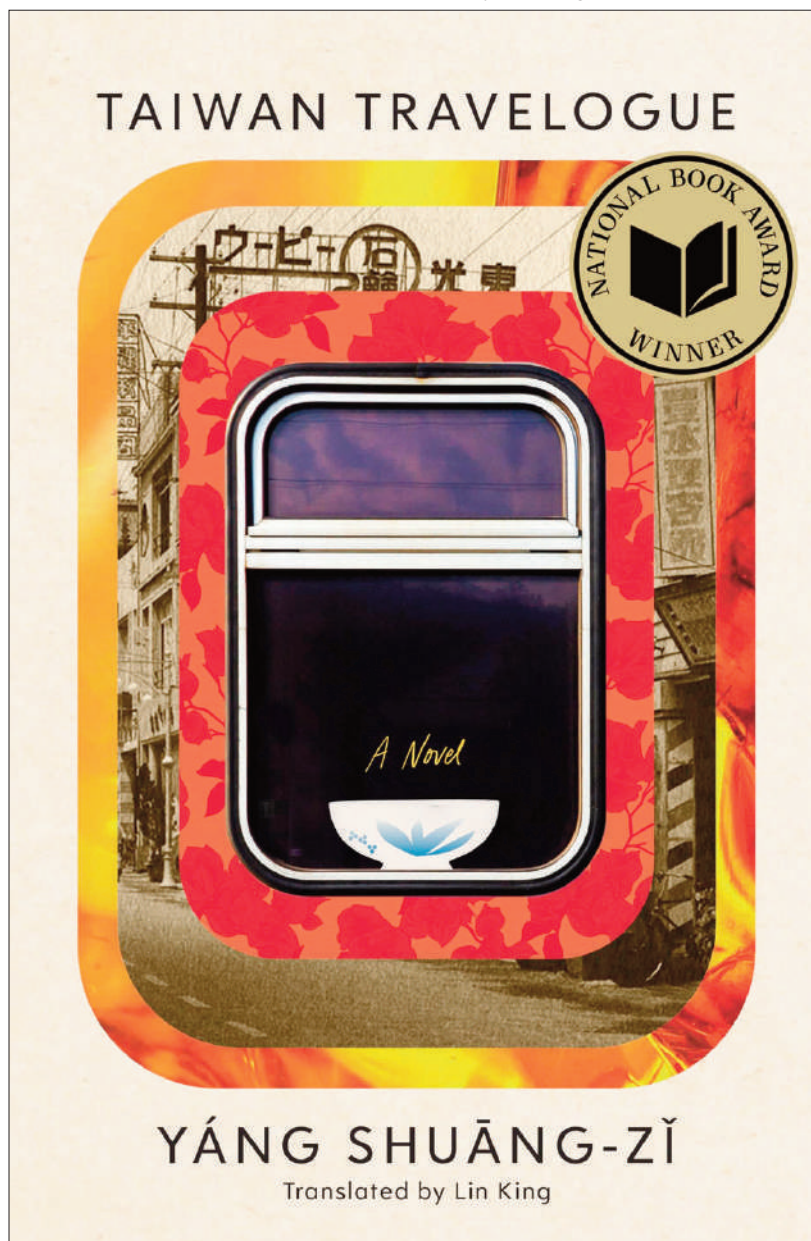
Japanese rulers also tried to impose their own cuisine and culture in Taiwan. However, the novel beautifully portrays how Taiwanese people preserved their traditions within their kitchens. When Shizuko tasted those indigenous dishes, she only experienced flavor, but she failed to understand the centuries of his-

culture, and history of ordinary Taiwanese people are often ignored. 'Taiwan Travelogue' introduces the world to the inner soul of Taiwan. It shows that Taiwan is not just a geopolitical issue but a living land of emotions, dreams, and self-determination for millions of people. This creation compels readers worldwide

to view Taiwan's history from a new perspective. It stands as an excellent example of how literature can influence global politics and amplify the voice of a small island on the world stage. The final chapters of the novel are deeply tragic and profound. As the dark clouds of the Second World War spread across Asia, they also affected the relationship between Shizuko and Chizuru. The growing intensity of Japanese imperialism made Shizuko more arrogant as a representative of the ruling class, while Chizuru gradually realized that their friendship could never be equal. The novel poignantly describes how war erases human emotions and reduces people to political identities. After Shizuko returned to Japan and wrote her diary, it reflected deep regret and emptiness. However, that realization came too late, and past mistakes could no longer be corrected. This suffering of history is not only Taiwan's story but a universal colonial experience.

Another major reason for the success of Yang Shuang-Zi's novel is its narrative style. The writer never uses aggressive or overly emotional language. The entire story is told in a calm and steady tone, yet behind this calmness lies a tremendous storm. As readers begin to engage with the novel, they gradually lose themselves in the atmosphere of 1930s Taiwan. Street lights, market noise, smoke rising from kitchens, and the silent language of two women's eyes create a lasting impression on the reader's mind. The vividness of the writing brings each scene to life. This visual narrative style makes the novel more realistic and emotionally powerful.

The role of translator Lin King in converting the original Mandarin and Taiwanese linguistic atmosphere into English is a historic achievement. He has carried the cultural essence and emotional depth of Taiwan into the hearts of English-speaking readers. Without this exceptional translation, the novel might not have achieved such global success. Therefore, this award is not only the achievement of the writer but equally of the translator. This success once again re-establishes the importance and dignity of translators in world literature.



The contribution of translator Lin King is also regarded as a major pillar of this success, as rendering the Taiwanese dialects within Mandarin Chinese, Japanese linguistic influences, and culinary terminology into comprehensible English while preserving their original essence was an extremely challenging task. The translator, inspired by the horrors of the war in Ukraine, took upon himself the mission of establishing Taiwanese literature on the global stage. This dedication is truly commendable.

In conclusion, 'Taiwan Travelogue' is not merely a story of a particular geography or time; it is an eternal protest shaped through words against human emotion, the longing for freedom, and colonial oppression. The international recognition received by this novel has enriched world literature and inspired all oppressed nations struggling for their identity to take pride in their language and culture. This creation, rich in deep human sensitivity and historical consciousness, will remain an invaluable literary treasure for generations. This journey of language proves that true literature knows no geographical boundaries.

A deep psychological observation of the characters in the novel reveals that Shizuko, who grew up under the shadow of Japanese imperialism, possessed a certain form of unconscious superiority. She believed herself to be more liberal and different from others because she loved the Taiwanese people and admired their food. However, this love resembled the affection of a master towards a domesticated pet, where equality had no place. On the other hand, Chizuru represents silent resistance, someone who never sold her self-respect and national identity to the ruling class. She respected Shizuko, obeyed her instructions, but never allowed the patriotism and anger within her to fade away. The psychological conflict and understanding between these two women give the novel a distinct dimension. Their conversations may appear simple on the surface, but underneath lies an intense mental struggle—a struggle of language, culture, and above all, survival of identity.

Yang Shuang-Zi skillfully uses food as a central element in the novel. Food is not merely something to satisfy hunger; it is one of the strongest identities of a nation's heritage. When a foreign power occupies a country, they first attempt to attack its language and food culture. The



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and struggle hidden behind them. When Chizuru explained the history behind each dish, it was not just a description of food but a silent attempt to restore dignity. The novel beautifully shows how food can unite people and simultaneously highlight the divide between ruler and ruled.

Another important aspect of the novel is its use of language. The combination of Taiwanese dialects and Japanese words within the structure of Mandarin Chinese created by the writer is truly extraordinary. During the colonial period, Taiwanese people were forced to learn Japanese, but they continued to use their native language in domestic spaces. The conversations between Shizuko and Chizuru clearly reflect this linguistic crisis. Shizuko believed Chizuru to be intelligent because she could speak fluent Japanese, but she did not understand that this ability was a result of colonial compulsion. The novel repeatedly reminds us that language is not just a medium of expression but also a powerful weapon of authority. When a nation is deprived of its mother tongue, its very soul is destroyed. The novel presents a deeply moving portrayal of how Taiwanese people struggled to preserve their language.

In today's global political situation, Taiwan remains a frequent topic in international media. However, media discussions are mostly limited to military power and economy, while the emotions,

and struggle hidden behind them. When Chizuru explained the history behind each dish, it was not just a description of food but a silent attempt to restore dignity. The novel beautifully shows how food can unite people and simultaneously highlight the divide between ruler and ruled.

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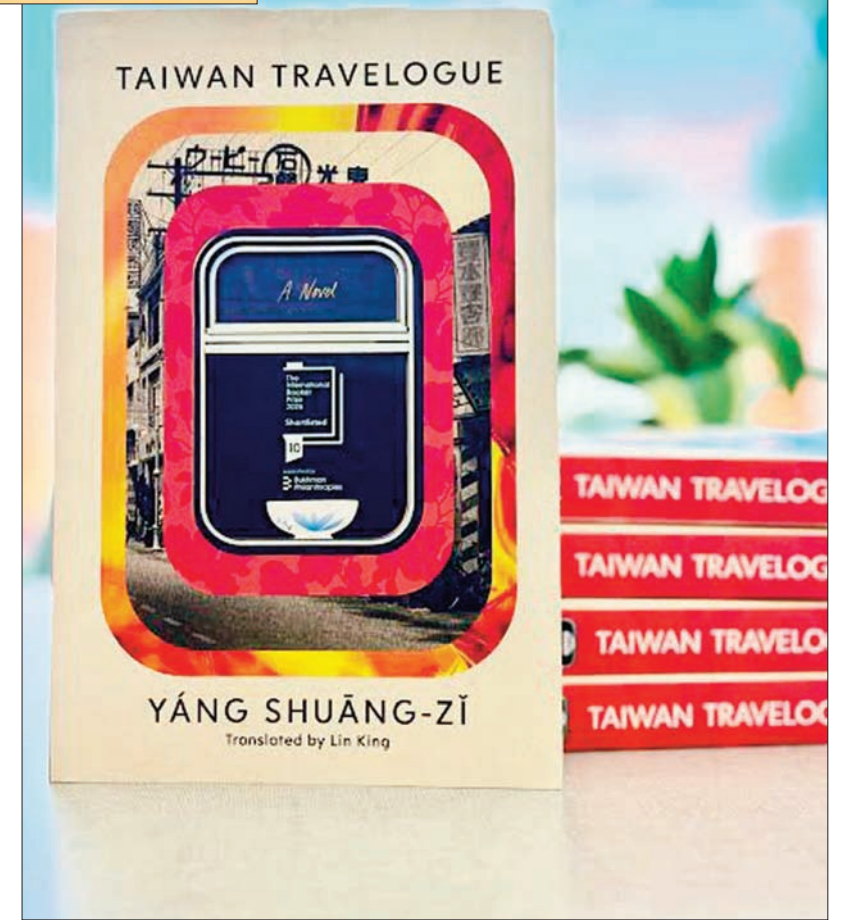
In today's global political situation, Taiwan remains a frequent topic in international media. However, media discussions are mostly limited to military power and economy, while the emotions,

and sovereignty highly relevant in today's global geopolitical context. By digging into the dusty pages of history, what the writer has revealed is not just the story of one island, but a major warning for human society as a whole.

The most striking aspect of this novel is its unique structure, where the writer has adopted a distinctive disguise to construct the entire narrative. The novel is presented to the reader as a translated version of a lost travel diary or memoir written in 1938 by a Japanese novelist Aokama Shizuko, which is said to have been published in Japan in 1954. According to the narrative, just before the Second World War, Shizuko came to Taiwan on a trip sponsored by the Japanese imperial government, where her primary intention was not to attend official banquets but to experience the local food and culture of Taiwan. During this journey, she is assigned a simple yet intelligent Taiwanese young woman named Chizuru as her guide and interpreter. The entire novel is divided chapter by chapter according to various traditional Taiwanese dishes such as special pork preparations, watermelon tea, and various indigenous fruits. The Japanese writer, who deeply

was imposed by Japanese colonial rule on Taiwanese daily life—such as traditional clothing being replaced by Japanese wooden footwear and modern attire, and the dominance of Japanese language over Chinese and local culture—are depicted with remarkable precision. This imbalance of power demonstrates how even the most intimate and personal relationships can become toxic and distant. Behind the kindness of the ruler always lies a sense of arrogance, constantly felt by the oppressed.

The novelist Yang Shuang-Zi has mentioned in various interviews that although both Korea and Taiwan fell under Japanese imperialism, Korean people generally hold a unified sense of historical resentment, whereas Taiwanese people exhibit a complex mixture of emotions where hatred and nostalgic longing coexist. The writer attempts to unravel these complexities from a contemporary Taiwanese perspective so that the younger generation can properly choose their future path. Especially in the present geopolitical context where Taiwan faces continuous pressure and threats from neighboring powerful nations, this novel raises a strong question of identity among the



The Undersea Front: Iran's Cable Threat and India's Digital Vulnerability

By: Pranoy Jainendran

As the conflict between the United States and Iran enters a critical new phase, Tehran has begun to weaponise global digital infrastructure, a dimension of modern warfare that extends well beyond conventional military confrontation. The Strait of Hormuz, now de facto controlled by Iran and Oman, is emerging as a consequential digital chokepoint, with Iran demonstrating a calculated intent to leverage its geographical position over the undersea fibre-optic cables that underpin international internet connectivity.

In April 2026, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-affiliated Tasnim News Agency published a detailed mapping of undersea internet cables and cloud infrastructure across the Persian Gulf. This was swiftly followed on 9 May 2026 by Iranian military spokesperson Ebrahim Zolfaghari's declaration on X: "We will impose fees on internet cables." Together, these developments point to a deliberate and calculated attempt to coerce countries across the globe by threatening the foundations of their technological infrastructure. Should Iran proceed with this course of action, the consequences are expected to reverberate across the global digital economy, with a disproportionate burden falling on the connectivity infrastructure and technology sectors of several East African, Middle Eastern, and Asian countries, including India.

Tehran's Rationale

The three-pronged strategy outlined by Tasnim reveals Iran's intent to extract both economic and strategic value from its geographical position over the Strait. First, foreign companies would be required to pay licensing fees for the use of subsea cables passing through Iranian-controlled waters. Second, major technology corporations — with Meta, Google, Amazon, and Microsoft specifically named — would be "compelled to operate under the laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran", a stipulation that analysts suggest would, in practice, necessitate the establishment of joint ventures subject to Iranian regulatory oversight and state influence. Third, and perhaps most consequential from a long-term strategic standpoint, Iran proposes to monopolise the repair and maintenance of these subsea cable systems, positioning itself as the sole authority over the physical integrity of infrastructure upon which a significant portion of the world's digital communications depend.

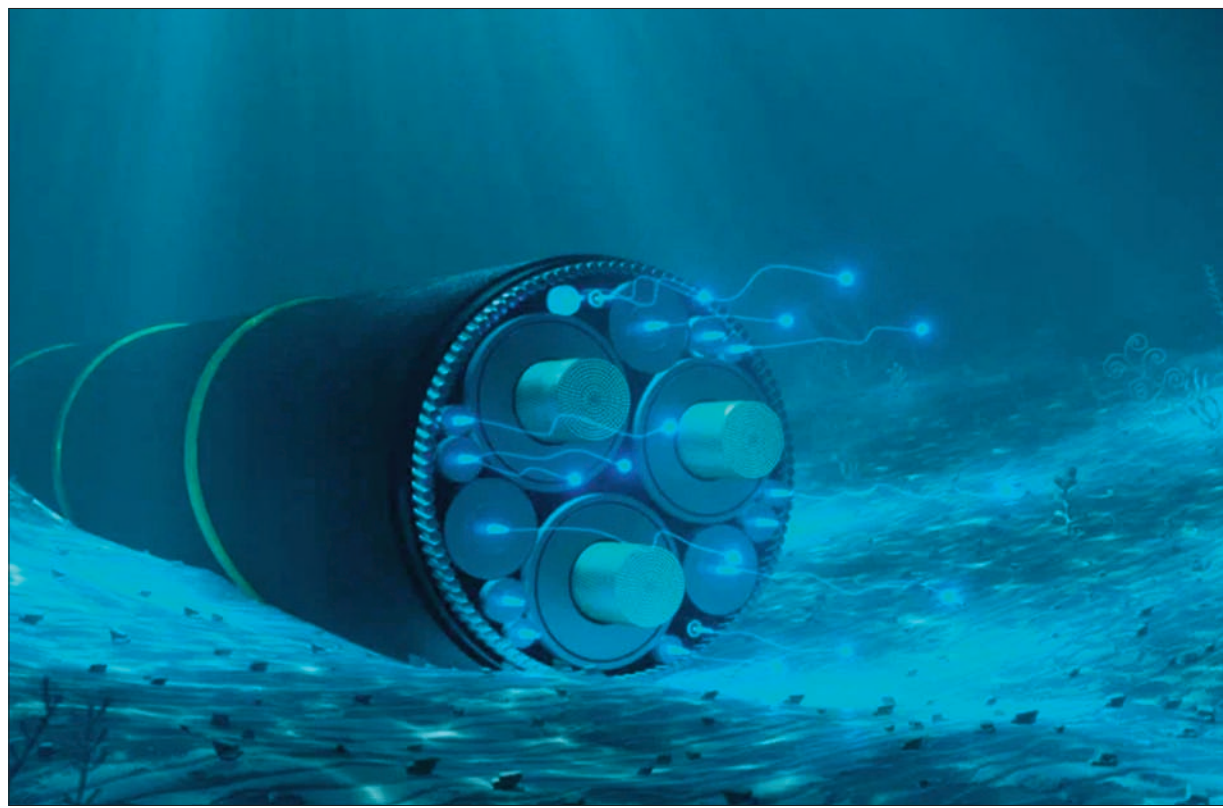
The nations of the Middle East stand to bear the most immediate consequences of any disruption. Gulf states such as Qatar and Kuwait, which rely heavily on Hormuz-adjacent cable systems for international connectivity, would face significant degradation of communications and financial services.

Iran's primary legal justification for the proposed cable fees rests on Article 79 of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which grants coastal states the authority to establish conditions for cables and pipelines entering their territory or territorial waters. In support of this position, Iranian media have drawn on the precedent set by Egypt, which levies transit and licensing fees on undersea cables passing through the Suez Canal, presenting this as an established and internationally accepted model for sovereign revenue generation from digital infrastructure.

