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● 8 new Rajya Sabha members take oath; Kharge re-appointed LoP

● CM Mohan Yadav mastermind behind Madhya Pradesh land scam: Congress



● No immediate need for major cabinet reshuffle in Mizoram: CM Lalduhoma

● State govt to aid reforms of tribal councils in Meghalaya: Conrad

Assam Police busts fake govt job racket, arrest seven

GUWAHATI, June 29: Assam Police has busted a fake job racket and arrested seven people for swindling people of lakhs of rupees on the promise of providing government employment, officials said on Monday.

According to officials, the gang allegedly used to issue forged appointment letters with fabricated government seals and false recruitment notices in the name of the Water Resources Department.

"The accused, operating as part of an organised racket, allegedly cheated job-seeking youths of substantial sums of money," an official said.

"Victims were made to believe that they were being offered legitimate government employment. A case has been registered at CID Police Station under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)," the official said. The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Assam Police has made significant progress in dismantling the criminal network.

In a series of sustained operations, the Assam CID arrested seven people from different districts, he said, and advised people to verify the authenticity of the government's recruitment notices through official channels and to refrain from making any payment for employment. (PTI)

Shah assures all possible help to flood-hit Assam: Himanta Situation deteriorates; 1 missing, 45,500 hit



Sushanta Borgohain, Assam's Minister of Water Resources and Keshab Mahanta, Minister of Revenue and Disaster Management, visited the flood-affected areas along the Kemi River in Dhemaji district, to assess the flood situation and review the ongoing relief and response measures on Monday.

GUWAHATI, June 29: The flood situation in Assam deteriorated on Monday with one person missing and over 45,000 people reeling under the deluge across five districts, an official bulletin said.

Till Sunday, over 22,000 people were suffering in flood waters across six districts of the state.

In the morning, Union Home Minister Amit Shah called up Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to discuss the flood situation in parts of the state and assured him of full support in dealing with the crisis.

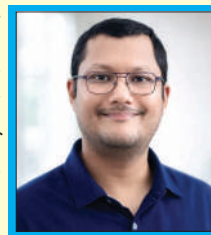
According to the daily flood report of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), one person was swept away by gushing waters at Jonai sub-division in Dhemaji district.

The report said more than 45,500 people are affected due to the floods in Chirang, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur and Nalbari districts.

Dhemaji is the worst hit with over 41,000 people suffering, followed by Dibrugarh with almost 4,000 people and Chirang with nearly 800 people reeling under flood waters, it added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

A Roadmap for Assam's Economic transformation

Economic transformation is rarely the result of a single policy, a government initiative, or a sudden surge of investment. It is a gradual process shaped by the collective efforts of institutions, entrepreneurs, workers, farmers, and ordinary citizens who recognize the need to move from dependency to self-sufficiency. Assam today stands at such a moment. The state possesses extraordinary natural wealth, a strategic geographical location, abundant water resources, fertile agricultural land, rich biodiversity, and a youthful population capable of driving growth. Yet these advantages have not translated into the level of economic progress that many expected. The contrast between Assam's vast potential and its present economic realities has become increasingly evident. Large volumes of goods consumed within the state originate elsewhere. A considerable number of educated young people continue to leave in search of opportunities. Local industries struggle to compete in a marketplace increasingly dominated by products from outside regions. While economic growth has occurred, it has often fallen short of creating the broad-based prosperity required for lasting development. The challenge before Assam is therefore not merely to grow economically but to transform structurally. Such a transformation demands a clear roadmap rooted in self-reliance, productivity, innovation, and sustainable development.



AUTHOR: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

A meaningful economic transformation must begin with a change in mindset. For decades, economic discussions in Assam have frequently revolved around demands, grievances, and expectations from governments. While public policy undoubtedly plays a critical role, sustainable development cannot be built solely upon external assistance or state intervention.

Details on Page-2

Monsoon fury hits Arunachal, 12 districts affected



ITANAGAR, June 29: Heavy monsoon rains continued to wreak havoc across Arunachal Pradesh on Monday, disrupting normal life in at least 12 districts as floods and landslides damaged infrastructure, cut off villages and triggered large-scale rescue operations, officials said.

In Lower Dibang Valley district, four people stranded on an island in Sisiri River in Dambuk were rescued by an Indian Air Force (IAF) helicopter. Heavy rainfall has also severely damaged the Roing-Anini road in Lower Dibang Valley district, with flash floods washing away roads and bridges at several locations. In Anjaw district, an excavator operator was feared dead after a massive rock crushed the vehicle engaged in high-way construction near Sarti village on Sunday night.

Rescue operations were suspended overnight due to poor visibility and the risk of further rockfalls before resuming early Monday. Police from the Walong Outpost and Hawaii police station are assisting in the operation, while the affected road has been closed to traffic until debris clearance is completed. The operator's condition was yet to be officially confirmed.

In East Siang, eight major road stretches remained blocked, leaving Yagrun, Tekang and Sibut villages cut off from Pasighat.

A cloudburst triggered flash floods in Ledum and Korang villages under Rukhin subdivision, damaging 11 houses, submerging three others and causing the collapse of the Rema Bridge, besides damaging the Bokrang Bridge, officials said.

Rescue teams comprising the SDRF, district administration and local volunteers rescued 40 people from flood-hit areas and shifted affected families to safer locations. The district administration has activated relief camps and emergency operation centres, mobilised multiple agencies for restoration work and ordered the closure of all schools till Tuesday in view of the IMD's red alert.

Of the 11 major roads hit, only two have been reopened, while nine, including the Pasighat-Pangin, Pasighat-Mariyang-Yingkiang, Pasighat-Mebo-Dambuk-Bomjir, Bilat-Ledum and Pasighat-Yagrun-Ledum-Tene roads, remain blocked or unsafe. The left-side approach to Letong Bridge on the Pasighat-Runne-Takialung road (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta hails ₹15,431-crore NH-15 expansion project

GUWAHATI, June 29: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday welcomed the Centre's ₹15,431-crore expansion of the Baihata Chariali-Mission Chariali-Tezpur stretch of National Highway-15, saying the project will significantly strengthen connectivity in Assam.

In a post on X, Sarma described the highway expansion

as a major step towards accelerating the state's infrastructure-led development and improving access to economic opportunities.

"When I speak about development, I envision connectivity that brings people closer to opportunities. The ₹15,431-crore expansion of the Baihata Chariali-Mission Chariali-Tezpur stretch of NH-15 is another decisive step in that direction,

making travel faster, safer and more seamless," the Chief Minister said.