Key Cable Systems and Parties Most at Risk

Whilst the prospect of Iran fully implementing its proposed cable fee regime remains uncertain — given the shaky legal premises upon which the threat rests — the threat itself carries sufficient strategic weight to warrant serious analytical attention. Seven significant undersea cable systems traverse the Strait of Hormuz, the most consequential of which is the Asia-Africa-Europe 1 (AAE-1) cable, which connects Southeast Asia, India, the Gulf region, Egypt, and Southern Europe. While these systems carry less than one percent of global international bandwidth, the nations whose international communications depend primarily on these routes would face profound consequences in the event of sustained disruptions.

Any damage to undersea cables in the Strait of Hormuz is unlikely to be repaired rapidly given the ongoing tensions in the area. In 2024, three cables were severed by the dragging anchor of a vessel struck by Iran-aligned Houthi militants, causing a disruption of approximately 25 percent of internet traffic between Asia and Europe. One of the severed cables required five months to repair, as specialised cable-laying vessels were unable to safely access the conflict zone for an extended period. A comparable scenario in the Strait of Hormuz — where active hostilities between the United States and Iran have already disrupted maritime traffic — would in all likelihood produce similarly protracted



outages, compounded by the added complication of a more confined and heavily contested waterway.

The convergence of these actions suggests a calculated campaign to contest Western technological primacy through asymmetric, infrastructure-targeted means.

The nations of the Middle East stand to bear the most immediate consequences of any disruption. Gulf states such as Qatar and Kuwait, which rely heavily on Hormuz-adjacent cable systems for international connectivity, would face significant degradation of communications and financial services. Of particular note are the substantial artificial intelligence infrastructure investments undertaken by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in recent years. These initiatives depend upon low-latency, high-bandwidth international data connections, and any sustained increase in latency resulting from cable damage or rerouting would materially impair the operational capacity of these emerging digital economies.

Viewed alongside the drone strikes on Amazon Web Services facilities across the Middle East in March 2026, Iran's cable fee proposals connect to form a

larger picture. Rather than an isolated act of opportunism, these proposals appear to be part of a deliberate strategy targeting US-based technology giants and the digital infrastructure their global operations depend on. The convergence of these actions suggests a calculated campaign to contest Western technological primacy through asymmetric, infrastructure-targeted means.

The Disproportionate Impact on India

Of the seven cable systems traversing the Strait of Hormuz, four are of direct and critical importance to India, routing internet traffic between the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf states, Europe, and Africa. These include the FALCON network, the Gulf Bridge International system, SeaMeWe-6, and AAE-1, with Indian telecommunications operators Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio holding operational stakes in several of these systems. Approximately 60 percent of India's westward data traffic passes through this corridor, rendering the country acutely exposed to any sustained disruption of cable infrastructure in the Strait.

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exposed to any sustained disruption of cable infrastructure in the Strait.

The sectors most immediately at risk span the breadth of India's modern economy. Banking and financial services, which rely on continuous low-latency data connections for transaction processing and interbank communications, would face significant operational impairment. Energy operations, many of which are digitally managed and linked to Gulf-based partners, would similarly be affected. Perhaps most gravely, disruption to military communications infrastructure at a time of heightened regional tension would carry serious national security implications, constraining India's situational awareness and its capacity for coordinated response in an already volatile geopolitical environment.

The most economically significant casualty of a sustained cable disruption, however, would be India's information technology and business process outsourcing sector, which constitutes one of the principal pillars of the economy. India's IT-BPO industry depends on uninterrupted, high-bandwidth data connectivity to service clients across Europe and North America. A 24-hour internet dis-

ruption could inflict losses as high as US\$920 million on India's IT and services economy — a figure that underscores the extraordinary degree to which India's economic prosperity is contingent upon the continued integrity of undersea cable infrastructure.

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Beyond the immediate threat posed by Iran's proposals, India's structural dependence on the Strait of Hormuz corridor represents a pre-existing and enduring strategic vulnerability, one that has drawn increasing attention from policymakers and the private sector alike. In recognition of this exposure, Google announced a US\$15 billion subsea cable initiative at the AI Impact Summit in India in 2026, designated the "America-India Connect" project. The initiative will establish new international subsea gateways connecting India to Singapore, South Africa, and Australia, effectively creating alternative data corridors across four continents that circumvent the Hormuz corridor entirely. Whilst the project represents a significant step towards diversifying India's international connectivity, its long-term infrastructural timeline means that India remains substantially dependent on cable systems passing through the Strait of Hormuz for the foreseeable future. The Iran threat has thus accelerated a strategic conversation that India's digital ambitions had already rendered unavoidable.

Iran's proposed taxation of undersea cables in the Strait of Hormuz forms part of a broader, targeted assault on Big Tech — and marks a new dimension of cyber warfare. Should this threat be realised, the greatest burden of disruption would fall on the Middle East and India. For India, it lays bare a structural vulnerability at the heart of its digital economy, with ramifications extending from its IT-BPO sector to its national security apparatus. Addressing this weakness cannot be achieved in the short term. While plans to diversify submarine cable routes are already underway, coordinated action at scale — encompassing multilateral legal frameworks and accelerated investment — will be imperative over the coming decade. (Courtesy: ORF)

How the 'Blue Economy' is devouring the ocean it claims to save

By: K.M. Seethi

Imagine waking up one morning to find that the lungs of the Earth have been appropriated for business. That the vast, ancient, breathing wilderness covering more than 70% of the planet's surface — the source of every second breath we take, the regulator of our climate, the cradle of our food — has been carved up, zoned, auctioned and branded as an 'economy.'

Let us not get shocked. It is already happening. It is being called the 'blue economy.' And on this World Ocean Day, as the United Nations invites us to "Reimagine: Beyond the World We Know, A New Relationship with Our Ocean," we must face a disturbing truth. The loudest voices reimagining the ocean are investment bankers, port developers and government planners with trillion-dollar ambitions.

Sustainability wrapped in blue

The blue economy, as conceptualised by the United Nations and multilateral institutions initially, was born of genuine concern. The World Bank and United Nations, in their foundational 2017 report *The Potential of the Blue Economy*, argued that oceans — carrying about 80% of global trade by volume, producing oxygen for billions, feeding hundreds of millions — must be managed as natural capital rather than exploited as a free common.

They warned that around 31.4% of global fish stocks were already overfished, that illegal fishing was draining US\$10–22 billion annually from the global economy, and that climate change, ocean acidification and sea-level rise were degrading the very ecosystems on which human welfare depends.

UNEP articulated a similar vision — a blue

economy that integrates economic growth, social equity and environmental sustainability within ecological limits, generating an estimated US\$2.5 trillion annually, equivalent to the world's seventh-largest economy while protecting the ecosystems that make this wealth possible. The UN's Sustainable Development Goal 14, 'Life Below Water' gave this vision a legal and moral weight.

However, these were documents that acknowledged hard truths. They spoke of the rights of small-scale fishers, Indigenous communities and coastal peoples. They demanded stronger governance, marine protected areas, and what researchers now call "safe and just" ecological limits for ocean use. But good frameworks, once released into the world, are quickly colonised by those with the most capital and the loudest lobbying voices.

When 'blue' becomes a licence to plunder

According to studies, the global ocean economy is projected to reach US\$3 trillion by 2030, growing faster than the world economy itself. Coastal and marine tourism alone contributes about US\$4.6 trillion annually, equivalent to 5.2% of global GDP. Offshore wind capacity reached 59,009 MW globally in 2023. The marine biotechnology market could expand from US\$5.8 billion to US\$11.7 billion by 2032. Aquaculture is projected to grow at 2% annually through 2030.

Behind every one of these figures is a race for ocean space. Around 90% of global fish catches and 97% of offshore oil and gas production already occur within Exclusive Economic Zones, Shipping routes, offshore wind farms, aquaculture zones, tourism infrastructure and deep seabed mining areas compete viciously for the same stretches of sea.

The result, as researchers Sumaila and Vil-

lasante warn, is an "increasingly crowded ocean" where overlapping claims generate conflicts — between industrial and artisanal fishers, between conservation zones and commercial projects, between the needs of coastal communities and the appetites of corporations.

Nigerian environmental thinker Nnimmo Bassey describes the outcome bluntly as 'blue-washing' — the deployment of sustainability language to mask what is, in practice, the extraction, privatisation and industrialisation of marine ecosystems. The absence of a universally accepted definition of the blue economy, he argues, allows governments and corporations to use the concept in ways that prioritise profit over ecological survival, displacing artisanal fishers, Indigenous peoples and coastal communities in the process.

Fishing rights concentrated under corporate quota systems. Nutritious fish species diverted into fishmeal production for global aquaculture industries. Traditional livelihoods extinguished in the name of 'sustainable development.' It is the lived reality of millions of people on coastlines from West Africa to South Asia.

The financial risks of this pattern are equally severe. A WWF-Metabolic study estimates the global ocean's assets at a minimum of US\$24 trillion — yet they are being systematically degraded. Its Baltic Sea case study found that fisheries alone could face a Value at Risk of 73%, equivalent to €1.32 billion, over fifteen years as fish stocks decline. More than US\$8 trillion worth of assets worldwide are exposed to climate-related threats such as sea-level rise, extreme weather and ecosystem collapse. The blue economy, in other words, is already eating its own foundations.

Blue destruction

The gap between blue economy rhetoric and reality is noticeable in some of the most consequential development projects of our time. Perhaps nowhere is the tension more plainly discernible than in India's Great Nicobar Island.

The Union government's mega infrastructure project — estimated to cost between Rs 81,000 crore and Rs 1 lakh crore — envisions transforming this remote island in the Andaman and Nicobar archipelago into a transshipment port, international airport, township of 3.5 lakh people, and industrial hub. Located only about 40 nautical miles from the East-West international shipping route, the project is designed in the language of strategic necessity and port-led development.

What it would actually destroy is staggering. According to critics, around 130 square kilometres of old-growth tropical rainforest — part of a UNESCO-recognised Biosphere Reserve — would be cleared. While official estimates suggest around 9.64 lakh trees may be felled, independent scientists estimate the figure could range between 32 lakh and 58 lakh, potentially exceeding 10 million trees if the full project footprint is considered.

Galathea Bay, where the port is planned, is the most important nesting site for the Giant Leatherback Turtle in the entire northern Indian Ocean. The Nicobar megapode and salt-water crocodile face habitat annihilation. And the Shompen — one of India's most isolated and vulnerable tribal communities, numbering only about 237 people — face effective dispossession of their ancestral land and forest, even as the government insists they will not be 'displaced.'

The NITI Aayog's own blue economy strategy identifies the Andaman and Nicobar waters as among India's richest offshore fishing grounds, with significant tuna, billfish and deep-sea shrimp resources. But the same strategy emphasises ecosystem-based management, biodiversity conservation and precautionary harvesting. The contradiction between that policy philosophy and the scale of destruction proposed in the Great Nicobar project is one that official India has yet to honestly address.

In the Baltic Sea, decades of over-fertilisation, overfishing and industrial expansion have pushed cod and herring stocks to near-collapse, with cascading effects on fishing communities that have depended on these waters for generations. The WWF-Metabolic study uses this as its case study precisely because it demonstrates how environmental degradation translates, inexorably, into financial ruin, within a single planning cycle.

Kerala's ambitions and the fishworkers' warning

Closer to home, Kerala chief minister V.D. Satheesan, marking World Ocean Day this year, declared that Kerala has the potential to emerge as India's maritime gateway and a major centre of the blue economy. With nearly 600 kilometres of coastline, the new Vizhinjam International Seaport, inland waterways and fishing harbours, the chief minister articulated a vision of port-led growth, coastal shipping, aquaculture, shipbuilding and cruise tourism — a vision of "sustainable ocean governance," he said, that protects the ocean while generat-

ing large-scale employment.

Vizhinjam is already a significant maritime investment. Kerala's coastal economy is real and substantial. The aspiration to create dignified livelihoods from the sea is entirely legitimate. And, yet, the fishworkers' leaders of Kerala — representing hundreds of thousands of artisanal fishing families who have worked these waters for generations — have raised urgent concerns. Their anxiety is not unfounded.

Globally, blue economy projects have repeatedly prioritised industrial and corporate actors while marginalising small-scale fishers, through displacement for port development, through the loss of traditional fishing grounds to aquaculture operations, through quota systems that concentrate fishing rights under corporate control.

The concentration of ocean governance in the hands of large investors, however well-intentioned, has a consistent history of eroding the food security and livelihoods of the most vulnerable coastal communities. Kerala's blue economy ambitions must reckon seriously with this history, and with the voices of those whose lives depend on the health of the sea, not merely its profitability.

The ocean we cannot afford to lose

Studies say that nearly 90% of large fish populations have been depleted. About half of the world's coral reefs have already been lost. The ocean, which produces at least half the planet's oxygen and absorbs 30% of global CO₂ emissions, is warming, acidifying and losing biodiversity at rates without precedent in human history.

Marine Protected Areas cover only about 7.5% of the world's oceans, far below the 30% target for 2030 — a target that itself risks becoming a new arena for corporate enclosure, displacing small-scale fishers and Indigenous peoples in the name of conservation.

For more than three billion people worldwide, the ocean is survival. It is protein, income, culture and identity. The fisherfolk of Kerala, the artisanal communities of West Africa, the island peoples of the Pacific, the tribal inhabitants of Great Nicobar — they are not mere stakeholders to be "consulted" in blue economy planning. They are its primary custodians, and they are the first to suffer when the ocean is treated as a commodity.

By 2030, ocean-based industries are expected to employ around 40 million people worldwide. That statistic, cited by the United Nations, carries a warning embedded within it — those 40 million people, and the billions who depend indirectly on the ocean, are entirely exposed to the consequences of getting this wrong.

Marine spatial planning must centre the rights of small-scale fishers, women, youth and Indigenous communities. Deep seabed mining — perhaps the most reckless frontier of blue extraction — must face a moratorium until studies can seriously assess its consequences.

Projects like the Great Nicobar mega-development must be subjected to genuine, independent environmental scrutiny rather than the performance of compliance. The World Ocean Day calls for serious introspection, beyond our short-term payoffs from the blue economy business. (Courtesy: Wire. In)



Lebanese army withdraws from southern village after Israeli troops advance nearby

BEIRUT, June 13: The Lebanese army on Saturday withdrew its troops from a base in a southern Lebanese village after Israeli troops advanced in an area nearby, a military official said.

The departure from the army barracks in Kfar Tebnit came as the Israeli military issued an evacuation warning for about 20 locations, including the southern city of Nabatiyeh and nearby villages.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported airstrikes on Saturday on different villages near Nabatiyeh, including one that killed two people in Deir al-Zahrani. It added that Nabatiyeh was subjected to artillery shelling on Saturday.

A senior Lebanese military official told The Associated Press that the Lebanese army moved its forces from the Kfar Tebnit barracks following an incursion by Israeli forces into the area. The official, who did not elaborate, spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Israeli troops were likely trying to capture the strategic Ali Taher hill on the edge of Kfar Tebnit that overlooks large parts of Nabatiyeh and some of the roads that link the



city with nearby villages.

Israeli troops held the Ali Taher hill for 18 years until they withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000.

In late May, Israeli troops captured a nearby strategic mountain topped with the Crusader-built Beaufort Castle in the deepest incursion into the country since 2000.

The push on the edge of Kfar Tebnit came a day after Pakistan's prime minister said that the United States and Iran have agreed to wording of an agreement aimed at ending their war in the Middle

East and that mediators are working with both sides to finalise a deal.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told Iranian state TV on Friday that both sides were working toward signing an initial agreement declaring an end to the war "on all fronts, including Lebanon."

Senior Hezbollah official Hussein Haj Hassan told Al Jazeera TV that they have been informed by Iranian officials that Lebanon will be part of a future ceasefire deal between the US and Iran.

Iran is Hezbollah's main backer, supplying the group with different types of weapons over the past four decades as well as billions of dollars.

Attacks by Israel and Hezbollah have continued despite a ceasefire that went into effect on April 17 and was renewed several times but remains a ceasefire in name only.

Israel continues to occupy large swaths of southern Lebanon while battling Hezbollah fighters, causing civilian casualties and damage to infrastructure. Hezbollah, which is not part of the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Lebanon, has launched frequent rocket and drone attacks.

The latest Israel-Hezbollah war began on March 2, when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel two days after the US and Israel began their attacks on Iran.

More than 3,700 people have been killed in Lebanon in the latest fighting, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. Also, 30 Israeli soldiers and a defence contractor have been killed in or near southern Lebanon, and two civilians have been killed in northern Israel, according to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office. (AP)

Trump says US military strike killed leader of Tren de Aragua gang with help from Venezuela



WASHINGTON, June 13: President Donald Trump said Friday that a "swift and lethal kinetic" U.S. strike has killed Hector Rusthenford Guerrero Flores, whom he called "the infamous leader" of the Tren de Aragua gang.

Tren de Aragua has been labelled by the United States as a terrorist organization. Guerrero Flores was charged in a New York federal court with racketeering conspiracy and other crimes, including lending support to terrorists in crimes that stretched more than a decade, authorities announced in December.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted on X that the strike occurred earlier in the week on a Tren de Aragua compound in Venezuela.

U.S. Attorney Jay Clayton said at the time that the gang is responsible for countless acts of violence, extortion and drug trafficking in North America, South America and Europe. Trump nominated Clayton on Thursday to be director of national intelligence.

The U.S. State Department had offered rewards of up to \$5 million for information leading to Guerrero Flores' arrest.

In a post on his social media site, Trump wrote, "Tren de Aragua terrorists no longer have safe haven in Venezuela or anywhere else and, under my leadership, we will find

these vicious murderers and drug lords anytime, anyplace, and send them to the depths of hell where they belong." Trump's post referred to Guerrero Flores by his alias, "Niño Guerrero."

Hegseth said, "The operation underscores the shared U.S. and Venezuelan commitment to take the fight to narco-terrorists and deny them any safe haven in our hemisphere."

Venezuela's ministry of communications did not immediately respond to a request for comment on the operation.

Trump has taken a series of extraordinary actions against the gang, including a series of strikes on small boats his administration has accused of smuggling drugs to America. At least 207 people have been killed in boat strikes by the U.S. military in the eastern Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea since the Trump administration began targeting those it calls "narcoterrorists" in early September.

Trump and administration officials have consistently blamed Tren de Aragua for being at the root of the violence and illicit drug dealing that plague some U.S. cities. The president spent months repeating the claim — contradicted by a declassified U.S. intelligence assessment — that Tren de Aragua had

operated under Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro's control. The U.S. whisked Maduro out of Venezuela to face U.S. drug charges in January.

Tren de Aragua originated more than a decade ago at an infamously lawless prison with hardened criminals in Venezuela's central state of Aragua. The gang has expanded in recent years as millions of Venezuelans migrated to other Latin American countries or the U.S. in search of better living conditions.

Guerrero Flores returned to the prison in Aragua for murder and other convictions in 2013, when Venezuela's crisis began as corruption, mismanagement and a drop in crude prices wrecked the oil-dependent economy. Guerrero Flores and a few other inmates saw a profitable opportunity as the government neglected prisons.

They assumed control and administration of the prison, establishing a system that controlled the entire inmate population through force and extortion. Over time, they transformed the facility into a sort of city that included a zoo, baseball field, casino and restaurants. Guerrero Flores had his own lavish suite.

The size of the gang is unclear. Countries with large populations of Venezuelan migrants, including Peru and Colombia, have accused the group of being behind a spree of violence in the region. Still, unlike other criminal organizations from Colombia, Central America and Brazil, Tren de Aragua has no large-scale involvement in smuggling cocaine across international borders, according to InSight Crime, a think tank that tracks crime across Latin America. In Venezuela, gang leaders have long been known to participate in various illegal activities, including gold mining.

Trump campaigned for a second term promising to crack down on immigration and crime. While polls show his favorability ratings have sagged on his handling of the economy, immigration remains Trump's strongest issue, according to the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. (AP)

'Downed Iranian drones targeting ships in Hormuz'

WASHINGTON, June 13: The US Navy said it has downed multiple one-way attack drones launched by Iran to target commercial ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

"Iran launched multiple one-way attack drones in an attempt to strike commercial ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz," the US Central Command said in a post on X late Friday evening.

It said US forces downed all of them in recent hours, and traffic flow through the strait continues unimpeded.

"The international trade corridor remains open for transit," the CentCom said.

The CentCom said US forces continue to strictly enforce a blockade against Iran, redirecting 139 compliant commercial ships and disabling nine non-compliant ships.

In the past week, at least three ships with Indian seafarers on-board have been targeted by US forces, resulting in the deaths of three mariners.

India lodged a strong protest with the US, asserting that such lethal actions against commercial shipping are not justified.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to US Secretary of State Marco Rubio on Friday and lodged a strong protest regarding the US Navy attacks in the Gulf that killed three Indian mariners. "Such lethal actions against commercial shipping are not justified," Jaishankar said about his phone conversation with Rubio. (PTI)

US Congress remembers Indian-American tech leader S Somasegar

WASHINGTON, June 13: The US Congress paid tribute to Indian-American entrepreneur late Sivarimakrishnan Somasegar for his contributions to the growth of Microsoft and the technology sector in the US. Somasegar, popular as 'Soma' among colleagues, passed away on May 19, at the age of 59.

"Soma was an incredible technologist, entrepreneur, leader, and friend in our Community," Suzan DelBene, Congresswoman from Washington state's first district, said in the US Congress earlier this week. Born and raised in southern India, Soma came to the United States to attend Louisiana State University.

In 1989, he began his career at Microsoft and played a critical role in Windows NT, one of the most important projects in the company's history. "Through his remarkable management skills, dedication, and work ethic, he rose to senior leadership at Microsoft, ultimately serving as Senior Vice President until 2015," DelBene said, recalling her time with him at Microsoft.

She said after leaving Microsoft, Soma devoted himself to supporting the next generation of entrepreneurs as a managing director at Madrona Venture Group, where he guided countless startups and helped strengthen the region's innovation ecosystem.

"Beyond his professional achievements, Soma was deeply committed to his community. As the proud cofounder of the Seattle Orcas, he helped bring professional cricket to the Pacific Northwest and shared his love of the sport with many in our region," she said. (PTI)

Trump accuses Iran of attacking Indian ships; Tehran rejects charge as 'baseless'

WASHINGTON, June 13: US President Donald Trump accused Iran of carrying out drone attacks against Indian ships leaving the Strait of Hormuz, describing the alleged action as "totally unacceptable", while Tehran rejected the charge as "baseless".

Three vessels with Indian crew came under attack off the Oman coast this week. One of them resulted in the death of three Indian seafarers on Wednesday.

"Their (Iran's) totally rebuffed Drone attack last night against Indian Ships leaving the Hormuz

Strait is TOTALLY UNACCEPTABLE," Trump claimed in a post on Truth Social on Friday.

In the same post, Trump also accused Iran of leaking the terms of the peace deal to the media that had nothing to do with the points under discussion.

Iran vehemently rejected Trump's allegation.

"The US president's accusation against Iran regarding an Indian vessel in the Strait of Hormuz is simply baseless," the Iranian Embassy in India said in a social media post late Friday night.

"It is an attempt to divert public attention from the brutal fact that the US has attacked 3 Indian vessels in less than a week and killed 3 innocent Indian sailors. That's pathetic!" it said.

Trump's remarks came after India summoned the Charge d' Affaires of the US Embassy in New Delhi to protest against US attacks on commercial ships carrying Indian nationals near the Oman coast.

India has described the attacks on commercial vessels as "deeply worrisome" and it has strongly taken up the matter with the US. (PTI)

Pakistan says US-Iran peace deal may be finalised within 24 hours

ISLAMABAD, June 13: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Saturday said a US-Iran peace deal could be finalised within the next 24 hours, raising hopes of a diplomatic breakthrough after months of conflict and negotiations.

"We are closer to a peace deal than ever before. With finalisation likely expected in the next 24 hours, Pakistan is preparing for the electronic signing of the peace deal immediately after, followed by technical level talks next week," Sharif said in a post on X.

He thanked the United States and Iran for their "ongoing commitment" during the negotiations and expressed appreciation for support from countries in the region.

"We are confident that this historic peace deal will form a strong foundation for lasting peace," he said in the post in which he tagged US President Donald Trump, Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and the country's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

There was no immediate confirmation from the White House or Iranian authorities regarding Sharif's latest assertion on the timing of the agreement. Sharif's remarks came a day after he said the US and Iran had agreed on the text of a peace deal and that Pakistan was working closely with both sides to finalise the next steps.

"Setting aside the noise, we can confirm that a final, agreed upon text of the peace deal has been reached and Pakistan is now working closely with both sides to finalise the next steps," he said on Friday.

Earlier, Araghchi had suggested progress in the negotiations, saying the "Islamabad Memo-

randum of Understanding has never been closer".

"Pending its finalisation, the media should refrain from entering speculation about its content. In line with our responsible and transparent approach, all details will be shared with the public in due course," Araghchi said in a social media post, without providing further details.

Iranian officials have indicated that an agreement is close, but have also said the memorandum of understanding remains under review.

Trump said on Friday that the United States was close to signing a deal with Iran to wind down the conflict and that a memorandum of understanding could be signed in the coming days.

Meanwhile, Vance cautioned against what he described as "a lot of fake information" circulating about a potential deal. "The Iranians are not receiving any cash, and no funds are being released for simply signing a deal or attending a meeting," Vance said in a social media post.

He said on Friday economic benefits for Iran would depend on it fulfilling its obligations under the proposed arrangement.

"This deal has the potential to remake the region and lead to lasting peace," Vance said, while urging caution over unconfirmed media reports and anonymous social media claims.

The conflict, which began on February 28, has rattled global markets, tested regional alliances and intensified diplomatic efforts to secure a negotiated settlement.

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs separately said in a post that Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar spoke with Swiss Foreign Minister Ignazio Cassis on Saturday.

According to Islamabad, the two ministers welcomed what they described as encouraging progress towards "an understanding between Washington and Tehran" and "expressed hope that ongoing efforts would contribute to peace and stability in the region".

Pakistan has emerged as a key mediator in the US-Iran negotiations, facilitating contacts between Washington and Tehran and hosting diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the conflict.

Days after a fragile ceasefire was established in April, Islamabad hosted the first round of peace talks. It was attended by senior officials from both sides but they failed to clinch a deal.

Sharif's recent remarks underscore revived diplomatic efforts surrounding the peace talks.

The negotiations have focused on Iran's nuclear programme, the fate of its stockpile of enriched uranium, US sanctions relief and arrangements for reopening and securing the Strait of Hormuz.

The latest push for a peace deal comes amid renewed tensions — a flare-up that has heightened concerns over the safety of commercial shipping in the region.

Earlier this week, three merchant vessels carrying Indian crew members were struck in separate US military actions off the Oman coast, with three Indian seafarers killed in one such incident. India on Friday summoned US charge d'affaires Jason Meeke, the second time in a week, and told him that American military's "lethal and deadly" strikes on commercial vessels with Indian crew members off the coast of Oman are "unacceptable" and they undermine the safety, security and stability of international maritime commerce. (PTI)

Slovak president says he looks forward to PM Modi's 'historic visit'



BRATISLAVA (SLOVAKIA), June 13: Slovak President Peter Pellegrini on Saturday said he looked forward to welcoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bratislava, calling it a "historic visit" that would open new opportunities for Slovakia-India cooperation.

Modi will be visiting Slovakia on June 14 and 15, the first by an Indian prime minister to the central European nation since its independence in 1993.

"Your historic visit will build on our good dialogue from New Delhi and open new opportunities for Slovakia-India cooperation," President Pellegrini said in a social media post.

Pellegrini was responding to Modi's announcement of the visit. Earlier on Saturday morning,

ahead of his departure for France, from where he will visit Slovakia, Modi said he looked forward to discussions with Pellegrini and Prime Minister Robert Fico in Bratislava, as well as interactions with top business leaders.

"The India-EU Free Trade Agreement offers innumerable opportunities for strong commercial and trade ties," Modi added in his post on X.

Modi said during his June 13-18 visits to France and Slovakia, he will attend various programmes, including bilateral talks, multilateral engagements and also hold interaction with the Indian diaspora.

"The focus will be on boosting economic as well as cultural linkages," he said. Modi will also participate in the G7 Summit in Evian, France on June 16-17. (PTI)

Clashes erupt in Congo's capital as opposition rejects changes to presidential term limits

KINSHASA, June 13: Violent clashes erupted Friday in Congo's capital, Kinshasa, during a rally against a proposed constitutional change that opponents say could pave the way for President Félix Tshisekedi to seek a third term.

The demonstration, organized by the opposition coalition C64, was dispersed by police with tear gas after protesters clashed with pro-government supporters outside Parliament.

Congo is plagued by multiple crises, including an Ebola outbreak and an escalation of the decades-long conflict with the Rwanda-backed M23 rebels, one of more than 100 armed groups vying for control in the eastern provinces.

Tshisekedi, 62, has been in office since 2019, and is due to complete his second five-year term in 2028. He has said he would be willing to seek a third term if approved by voters in a referendum. The Congolese Constitution bars any revision of presidential term limits. However, a bill under consideration in the National Assembly, a lower chamber, would allow the president to amend those provisions in the event of a "major dysfunction" that paralyzes state institutions, potentially following a referendum.

The country's main opposition parties, which have been divided in recent years, joined forces in May under the banner of C64, or Coalition Article 64, to oppose what they describe as an attempt by Tshisekedi to remain in power. The coalition has called the proposed changes a "serious threat" to the country's stability. The rally on Friday descended into clashes between opposition supporters and pro-government activists before police intervened.

Among those injured was Martin Fayulu, runner-up in the 2018 presidential election and one of Congo's most prominent opposition figures. A video posted on his official Facebook page showed Fayulu with blood visible around his eyes and on the collar of his white shirt as supporters helped him through a crowd. (AP)

Trump's name still on Kennedy Center, though officials say will be down by noon

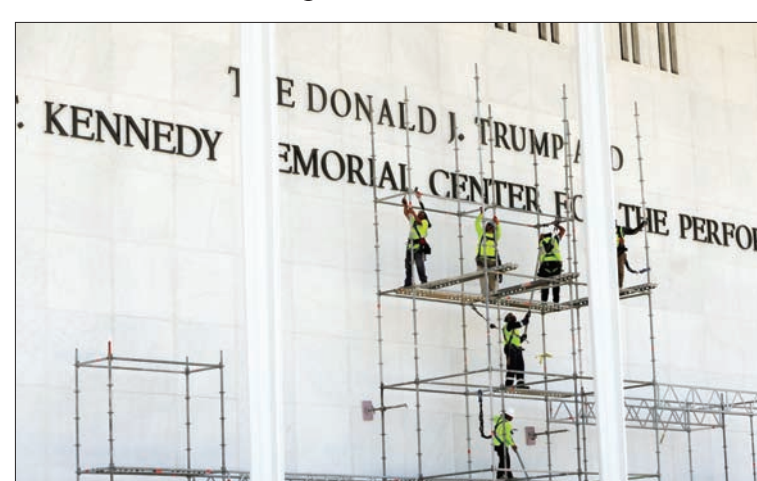
WASHINGTON, June 13: President Donald Trump's name remained on the facade of the Kennedy Center early Saturday despite a court-ordered Friday deadline to remove references to Trump from the building and other aspects of the iconic performing arts venue's operations.

Scaffolding was erected Friday around a section of the building that includes Trump's name, but shortly after midnight, the Kennedy Center asked a judge to extend the deadline until noon Eastern Time on Saturday because of thunderstorms that had swept through the Washington area, causing a delay.

In the filing, the Kennedy Center offered assurance that the "removal work is presently ongoing" and would "conclude in the early hours of the morning."

A few hours later, workers begin covering the scaffolding with tarps.

Dozens of people spent hours Friday on the plaza in front of the Kennedy Center taking pictures and cheering occasionally as they broke into chants of "take it down." Rep. Joyce Beatty, D-Ohio, an ex-officio board member who sued to have Trump's name removed from the building, was spotted at one point on the plaza.



Earlier Friday afternoon, a judge rejected a request to pause the court-ordered deadline. The institution appealed that ruling, an effort that was also rebuffed Friday evening.

After ignoring the Kennedy Center for much of his first term, Trump has wielded tremendous influence over the venue during his return to office. Just a month into his second term, he ousted the center's previous leadership and replaced it with a board of trustees that

named him chairman. Trump's name was quickly added to the building.

In his ruling that only Congress could make changes to the Kennedy Center's name, US District Judge Christopher Cooper also blocked the administration from closing the cultural and arts venue for major renovations that had been planned to start in July and last for two years.

The Kennedy Center's leadership argued in its appeal Friday that the re-

novation was badly needed and accused the lower court, in terms that seemed similar to Trump's speech patterns, of interfering in the effort.

"The District Court is not allowing us to close in order to properly fix up and repair the Building, including potentially life threatening structural damage like beams and parking garage ceilings that are rusted, and in serious danger of falling onto people below," according to the appeal. "Indeed, total collapse!"

Even as the Kennedy Center has fought efforts to remove Trump's name from the building, it has taken steps to comply with Cooper's initial ruling.

A June 4 memo to staff from the Kennedy Center's Office of General Counsel said email signatures, letterhead and other documents must reflect the name as "The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts" or "Kennedy Center."

The Kennedy Center's website has dropped Trump's name. And an earlier email sent to members offering ticket packages for the June 28 Mark Twain Award for American Humor ceremony came from the Kennedy Center without including Trump's name. (AP)

Centre to provide ₹ 10 crore rice aid for refugees in Mizoram

AIZAWL, June 13: The Centre will provide rice worth ₹ 10 crore to support nearly 40,000 refugees from Myanmar and Bangladesh, and displaced people from Manipur currently taking shelter in Mizoram, an official statement said here on Saturday.

The assurance came after Chief Minister Lalduhoma highlighted the humanitarian challenges faced by the state in accommodating refugees and sought the Centre's support during a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi on Friday, the statement said.

During the meeting held at the Union Home Minister's office, Lalduhoma informed Shah that Mizoram is currently providing shelter to nearly 40,000 refugees from Myanmar, Bangladesh, and internally displaced people from Manipur.

He said that the state government has been making every possible effort to provide humanitarian assistance to the refugees and stressed the need for urgent support from the Centre, it said.

Responding to the request, Shah informed the chief minister that the Centre would provide ₹ 10 crore



worth of rice to aid relief efforts and help meet the food requirements of the refugees residing across the state, the statement said.

Over 28,000 Myanmar nationals, mostly from Chin state, have been taking shelter in Mizoram since February 2021 following the military coup in the neighbouring

country, while about 2,300 asylum seekers belonging to the ethnic Bawm tribe, one of the Mizo tribes, from Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts, fled to the state after a military offensive against an ethnic insurgent group in 2022, officials said.

Additionally, nearly 7,000 Kuki-

Zo people from Manipur displaced by ethnic violence in May 2023 also took shelter in Mizoram, they said.

The Chin, Bawm and Zo-Kuki people share close ethnic ties with Mizo people.

The official statement also said that the Shah and Lalduhoma also discussed a range of development and security-related matters concerning Mizoram during the meeting.

The chief minister urged the Centre to extend funds under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme to Mizoram to strengthen the government's efforts in combating drug trafficking and cybercrime, it said.

Lalduhoma pointed out that Mizoram has not been receiving assistance, unlike other northeastern states under the scheme, because of its peaceful security environment.

In response, Shah advised the Mizoram government to submit more project proposals under the PM-DeVINE (Prime Minister's Development Initiative for North Eastern Region) Scheme and assured support to pursue the proposals from his end, the statement added. (PTI)

Papum Pare DC calls for innovative waste management plans

HT Correspondent
YUPIA, June 13: Deputy Commissioner Papum Pare, Lobsang Tsering on Friday urged all Zilla Parishad Members (ZPMs) to brainstorm and develop innovative and practical methods for effective solid waste management in their respective jurisdictions.

The Deputy Commissioner made the call while chairing a consultative meeting on the Solid Waste Management Rules 2026 with PRI members and officials from PHE & WSD, Tourism and Agri-allied Departments at the ZPC Conference Hall, Yupia.

The meeting was organised by the District Panchayat Office in collaboration with the District Administration following the Supreme Court order dated February 19, 2026, mandating the transfer of Solid Waste Management responsibilities to Panchayat bodies, which were earlier handled by the PHE & WSD and Urban Development Department.

Addressing the gathering, the DC stated that the waste management plans prepared by the PRI members should clearly outline methods of waste collection, challenges faced at the grassroots level and the support required from concerned departments. He further stressed the importance of involving community members while formulating

such plans.

Highlighting the need for practical discussions, Lobsang Tsering remarked that consultative meetings should be interactive rather than merely academic and suggested that ZPMs personally present their proposals and action plans during future meetings.