The project is expected to improve connectivity between central and upper Assam by widening and upgrading a key section of NH-15, one of the state's major transport corridors. Officials said the expansion would reduce travel time, ease traffic congestion and enhance road safety while faci-

lating the movement of goods and passengers. The upgraded highway is also expected to improve connectivity to commercial centres, educational institutions and tourist destinations, besides strengthening links with neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh.

The project is part of the Centre's broader initiative to modernise highway infrastructure (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Cong Turmoil: KC Venugopal cancels scheduled State visit

GUWAHATI, June 29: Amid an intensifying leadership tussle within the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee (APCC), Congress General Secretary (Organisation) K.C. Venugopal has cancelled his scheduled visit to Assam, party sources said on Monday.

Venugopal was expected to arrive in Guwahati on Monday to attend an organisational meeting and hold discussions with senior state leaders as part of the party's preparations for the upcoming Assembly elections.

However, his visit was cancelled at the last moment, triggering fresh political speculation as the state unit continues to grapple with internal differences.

While the Congress has not officially cited any reason for the cancellation, party insiders said the development has fuelled speculation amid the ongoing differences between APCC president Gaurav

Gogoi and Assam Youth Congress president and Algapur-Katlicherra MLA Zubair Anam.

The cancellation comes days after a heated altercation between Gogoi and Anam at Rajiv Bhawan in Guwahati during a party review meeting. According to party leaders, the confrontation began after Gogoi reportedly reprimanded Anam for arriving late.

The exchange allegedly escalated after Anam questioned what he described as "double standards" in the party's functioning, claiming that other senior leaders who had also arrived late were not similarly criticised.

Party sources said the incident exposed simmering factionalism within the state Congress and deepened organisational tensions.

The differences between the two leaders are understood to have widened over issues related to organisational appointments and decision-making. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ram temple donation row Ayodhya lawyers boycott accused, seek CBI probe

NEW DELHI/AYODHYA, June 29: Amid mounting outrage over the alleged embezzlement of Ram temple donations, the Faizabad Bar Association in Ayodhya on Monday announced that none of its members would represent the eight arrested accused, even as the Supreme Court said it will hear after the summer break a plea seeking a time-bound probe by a CBI-led multi-disciplinary team into the case.

The lawyers' body passed a resolution warning that any member going against the decision would face a Rs 5 lakh penalty and demanded that Champat Rai, Anil Mishra and Gopal Rao -- all associated with the management of the temple but not mentioned in the FIR -- "must leave" Ayodhya.

It warned that if the trio did not leave "within three days", the entire city of Ayodhya would be blockaded and no one would be allowed to enter. Association president Kalika Prasad said that it will

also move the high court for a CBI probe. The Bar had taken a similar boycott decision in 2005, following a terrorist attack at the then makeshift Ram temple, when lawyers decided not to defend the accused. Finally, a lawyer from Lucknow represented the accused in the case.

The eight accused, arrested last Thursday, were produced before Special Judge, Anti-Corruption Court, Rajat Verma, through video conferencing and were remanded in judicial custody for additional two weeks after the police did not seek their custody, special prosecution officer Umesh Dubey said.

In the apex court, Justices M M Sundresh and Sheel Nagu refused an urgent hearing on a plea on the allegations and said the matter will be listed for hearing after the summer break. The court will reopen on July 13. "Heavens are not going to fall... What is the urgency," the bench observed orally.

The petition, filed by advocates

Ajay Kumar Rai and Dinesh Kumar Yadav, said a CBI-led multi-disciplinary special investigation team (SIT) should investigate the alleged financial irregularities and other purported illegalities concerning the affairs and administration of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

The plea also sought directions to the Centre, the Uttar Pradesh government and the temple trust to constitute and operationalise such regulatory, supervisory and audit mechanisms as may be necessary to safeguard public interest and maintain the confidence of millions of devotees and donors.

It said the issues involved not only concern the possible commission of cognisable offences but also directly affect the faith, sentiments and confidence of countless devotees and the public.

The opposition sharpened its attack on the BJP, which has highlighted the Ram temple construction (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Barman thanked the Prime Minister for recognising the conservation movement' Green Oscar winner Purnima Barman meets Assam forest minister

GUWAHATI, June 29: A day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the efforts of 'Hargila Army' in protecting the Greater Adjutant Storks, 'Green Oscar' winner Purnima Devi Barman on Monday met Assam Forest Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah and discussed ways to strengthen wildlife conservation initiatives in the state.

Modi on Sunday praised the conservation efforts of biologist Barman and a group of rural women in the northeastern state for protecting the Greater Adjutant Stork, commonly known as 'Hargila'.

Baruah called on Barman to discuss ongoing efforts for the conservation of the Greater Adjutant Stork and explore measures to further strengthen wildlife conservation initiatives in the state, according to an official release.

"During the interaction, Barman briefed the forest minister on the current status of Hargila conservation, ongoing community-led initiatives and the challenges that continue to affect the species," it added.



strengthening conservation efforts across Assam. The recipient of the prestigious Whitley Awards, commonly known as 'Green Awards', has been working on the conservation of 'Hargilla' at Pacharia, Dadara and

Singimari villages of Kamrup district. "Expressing her gratitude, Barman thanked the Prime Minister for recognising the conservation movement at the national level and appreciated the continued encour-

agement extended by the Assam forest minister towards wildlife conservation," the statement said.

Barman said that she has shared several suggestions regarding Hargila conservation, and the minister has assured her that the forest department will examine them positively.

Speaking after the meeting, Baruah said, "For years, Hargila was associated with superstition and considered a bad omen by many. Through the tireless efforts of Dr Barman and countless community volunteers, these misconceptions are gradually disappearing, paving the way for greater public participation in conservation."

He reaffirmed the Assam government's commitment towards protecting the state's rich biodiversity and said his department will continue to work closely with conservationists, researchers and local communities to ensure the long-term survival of the Greater Adjutant Stork and other endangered species.

"The meeting underscored the importance of community-driven conservation and the collaborative efforts being undertaken by the Assam government to preserve the state's unique wildlife heritage," the statement said. (PTI)

BJP hails 11 yrs of Digital India, calls it landmark governance reform

GUWAHATI, June 29: BJP Assam Pradesh spokesperson Dr Zafreen Mehjabin on Sunday described the completion of 11 years of the Digital India Programme as one of the most profound governance transformations undertaken in post-Independence India.

In an official statement, she said the initiative, launched under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has evolved beyond the objective of digitising government services.

"Digital India has transcended the conventional objective of digitising government services to emerge as a comprehensive framework for governance reform, institutional modernisation, economic transformation and citizen empowerment," Dr. Mehjabin said.