The Deputy Commissioner also directed all ZPMs to identify Bulk Waste Generating (BWG) pockets within their jurisdictions and submit the details to the Panchayat Office for registration and uploading on the CPCB portal.

ADC-cum-DPDO Tame Yajum, in her introductory address, stated that the need for convergence of Solid Waste Management programmes under Urban Development and PHE & WSD had been felt for a long time and the present transfer of the subject to Panchayati Raj Institutions is a significant initiative towards integrated waste management.

Expressing optimism, she said that with the manpower available within PRI institutions and technical support from the concerned departments, the district would be able to address solid waste management challenges effectively in the near future.

ZPC Bamang Yaju urged PRI members to utilise the opportunity to understand their roles and re-

sponsibilities under the new rules and requested departmental officials to actively participate in Gram Sabhas for wider dissemination of information.

During the programme, Er. Nabam Kuku, Assistant Nodal Officer for SWM, delivered a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the Solid Waste Management Rules 2026 and elaborated on the responsibilities of PRI members in implementing the provisions of the rules.

Officials from PHE & WSD, including Executive Engineers Debia Padang and Sawang Rieng, along with AE Harang Sonam, sensitised PRI leaders about the various components of Swachh Bharat Mission Phase I and II, including ODF Plus initiatives.

The officials unanimously emphasised the importance of segregation of waste at the source, stating that proper segregation alone could resolve a major portion of waste management issues. They also highlighted the crucial role of women and Self Help Groups (SHGs) in ensuring proper waste disposal and management practices.

The meeting was attended by ZPMs of Papum Pare district, Heads of Departments of Agri and allied departments, PRI members and officials from various line departments.

Sikkim CM inspects state guest house near Bagdogra Airport



GANGTOK, June 13: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Saturday inspected the state guest house near Bagdogra Airport in West Bengal and directed officials concerned to explore its redevelopment and future utilisation.

Accompanied by Minister Bhim Hang Limboo, Chief Secretary R Telang, Principal Chief Engineer Chandra Vijay Basnet and several officials, the CM visited the premises.

According to a chief minister's social media post, the inspection was carried out to "assess its present condition and explore possibilities for its renovation, modernisation, and better utilisation".

Spread across nearly 28,800 square feet, the strategically located property is owned by the Sikkim Tourism Development Corporation and is currently leased to the Airport Authority of India (AAI).

At present, it is being used by CISF personnel deployed for the security of Bagdogra Airport, he said.

Tamang said, "Spread over approximately 28,800 square feet, the property holds immense potential and can be developed into a valuable asset for the people of Sikkim. Owing to its strategic location near Bagdogra Airport, it offers significant opportunities to strengthen the state's hospitality infrastructure and provide better facilities for visitors, guests, and officials."

During the visit, the team reviewed the existing infrastructure and deliberated on the scope for upgrading the facility, he said.

The chief minister said the government's objective is "to preserve and revitalise this important state asset while enhancing its functionality, appearance, and long-term value."

He also stated that the departments concerned have been directed to examine suitable measures for the property's redevelopment.

"The property can serve the people of Sikkim more effectively and contribute meaningfully to the state's growth and development," the chief minister said.

The proposed revamp is expected to boost the state's hospitality infrastructure while making better use of a valuable government asset situated at one of the key gateways to Sikkim, he added. (PTI)

Nagaland Cong seeks people's feedback to shape its 2028 state poll roadmap

KOHIMA, June 13: The Nagaland unit of the Congress on Saturday launched "People's Voice Questionnaire", a statewide exercise seeking feedback from the people to formulate its vision and policies for the 2028 Assembly elections.

Addressing a press conference here, the Nagaland Congress Working President Khriedi Theunuo said the questionnaire has been designed to gather opinions on key issues affecting the state and to better understand the aspirations, concerns and priorities of the people.

He said the feedback would assist the Congress in developing a people-centric policy framework and election agenda.

"The Congress wants to know what the people expect from the party and what kind of future they envision for Nagaland. The responses will help shape our policy-making and preparations for the 2028 elections," Theunuo said. (PTI)

No FIRs in purely civil or commercial disputes: Nagaland police

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, June 13: The Nagaland DGP's office has directed all police stations and district executive forces DEFs in the state not to register FIRs in disputes relating to recovery of business dues, trade credits, pending loans, contractual breaches, or other purely civil/commercial transactions unless there is clear evidence of dishonest or fraudulent intention right at the inception of the transaction.

In a circular, dated June 10, the state police chief instructed that station house officers (SHOs) and officers-in-charge must personally scrutinise every complaint involving business dues, loans, or contractual matters.

In case the criminality is not appar-

ent on the face of the complaint, police must register a preliminary enquiry (PE) as mandated under the BNSS to verify facts and determine whether a cognizable offence exists, it said.

The order said: "If the complaint discloses only a civil dispute without prima facie proof of dishonest intention at the beginning of the commencement of the civil matter concerned, no FIR shall be registered."

It added that the complainant will be advised in writing to approach the competent civil court and copies of the circular must be displayed prominently in every police station for public information.

Any SHO or police officer who violates these instructions by register-

ing an FIR in a purely civil matter will face strict disciplinary action, including major penalty proceedings.

The circular was issued in light of a series of Supreme Court judgments and directives to prevent the misuse of criminal law to settle civil and commercial matters.

The police advised the public to approach the competent civil court, consumer forum, or avail alternative dispute resolution mechanisms (arbitration/mediation) for speedy resolution of commercial and loan-related disputes.

It added that genuine cases involving cheating or criminal breach of trust, with clear dishonest intent at the outset, will continue to be investigated after a due preliminary enquiry.

Old mortar defused in Arunachal's Tawang

ITANAGAR, June 13: A live mortar, supposedly of the 1962 India-China war, was successfully defused by the Indian Army in Arunachal Pradesh's Tawang district, a senior police officer said on Saturday.

Tawang Superintendent of Police Tasi Darang said the unexploded mortar was recovered on Thursday afternoon in Lebrang area within the Tawang township, prompting an immediate security mobilisation.

"The information regarding the live mortar bomb was received from Tawang Police Station sub-inspector Lham Thinley. We immediately contacted the Indian Army, and the local police cordoned off the entire area to ensure public safety," the SP said.

The mortar was defused on Friday in the presence of senior officials, including 190 Mountain Brigade Commander Brigadier Bhupal Singh, Colonel N Vasantharaj, Major Mohammad Akhlaas, and the SP, another officer said. (PTI)

Passenger footfall at Agartala's MBB airport has almost doubled in 12 years: Official

AGARTALA, June 13: Passenger footfall at Maharaja Bir Bikram (MBB) Airport in Agartala has "almost doubled" in the last 12 years with the induction of more flights to different destinations, an official said on Saturday.

MBB Airport is the second busiest airport in the northeast, the official said.

"The number of passengers using the airport has received a major boost after the inauguration of the new terminal building. Passenger footfall has increased from 8 lakh annually in 2014 to 15 lakh during 2025-26 FY, which is almost double," Airport Director, K M Nehra said at a press conference.

Currently, 34 flights operate in and out of MBB airport daily, ferrying around 5,000 passengers every day.

"Earlier (2014), flight operations were confined only to Guwahati and Kolkata, but now the airport is connected with several cities like Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Imphal and Bagdogra", he said.

Nehra said there is a need to introduce direct flight service from Agar-

tala to Mumbai and Chennai, as many students and professionals are residing there.

"DG Yatra", a new digital service for passengers, has been introduced to ensure the seamless movement of flyers, and dedicated manpower will be deployed to assist passengers in using it.

On the operation of international flight services, Nehra said the airport authorities are ready.

"Separate provision for immigration, security, arrival and departure lounges is available at the MBB airport's new terminal building. It can be started at any point of time", he said.

On the opening of Kailashahar airport in Unakoti district, Nehra said the Airport Authority of India (AAI) has already sought 20 acres of land from the state for expansion of the existing facility.

"The AAI wants to make it an all-weather airport, for which we need at least 20 acres of land. We are still working on the project, but additional land is required", he said.

The Kailashahar airport has been shut since 1990. (PTI)

MLA Toko Tatung signs MoU with Ekluvya to provide quality digital learning, competitive exam coaching and teacher support at no cost to students

Keyi Panyor launches free digital education mission under Vision 2040

HT Correspondent
YAZALI, June 13: In a major initiative aimed at transforming the education sector in Keyi Panyor district, 16-Yachuli MLA Toko Tatung on Saturday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Ekluvya to launch a comprehensive free digital education programme for students and teachers across the constituency.

The agreement was signed in the presence of Vijayan MJ, Chief Executive Officer of the Keyi Panyor Mission Plan, and Aneil Deepak, Chief Executive Officer of Ekluvya.

The initiative forms part of the Comprehensive Action Plan for Education (CAPE) under the Keyi Panyor Mission Plan 2040, which seeks to strengthen public education through improved infrastructure, accountability, equal access to learning opportunities and quality educational support.

Speaking on the occasion, Tatung reiterated that education should not be treated as a business but as a powerful tool for social transformation.

He said the mission is focused on revitalising neglected educational systems while ensuring every child receives quality education regardless of economic background.



As part of the broader education reform effort, extensive teacher training programmes were conducted on June 8 and 9 to enhance classroom effectiveness and improve learning outcomes.

A dedicated programme was also organised on June 10 to honour and strengthen Anganwadi workers, recognising their crucial role in early childhood care, development and education.

Under the newly signed agreement, Ekluvya will introduce a digital learning platform to support students and teachers.

The programme will cater to students from Classes VI to XII and will also provide specialised preparation for competitive examinations such as NEET and JEE through digital resources, expert mentorship and continuous academic support.

Officials said the initiative is designed to bridge educational gaps, improve academic performance and create greater opportunities for students studying in government schools.

A key feature of the programme is that it will be implemented entirely free of cost for students and families in Keyi Panyor.

The initiative aims to provide access to modern educational tools and quality learning resources while restoring public confidence in government schools.

The programme reflects the constituency's long-term vision of building an inclusive and accountable education system where students, teachers, Anganwadi workers and educational institutions are empowered to achieve excellence and contribute to the region's future development.

Nagaland's Cong MP condemns killing of Nagas in Manipur

KOHIMA, June 13: Nagaland's Congress MP Spongmeren Jamir on Saturday condemned the killings of six Nagas in Manipur, and called for stronger intervention by the Y Khemchand Singh government in the neighbouring state and the Centre.

The Manipur Police had on Wednesday said they found the mortal remains of six people, suspected to be of missing Naga men, who had been held hostages by armed groups in Kangpokpi district. Jamir, also the president of Nagaland Pradesh Congress Committee, said those involved in the killing of Nagas must be arrested.

"This is a very serious case because it is against humanity and human rights. Those who are involved must be apprehended," the Congress MP said. Jamir also cautioned that the situation should not spill over into Nagaland and urged the state government to remain vigilant and take precautionary measures.

"The state government should be on alert, and precautionary measures must be taken," he said. Jamir said that the Manipur government and the Centre must act "more vigorously" to control the situation and prevent escalation. (PTI)

E-AUCTION FOR TEA STALL AT TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-Auction for Tea stall at Digboi, Amguri, Moranhat & Tinsukia over Tinsukia Division. Rate Unit: Annual Licensing Fee. Trips/Days. 1826.

Auction Catalogue No. CATG-TSK-26-01		
Seq No.	Lot No./Category	Description
AA/1	Catg-TSK-DBY-GMU-2-24-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit (GMU))	GMU (Tea Stall no-1) at Digboi station
AA/2	Catg-TSK-AGI-GMU-104-25-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit (GMU))	At PF-1, GMU tea stall no 3, size 8X4=32 sq feet
AA/3	Catg-TSK-MRHT-GMU-116-24-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit (GMU))	At PF-2, GMU tea stall no 2, size 8X4=32 sq feet
AA/4	Catg-TSK-MRHT-GMU-117-24-1 (Catering - General Minor Unit (GMU))	At PF-1, GMU tea stall no 3, size 8X4=32 sq feet
AB/1	Catg-TSK-SMU-181-25-1 (Catering - Special Minor Unit (SMU))	Tea Stall no 2 at PF-2 indicated in Tinsukia Sketch plan, size: 8 x 4 = 32 sq. feet

Auction Start Date & Time: At 11.30 hrs. & Closing at 12.40 hrs. of 29-06-2026. Initial Cooling off period is 30 minutes. Lot wise closing time can be viewed in e-Auction module of IREPS.

Note: Prospective bidders are requested to visit E-Auction Leasing Module on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in for more details.

Divisional Commercial Manager (C), Tinsukia

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PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE

As per the provision of the EIA Notification dtd. 14.09.2006, the Public Hearing for the Proposed "North Boro Hundong Limestone Block (Part- A) Auctioned Block area 188.498 Ha with Limestone Production Capacity 6.0 Million TPA, Waste (OB/B): 2.8 Million TPA & Top Soil: 0.076 Million TPA (Total Excavation: 8.876 Million TPA) at Village: Boro Lakhindong, P.O. & P.S.: Umrangso, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788931 by M/s. Star Cement Limited" to be held as per following schedule:

Date & Time	Venue
23-07-2026 at 11:00 A.M.	At Proposed Project Site, Vill: Boro Lakhindong, P.O. & P.S.: Umrangso, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam. PIN: 788931

Interested persons of the locality including bonafide residents, NGOs, etc., are hereby requested to attend the aforesaid Public Hearing for getting their statements recorded, if any. Stakeholders may also send their views before the date of Public Hearing to the Member Secretary, APCB.

To know details of the proposed Project, interested person may collect the Executive Summary of Draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Report for the project, available at the following offices:

- The District Commissioner, Dima Hasao District, Halflong Assam.
- The Principal Secretary, NCHAC, Halflong, Dima Hasao District.
- The Addl. Director, District Industries & Commerce Centre, Dima Hasao District.
- The Gaonburah, (a) Boro-Lakhindong Village, (b) Choto-Lakhindong Village & (c) Tarvelangso Village.
- Head Office, APCB, Bamunimadam, Guwahati - 21.
- Regional Laboratory cum Office, Silchar, District: Cachar, Assam.
- APCB's website at <http://www.pcbassam.org>.

Date: 12-06-2026 Sd/- Member Secretary

Predawn police search at Abhishek's residence triggers fresh political storm in Bengal

KOLKATA, June 13: In a predawn raid certain to deepen the political faultlines in West Bengal, police personnel, accompanied by central forces, searched TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee's residence here for several hours on Saturday in pursuit of his close aide in connection with an alleged financial fraud, officials said.

The operation, led by a team from Paschim Medinipur's Salboni Police Station and assisted by Kolkata Police personnel, began at around 2 am and triggered a confrontation, with the TMC alleging "political vendetta" and BJP leaders insisting that investigators were merely following due process.

Former chief minister and TMC supreme Mamata Banerjee rushed to Abhishek's Kalighat residence and remained there till the search operation was concluded and the police left the premises.

Police sources said the search was primarily aimed at tracing Abhishek's personal assistant Sumit Roy, who is wanted in connection with an ongoing investigation into a "financial fraud" case registered at Salboni Police Station.

According to the sources, Roy's mobile phone was last traced to Banerjee's Kalighat residence, prompting investigators to launch the operation. The officials said the raiding police team repeatedly knocked on the doors of Abhishek's residence but received no response and was made to wait outside for nearly four hours.

The TMC alleged that the police team broke open a lock and entered the premises to carry out the search. "They broke the lock and



searched the entire house," Abhishek told reporters after the raiding team left at around 7.30 am after searching the premises for nearly an hour and a half.

Asked if Roy could be traced at the premises, the TMC leader said, "You should ask that question to the police who searched my house thoroughly. I am not the spokesperson of the police."

Sources in the investigating team said Roy could not be located despite the extensive search, and the team left without making any seizures. The premises in Kalighat's Patuapara area remained heavily guarded throughout the operation, with the deployment of central forces in the neighbourhood, while personnel from Kalighat and Bhabanipur police stations assisted the search team.

The police officers, however, declined to disclose details of the case or the evidence they were seeking. Personnel, including women officers, participated in the

investigating agencies over the past week. Just two days ago, the West Bengal CID questioned him in connection with the alleged forged-signature case linked to the state assembly.

He has been summoned again on June 14 after investigators were reportedly dissatisfied with certain aspects of his responses.

The Calcutta High Court, while directing Banerjee to cooperate with the probe, had observed that no coercive action should be taken against him for two weeks.

On Friday, CID officers also visited his Kalighat residence to serve a notice in connection with a complaint lodged over certain remarks allegedly made by him.

Banerjee has been asked to appear before investigators on June 16 in that case. The Diamond Harbour MP was also asked to appear before the Enforcement Directorate on June 15 in connection with the agency's probe into the alleged primary school recruitment irregularities. The TMC reacted sharply to the police action.

In a brief post on X, the party said, "Political vendetta gets from bad to worse." Rajya Sabha MP Sagarika Ghose alleged that police arrived at Banerjee's residence around 3 am and that a disaster management team was subsequently called in to break open a lock before the search began.

Investigators claimed that they have incriminating evidence of financial transactions having taken place between Hazra and Roy in connection with the alleged fraud.

Saturday's operation came at a politically sensitive moment for Banerjee, who has found himself facing scrutiny from multiple in-

vestigating agencies over the past week. Just two days ago, the West Bengal CID questioned him in connection with the alleged forged-signature case linked to the state assembly.

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vestigating agencies over the past week. Just two days ago, the West Bengal CID questioned him in connection with the alleged forged-signature case linked to the state assembly.

Nothing," she wrote on X. Calling the operation an instance of "political vendetta, intimidation and mental torture", Ghose alleged that leaders unwilling to submit to the BJP were being selectively targeted. The BJP rejected the allegations, maintaining that "investigative agencies were functioning independently and that no individual was above the law".

"Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek now belong to the past. The people have already punished them for their loot and deception by throwing them out of power. But they must also be held accountable from the Constitutional and legal point of view. The TMC's web of corruption reaches the very top, and its leaders must go through this process. No one can be spared," said BJP leader Locket Chatterjee.

The latest episode has added another layer to Bengal's turbulent political atmosphere, where legal battles, agency investigations and political confrontation have increasingly intersected post-2026 assembly polls.

For the TMC, the search has become another rallying point in its long-standing charge that opposition leaders are being subjected to selective targeting after its defeat in the assembly polls.

For investigators, it was part of an ongoing criminal probe.

But politically, the images of police and central forces entering the residence of Mamata Banerjee's heir apparent before dawn ensured that the operation resonated far beyond the confines of the case itself. (PTI)

AIADMK ex-minister Pachaimal, BJP leader Vijayadharani join TVK

CHENNAI, June 13: Exodus from the AIADMK to the ruling TVK continued, with former MPs, MLAs and a former state minister K T Pachaimal, joining the TVK on Saturday.

Also, BJP leader S Vijayadharani and several others joined the ruling party.

Former minister Pachaimal, former Tirunelveli Mayor E Bhuvaneshwari, former AIADMK MPs R Vanaroja, N Balaganga, and A Elavarasan and former AIADMK MLAs S Ravi and S Murugesan, were among the prominent personalities who joined the ruling party on Saturday.

Pachaimal had served as Forests Minister in the late Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa-led Cabinet.

Three-time Congress legislator Vijayadharani, also an advocate by profession, had joined the BJP in 2024 after resigning as MLA from Vilavancode constituency.

She had formerly been president of Tamil Nadu Mahila Congress.

Both Vijayadharani and Pachaimal, who hail from the southern coastal Kanyakumari district, joined the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam along with their supporters, in the presence of its general secretary 'Bussy' N Anand. TVK senior leaders including Aadhav Arjuna were present on the occasion. TVK said over 2,500 functionaries from several political parties including 37 prominent political personalities joined.

After the Vijay-led Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam emerged victorious and managed to form the government despite lacking a simple majority, several leaders from the AIADMK defected to TVK.

Recently, former state ministers



- M C Sampath, Kadambur C Raju, Udumalai K Radhakrishnan and N R Sivapathi switched loyalties to Vijay's party.

Former ministers Vellamandi N Natarajan and MSM Anandan too had transitioned to the TVK.

In May, four AIADMK legislators resigned as MLAs and joined the TVK triggering a crisis in the Dravidian major.

"The TVK has brought about a transformation in Tamil Nadu. It is eliminating corruption, bringing safety to women, and removing the drug culture in the state. Definitely, Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay is achieving what he promised (during the Assembly polls)," Vijayadharani later told reporters.

She said she was happy joining the TVK as the party offered her work to serve the people.

Flying those defecting from the AIADMK, the party's state women's wing deputy secretary Gayathri Raguram said, "many people seem eager to join TVK for victory, position, or a few minutes of fame, without seriously considering what the party is capable of achieving development or growth or whether it can truly fulfill its manifesto promises." (PTI)

India will give voice to aspirations of Global South at G7 Summit: Modi

NEW DELHI, June 13: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said India will not only speak for itself but also give voice to the aspirations of the Global South at the upcoming G7 Summit.

In his departure statement ahead of his week-long visit to France and Slovakia, during which he will attend the summit, Modi said India's presence at the G7 reflects the trust its partners place in the country and its rising global profile. "This is the 8th consecutive G7 Summit to which India has been invited. At the G7, India will not only speak for itself, but it will also give voice to the aspirations of the Global South," he said.

The G7 Summit will be held in Evian, France, on June 16 and 17. "I am confident that my visits to France and the Slovak Republic will reinforce India's deepening engagement with both Europe and the G7, and showcase our steadfast commitment to expanding the horizon of our partnerships with the continent and beyond," Modi said.

Modi said France occupies a special place in India's strategic vision while his visit to Slovakia -- the first by an Indian prime minister since the country's independence in 1993 -- marks a historic milestone and builds on the growing momentum in bilateral ties.

The prime minister said he was eagerly looking forward to inaugurating 'Bharat Innovates' alongside French President Emmanuel Macron in Nice on June 14. This landmark event, being held against the backdrop of the India-France Year of Innovation, will connect India's most promising start-ups with global investment and serve as a major accelerator for innovations emerging from India's higher education ecosystem. From France, Modi will travel to Slovakia for a state visit on June 14-15, where he will hold talks with President Peter Pellegrini and Prime Minister Robert Fico in Bratislava and interact with business leaders. (PTI)

Haryana approves ₹ 913-cr power infrastructure expansion

CHANDIGARH, June 13: In a boost to Haryana's power sector reforms, the Distribution Reforms Committee (DRC) chaired by State Chief Secretary Anurag Rastogi has approved additional power infrastructure works worth ₹ 912.70 crore under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS).

This paves the way for major upgrades in the state's electricity distribution network. The committee also approved forwarding the proposal to the Power Finance Corporation (PFC) and the Ministry of Power for consideration and approval by the Monitoring Committee under RDSS, according to an official statement.

The decision comes at a time when Haryana's power distribution companies have emerged among the country's best-performing utilities, recording substantial reductions in line losses and significant improvements in operational efficiency, it said.

During the meeting on Friday, the chief secretary reviewed the progress of RDSS projects being implemented by Dakshin Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam Ltd (DHBVNL) and Uttar Haryana Bijli Vitran Nigam Ltd (UHB-

VNL) and noted the remarkable transformation achieved by the state's power sector in recent years.

A key achievement highlighted during the review was the sharp reduction in Aggregate Technical and Commercial (AT&C) losses. DHBVNL has brought down its AT&C losses from a baseline level of 16.93 per cent in 2020-21 to 9.54 per cent in 2024-25, while UHBVNL reduced losses from 17.21 per cent to 9.33 per cent during the same period.

Both utilities have significantly outperformed the national average of 15.04 per cent, reflecting the success of Haryana's sustained focus on power sector reforms and loss reduction measures.

Commissioner and Secretary, Energy Department, Ashima Brar said billing efficiency in Haryana has increased steadily from 82.95 per cent in 2020-21 to 90.12 per cent in 2024-25, surpassing the national benchmark of 87.59 per cent. Collection efficiency has consistently remained near 100 per cent, indicating strong financial discipline and effective revenue management by the state's power utilities. (PTI)

Emerging tech has altered definition of warfare: Rajnath

HYDERABAD, June 13: Asserting that recruits to the armed forces must be mentally prepared for the evolving nature of modern conflict, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Saturday said major powers no longer hold an edge on the battlefield as even smaller forces can inflict significant damage using specialised tactics.

Addressing the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) at the Air Force Academy at Dundigal near here, Singh also said emerging technologies have altered the very definition of warfare. "Earlier, it seemed that the big powers had a decisive edge on the battlefield. But now, comparatively, even small powers can cause heavy losses with their small but dangerous weapons and new tactics. My purpose in telling you all this is that you should be mentally ready for any form of warfare," he said.

"In contrast to the visibility of soldiers and equipment earlier, many systems such as radars, satellites, drones, sensors and robotics are deployed in modern warfare. Such scenarios are being witnessed now in which traffic systems and CCTVs of adversaries are being controlled," he said.

According to him, the definition of warfare has changed to a great extent. The newly commissioned officers should understand modern warfare and strategies and adapt, adopt, and, if necessary, amend them. Underscoring the importance of smart work along with hard work, he said smart nations are carving out a place for themselves in the modern technology landscape. Noting that IAF serves as a source of inspiration for crores of Indians, he cited the example of astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla and exhorted the officers to uphold the rich legacy of the Force. Congratulating the women officers commissioned by the Indian Air Force, he said their growing numbers make the IAF even more powerful, balanced and robust, which demonstrates the strength of the inclusive force.

He also wished success to the graduating Vietnamese cadets in their future endeavours, exuding confidence that their training will bol-

ster the friendship between the two countries.

He highlighted the Indian Air Force's success in high-stakes rescue missions and its role in ensuring the safety of foreign citizens during crises. "That way, during the humanitarian missions, the Indian Air Force has enhanced the Indian culture and ethos," he added.

A total of 231 Flight Cadets (194 men and 37 women), including the first batch of women from the National Defence Academy, were commissioned as officers in the IAF following their graduation from the Air Force Academy (AFA). The Defence Minister, who reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade of 217 Course, awarded the 'President's Commission' to the graduating cadets, marking the culmination of the pre-commissioning training of the cadets for the Flying and Ground Duty branches of IAF. Nine officers from the Indian Navy, three from the Indian Coast Guard and two from the Socialist Republic of Vietnam were awarded 'Wings' on the occasion. 'Brevets' were given to three officers upon the completion of their navigation training.

Singh was presented with a General Salute by the parade, followed by an impressive march past. The parade was interspersed with a synchronised flypast led by Chief of the Air Staff Air Chief Marshal AP Singh. The flypast showcased four types of trainer aircraft -- Pilatus PC-7 Mk II, Hawk, Kiran, and Chetak aircraft. In recognition of their exceptional performance across various training disciplines, the defence minister gave away awards to the graduating officers. Flying Officer Ashish Kumar Yadav was awarded the coveted 'President's Plaque' and the 'Nawanagar Sword of Honour' for standing first in the overall order of merit in the Pilot Course. Flying Officer Ekta Gupta was awarded the 'President's Plaque' for standing first in the overall order of merit in the navigation stream. Flying Officer Divyanshi Singh was awarded the 'President's Plaque' for standing first in the overall order of merit in the Ground Duty branches. (PTI)

ED conducts raids on TMC MLA Madan Mitra's properties to probe municipal recruitment 'scam'

KOLKATA, June 13: The Enforcement Directorate has been carrying out raids since early Saturday at multiple properties, allegedly linked to TMC MLA Madan Mitra, in West Bengal as part of its money laundering investigation into municipality recruitment "irregularities", officials said. A total of seven premises allegedly linked to Mitra, a former minister in the previous TMC regime, are being searched, they said.

Search operations were launched at Mitra's Bhabanipur residence in south Kolkata, alongside a five-floor apartment in Dakshineswar on the northern fringes of the city and a flat in Joka on Kolkata's southern outskirts, they said.

Raids are also taking place at a property in Belegkata in north Kolkata and the premises of two local clubs in Bhabanipur and Santoshpur, the officials added.

The leader was also being questioned by the investigators at his Dharendra Nath Gupta Road residence in Bhabanipur, where he was reportedly staying with his family. Mitra represents the Kamarhati assembly seat in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district.

It is alleged that Mitra received bribes in the form of cash and gold through middlemen in relation to the appointment of undeserving candidates for various posts to different municipalities, including civic bodies of Kamarhati and adjacent Titagarh, ED officials said.

They claimed Mitra is "linked" to 125 such illegal appointments. The ED officers are looking to trace paper documents involving financial transactions in connection with the case, they said.

The central agency stated that the current search operations are based on leads obtained from businessman Ayan Sil, who was arrested on March 20, 2023, in connection with the same case.

Sil is alleged to have been involved in conducting recruitment processes for multiple municipalities through his company, ABS Infozone Private Limited. The ED accused the firm of irregularities in preparing OMR sheets, organising examinations, and managing interview procedures for recruitments in state-run schools.

While probing the school job recruitment scam at properties linked to Sil, investigators stumbled upon alleged evidence which suggested widespread corruption in the recruitment of Group-D staff, typists, and other lower-level employees across at least seven municipalities in West Bengal. Officials believe that large sums of money were exchanged in return for securing jobs, with Kamarhati Municipality among the affected civic bodies. In a report submitted to the Calcutta High Court in April 2023, the ED had stated that Sil collected over ₹ 200 crore from job aspirants by promising them appointments in municipalities across Bengal, of which the agency had seized ₹ 111 crore. (PTI)

ICMR team arrives in Kozhikode after Nipah case confirmation; contact list reaches 100

KOZHIKODE (KERALA), June 13: A team from the ICMR arrived here on Saturday following the confirmation of a Nipah virus case in the district, officials said.

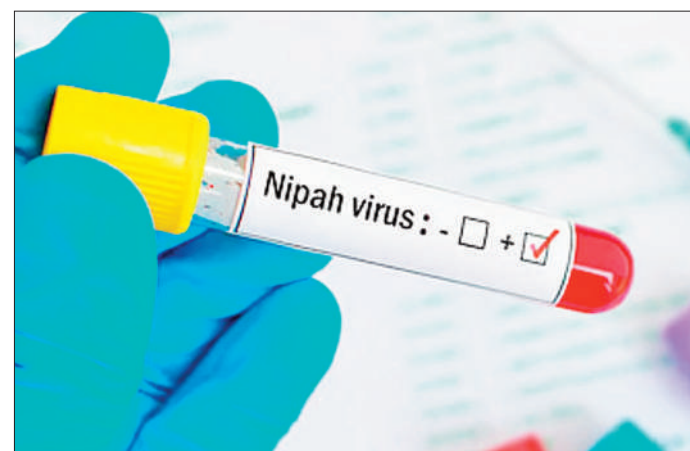
Officials also said tests conducted on three close relatives of the patient returned negative results.

According to a government press release, the Indian Council of Medical Research team interacted with Revenue Minister A P Anil Kumar, who is in charge of the district. The team visited the medical college hospital where the patient is admitted and reviewed the ongoing response measures.

The medical experts also held discussions with doctors and district administration officials regarding the Nipah case and the measures being taken to prevent further spread of the virus.

The team is expected to remain in the district for a few days, officials said.

Experts from the National Centre for Disease Control are also scheduled to visit the district, they added. Anil Kumar, earlier in the day,



chaired a review meeting on the Nipah situation and directed officials to ensure all necessary facilities for the patient and his contacts.

The meeting was held in the chamber of District Collector M S Madhavikutty.

According to the government release, the minister sought details about the patient and his contacts and instructed officials to ensure the availability of all required medical facilities, equipment and medicines.

He also directed that preventive measures adopted during previous Nipah outbreaks be continued.

The district collector informed the meeting that all measures were being implemented strictly in accordance with protocol.

She said three relatives on the patient's contact list, who had been admitted to the hospital for observation on June 12, tested negative during examinations conducted at the Government Medical College Hospital.

A statement issued by Health Minister K Muraliedharan said that four more people from the contact list were admitted to the hospital for observation on Saturday, while 13 additional persons were newly added to the contact list. All 13 have been categorised as low-risk contacts.

With the latest additions, the contact list now comprises 100 people, including four in the very high-risk category, 14 in the high-risk category and 82 in the low-risk category, the statement said.

Health workers conducted surveys in 35 additional houses in Division 5 of Ramanattukara municipality, where the infection was reported. With this, visits to all 320 houses in the division have been completed, the statement said. Muraliedharan said the patient is currently receiving ventilator support in the intensive care unit of the Government Medical College Hospital.

The minister said a medical board would assess the patient's condition after 48 hours and decide whether to administer a second dose of monoclonal antibody treat-

ment. Health workers from the control room contacted all 100 people on the contact list, including the 13 newly identified contacts. Officials also attended to 30 public calls seeking clarification and information about Nipah through the control room on Saturday.

So far, the control room has received 80 such calls.

As part of the district mental health programme, officials contacted 76 people on the contact list and provided psychological support, the statement said.

A 43-year-old native of Ramanattukara tested positive for Nipah on June 10 and was subsequently shifted to the Government Medical College Hospital.

Nipah is a zoonotic virus that can spread from animals to humans and, in some cases, between humans.

Fruit bats, also known as flying foxes, are the natural reservoir of the virus.

The infection can cause severe respiratory illness and encephalitis and is associated with a high fatality rate. (PTI)

**OFFICE OF THE
DISTRICT PRIMARY EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL,
DIPHU**

No: KAAC/PED/DPEO/SIU-198/208/2025-26/179

Dt. 12/06/2026

**MERIT LIST OF CANDIDATES FOR APPOINTMENT AS ASSISTANT
TEACHER OF LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN NOTIFIED SPECIAL FOCUS
AREA SCHOOLS UNDER KARBI ANGLONG AUTONOMOUS COUNCIL**

Sl No.	Interview Sl. No.	Name of Candidate.	TET Roll No.
1	430	SANJIB DERA	0602094
2	442	DILIP KR. LEKTHE	0501864
3	858	ROSEMARI TIMUNGPI	0601805
4	1079	SANJAY KILING	0602091
5	835	HAIJESON BEY	0601067
6	271	PAHARSING TERON	0601265
7	514	NIHA TERONPI	108105777
8	6	THUIET INGTIPI	0600794
9	872	KAJOL ENGLENGPI	0601647
10	552	HARLYN TERANGPI	0500346
11	553	RIMA RONGPIPI	0501173
12	277	ROBISING KATHAR	0602078
13	433	HILSON RONGPI	0503208
14	160	PRECILA TOKBIPI	0501018
15	451	SRI SARJEE KRAMSA	0602098
16	833	ANTORAM ENGTI	0600868
17	45	ANUP KRO	0600871
18	89	LIBBON TERONPI	0500611
19	832	MINUKA TERANGPI	0500752
20	1042	RINGSON RONGHANG	0502308
21	388	SEEMA TISSOPI	0600703
22	306	REBECCA ENGTIPI	0502935
23	490	THOMAS PHANGCHO	0601517
24	422	BIKROM LEKTHE	0501749
25	249	MUKRANG TERANG	0601222
26	142	WELCOME KRO	0502521
27	409	SERMILI TOKBIPI	0501406
28	1	ROBIN RONGHANG	601398
29	125	ANGTANG KRO	601888
30	816	STEFFI RONGHANGPI	0503070
31	130	SUKH TIMUNG	0601491
32	417	MANIM TERONPI	0500683
33	117	PREETY TOKBIPI	0600484
34	393	PROWESS BEY	0602045
35	586	DHONSING BEY	0601947
36	16	RUMI BEYPI	0501264
37	482	NIOMI LEKTHEPI	0500905
38	348	BENEDICT TISSO	0600904
39	500	SIMA BEYPI	0501439
40	307	ONIKA RONGPIPI	0500930
41	823	DEBYAJYOTI PATAR	0501833
42	474	PROTIKA RONGPHARPI	0600512
43	970	RAMSON ENGTI	0601385
44	515	RUPALI ENGLENGPI	0601818
45	364	MARY RONGPIPI	0601695
46	266	JENISH BEYPI	0500426
47	512	WINSEN BEY	0601541
48	398	JEMSON ENGTI	0501965
49	456	ELIZABETH HANSEPI	0502640
50	908	MONJIR KROPI	0502815
51	951	BRONSON ENGTI	0600973
52	513	MIRKASIM TIMUNGPI	0500767
53	224	RAMON SONG BEY	0601381
54	219	JAYSHREE HAZARIKA	0500418
55	356	MANOBI ARDAO	0500689
56	39	SANJOY PHANGCHO	0502382
57	797	EUNICE SEBU RENGMA	0500297
58	161	RUSTOM BEY	0502338
59	972	RUPLIN ENGTIPI	0600640
60	857	JEMSON SINGH RONGHANG	0601103
61	979	SAR SARKANGTHIR ENGTI	0502399
62	450	DURGA MAYA DEVI	0600153
63	252	DIPTI HANSEPI	0500277
64	537	MIRBON KATHARPI	0500755
65	392	KLEVERSON TERON	0601141
66	984	ANITA TERONPI	0500130
67	814	LILY TERONPI	0500605
68	1035	SONIA TOKBIPI	0501469
69	1037	SANDIP TISSO	0502360
70	819	RAHULIN MASLAI	0601324
71	263	LEENA TIMUNGPI	0500600
72	463	KASO TERONPI	0500535
73	919	BIDYA SING RONGPI	0601908
74	120	ELWIN KRO	0501888
75	1008	KALPANA RONGHANGPI	0601649
76	977	MIRDALIN TERANGPI	0500760
77	689	AMARJIT SINGHA	0600852
78	57	RASINGJA ENGTI KATHARPI	0501149
79	671	JUNTY TERANGPI	0500471
80	862	JIRBON KILLINGPI	0500437
81	533	SANGMIR TERANGPI	0503018
82	1090	REEMA TERANGPI	0501161
83	808	PILSING MALANG	0502178
84	195	NONGEH SINGNARPI	0500926
85	922	DALIMI HANSEPI	0500231
86	989	MARIGOLD TERANGPI	0500693
87	397	UNIKI MILIKPI	0501597
88	976	BIRSING TIMUNG	0600756
89	1093	SUNITA BEYPI	0501517
90	371	NANG SENG SHYAM	0502835
91	289	AJOLI SEB RENGMA	0500008
92	956	THENGRAK ENGTI KATHAR	0601515
93	309	SARMON TERANG	0502403
94	527	RUMIR LEKTHEPI	0600629
95	943	STEPHEN BEY	0502445
96	839	PRIYANKI TOKBIPI	0502894
97	459	SERDIHUN SINGNARPI	0503034
98	420	MALIN RONGPIPI	0502765