She further said that the programme has redefined the relationship between the government and citizens by promoting transparency, efficiency, accountability and inclusivity while positioning India as a global leader in Digital

Public Infrastructure (DPI). According to Dr Mehjabin, public service delivery before the launch of Digital India in 2015 was marked by procedural complexity, administrative delays, fragmented institutional systems and limited digital accessibility.

"Over the past 11 years, governance has progressively shifted to an integrated, technology-enabled ecosystem that delivers services with greater speed, transparency and precision," she added.

Highlighting the role of the JAM Trinity—Jan Dhan, Aadhaar and Mobile connectivity—she said it has become the foundation of India's digital governance architecture and the world's largest financial inclusion ecosystem. She noted that India now has more than 57.78 crore Jan Dhan accounts, over 144 crore Aadhaar enrolments and internet access for more than 109 crore citizens. Dr Mehjabin said the digital ecosystem has enabled the seamless implementation of Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT), through (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Industrial output grows 5.1 pc in May on manufacturing sector boost

NEW DELHI, June 29: India's industrial output growth accelerated to 5.1 per cent in May, mainly boosted by better performance of the manufacturing sector, according to government data released on Monday.

The reading stood at 4.9 per cent in April. The latest Index of Industrial Production (IIP) figures for May under the new series are based on the output Producer Price Index (PPI) that provides a more granular price structure than the earlier used Wholesale Price Index (WPI) system, the National Statistics Office (NSO), the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) said in a release.

This is the second data released after the revision in the base year to 2022-23.

The IIP index has 463 item groups, and the adoption of output PPI, wherein output is collected in value terms, impacts 234 item groups that together account for 36.02 per cent of the total index weight.

"In May 2024, the Index of Industrial Production recorded a 5.1 per cent year-on-year growth, supported by 5.5 per cent growth in the manufacturing sector and strong growth of 9.9 per cent in the electricity & gas supply sector," the release said.

According to the data, the growth rates of the 4 sectors - mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity, gas and water supply, sewerage and waste management during May were (-) 1.6 per cent, 5.5 per cent, 9.9 per cent, and 5.5 per cent, respectively.

Within the manufacturing sector, 16 out of 23 industry groups recorded a positive growth in May 2024.

The top 3 positive contributors in May were - man-



ufacture of motor vehicles, trailers and semi-trailers (14.5 per cent), manufacture of electrical equipment (20.8 per cent) and manufacture of basic metals (4.6 per cent).

As per the use-based classification, the growth in primary goods was 2.6 per cent, capital goods (12.9 per cent), intermediate goods (5.8 per cent), infrastructure/construction goods (5.9 per cent), consumer durables (7.2 per cent), and consumer non-durables (3.6 per cent).

The new series of the All India Index of Industrial Production (IIP) with base year 2022-23 was released on June 1 2026, using the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) as the deflator.

Subsequently, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, released the Output Producer Price

Index (Output PPI) series with base year 2022-23 on June 15, 2026.

As output, PPI is a new and important indicator for capturing producer-level prices; it has significant implications for compiling IIP, MoSPI said.

"The transition from WPI to Output PPI assumes significance because a part of industrial production in the IIP is reported in value terms. Out of the 463 item groups included in the IIP basket, 234 item groups, accounting for 36.02 per cent of the total weight, are compiled using value-based production data," it added.

Commenting on the data, Megha Arora, Director, India Ratings and Research, said the agency expects IIP growth to improve to 5.7 per cent in June 2026 as the base effect will help in maintaining the growth momentum.

"Decline in crude prices due to fragile resolution of the West Asia crisis is also likely to support growth momentum in June 2026. The government's continued capex is likely to keep capital goods and infrastructure/construction goods growth momentum in FY27 as well," Arora added.

Dipti Deshpande, Principal Economist, Crisil, expects industrial production to turn somewhat softer in the coming months. Manufacturing and construction face high-cost pressure on key imported inputs.

"Even if shipping resumes through the Strait of Hormuz, repairs to the damaged oil and gas infrastructure in West Asia will take time, and elevated war risk premiums, among other factors, would keep pressure on input costs," she said. (PTI)

Delhi approves EV policy with incentives, vehicle tax exemptions

NEW DELHI, June 29: From next month, Delhiites buying electric cars priced up to ₹ 30 lakh will not have to pay road tax or registration fees, as the Delhi government on Monday approved a new EV policy aimed at reducing vehicular pollution and accelerating the transition to cleaner transport in the national capital.

The Electric Vehicle Policy proposes that 30 per cent of all school buses in Delhi be converted to electric by the end of March 2030. It seeks to transform Delhi into a pollution-free capital through zero-emission transport and will remain in force till March 31, 2030.

Around 30,000 EV charging points

will be set up across the city to expand charging infrastructure, and the government is committing over ₹ 7,000 crore over the next four years to drive this transition.

However, there is no incentive for hybrid vehicles. A dedicated online portal will be developed to enable applicants to apply for EV-related incentives under the policy.

Transport and vehicular emissions remain the single largest contributor to Delhi's local PM 2.5 burden, accounting for nearly half of the pollution load.

During last year's peak winter pollution period, vehicles contributed about 46 per cent to 53 per cent of the city's local PM2.5 levels, according to a re-

port by the Centre for Science and Environment released on December 31 last year.

Under the policy, a 100 per cent waiver of road tax and registration fees will be provided for all pure electric four-wheelers with an ex-showroom price of up to ₹ 30 lakh.

Addressing a press conference, Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said benefits worth around ₹ 15,000 crore, including government investment, tax exemptions and EV infrastructure development, will be provided under the policy over the next four years to promote electric mobility and reduce vehicular pollution in the national capital. The policy, approved by the Delhi Cabinet,

will come into effect from July 1 after the approval of the Lieutenant Governor, Gupta said, describing it as a major step towards making Delhi a pollution-free city by March 31, 2030.

It lays special emphasis on the transport sector and provides a roadmap for the phased transition from conventional fuel-powered vehicles to electric vehicles. To encourage the adoption of electric vehicles, the government has announced purchase incentives for buyers.

Under the policy, people buying electric two-wheelers will get a subsidy of ₹ 30,000 in the first year, ₹ 20,000 in the second year and ₹ 10,000 in the third year. (PTI)

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Situation deteriorates

Shah sought to know from the CM the extent of damage, if any, caused by the swelling rivers of the state, and offered all help from the Centre in handling the situation, officials said. Acknowledging the gesture, Sharma said in a post on X, "I thank Hon'ble Home Minister Shri @AmitShah Ji for his phone call and enquiring about the flood situation in Dhemaji."

The CM briefed Shah on the relief and rehabilitation measures presently underway in the district.

"He (Shah) has also assured us all possible support and assistance from the Government of India to deal with this situation," Sharma said. He said that Water Resources Minister Susanta Borgohain and Revenue & Disaster Management Minister Keshab Mahanta have been directed to station themselves in Dhemaji and oversee the entire relief process.

"Our priority is to ensure relief and rescue reach all those affected. We are closely monitoring the situation... We are taking early precautions by strengthening anti-erosion measures to reduce any impact arising out of heavy rainfall," Sharma said.

He said that while conducting field inspections, the ministers are emphasising ensuring all relief materials reach the people staying in relief camps and efforts are ongoing to restore disrupted transportation systems in various places.

The ASDMA said that the administration has been operating 12 relief camps and relief distribution centres in two districts, taking care of 655 displaced people at present.

The authorities have distributed 519.8 quintals of rice, 93.52 quintals of dal, 28.2 quintals of salt and 2,815.57 litres of mustard oil among the flood victims of the state during the last 24 hours.

At present, 257 villages are under water, and 4,278.52 hectares of crop areas have been damaged across Assam, the ASDMA said. Embankments, roads, bridges and other infrastructure have been damaged by flood waters in different districts of the state.

The Disang river is now flowing above the danger mark at Nanglamuraghat. On account of widespread flooding, over 76,161 domestic animals and poultry are affected across the state. (PTI)

Himanta Hails ₹15,431-Crore

across the Northeast through investments in roads, bridges, railways and airports. The Assam government has maintained that improved transport infrastructure is key to attracting investment, generating employment and promoting balanced regional development.

Monsoon fury hits Arunachal,

has been washed away, while roads near Balek Secondary School, Ranaghat Bridge and the Poglek River crossing remain impassable, an official report said. Floodwaters also inundated at least 10 houses in Ledum after the river changed its course due to continuous rainfall.

One house was almost completely submerged, two cattle were swept away, while a community toilet and a rice mill were on the verge of submergence. Three shops were also damaged. Around 12 families were shifted to safer places, with the displaced taking shelter at relatives' houses, while a community Dera (prayer hall) has been designated as a relief shelter.

No casualties or missing persons have been reported, though a vital bridge collapsed, disrupting connectivity.

In Lower Siang district, a massive landslide at Siji blocked the flow of Siji River near Likabali checkpoint between Siji and Magi, causing water to accumulate upstream. A biker had a miraculous escape after being swept down a slope along with his motorcycle when a landslide struck the area, officials said. Authorities warned of possible danger to downstream areas and deployed police personnel to alert riverside residents to move to safer locations.

Officials later said the river resumed its normal flow on Monday morning after the ponded water receded.

Leparada district also witnessed widespread damage as flash floods, overflowing rivers and landslides affected several areas.

Chisi and Padi villages in Dari circle were among the worst hit, with floodwaters carrying boulders, logs and debris onto roads, severely disrupting traffic. Landslides blocked roads at Jime village and along the Zirido-Dari stretch, while the swollen Ego River inundated the Ego Bridge.

In Basar circle, Kidi River flowed above the danger level, flooding nearby paddy fields and posing a threat to riverside houses. Landslides were also reported in Sago circle due to road cutting and poor drainage, while Tirbin circle reported only minor damage.

Meanwhile, search operations entered the sixth day on Monday for two persons still missing in the flash flood that struck Keyi Panyor district last Wednesday. The death toll rose to three after the body of Saurabh Kumar Kharwar was recovered near Hawa Camp in adjoining Papum Pare district on Sunday.

Earlier, the bodies of a 35-year-old woman and another woman were recovered on Wednesday and Saturday, respectively.

Five people had gone missing after the flash flood devastated the NEEPCO colony at Poosa, damaging houses, roads and triggering landslides. Preliminary estimates indicate that around 30 houses were completely damaged or washed away in the colony, while another 10 houses were destroyed and 14 partially damaged in the

Posa and Pitapool areas. Altogether, 128 households have been affected, with 60 displaced people currently staying at a relief camp on the NEEPCO campus.

According to officials, the rain fury has so far affected Keyi Panyor, Papum Pare, Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey, Lower Subansiri, Kamle, Upper Subansiri, East Siang, Leparada, Lower Siang, Lower Dibang Valley and Anjaw districts.

Relief and rescue operations have been intensified across the affected areas. (PTI)

Assam Cong Turmoil: KC

Sources alleged that Anam's independent organisational initiatives, including the formation of committees for election-related activities, were viewed by Gogoi's camp as bypassing the authority of the state leadership. The rift reportedly intensified after the recent Assembly bypolls. Despite being regarded by supporters as one of the party's stronger performers electorally, Anam was allegedly excluded from key organisational responsibilities, further widening the divide between the two camps.

Following the public fallout, the Congress high command constituted a one-member committee to ascertain the facts surrounding the altercation and recommend measures to restore organisational discipline in the Assam unit.

Meanwhile, the BJP criticised the Congress over the episode, alleging that the opposition party is plagued by factionalism and leadership uncertainty ahead of the Assembly elections. With Venugopal's visit now cancelled, political observers believe the Congress leadership may be reassessing its strategy to resolve the internal crisis before rescheduling its organisational review in Assam.

Ayodhya lawyers boycott

among its major achievements, with Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav urging "true Sanatanis" not to vote for the BJP or seek election tickets from the party, alleging that it had "betrayed Lord Ram". Speaking in the same vein, Rajiya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal urged the people to defeat the BJP, alleging that they had "looted" the country and did not even spare Lord Ram.

The BJP, on its part, described the lawyers' move as a "powerful message from Hindu society" and asserted that those accused of looting in Ayodhya are not only facing the full force of the law but also social boycott.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has made it very clear that exemplary punishment will be meted out to the guilty and speedy justice will be ensured, the party said, adding the case will proceed as per the rule of law.

As the sparring between the BJP and the opposition parties intensified, the Congress said that its high-level delegation led by its Uttar Pradesh Chief Ajay Rai will visit Ayodhya on Tuesday. The opposition party claimed that the State Bank of India had three months ago recommended the removal of officials posted at the donation counting centre at the temple and sought to know who was "protecting" them before the fund embezzlement came to light.

Speaking to reporters in Raipur, Pawan Khera, Chairman (Media and Publicity Department), AICC, said the alleged donation theft at the Ram Temple was only a brief glimpse and more such cases were yet to come. Hitting out at opposition parties, Uttar Pradesh minister Dayashankar Singh said that their leaders "don't believe in Lord Ram, have never visited the temple in Ayodhya, have taken no part in its construction and yet question people who have given up family life to serve the nation".

Meanwhile, Faizabad Bar Association president Kalika Prasad said that the Bar Association would approach the Allahabad High Court to seek a CBI investigation and, if no relief is granted there, it would move the Supreme Court.