Sl No.	Interview Sl. No.	Name of Candidate.	TET Roll No.
99	144	ALVA KACHE RONGPHARPI	0502548
100	912	SALIGRAM NATH	0503341
101	387	PRIYA TISSOPI	0501039
102	458	JUNALI TERONPI	0500464
103	741	BABU RONGPHAR	0501695
104	84	SERDIHUN HANSEPI	0501392
105	865	JASMINE TOKBIPI	0502676
106	1074	MOLOYA TERANGPI	0500792
107	565	HELMILA THAUSEN	0500350
108	79	DILIP TERON	0503189
109	1103	SERLIN TOKBIPI	0501403
110	68	BHUPEN ENGLENG	0501718
111	1102	CLIMBERSON KRO	0503174
112	454	PALLABI DUTTA	0500934
113	623	MRIDUSMITA KONWAR	0500852
114	1070	ROSHMI PATORPI	0600620
115	399	RATAN CH TISSO	0502304
116	334	PURNA BASUMATARY	0502227
117	260	RANGSINA TOKBI	0503316
118	426	KAJECK BEYPI	0601646
119	817	FERDINAND SAGRA	0601046
120	5	LEAH TERANGPI	0500594
121	790	JOHN RONGPI	0501987
122	1107	ALISHA TERANGPI	0502547
123	824	QUEEN BORDOLOI	0600542
124	159	SAMUEL TIMUNG	0601421
125	574	LEENA GOGOI	0500597
126	702	SHILPALI SINGNARPI	0501425
127	701	GONESH PHANGCHO	0501900
128	773	RUPLIN TAROPI	0501296
129	1025	ALISHA INGTI KATHARPI	0502546
130	413	SANJOY ENGLENG	0602095
131	563	DURMI RONGPIPI	0600156
132	1034	OMPHU TERANGPI	0500929
133	400	SEMSON RONGPI	0502415
134	813	ROSY TIMUNGPI	0601811
135	1077	LIRBON KILLINGPI	0601671
136	286	MERIJIM BEYPI	0500724
137	840	JENSING KRO	0501967
138	308	GITAMANI SAIKIA	0500328
139	315	MILINA KRAMSAPI	0500740
140	358	AROTI RONGHANGPI	0502566
141	313	HUNMILI RONGPIPI	0500382
142	508	SMITA MARAK	0600730
143	532	RUMILA TERANGPI	0502985
144	1116	MOLINA TISSOPI	0500790
145	854	MONGALSING RONGPHAR	0601209
146	714	CHARLISH SINGNAR	0501808
147	580	MUNMUNI TERONPI	0500857
148	520	BONMILI HANSEPI	0500173
149	591	MONGOL SING TIMUNG	0601210
150	821	RUPALI AMSI	0501279
151	1056	RANJIT TISSO	0503318
152	806	KELVIN ENGLENG	0601138
153	22	FREEWELYN PHANGCHOPI	0601613
154	98	ROBITA TOKBIPI	0600605
155	24	KANGBURA RONGPHAR	0503239
156	412	RUKASEN HANSE	0503332
157	292	SUSHMA SARKAR	108011740
158	455	DAOGA CHARD NARZARY	0501820
159	825	SANGTE VAIPHEI	0502361
160	168	ABHISEK CHAUHAN	221220800030207
161	246	YOGENDRA CHAUHAN	1604442
162	637	RABINA JIGDUNG	0501114
163	208	NEINU PRADHAN	0500881
164	992	DURANI DEVI	0600148
165	180	RINGKI DEVI	0600590
166	27	JINTU NATH	0501973
167	283	SUMAN CHAUHAN	108014238
168	446	KIRON THAPA	0600263
169	438	NILAM ADHIKARI	0600423
170	465	SAMUEL HMAR	0502352
171	698	TULARENDRA KHAHLARY	0502509
172	815	REBECCA STEN	0600572
173	683	AMRITA DEVI	0600016
174	787	SMITA SAIKIA	0600731
175	571	SABITA SUNAR	0501331
176	1092	BARDWI BASUMATARY	0500117
177	429	AKHAMONI MOSORONG	0600007
178	69	DALEN CH. BASUMATARY	0501817
179	274	GRINALIN SANGMA	108014904
180	189	ASHA BORDOLOI	0600051
181	177	SOMIKHYA SAIKIA	2001863
182	643	JOSEPH KUJJUR	0501991
183	849	ROBERT STEN	0601397
184	812	PATRICK MASLAI	0602036
185	131	GLORIA RONGPIPI NARZARY	0500334
186	158	SABITA BASUMATARY	0501325
187	699	DIPANKAR PAUL	2000444
188	843	MATHEWS STEN	0601188
189	963	MITALI LAHKAR BORAH	0500784
190	748	NAKUL SHARMA	0601234
191	416	MELODY SINGNARPI	0500720
192	82	GRACELYN SINGNARPI	0601618
193	389	MADONNA VESO BEYPI	0500634
194	487	ROHIT RONGHANG	107004522
195	150	SAVIO KATHAR	0602102
196	2	ANAND SINGNAR	0501655
197	799	ROSE MARY TISSOPI	0501240
198	775	MAMTA KROPI	0502770

N.B: Appointment letters for 198 Assistant Teachers (Lower Primary), duly approved by the competent authority are proposed to be distributed during the KAAC Foundation Day Celebration. The appointment process for the remaining 131 nos. of Assistant Teachers (Lower Primary) posts is proposed to be taken up in the second phase, for which the requisite SIU approval is under process.

Sd/-
District Primary Education Officer,
Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, Diphu.

IPRD/ KA/ 2026-27/45

Nigerian writer Onyeka Nwelu's 'Tokyo Spies' draws attention after reported 85 mn yen Japanese deal

Nigerian writer, filmmaker, jazz musician and cultural thinker Onyeka Nwelu has returned with a new literary novel "Tokyo Spies", which has drawn attention after a Japanese publisher reportedly acquired it in a major 85 million yen deal.

The novel, set in 1887, marks an unusual cross-cultural literary project by an African writer working with Japanese history, Chinese exile, calligraphy, family duty and moral reckoning. The author also has an India connection. Nwelu has worked, taught and travelled in India, and served as visiting assistant professor of African Literature at the University of Manipur, Imphal. He is currently associated with the African Centre of India.

According to those associated with the book, "Tokyo Spies" is the first in a planned six-part literary project set in Japan. The larger project is expected to explore themes of art, history, exile, cultural exchange and the moral cost of self-invention.

"Tokyo Spies" follows Zenjiro Ito, a young calligraphy student at Tokyo Imperial University, whose life begins to collapse after he learns that his entire family has fallen gravely ill. Instead of returning home, Zenjiro flees to Tianjin in China, pretending that he is leaving Japan in pursuit of art.

In Tianjin, he is drawn into the lives of two women - Lin Ruo, warm and emotionally grounding, and Mei, disciplined, philosophical and exacting. But the lie on which Zenjiro builds his new life cannot survive for long. As his deception falls apart, he loses his home, his art, his lovers, his dignity and the future he had imagined for himself.

At the heart of the novel is calligraphy, not

merely as an art form but as a language of truth, shame and self-confrontation. Zenjiro's art becomes a mirror of his moral failure.

Reduced to living on the streets, he begins creating a new calligraphic style that blends Chinese and Japanese traditions. The style emerges not as a performance of mastery, but as an act born out of exile, humiliation and humility.

A devastating letter eventually forces Zenjiro back to Japan, where he must confront the family he abandoned, the guilt he buried and the person he has become. The novel asks whether art can redeem a person if it has first been used as a way of escaping the truth.

Nwelu has published more than 40 books, including "The Strangers of Braamfontein", which won the Crime Awards and the ANA Prize, and was described by Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka as "raunchy".

He is also the founding director of the James Currey Society in Oxford. He has been an academic visitor at the University of Oxford, a visiting scholar at the University of Cambridge, a visiting research fellow at Ohio University and a research associate at the University of Johannesburg.

His work as a filmmaker has also travelled widely. His documentary "The House of Nwapa" was nominated in the Best Documentary category at the 2017 Africa Movie Academy Awards. He later adapted his novella "Island of Happiness" into the Igbo-language film "Agwaeti Obiuto", which was nominated at the 2018 Africa Movie Academy Awards in the Best First Feature Film and Best Film in an African Language categories.

The film also won Best Film by a Director



at the Newark International Film Festival.

In 2024, his biopic of Emeka Ojukwu, "Other Side of History", was screened at the Toronto International Film Festival and premiered at Lincoln College, University of Oxford.

Nwelu is currently studying calligraphy in Osaka in Japan, a detail that gives "Tokyo Spies" a closer artistic intimacy. (PTI)

SUNNY DEOL, AKSHAYE KHANNA'S NETFLIX COURTROOM THRILLER 'IKKA' TO PREMIERE ON JULY 10



Netflix's courtroom drama "Ikka", starring Sunny Deol and Akshaye Khanna, will make its debut on July 10, the OTT platform announced on Saturday.

Directed by Siddharth P Malhotra, the film reunites the two actors for the first time in nearly three decades. They were last seen together in J P Dutta's 1997 war film "Border".

In "Ikka", Deol plays a celebrated lawyer forced to defend a man from his past, portrayed by Khanna, in a case that puts his principles and family under pressure.

The film also stars Tilotama Shome as the public prosecutor opposite Deol's character and Dia Mirza as his wife.

The film marks Deol's streaming debut and his return to the courtroom after 33 years -- he last played a lawyer in the 1993 film "Damini".

Director Malhotra said the subject had been close to him for years.

"As a storyteller, I'm always looking for stories that challenge me emotionally and creatively, and 'Ikka' has been one such journey. I've always been a huge fan of courtroom dramas.

"What drew me to 'Ikka' was the opportunity to tell a courtroom story that focuses as much on personal relationships and emotional dilemmas as it does on the pursuit of justice. To finally tell this story with a cast of the calibre of Sunny Deol, Akshaye Khanna, Dia Mirza and Tilotama Shome feels truly special," he said in a statement.

Netflix India Vice President (Content) Monika Shergill said the film marked a significant moment for the platform.

"'Ikka' brings together everything audiences love about a great courtroom drama: high stakes, moral complexity and emotional conflict. Directed by Siddharth P. Malhotra, the film explores justice, truth and accountability through a gripping narrative that keeps audiences guessing until the very end, with layered characters, unexpected turns and moral questions that linger long after the verdict," she said.

Produced by Alchemy Films, the film's cast also includes Sanjeeda Shaikh, Shishir Sharma and Akansha Ranjan Kapoor. (PTI)

'Jab We Met' is my most rejected script: Imtiaz Ali

"Jab We Met" was a story Imtiaz Ali wrote just to entertain himself, and he never thought it will be a "good enough" film to make. But the 2007 hit proved him monstrously wrong, as well as all the naysayers who rejected its script as silly.

The Kareena Kapoor and Shahid Kapoor starrer, about two diametrically opposite strangers who meet in a train and develop an unlikely friendship that much later turns into love, is still remembered for its sparkling one-liners, music and the story.

As a new director struggling to make his mark, Ali recalled how it took him a long time to complete his debut film "Socha Na Tha", starring Ayesha Takia and Abhay Deol. It was while shooting the film that he wrote "Jab We Met" during periods of inactivity.

But even while shooting "Jab We Met" in Punjab, the director said he continued to be plagued by self-doubt, unsure if the shoot would happen the next day.

"And this was a story that I wasn't even very proud of, honestly. I wrote this script just to entertain myself. I never thought this film was good enough to be made. It was just my personal toy, so to speak," Ali told PTI during a visit to its headquarters in Delhi, breaking down what it takes to write his stories.

After writing the story, he was too embarrassed to narrate it. And when he did narrate it, "believe me, this movie got rejected by producers and actors more than any other movie of mine", the director said.



Asked what they found wrong with the script, Ali listed a number of reactions that he encountered as he travelled around pitching the story to producers.

"What is this movie about?", "What is it achieving?", "There is no conflict", "And it's quite silly actually the things that are happening in this film", "Why will they accept Shahid Kapoor's character in the end?" ... This was getting rejected a lot."

Ali said the first person who actually believed in the story was actor Preity Zinta.

"It took a long time for 'Jab We Met' to find its cast. I had narrated it one time to Preity Zinta ... she was the first person who liked this story, this script."

Zinta could not be cast eventually as the making of the film got delayed and Ali went back to his original choice, Kareena Kapoor.

When Ali read the script to Zinta, she burst out laughing at the point where Shahid's character Aditya runs away from Geet at the railway station.

"And I thought she's laughing at me. And I got a little awkward about it. And then she just looked at me and said, 'This is really fun'. I asked her, 'Are you liking it?' She said, 'I'm loving it. What happens next?' And I thought, 'man, there's someone who actually likes this'."

Ali himself wrote the script and all the dialogues, including the many memorable one-liners.

Like the one where Geet catches a running train and bashfully and loudly tells the passenger who helped her get in -- as well as the rest of the coach: "Ab toh mera haath chor do... Itni bhi sundar nahi hoon main". Sustaining her non-stop prattle, she later declares confidently, "Main apni favourite hoon!" or "Bachpan se hi na mujhe shaadi karne ka bahut craze hai, by god!"

It was not just Geet's lines. Many other dialogues from the film have become part of the vocabulary of film lovers. When, for instance, an irritated Aditya tells Geet, "Tumhe utakar museum mein rakha chahiye... ticket lagni chahiye tumhe dekhne ke liye". Or when a befuddled Anshuman, Geet's one-time boyfriend, tells Aditya, "Kyun dekhoon main ganne ke khet?"

Ali said the lines were written while he was stuck in a hotel room in Manali during heavy snowfall. He never could go back to revise or have another look as they had to begin production in just 21 days. (PTI)

We were like boy scouts on a camp: Cinematographer Anil Mehta on 25 years of 'Lagaan'

They were like boy scouts in a camp, stumbling through uncharted territory, searching for answers together and somehow finding them. And now 25 years later, this is what cinematographer Anil Mehta remembers most about "Lagaan".

The 2001 film, directed by Ashutosh Gowariker and produced by Aamir Khan, broke all the rules of mainstream commercial cinema with its unconventional storyline, period setting of colonial India and lengthy runtime, emerging as both a critical and commercial success.

Ahead of the film's 25th anniversary on June 15, Mehta said "Lagaan" was developed "bit-by-bit" in prep.

"For me, it was a journey of searching, finding out what to do, how to do it and what to say, all that is understood in the process. We were literally like boy scouts on a camp, and everybody was searching for how to get this done right. It was not an easy task. It was not something that was part of the mainstream medium at that time, we were in uncharted territory," the cinematographer told PTI in an interview.

"So, everyone was on the find and the great part of that find is that all of us were looking for it together, which included a very hands-on producer in Aamir, he also used to roam around as a boy scout with us," Mehta added.

Gowariker, despite having made two films, "Pehla Nasha" (1993) and

"Baazi" (1995), which didn't work at the box office, was looking to "reinvent" himself with "Lagaan", the cinematographer said.

Set in 1893, when India was ruled by the British, the sports drama follows the residents of a small village who, crushed under oppressive taxes imposed by a ruthless British officer, stake their fate on an unlikely game of cricket to escape the burden.

Khan headlined the film as Bhuvan, the spirited villager from Champaner, Gujarat, who leads the challenge.

Mehta, an FTII graduate, said one of the biggest challenges was creating the world of "Lagaan" from the ground up -- from finding an authentic location to getting the visual texture and costumes right.

"The entire film was challenging," said Mehta, who had previously worked as a cinematographer on Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "Khamoshi" and "Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam".

Gowariker and Desai had initially chosen a location near Nashik but a trip to Bhuj changed everything, he said.

He recalled shooting actor Aishwarya Rai Bachchan's introductory song, "Mann Mohini" from "Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam", at the arid Bhuj wastelands. He realised the landscape would serve as the apt backdrop for "Lagaan".

The next morning, the trio of



Gowariker, Desai and Mehta, visited the same location.

"It's like serendipity. Nitin was saying, 'I can put the temple on this mound,' and I'm saying, 'We can have the final match with the other mound as a backdrop, so the crowd can sit like in stadium seating.' We still had enough plain land to set up the village. It's just that the morning was magical as it all came together."

The filming process was a key challenge, according to 67-year-old Mehta.

He felt Khan was under pressure to stay on schedule and pushed for continuous shooting throughout the day, while Mehta believed in shooting at

specific times to get the right light for the scene.