It would also seek registration of an FIR against Champat Rai, Gopal Rao and Anil Mishra under BNSS Section 156(3), which empowers a magistrate to order the police to investigate a cognizable offence if the police have not acted on a complaint.

"We will first approach the police for registration of the case, and if no action is taken, we will seek legal remedy through the courts," Mishra said.

However, the brother of Champat Rai, who resigned as the general secretary of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, defended him. Speaking to PTI, Sunil Bansal, a resident of Nagina in Binjor district, described the allegations against his brother as politically motivated, asserting that Champat Rai had given up "everything" for the RSS, the Ram temple movement, and the service of the country.

On June 13, the Uttar Pradesh government constituted the SIT on a request from the temple trust following allegations of misappropriation of donations received at the Ram temple. The SIT comprised Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, IGP Kiran S and Finance Department Special Secretary Neel Ratan. (PTI)

BJP hails 11 yrs of Digital

which more than ₹ 51 lakh crore has been transferred directly to beneficiaries across 176 crore transactions. Referring to digital payments, she said the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has grown from two crore transactions in 2016-17 to more than 24,162 crore transactions in 2025-26, accounting for nearly 49 per cent of all global real-time digital payment transactions.

"Digital India has democratised access to governance by ensuring that technology is no longer the privilege of a few but an instrument of empowerment for every citizen, irrespective of geography or socioeconomic background," she added.

Dr. Mehjabin also said the Digital India Programme has significantly strengthened the country's digital infrastructure. According to her, BharatNet has connected nearly 2.15 lakh Gram Panchayats through almost seven lakh kilometres of optical fibre, while India now has more than 106.58 crore broadband subscribers.

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A Roadmap for Assam's Economic transformation

Prosperity emerges when societies develop a culture of enterprise, initiative, and production. Across the world, regions that have experienced remarkable economic progress share one common characteristic: they cultivate people who create value rather than merely consume it. Assam possesses a long tradition of hard work and resilience, yet these qualities must increasingly be directed toward productive economic activity. The future cannot depend exclusively on government employment or traditional livelihoods. A new generation of entrepreneurs, innovators, skilled workers, and professionals must emerge to drive growth. Economic transformation requires citizens who are willing to take risks, establish enterprises, explore new opportunities, and create employment rather than simply seek it. Such a shift in attitude is perhaps the most important foundation upon which all other reforms must rest.

Agriculture remains central to Assam's economy and will continue to play a decisive role in its future. Despite employing a substantial portion of the population, the agricultural sector has not generated the level of prosperity necessary to transform rural livelihoods. The problem is not a lack of resources. Assam's fertile soil, favorable climate, and extensive water systems provide natural advantages that many regions would envy. Yet agricultural productivity remains inconsistent, post-harvest losses remain significant, and market access often remains inadequate. Farmers frequently struggle to secure fair prices for their produce, while consumers continue to depend on products imported from other states. This contradiction reveals a deeper structural weakness. The future of agriculture in Assam lies not merely in increasing production but in building complete value chains. Agricultural products must be processed, packaged, branded, and marketed within the state itself. Agro-based industries can create substantial employment while increasing the value of local produce. Cold storage facilities, improved logistics, modern irrigation systems, and scientific farming methods can significantly enhance productivity and profitability. When agriculture becomes a profitable enterprise rather than a subsistence activity, rural economies become stronger, migration decreases, and economic growth becomes more inclusive.

Industrial development represents another essential component of Assam's economic roadmap. For many years, the state has functioned largely as a supplier of raw materials while importing higher-value finished goods. Such a pattern inevitably limits economic gains. The true benefits of natural resources are realized when value addition occurs close to the source of production. Assam's tea industry provides an example of how regional products can achieve national and international recognition. Similar opportunities exist in sectors such as food processing, bamboo products, textiles, handloom manufacturing, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and forest-based industries. Economic transformation requires a deliberate effort to move beyond extraction toward manufacturing and innovation. Small and medium enterprises can play a particularly significant role in this process. Large industries are important, but smaller enterprises often generate employment more rapidly and distribute economic opportunities more widely. By supporting local entrepreneurs through access to finance, technology, and market linkages, Assam can create a dynamic industrial ecosystem capable of driving long-term growth. Industrialization should not be concentrated in a few urban centers alone. A balanced strategy that encourages regional industrial clusters can ensure that development reaches every part of the state.

Traditional industries possess immense untapped potential and deserve a prominent place in Assam's economic future. Handloom weaving, silk production, handicrafts, traditional food processing, and indigenous artisanal skills have long formed part of the state's cultural identity. However, these sectors are often viewed primarily through a cultural lens rather than an economic one. This perception needs to change. Modern consumers increasingly value authenticity, sustainability, and craftsmanship. Assamese products possess all three characteristics. Muga silk, Eri silk, traditional textiles, bamboo crafts, and indigenous food products have the potential to compete successfully in national and global markets. Yet realizing this potential requires modernization without sacrificing authenticity. Improved design capabilities, stronger branding, quality certification, digital marketing, and better access to international markets can significantly increase the commercial value of traditional industries. Economic transformation does not require abandoning cultural heritage. On the contrary, Assam's cultural uniqueness can become a source of competitive advantage in a global marketplace increasingly seeking distinctive products and experiences.

Human capital is perhaps the most critical determinant of future prosperity. Every year, thousands of young Assamese leave the state for education and employment. While mobility is a natural feature of modern economies, excessive outmigration can weaken local development by depriving industries and institutions of talent. Economic transformation requires creating opportunities that encourage skilled individuals to build their futures within Assam. This challenge extends beyond employment alone. It involves creating an environment where ambition, innovation, and entrepreneurship can flourish. Educational institutions must align more closely with the evolving needs of the economy. Traditional academic qualifications remain important, but practical skills, technical expertise, and entrepreneurial capabilities are becoming equally essential. The future workforce will require knowledge of digital technologies, advanced manufacturing, financial management, and emerging industries. Educational reforms should therefore focus on employability and innovation alongside academic achievement. A society that equips its young people with relevant skills gains a significant advantage in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Infrastructure development forms the backbone of economic transformation. No economy can thrive without efficient transportation networks, reliable electricity, robust digital connectivity, and modern logistics systems. Assam has made notable progress in infrastructure development over recent years, yet significant challenges remain. Many productive regions continue to face connectivity constraints that increase costs and reduce competitiveness. Farmers often struggle to transport perishable products efficiently. Businesses face logistical hurdles that discourage expansion and investment. A comprehensive infrastructure strategy must therefore focus on connecting production centers with markets, rural areas with urban hubs, and local enterprises with national and international supply chains. Improved infrastructure not only facilitates economic activity but also attracts investment by reducing operational uncertainties. At the same time, development must be environmentally responsible. Assam's ecological richness is one of its greatest assets, and economic growth should be pursued in a manner that preserves natural ecosystems rather than undermines them.

The role of governance in economic transformation cannot be overlooked. Investors and entrepreneurs thrive in environments characterized by transparency, efficiency, and predictability. Excessive bureaucracy, regulatory complexity, and administrative delays create barriers that discourage innovation and investment. A business-friendly environment does not imply the absence of regulation; rather, it means the presence of efficient and fair regulation. Procedures for establishing and operating businesses should be straightforward, transparent, and accessible. Government agencies must increasingly view themselves as facilitators of economic activity rather than obstacles to it. Public institutions also play an important role in providing infrastructure, promoting skill development, supporting innovation, and ensuring equitable access to opportunities. Effective governance creates confidence, and confidence encourages investment. When businesses trust institutions, they are more likely to expand operations, create employment, and contribute to economic growth.

Women must occupy a central position within Assam's economic transformation strategy. Across rural and urban communities, women have consistently demonstrated resilience, creativity, and entrepreneurial ability. Self-help groups have emerged as important instruments of social and economic empowerment, enabling thousands of women to generate income and improve household welfare. Yet the full economic potential of women remains underutilized. Greater access to finance, training, technology, and market opportunities can significantly enhance female participation in economic activity. When women succeed economically, the benefits extend beyond individual households to entire communities. Improvements in education, healthcare, nutrition, and social welfare often follow. Economic transformation is most effective when it is inclusive, and inclusivity requires the active participation of women at every level of economic life.

Globalization presents both opportunities and challenges. The integration of markets has expanded access to consumers, technologies, and investment opportunities, but it has also intensified competition. Assam's industries cannot rely solely on emotional appeals to support local products. Success in modern markets depends upon quality, efficiency, reliability, and innovation. Consumers choose products that offer value. Therefore, local industries must continuously improve standards and adopt modern technologies while preserving unique regional characteristics. Economic transformation does not require isolation from global markets. Instead, it demands the confidence and capability to compete within them. Assam's tea industry has demonstrated that products originating from the state can achieve international recognition. Similar success can be achieved in numerous sectors if businesses are supported by appropriate policies, infrastructure, and innovation ecosystems.

Economic transformation is ultimately about building confidence. It is about creating a society that believes in its own abilities, invests in its own potential, and takes responsibility for shaping its own future. Assam possesses all the ingredients necessary for such a transformation. Natural resources, cultural richness, entrepreneurial talent, strategic location, and human potential provide a strong foundation. What is required now is a sustained commitment to production, innovation, skill development, and institutional reform. Progress will not occur overnight, nor will it be achieved through isolated initiatives. It will emerge through consistent effort, long-term planning, and collective determination. A transformed Assam would not merely be a wealthier Assam. It would be a state capable of retaining its talent, empowering its communities, preserving its cultural identity, and creating opportunities for future generations. The roadmap exists. The resources exist. The responsibility now lies in translating potential into performance and aspiration into achievement. The journey toward economic transformation may be demanding, but it offers the most promising path toward a stronger, more self-reliant, and more prosperous Assam.

Pijush Hazarika seeks to boost Tezpur litchi production, exports



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 29: Assam Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika on Sunday visited a litchi orchard at Parmaighuli in Tezpur and interacted with farmers to understand the cultivation process of the famous Tezpur litchi, which has

gained global recognition. The minister also took stock of issues affecting litchi growers and Farmer Producer Companies (FPCs). He said the Agriculture Department would soon organise a meeting with litchi exporters

and farmers to boost production and exports. During the interaction, Hazarika discussed issues such as pest infestation and the need for subsidised tractors, power tillers, solar lights and other support for FPCs.

The minister urged litchi farmers to provide at least two lakh litchi saplings for distribution among farmers across the state.

While stressing the importance of increasing the cultivation of cash crops such as litchi, coconut and areca nut to enhance farmers' income, he said the Agriculture Department has set a target of distributing one lakh saplings in each constituency from next year.

Hazarika also said the younger generation should take up the cultivation of profitable crops instead of attributing poor agricultural output to unverified factors such as mobile tower radiation.

He further encouraged them to utilise available land for growing crops such as coconut and areca nut.

The minister also distributed spraying machines and other equipment to farmers on the occasion.

MLA Prithiraj Rabha, Agriculture secretary and director Uday Praveen, Sonitpur deputy commissioner, the director of Horticulture and other officials were present.

NTPC Bongaigaon flags off three boat ambulances for riverine areas in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 29: National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) Bongaigaon has flagged off three boat ambulances under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme to improve healthcare access in flood-prone riverine and char areas of Kokrajhar district bordering Dhubri. The boat ambulances were inaugurated by BTC executive member for Health and Family Welfare Derhasat Basumatary in the presence of BTC executive member for Urban Development Moon Moon Brahma, director of Health Services, BTC, Nilu Brahma, officials of NTPC Bongaigaon, the district health department and local residents. Implemented in collaboration with the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) government and the Directorate of Health Services, BTC, the initiative aims to provide uninterrupted healthcare services to residents of Khutabagra and adjoining riverine areas that often remain cut off during floods.

NTPC Bongaigaon said the project, implemented at a cost of Rs 20 lakh, includes three boat ambulances equipped with essential medicines and emergency medical facilities. The boats will be operated by trained healthcare personnel, including Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), to provide primary healthcare services and emergency medical assistance. Speaking at the programme, Basumatary said the initiative would improve access to healthcare, particularly for pregnant women, children, elderly people and emergency patients during floods. Moon Moon Brahma said partnerships between public institutions and corporate organisations could play an important role in improving healthcare delivery in remote areas. Director of Health Services, BTC, Nilu Brahma said the boat ambulances would function as mobile healthcare units, supporting immunisation drives, maternal healthcare services and treatment of common ailments in difficult-to-reach villages. NTPC officials said the boat ambulances would help ensure uninterrupted healthcare delivery and emergency medical transportation for riverine communities throughout the year, especially during the flood season.

DC Chakravarty visits flood-affected villages as Longa river water recedes



HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 29: Kokrajhar District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty on Sunday visited flood-affected villages along the Longa River to assess the situation after incessant rainfall caused the river to overflow.

Chakravarty visited Naodrabail, Uttar Ramfalbil, Alaijhar and nearby areas, where he reviewed the extent of flood damage and interacted with affected residents.

The district commissioner was accompanied by the Circle Officer of Dotma, senior district officials, the Executive Engineer of the Water Resources Department and local stakeholders.

During the visit, officials observed that floodwaters were gradually receding. The district administration said it is closely monitoring the situation and is prepared to take all necessary measures to address any emerging challenges.