"He said we can figure these things out by sitting together and scheduling it correctly. The disagreement is sharp and we had to resolve it, he is a 360-degree filmmaker," the cinematographer said, adding they used bulky blimped cameras as the film was shot using synchronized sound.

Citing the example of collective problem-solving, Mehta recounted how the lighting, the camera and choreography team came together to create an illusion of overcast, rainy weather to shoot the song "Ghanan Ghanan".

In the movie, the track captured the

moment when dark clouds gathered over the village of Champaner, sending the drought-hit villagers into a frenzy of excitement, only for the clouds to move away without a drop of rain.

"If you see the song, you will see that there are no shadows on the ground because we shot when the cloud cover was there. It gives you the feeling of overcast but it's not genuine," he said.

"We are not going to get clouds in the middle of Bhuj, we found this solution, the choreographer chips in and says, 'Let's do it in 4-5 shots, they are all extended shots. I'm reinforcing this thing, how everybody comes together to find solutions to problems, and the problems crop up every day,' he added.

Speaking about the cricket sequences, the Kolkata-born lensman described the shoot as "frustrating" because the matches had to be captured authentically on camera without relying on VFX.

He revealed that the cast's lack of cricketing skills added to the chaos, particularly with actor Rajesh Vivek, who played the eccentric Guran.

According to Mehta, Vivek was the worst player, whereas Aditya Lakhia, who essayed the role of Kachra, a disabled man, was a skilled cricketer in real life.

"If the character has to hit a four with a square cut, so the ball has to

land in a particular place for a batsman to play that. Besides, we are not generating the ball in post (production) in VFX. So, we would go with the flow, and it would take hours to shoot that. If someone had to hit a six, it would take at least an hour. If Guran comes for batting, 'toh phir Allah maalik' (Then it's in God's hands)."

Off-camera the atmosphere remained lively, recounted Mehta, adding that Aamir would play chess with local villagers, while the cast bonded over card games inside the huts, and Raghubir Yadav sang traditional folk songs.

More than two decades later, "Lagaan" is remembered for its scale, storytelling, and its phenomenal success, but for Mehta, the lasting memory is the "journey" itself.

He fondly recalls his association with his camera and lighting team to crack complex visual solutions, noting they used many "jugaad" (makeshift solutions) to pull off technical feats that remain lifelong memories for him.

"It was a very long and tough journey to make that movie. That journey had inherent issues, arguments, and the tension of mounting a film like that but it also had the great joy of taking this, what I call the boy scout," concluded the cinematographer, who later worked on films like "Kal Ho Naa Ho", "Veer Zaara", "Jab Tak Hai Jaan", and others. (PTI)

Folarin Balogun, who could have played for England or Nigeria, scores 2 for US in World Cup debut

INGLEWOOD, June 13: Folarin Balogun could have played for any one of three countries. He chose the United States, and it paid off with a splashy World Cup debut on home soil.

The 24-year-old striker scored two goals as the Americans opened with a 4-1 victory over Paraguay on Friday night in front of a rabid and star-studded red, white and blue-clad sold-out crowd of 70,492 at SoFi Stadium.

"I visualized my debut in the World Cup scoring, but the reality did surpass that," Balogun said. "A very dreamy night."

With retired England captain David Beckham looking on, Balogun became the first U.S. player to score multiple goals in a World Cup game since 1930. Back then, Bert Patenaude scored all three goals in a 3-0 U.S. win over Paraguay, the first hat trick in World Cup history.

"The kid's insane," teammate Christian Pulisic said. "He's lethal right now. We're really lucky to have him."

Balogun was born in the New York City borough of Brooklyn to Nigerian parents. A month later, he moved to England, where he grew up in London. He joined Arsenal's academy at age 8. He represented England at the youth level and also played for the U.S. under-18 team.

England's roster is traditionally filled with stars. Nigeria failed to



qualify for this World Cup. So Balogun is making himself an American household name during this summer of soccer.

"Everyone will look at the goals," Pulisic said, "but the way he's fighting against these center backs, holding up the ball, getting fouls, I really like it."

Balogun committed to play for the U.S. three years ago.

"I've always said the fans gave me so much motivation and showed me so much support. The most important thing has always been to be able to repay that," he said. "I just want to continue to show the fans I

made the right decision." Among the crowd were Balogun's relatives, with extended family watching around the U.S. and in London.

"I was able to spot them out in the crowd, but it was tough because so many fans were wearing red and white," he said. "I had to sort a lot of tickets, but I'm happy to do it because this is a once in a lifetime occasion and I want everyone to experience it."

The U.S. took a 1-0 lead on an own goal by Damian Bobadilla.

Balogun extended the lead to 2-0 when Christian Pulisic played the ball

into the box to set up Balogun with his 21st career assist. That tied Pulisic for fourth most in U.S. history.

Minutes earlier, Balogun nearly had another goal, but it was called back when the U.S. was offside.

Undeterred, Balogun scored again just before halftime, putting the ball in the upper left corner for a 3-0 lead.

"I've not been able to take it all in," he said.

Balogun was heading back to the team hotel to rest.

"To be honest, I think I'll just watch some Netflix," he said, smiling. (AP)

BCCI not to intervene over foreign player availability in IPL

DHARAMSALA, June 13: The BCCI has no plans to act as a bridge between overseas players and their respective teams over their availability for the IPL despite concerns being raised by franchises in the recently concluded edition.

The BCCI has a ban in place for foreign recruits who pull out of the tournament after being bought in the auction but player availability over the two-month long IPL still remains an issue.

The likes of Josh Hazlewood, Pat Cummins and Mitchell Starc were not available for the first half of the tournament due to niggles. Delhi Capitals were adversely impacted by Starc's absence in the first half.

After their play-offs campaign, Rajasthan Royals head coach Kumar Sangakkara had expressed his frustration over Sam Curran playing the T20 back home in the UK after ruling himself out of the IPL due to an injury.

Punjab Kings co-owner Mohit Burman had said that BCCI and other boards need to align better on availability of foreign recruits.

"We were told that Sam Curran had a season-ending injury, but I think I saw him playing for Surrey for two or three games now. So that was disappointing," Sangakkara had said.

However, BCCI feels the contentious issue needs to be sorted between the player and his franchise as "they are the custodians of the players."

The Board also thinks the two-year ban in place for last minute withdrawal is a strong enough deterrent and the players are free to make their individual choice in consultation with the franchise.

To put things in perspective, Archer made himself available for the entire tournament despite the ECB wanting to manage his workload, PTI has learned.

No need for massive hike in auction purse

The current auction stands at ₹ 125 crore but the players' contracts still can't compare to the ones in European football or NFL.

The BCCI is open to a gradual increase in the future but is against a significant hike. It fears that more money at teams' disposal can lead to irrational bidding, like it happened in the case of Chris Morris back in 2021 when he became the league's costliest recruit at the time.

It is worth mentioning that the players get match fees also (₹ 7.5 lakh per game) and get additional sponsorship during the tournament over and above their contractual fee.

Post 2027, starting early in March best option

The BCCI plans to increase the number of games from 74 to 94 from the 2028 season onwards and that would require a bigger window.

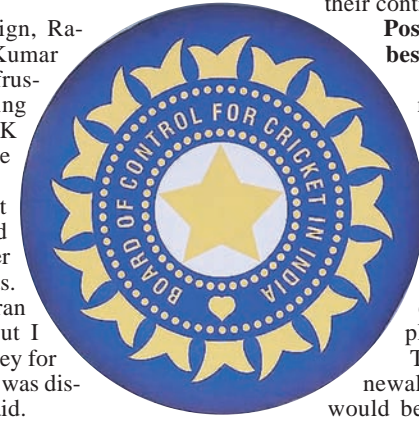
As per BCCI sources, the best window is from the first week of March till mid of May. The 2026 edition began at the end of March and the final was played on May 31.

The media rights will be up for renewal post the 2027 cycle and that would be the time all stakeholders will need to see the feasibility of bilateral series going forward.

Most Test playing nations have their own T20 leagues and they are not entirely dependent on hosting an India series like it used to be earlier.

The broadcaster is already not seeing value in some of the bilateral series being played.

The recent one off Test between India and Afghanistan was played in front of near empty stands. (PTI)



Calhanoglu says his 'more talented' team will 'dominate' Australia in WC



VANCOUVER, June 13: Turkey is back in the World Cup for the first time since 2002 and, despite the long absence, captain Hakan Calhanoglu has made some bulletin-board worthy comments about his team's first opponent.

"I think we will dominate (Saturday), the game, because we have more qualities and a more talented team," Calhanoglu said Friday of Australia, Turkey's opponent at BC Place. "So we will see (Saturday) what happens."

Turkey has had its share of continental success throughout much of this century but did not qualify for the past five World Cups. Australia is playing in its sixth consecutive World Cup and advanced to the knockout stage in Qatar in 2022.

"He's allowed to have his own opinion," Australia midfielder Aiden O'Neill said Friday about Calhanoglu's comments. "We've got quality players on our team, too, so we're ready."

Calhanoglu, a 32-year-old midfielder who won a Serie A championship this season with Inter Milan, and Turkish manager Vincenzo Montella also complimented the Socceroos.

"I would like to use some of their techniques because I think they are interesting techniques," Montella said. (AP)

ODI World Cup win showed India can cross the line, says coach Muzumdar

BIRMINGHAM, June 13: India's long-awaited ODI World Cup triumph last year has reinforced the belief that the team can finally get over the line in a global tournament, said head coach Anil Muzumdar as Harmanpreet Kaur and Co begin its quest for a maiden Women's T20 World Cup title here.

India ended years of heartbreak by lifting the 50-over World Cup at home last year, having previously finished runners-up in the 2005 and 2017 ODI editions and the 2020 Women's T20 World Cup.

Muzumdar said the historic triumph has instilled confidence within the squad ahead of its campaign opener against Pakistan on Sunday.

"It's a completely different format, isn't it? I mean, yes, we won the World Cup but that was in the ODIs, this is a brand new format. So, I guess we are really looking forward for it," Muzumdar said when asked if there is extra pressure on the team.

"One thing I can assure you that we would take a lot from that



World Cup getting into this tournament because we know for a fact that we will cross the line."

The Indian team has spent more than three weeks in the UK, including a three-match T20I series against England, and Muzumdar feels the players have adapted well to the conditions.

"As far as acclimatisation is concerned, we've had three weeks over here now. We came on 23rd of May and we've got used to it now."

Muzumdar also hailed Yastika Bhatia's return after the wicket-keeper-batter missed last year's ODI World Cup because of a serious knee injury suffered during

the team's preparatory camp in Visakhapatnam.

"I think it was very unfortunate that Yastika missed out on the previous World Cup. It was just on the last day, last minute, probably the last over that was bowled in that camp."

The left-hander has made a successful return to the T20I setup after more than two years away and has impressed at No. 3, providing India with a valuable left-handed option in the middle order.

"It was really unfortunate that in the last minute she had to miss out. It was a huge injury and the way she has come back, the way she has fought her way back in this team, it just tells you a little bit of an insight of how this team reacts to challenges. I think Yastika is a good example of that," Muzumdar said.

On India's bowling resources, Muzumdar said the side is no longer solely dependent on spin despite it remaining a traditional strength.

"Definitely, it (spin) has been our biggest strength. But if you look at this team, we have got

eight quality bowlers. Quality spin bowlers and quality seam bowlers. So we've got four and four. If you see the variety in this team, it's really good."

Muzumdar also backed explosive batter Richa Ghosh to make a major impact in the tournament after she ended a lean run with a half-century in the warm-up game against England.

"I'll not deny this, that she had a little bit of a lean phase. But she's a world-class player. We always had this talk around in the changing room that somebody as good and as talented as Richa, it will require a couple of hits out of the ground and it will all come back."

"So, I guess it happened in the last game. And I'm glad that we're getting into the World Cup with Richa being in. She spent quality game time in the previous game," he said.

"No doubt, she does a very great job for us at number six, number five. According to the situation, we get her in the game. So, yeah, Richa is a world-class player and she's a matured cricketer." (PTI)

Blind cricketer and group allege discrimination by Cathay

Airline cites unpaid excess fee



NEW DELHI, June 13: A dispute between a group of visually impaired travellers and Cathay Pacific Airways at Bengaluru airport has sparked allegations of discrimination, but the airline maintained that the passengers' failure to pay excess baggage fee in time led to denial of boarding.

The travelling group, which reached the KIAL on Thursday night, contained blind World Cup winning cricketer Lokesh, musicians Ashoka, Nam Chang Buiing, Pranay and Dadasab. They were travelling to the USA on a three-month cultural concert tour under the Samarathanam Trust for the Disabled.

"Their tone and their sudden, aggressive shift in stance indicated that they believed visually impaired individuals could not navigate or stand up for themselves. This is unadulterated discrimination," Lokesh, a partially sighted cricketer who was instrumental in India's triumph in the 2017 T20 World Cup for the Blind, told PTI.

Lokesh further alleged that the airline staff tried to snatch their mobile phones when they tried to record the incident.

However, Cathay Pacific clarified that the touring party was not allowed to board because of "non-completion of payment" and it has nothing to do with their "disability."

"Cathay Pacific is aware of the case, and this matter relates to the non-completion of payment within

the required timeframe, and not to the passengers' disability.

"Based on available records, the non-acceptance of the passengers was due to the non-completion of payment for applicable excess baggage charges within the required operational timeframe, and not to the passengers' disability," the airline said in the statement.

The flight operator said the travellers' baggage exceeded the permissible limit, and their travel coordinators could not complete the payment on time through the provided link.

"During check-in, the group was found to be carrying baggage in excess of the permitted allowance, including four additional pieces and an oversized musical instrument, for which payment options were shared with their three remotely based travel coordinators, and our teams continued to follow up to support completion of the payment. The payment link was functional and successfully used by other passengers."

The airline said they allowed additional time for the passengers to complete the payment.

"Our airport team extended support where operationally possible, including allowing additional time for completion of excess baggage payment and other formalities. As a result, we were unable to accept the group for travel on that flight. We sincerely apologise for the distress and inconvenience caused." (PTI)

Suthar strikes twice on Warwickshire debut in County C'ship

SCARBOROUGH, June 13: Fresh from a memorable Test debut for India, left-arm spinner Manav Suthar made an immediate impact in county cricket, claiming three wickets on his Warwickshire debut against Yorkshire on day two of the County Championship Division One here, on Saturday.

Suthar, who was named 'Player of the Match' for his seven-wicket haul in India's one-off Test against Afghanistan earlier this week, returned with 3/85 from 21 overs as Yorkshire were bundled out for 469 in 110.4 overs an hour into the opening session on day two.

The 23-year-old opened his county account by dismissing Yorkshire No. 3 Sam Whiteman for 55 shortly after the batter completed his half-century on the opening day.

He removed opener William Luxton, trapping him leg-before to end a marathon knock of 167 off 261 balls, at the fag end of the day. Suthar then added the wicket of George

Hill adding to the Yorkshire's collapse from 386/6 overnight to 469 all out inside 15 overs.

Suthar has been signed by Warwickshire for the next two rounds of the ongoing County Championship and is also likely to play against Somerset at Taunton next week.

The Rajasthan spinner had struck in his very first over in Test cricket and finished with 6/33 in the first innings before adding 1/29 to the second as India won the one-off Test against Afghanistan by an innings and 300 runs.

Suthar earned his India call-up after a string of strong domestic performances for Rajasthan, with 136 first-class wickets at an average of 24.89.

Unadkat shines Meanwhile, veteran India left-arm pacer Jaydev Unadkat continued his stint with Sussex, producing figures of 4/29 in 14.2 overs against Glamorgan. His spell helped bowl out Glamorgan for 155 in 51.2 overs. (PTI)

Sindhu's title wait prolongs with semifinal loss in Australia Open

SYDNEY, June 13: Double Olympic medallist PV Sindhu's wait for a BWF title continued as she bowed out in the semifinals of the Australian Badminton Open after a straight-game defeat to top seed Akane Yamaguchi of Japan, here on Saturday.

The former world No. 1, who got a third seed here, put up a spirited fight in the opening game and even held a game point before going down 20-22, 12-21 to the world No. 3 Japanese in a 43-minute contest.

With Sindhu's exit, India's campaign in the tournament also came to an end in the BWF World Tour Super 500 tournament.

Sindhu matched Yamaguchi shot for shot in a closely-fought first game.

Both players enjoyed runs of six consecutive points each, but the Indian failed to convert her game point as Yamaguchi held her nerve to take the opener. The momentum shifted decisively in the second game.

Yamaguchi raced ahead with an eight-point burst to go 13-6 up and maintained solid control throughout to seal the match without any fuss. (PTI)

Roaring crowds in stars and stripes show up for the US team, and soccer's moment in their country

INGLEWOOD (USA), June 13: It was a stadium like any other, packed with American sports fans wearing their favorite team's jerseys and red-white-and-blue face paint, roaring as players took the field.

Only this time, the sport was soccer.

The U.S. team's home opener in the World Cup on Friday brought 70,492 passionate soccer enthusiasts to the massive stadium near Los Angeles, where they saw the U.S. beat Paraguay 4-1. They had, in many cases, paid thousands of dollars to see their team play on the biggest global stage for a sport that has long been eclipsed in the United States — a sport many say is finally having its moment.

Many fans said they grew up playing soccer in recreational leagues as young children, and well into high school and college. Nakisha Gutierrez, a 37-year-old occupational therapist from Los Angeles, and her sister both played the

sport. Their Argentine father raised them on soccer, and the next generation is now taking it up, too, she said.

"It's in the family blood," said Gutierrez, her cheeks painted with sparkling red-and-blue stars. "It is the American culture — it's starting to be."

The World Cup is played every four years, and fans around the world track their national teams, hoping they'll have a strong enough showing to qualify for it. In many countries — like Friday's opponent, Paraguay — just making it to the tournament can prompt street parties, fireworks and national holidays. In the United States, though, the response is often a bit more muted. Soccer has long been overshadowed by football, basketball and "America's pastime" of baseball.

But soccer's popularity has risen in the United States since the country last hosted the World Cup in 1994. Major League Soccer was launched two years later, and soccer has become especially



popular among young athletes. Interest has also been buoyed by immigrants from countries where, as Gutierrez puts

it, "soccer is life."

Ava Cupit, 14, traveled with her family from Franklin, Tennessee, to cheer on

the U.S. team, dressed up as the Statue of Liberty. Her great-grandfather was from Spain and helped bring soccer to their small town, where he built fields and promoted the sport.