BTC CEM Mohilary reviews progress of infrastructure projects in Udalguri

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 29: BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary on Monday chaired a district-level review meeting at the conference hall of the Udalguri Deputy Commissioner's Office to assess the physical and financial progress of ongoing infrastructure projects.

The meeting reviewed the status of various development schemes being implemented across the district and discussed measures to ensure their timely completion.

Assam transport minister Charan Boro, senior government officials and district administration representatives were present at the meeting.

Speaking on the occasion, Mohilary said that the meeting evaluated the physical and financial progress of ongoing infrastructure projects in the district.

He further said that the BTC government is committed to the overall development and welfare of the people across its districts.



"A district-wise review meeting to evaluate the physical and financial progress of ongoing infrastructure schemes was successfully held today at the Udalguri DC Office conference hall," Mohilary said.

Dilip Saikia urges BJP workers to earn public trust through service

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 29: Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia attended an organisational meeting of party representatives from Sonitpur and Biswanath districts at the Convention Centre in Batamari here on Monday.

During the meeting, Saikia urged party workers to earn public trust and social recognition through self-improvement, inspired by the motto, 'Service is Organisation'. The meeting focused on the qualitative development of party workers as well as the formation of 'Capable Mandals' and 'Capable District Committees'.

60 farmers attend ATMA training on agricultural mechanisation, livestock management

HT Correspondent
GOSSAIGAON, June 29: As many as 60 farmers from different villages participated in a within-district farmers' training programme organised by the Department of Agriculture, Kokrajhar, under the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (CSS-ATMA) 2026-27 at Binyakata under the Kachugaon Development Block recently.

The capacity-building programme focused on achieving self-sufficiency through agricultural mechanisation in farming, horticulture and livestock management, with special emphasis on Kharif crop cultivation.

Farmers were also sensitised to the balanced use of chemical fer-

tilisers, scientific poultry and pig-gery farming, and other improved agricultural practices aimed at promoting sustainable agriculture.

The technical sessions were conducted by Dr Sikdar Jabidur Islam, Veterinary Officer, SVD, Narayanpur, Gossaigaon; Sunita Dutta, Agricultural Development Officer (ADO), Bhumka; Flora Basumatary, ADO, Hatidhura; and Ayan Hazarika, ADO, Gurufela.

The programme was coordinated by Nitul Kalita, Assistant Technology Manager (ATM), Kachugaon Development Block, under ATMA.

Addressing the participants, the resource persons highlighted the importance of adopting scientific farming methods, agricultural

Lightning strike claims fisherman's life in Demow

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, June 29: A 45-year-old man was killed after being struck by lightning at Dehingmukh Rangadaria on Sunday evening.

The deceased has been identified as Jyotish Pii (45).

According to reports, Pii had gone out for fishing when he was struck by lightning and died on the spot.

He is survived by his wife and two sons.

His death has been widely mourned by residents of the area.

A police official said the body was sent for post-mortem examination on Monday.

Guwahati hosts BBPPDR trials to strengthen emergency communication



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 29: Guwahati on Monday hosted Proof of Concept trials for India's Broadband Public Protection and Disaster Relief (BBPPDR) network, a key initiative aimed at building robust mission-critical communication systems for public safety and disaster response, said an official statement.

As per the statement, the trials were chaired by Akhilesh Kumar Singh, IPS, Inspector General of Police (Law & Order), Assam Police.

Representing the Ministry of Home Affairs were K. Elamurugan, deputy director; Ankit Adjarjariya, assistant director; Vivek Gupta, assistant director; Sunil Kumar, assistant director; and Kunal Pal, communication officer.

Other participants included Biraj Das, senior superintendent of Police (Communication), Assam Police, who serves as the state nodal officer for the BBPPDR project in Assam; Md. Saadeque Ali Ahmed, APS, senior superintendent of Police, State Fire Service Organisation; Naveen Kumar, director, Department of Telecommunications; and Y. N. Rai, commandant, CRPF.

"The exercise focused on assess-

ing the operational readiness, interoperability and effectiveness of the BBPPDR network in enabling seamless communication during emergencies and disaster situations. A Dispatcher Console was set up at the conference hall of the Office of the Additional Director General of Police, Fire and Emergency Services in Guwahati," the statement added.

As part of the trials, officials conducted training and briefing sessions and distributed MCC handheld devices to various disaster response agencies, including police, fire and emergency services, NDRF, SDRF and central forces.

Telecom service provider Airtel supported the network during the trials.

The BBPPDR project aims to create a nationwide integrated broadband communication network based on advanced technology to enhance coordination among first responders and improve the country's emergency preparedness.

The successful conduct of the trials in Guwahati underscores the collaborative efforts of central and state agencies to strengthen secure and resilient communication infrastructure for public protection and disaster relief.

Elderly woman killed, two injured in separate road mishaps in WKA

HT Correspondent
KHERONI, June 29: Two separate road accidents occurred on Sunday in Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong, leaving an elderly woman dead and two others seriously injured.

In the first incident, a speeding Tata Magic vehicle struck and killed a 60-year-old woman, identified as Parvati Devi, on the spot at Mailudisaon. The

accident occurred when the vehicle (registration number AS 02 CC 3057), which was ferrying school students from Mailoo, reportedly lost control and hit the victim.

In a separate incident at Kheroni Tilabasti, a motorcycle collided with an e-rickshaw, leaving two passengers critically injured. The injured have been identified as Rita Devi and Poonam

Chouhan. Both were travelling in the e-rickshaw when the collision occurred. The motorcycle rider fled the scene along with the vehicle.

Police reached both accident sites shortly after the incidents. The injured were rushed to Kheroni Model Hospital for treatment. An investigation has been launched, and efforts are underway to trace the absconding motorcyclist.

AJYCP demands probe into alleged DISE-SEBA code fraud in Nagaon

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, June 29: The Nagaon district unit of the Asom Jatiyatabadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) has demanded a thorough investigation into the alleged DISE and SEBA code fraud at the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Nagaon Circle.

In a memorandum submitted to the district administration, district president Prabal Sarma and general secretary Hemanta Das stated that the Education Department had recently cancelled the registration of several private educational institutions in the district over alleged irregularities in their DISE and SEBA codes.

The schools whose registrations were cancelled include Dighaliati Jatiya Vidyalaya, Gyandeep Jatiya Vidyalaya and Bishnurabha Senior Secondary School.

Expressing concern over the future of students of the de-registered schools, particularly those in Classes IX and X, the AJYCP demanded immediate arrangements for their admission to nearby SEBA-affiliated schools. It also sought counselling sessions involving parents, teachers, psychologists and education experts to help students cope with the sudden disruption and prevent academic loss.