"He made us all fall in love with it, and our whole family loves soccer," Ava's mother Rachel Cupit said. "The people who've married in, they've just become a part of it too."

Self-proclaimed soccer "addict" Jose Contreras said he grew up playing the sport with his uncle in Mexico because it was cheap and accessible. He flew from Georgia to support the U.S. in its opening match, even though there are games he could attend in Atlanta, closer to home.

"This is one of the happiest days of my life," Contreras said.

In the massive stadium in Inglewood, California, usually home to football games, the stands thundered with the roar of fans. Seats were a sea of red and white. Fans wore glitter, Stars-and-

Stripes high-tops, overalls, robes and the team's hallmark jerseys. Some dressed as that ultimate symbol of American patriotism, Uncle Sam, with long white beards and top hats. A few wore George Washington costumes.

They came to show their support for their team, and to show that Americans, like the rest of the world, can be passionate about soccer, too. Many were trying to attend all of the U.S. team's group round matches. One spectator said he came from Texas after seeing the U.S. team previously face off in international matches before large crowds backing their opponents.

Hector Garcia, 63, said he was at his sixth World Cup. He thinks the U.S. team is the best it's been, and that the players will be energized seeing so many fans dressed in the Stars and Stripes.

"This is World Cup atmosphere," he said, "and I think this is really going to lift their spirits." (AP)

US opens home World Cup with 4-1 victory over Paraguay

INGLEWOOD, June 13: Folarin Balogun scored twice in the Americans' historic three-goal first half, and the US opened its first home World Cup in 32 years with its biggest win in the tournament, a dynamic 4-1 victory over Paraguay.

Christian Pulisic had an assist in a stellar first-half playmaking performance for the Americans, who enthralled their Southern California fans with an aggressive attack while streaking to a 3-0 halftime lead — the team's largest in any World Cup game.

Gio Reyna ripped another goal in the dying moments of second-half injury time, giving the Americans four goals in a World Cup match for the first time.

The US scored only three goals combined in its four matches at the Qatar World Cup four years ago, and it had never scored more than three in a World Cup match, but the Americans were a team transformed while playing in new coach Mauricio Pochettino's more creative system in front of a passionate, star-studded Los Angeles crowd of 70,492.

Mauricio scored in the second half for Paraguay, but La Albitroja fell too far behind early in their first World Cup match in 16 years.

After the US went ahead on an early own-goal created by Pulisic's playmaking, Balogun scored in the 31st minute and again in the fifth minute of first-half injury time.

The New York-born, London-raised



striker made his World Cup debut with the first multi-goal performance from a US player in the tournament since 1930. Balogun chose to represent the US three years ago instead of staying in the English system, where he likely would have struggled to make the Three Lions' roster — and the 24-year-old Monaco professional has swiftly provided the top-level striker play histori-

cally lacking on US rosters.

Pulisic was replaced by Sebastian Berhalter at halftime, but the U.S. didn't immediately indicate whether the AC Milan standout was injured. Pulisic appeared to signal to family in the stands that he was fine.

Pulisic created the first two U.S. goals with exceptional runs down the left side. In

the seventh minute, he cleverly split two defenders and passed to Weston McKennie, whose centering touch hit Paraguay midfielder Damián Bobadilla's outstretched foot and went in, setting off pandemonium in the SoFi Stadium stands.

The Americans gradually amplified their attack centered around Pulisic's runs — and three minutes after an apparent goal from Balogun was erased by an offside call, Pulisic again drove the left side and got a deflected pass to the trailing Balogun, who banged it home.

With first-half injury time winding down, Malik Tillman weighted a long pass to a streaking Balogun, who held up to create space and fired a brilliant shot into the far top corner.

The Americans were less cohesive without Pulisic in the second half, but Reyna still added the finishing touch by gliding into the box and toe-flicking home his first World Cup goal.

The moment was sweet for Reyna, who barely played at the Qatar World Cup amid a messy family dispute with former U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter.

Dozens of American celebrities and cultural icons turned out for the match 10 miles south of Hollywood, including Tom Cruise, George Lucas, Bill Gates, Halle Berry, Leonardo DiCaprio and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar. (AP)

Larin scores in 78th minute to rally Canada to 1-1 draw with Bosnia-Herzegovina in WC opener



TORONTO, June 13: Canada earned its first World Cup point in seven matches on soccer's biggest stage, and coach Jesse Marsch noted the sea of red-clad, maple leaf-waving fans who continuously belted out chants of "Go Ca-na-da!" helped get it.

A slow start and an early deficit turned into a rousing celebration once late substitute Cyle Larin scored in the 78th minute for a 1-1 draw against Bosnia-Herzegovina on Friday in Canada's tournament debut on home soil.

Playing in the shadow of Toronto's iconic CN Tower, and with hockey star Connor McDavid and actors Ryan Reynolds and Mike Myers in the stands, Larin converted Promise David's pass a mere two minutes after entering the game.

"The crowd, I think, will be into the game as (the players) could feel that energy in the second half tilting more and more," said Marsch, who took particular delight upon learning Myers, who portrayed international man of mystery Austin Powers in the movies, was on among those on hand.

"Oh, sweet," Marsch said. "It was an even better feeling for Larin, who normally starts but had to bide his time watching on the bench until late in the second half."

"It was amazing feeling, just to score a goal on home soil, where I'm from, and just to celebrate with the fans, amazing atmosphere," said Larin, who plays for second-division English club Southampton and is from Toronto's suburb of Brampton.

The goal was only the second in World Cup play scored by Canada after the team lost all three of its games at the 1986 World Cup in Mexico and again four years ago at Qatar.

Injury fill-in Jovo Lukic headed in a corner kick in the 21st minute for Bosnia-Herz-

egovina, which is making its second earned its first World Cup appearance. The team previous played at the 2014 tournament in Brazil but failed to advance out of group play.

Starting in place of Edin Dzeko (shoulder) and Haris Tabakovic (undisclosed), Lukic was in an ideal position to cap a set piece with captain Sead Kolasinac flicking along a header off Ivan Basic's corner kick. The goal was Lukic's first in international play and coming in the 27-year-old attacker's fourth international appearance.

Despite giving up the lead, the small Balkan nation of about 3 million people keeps coming up big on the international stage — including eliminating four-time champion Italy in the European playoffs.

Bosnia coach Sergej Barbarez couldn't help but feel relief in how his team persevered amid such a tough environment. "This is huge pressure and it's a huge compliment for my team to have not succumbed to that pressure and I'm very satisfied with that aspect of the game, too," Barbarez said through a translator.

Though a large majority of the 43,000 fans filling the temporarily expanded Toronto Stadium along the shores of Lake Ontario were Canadians, a small but vibrant group of Bosnian fans in blue also stood out in the upper deck of the stands.

The Bosnians now head west, with games against Switzerland on June 18 in Los Angeles and Qatar on June 24 in Seattle. Canada also heads west, to Vancouver, for its final two group games, against Qatar on June 18 and Switzerland on June 24.

Marsch's challenge is to get his team off to a better start. "I told them after the match that if we play like that second half the whole match, we win, right?" he said. (AP)

Cristiano Ronaldo wants Portugal focused on good start

NEW YORK, June 13: Portugal traveled to the United States with Cristiano Ronaldo saying the team needs to focus on getting off to a good start instead of thinking ahead about contending for its first World Cup title.

The Portuguese are among the favorites at the expanded 48-team tournament and the 41-year-old Ronaldo will be playing in his sixth World Cup, the most ever alongside rival Lionel Messi of Argentina.

"It is important to get off to a good start, do well in the first and second matches and then finish first in the group," Ronaldo told reporters in Portugal before the team's departure. "Then we go match by match, but not with the expectations of winning it all. It has to be step by step. A good start is the most important thing."

Portugal will play its opening Group K match against Congo on Wednesday in Houston. The team then faces Uzbekistan on June 23, again in Houston, and finishes the group stage against Colombia on June 27 in Miami.

Ronaldo said it will be further in the tournament, "when things get tighter and the psychological and physical fatigue" come into play, "that we will know who the real champions are."

This is Portugal's ninth World Cup appearance. The team finished third in 1966 and fourth in 2006 — when Ronaldo made his World Cup debut. In 2022, Portugal reached the quarterfinals but was upset by Morocco 1-0.

Ronaldo, who won the European Championship with Portugal in 2016, said the team's preparation at home was intense and productive. He said he is feeling well physically and the whole squad is ready and hopeful ahead of its quest for a first World Cup title. (AP)

England crush Sri Lanka in Women's T20 World Cup as Wyatt-Hodge's 105 powers record total

BIRMINGHAM, June 13: England launched its home Women's Twenty20 World Cup in style by crushing Sri Lanka by 87 runs at Edgbaston.

After making the highest total in tournament history — 219-1 — with 105 not out by opener Danni Wyatt-Hodge, England dismissed Sri Lanka for 132 on Friday.

Left-arm pacer Freya Kemp took a career-best 4-21 including three wickets in one over that reduced Sri Lanka to 92-8.

But it was England's record-setting batting that shone on a sunny evening in front of 14,865 fans.

Wyatt-Hodge and Amy Jones, who was pushed up the order to open, combined for 100 inside 10 overs. Jones was dropped on 12 and 48 and was out for 53 off 38 balls. But her's and Wyatt-Hodge's stand of 135 was England's highest opening partnership in T20 World Cup history.

Captain Nat Sciver-Brunt, only just back from a torn calf in April, was dropped on 14. But her unbeaten 46 off 22 balls shot her past Charlotte Edwards, the former captain and current England coach, to be England's highest run-scorer in T20 World Cups. Sciver-Brunt has 784 and Edwards 768.

Sciver-Brunt gave Wyatt-Hodge, on 97, the last two balls of the innings. She immediately hit behind square to the boundary, reaching the seventh hundred in tournament history and the



second by an Englishwoman.

She punched the air and made a baby-rocking celebration a la Brazil's Bebeto in the 1994 men's soccer World Cup. Wyatt-Hodge was only just back from maternity leave. Her wife gave birth to their first child on May 20.

"It was great fun out there," Wyatt-Hodge said. "My century celebration was for my daughter Daisy. I hope TV got it."

She also hit the last delivery for four, her 13th, to finish her third T20 century 105 not out

from 62 balls.

If that wasn't enough, Wyatt-Hodge took a brilliant catch, running from deep square leg, over her shoulder with a dive to remove Sri Lanka's biggest threat, captain Chamari Athapaththu, on 4 in the fourth over.

Wyatt-Hodge dropped her next two chances but neither caused any great harm.

On Saturday, it's Ireland vs Scotland, Australia vs South Africa, and defending champion New Zealand vs West Indies. (AP)

Mexico coach Javier Aguirre's youth gamble sparks a victory in the World Cup's opening match

MEXICO CITY, June 13: Mexico's dire performance at the last World Cup in Qatar served as a wake-up call for this year's event. The message was clear: El Tri needed new players if it wanted a different ending on home soil in 2026.

Four years after the national soccer team's disappointing group-stage exit — Mexico's earliest World Cup finish since 1978 — coach Javier Aguirre's youthful gamble is already showing promise.

El Tri opened this year's tournament with a convincing 2-0 victory over South Africa, fielding seven players who were making their World Cup debuts — including forward Julián Quiñones, who scored the first goal in only the ninth

minute of the match. "We worked hard on our mental game so the size of the stage wouldn't affect us, and we were able to get off to a good start," said midfielder Erik Lira, another player making his debut on soccer's biggest stage.

The 26-year-old Lira played a crucial role in the victory, forcing a key turnover that directly led to Mexico's first goal.

In addition to Quiñones and Lira, Aguirre handed World Cup debuts to Álvaro Fidalgo, Raúl Rangel, Israel Reyes, Brian Gutiérrez, Armando González and teenage sensation Gilberto Mora. Defender Johan Vázquez, who traveled to Qatar but didn't see any playing time, also made his tournament debut.

"It's the happiest day of my life. From the moment we walked out of the tunnel, Mateo (Chávez) and I felt like crying," said González, who came on as a second-half substitute. "You dream about it as a kid, you imagine it, you see it on TV, but to actually make your debut is incredible."

Fidalgo, a Spanish-born playmaker who became a naturalized Mexican citizen earlier this year, echoed that pride.

"I can't describe it, maybe I'll be able to in a while. I don't think I'm fully aware of it yet," Fidalgo said. "I'm just happy to be playing my first World Cup match, and to do it with Mexico is a source of pride and an honor. From here on out, we're on the upswing."

With this rejuvenated core, Mexico will target a second victory when the team faces South Korea on Thursday in Guadalajara. The Mexicans currently lead

Group A on goal difference over the South Koreans, who opened their tournament with a 2-1 win over the Czech Republic.

A victory would virtually guarantee El Tri's passage to the knockout rounds, helping erase the bitter memory of the early exit in Qatar. It would also fuel hopes of emulating Mexico's best-ever World Cup performances — reaching the quarterfinals, a feat achieved as hosts in 1970 and 1986.

Despite the mounting excitement, the team is keeping its feet on the ground, especially with two knockout matches to play before the quarterfinals in this year's expanded 48-team World Cup.

"We can't think about playing a sixth match (the quarterfinals) without even playing the second," Lira said. "We're taking it one step at a time, but we want to make it clear that our ambitions are very high and that we won't settle for anything less." (AP)

Australia embraces immigrants on World Cup squad with message that soccer is for everyone

NEW YORK, June 13: Ahead of Australia's opening World Cup match, the Socceroos are celebrating the immigrants on the squad.

The message is simple: Soccer is for everyone. But it comes at a time when anti-immigrant sentiment is on the rise in Australia and in many places around the world.



Among those featured in a video released by Professional Footballers Australia is Awer Mabil, who was born in a refugee camp in Kenya to South Sudanese parents.

"There's a lot of journeys behind the jersey, so to be a Socceroo has many different meanings, but with one purpose, and that is to do the country proud," Mabil said.

Mabil is one of three Socceroos who were born in refugee camps. Fellow forward Mohamed Touré was born in a camp in Guinea to Liberian parents before his family settled in Adelaide. And attacker Nestory Irankunda was born in a Tanzanian refugee camp after his parents fled Burundi. The family moved to Perth but later settled in Adelaide, where Irankunda and Touré became friends.

Both Touré, who plays for Norwich, and Irankunda, who plays for Watford, are making their World Cup debuts. Mabil plays in Spain for Castellón, and is making his second World Cup appearance.

Milos Degenek's family left Croatia when he was a baby and they lived as refugees in Serbia before moving to Sydney.

The Socceroos' message comes at a fraught time for immigrants around the world. A knife attack in Northern Ireland earlier this month set off two nights of fiery riots, stoked by anti-migrant rhetoric.

In the United States, President Donald Trump has implemented a widespread immigration crackdown. Visa restrictions have touched the World Cup, with Somalia referee Omar Artan denied entry into the country. (AP)

Expected to win 6th World Cup title

Brazil coach faces more pressure than nation's president

EAST RUTHERFORD (USA), June 13: Alisson Becker feels for Carlo Ancelotti, the Italian expected to bring Brazil a record sixth World Cup title.

"His position perhaps has more pressure than being the president of the country," the Seleção's top goalkeeper said.

Brazil is unbeaten in 20 World Cup openers since 1934, winning 17 going into Saturday night's match against African champion Morocco.

Having conquered the globe with Pelé, samba soccer and canary yellow jerseys, Brazil was once the nation others emulated.

No more. Brazil hasn't won the title since 2002 and has moved past the quarterfinals just once since, a humiliating 7-1 defeat to Germany in the 2014 semis on home soil in Belo Horizonte.

"We're here to try to change history, try to put Brazil back to where it never should have left, which is at the top," striker Vinicius Júnior said Friday through an interpreter. "We are at the same level as the other major teams."

Morocco became the first African nation to reach the World Cup semis, losing 2-0 to France four years ago. The Atlas Lions won their continent's title controversially in January — they lost 1-0 to Senegal but were awarded a 3-0 forfeit victory because the Lions of Teranga left the field for 15 minutes



during stoppage time in protest of a penalty kick awarded to their opponent.

Brazil is ranked sixth in the world and Morocco seventh.

"In modern football, there is no — how we say? — small-time team," Ancelotti said through an interpreter. "They are definitely up to the task."

In their one World Cup meeting, Brazil won 3-0 in the 1998 group stage behind goals from Ronaldo, Rivaldo and Bebeto.

"We all respect Brazil. Some people say

it's not the Brazil of before. Well, it's still Brazil," Morocco captain Achraf Hakimi said through an interpreter. "They're passionate. They love football. They have great qualities. They really want to win this World Cup."

En route to the title during the 1994 World Cup in U.S., Brazil became famous for the baby-rocking goal celebration by Bebeto, joined by teammates Romário and Mazinho.

Ancelotti wouldn't mind more prancing. "It's not banned to dance in the new regulations of FIFA. This is not forbidden," he said. "They want to optimize the time of play, but you can still celebrate and dance."

Brazil faces great expectations back home. Brazilian fans don't anticipate a title. Some expect one and others demand it.

"We have a possibility to compete to win," Ancelotti said, switching to English. "We have a good feeling."

Ancelotti, the first non-Brazilian to coach the team at a World Cup, took over in May 2025 from Dorival Júnior. He has won a record five Champions League titles leading AC Milan and Real Madrid, and he is the only coach to win championships in all five major European leagues.

"I respect him very much. I've read all his books," Hakimi said playfully. "Maybe I'll have an advantage over him. I know all his secrets."

Hot weather expected in New York area. A temperature of 88 degrees Fahrenheit (31 Celsius) is forecast for kickoff at MetLife Stadium, site of the final on July 19.

"We are used to the heat. We're Africans," Hakimi said.

Morocco and Brazil captains are friends — but not for the next 5 weeks. Hakimi and Brazil captain Marquinhos are Paris Saint-Germain teammates and on May 30 they helped their club win a second straight Champions League title.

Hakimi said he took two days off before starting World Cup preparations.

"When we play together at PSG we have a good laugh and we said on the (World Cup) pitch we're not teammates," Hakimi said. "We will talk, of course, but we each want to win and may the best win."

Neymar is still sidelined with a calf injury. Picked for his fourth World Cup at age 34, Neymar is still recovering from a torn right calf and Ancelotti said the nation's career leader with 79 goals won't be ready to play Saturday.

"We hope that he can be back in full training next week," Ancelotti said. "When we called up Neymar we didn't only call him up for his footballing qualities, which are undoubted, but also for his experience, because he can be an example for the young players that we have in the squad." (AP)