The organisation further demanded a comprehensive probe into the alleged DISE and SEBA code fraud and sought an inquiry into why certain employees of the Inspector of Schools' office in Nagaon Circle were reposted to the same office despite transfer orders. The AJYCP said it would not tolerate irregularities that undermine the education system and jeopardise students' futures.

It further urged the district commissioner to take immediate action on its demands and warned of a democratic agitation if appropriate steps were not taken.

NFR introduces IoT-based tunnel lighting automation for efficient energy use

The initiative enables centralized supervision, remote operation and real-time energy monitoring



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 29: In a significant step towards enhancing energy efficiency and adopting smart technologies, Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has implemented an advanced IoT-based tunnel lighting automation and energy monitoring system for Tunnel No. 9 at New Haf-long in the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section, an official statement said on Monday.

According to the statement, the initiative enables centralized supervision, remote operation and real-time energy monitoring through the IR Niyatrac platform, marking another milestone in NFR's efforts to modernize railway infrastructure and optimize energy consumption.

"As part of the project, smart metering infrastructure has been installed for tunnel lighting feeders, and field devices have been successfully integrated with the IR Niyatrac platform. The system facilitates remote operation and monitoring of Tun-

nel No. 9 lighting installations while providing real-time data on energy consumption and operational status," the statement added. It said the automation system ensures efficient energy use by enabling timely control and continuous monitoring of lighting systems.

"By enabling real-time monitoring of power consumption and system performance, the initiative will help optimize energy usage, reduce wastage and promote sustainable practices," it added.

The implementation of the IoT-based tunnel lighting automation system is part of NFR's ongoing efforts to modernize its infrastructure and strengthen energy management across its network. Through such initiatives, Northeast Frontier Railway aims to reinforce its commitment to operational excellence, environmental sustainability and the development of modern railway infrastructure, in line with Indian Railways' vision of a smarter and greener future.

No.DPRD/BTC/15FC/Baksa(TJ)/VIII-10/2026/3 Dated Kokrajhar the 26th June 2026

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days from the date of receipt in prescribed form affixing non-refundable court fee stamps of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed F-2 form are hereby invited from the Govt. registered Contractor/Firm from Electrical, PWD (Roads/Building) other Department under Class-II & Class-I (A, B, C) category from according to tender limit of eligibility for the following works and will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 pm on 18/07/26 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.15 pm in the presence of willing contractors or their authorized agents.

Sl. No.	Name of Scheme	Tender Value (Rs.)	Earnest Money (ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	Cost of Tender	Pre-Bid Meeting	Time for completion period
1	Installation of drinking water supply at Matipur Lamidar Nepali village (ID-610, Activity Code-126133167)	Rs.19,99,998/-		600.00	10/07/26	90 days
2	Installation of drinking water supply at Doommi Bongaon village (ID-611, Activity Code-126158325)	Rs.19,99,998/-		600.00	10/07/26	90 days
3	Installation of drinking water supply at Nikashi Kalbari village (ID-612, Activity Code-126038989)	Rs.19,99,998/-		600.00	10/07/26	90 days
4	Installation of drinking water supply at Dighaldonga B Block village (ID-613, Activity Code-126039016)	Rs.19,99,998/-		600.00	10/07/26	90 days

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent up to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 26/06/26 to 18/07/26 in the office of the undersigned on payment of in the form of Banker Cheque/Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar. The Cost of tender (Non-Refundable) must be in the form of Demand Draft/ Banker Cheque of a Nationalized Bank drawn in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar and payable at SBI, Kokrajhar Court para, Kokrajhar to be deposited 0.03%.

Sd/-Director,
Panchayat & Rural Development,
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/705

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The goal of art was the vital expression of self.- Alfred Stieglitz

Misconduct of air passengers

The modern airliner is one of humanity's greatest achievements. Hundreds of strangers are packed into a pressurized metal tube and transported safely across continents at nearly 900 kilometers an hour. The system works because of one fundamental principle: discipline. When that discipline breaks down at 36,000 feet, the consequences can be serious, dangerous, and sometimes criminal. Recent events aboard international airlines have once again highlighted an uncomfortable truth. A tiny minority of passengers continue to behave as though boarding an aircraft exempts them from the norms of civilized society. Cabin crew across the world increasingly report incidents ranging from verbal abuse and drunken aggression to physical assault and sexual harassment. The latest case to attract attention involved an Indian national travelling on a Singapore Airlines flight. According to Singapore court proceedings, the passenger allegedly molested and harassed a flight attendant during the journey before being arrested immediately upon arrival at Changi Airport. Such incidents are deeply embarrassing not merely because they involve criminal conduct but because they tarnish the image of millions of law-abiding travellers who represent their countries with dignity. The International Air Transport Association reports that unruly passenger incidents continue to occur at a significant rate worldwide, with non-compliance with crew instructions remaining the most common offence. In 2025, airlines reported roughly one unruly passenger incident for every 355 flights.

Most incidents begin innocuously enough. A passenger consumes excessive alcohol in an airport lounge. Another becomes frustrated by delays. A third believes cabin rules somehow do not apply to him. What follows may involve shouting, threats, refusal to obey crew instructions, smoking in lavatories, fights with fellow passengers, or harassment of cabin staff. The age profile is revealing. Contrary to popular assumptions, most serious offenders are not teenagers. Aviation and law-enforcement records show many are adults between 25 and 50 years old — people who should know better. Professionals, businessmen, tourists and frequent flyers have all appeared in police reports. Sexual misconduct remains among the most disturbing categories.

Several airlines have reported cases involving unwanted touching, stalking within the cabin, indecent exposure, obscene remarks and attempts to corner crew members in galleys or near lavatories. The response is increasingly swift. Airlines have little patience for repeat offenders. Blacklisting has become increasingly common. Passengers found guilty of serious misconduct can be banned permanently or temporarily from flying with specific carriers. Some governments also pursue criminal prosecution, resulting in imprisonment, fines and civil liability. Air travel depends on trust — trust between passengers, crew and airlines. Every act of harassment, assault or intimidation weakens that trust.

A crucial aspect of Assam's green economy lies in the transformation of its traditional industries into sustainable engines of growth. Tea, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, handloom, and tourism have always formed the backbone of the state's economy, yet each of these sectors now faces unprecedented environmental pressures. Climate variability has altered rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells have affected tea production, floods continue to damage agricultural land, while changing consumer preferences in global mar-

ket increasingly reward environmentally responsible production. These developments should not be viewed merely as challenges but as opportunities for structural transformation. Assam's globally recognised tea industry, for instance, possesses enormous potential to strengthen its position through sustainable cultivation practices, reduced chemical dependency, organic certification, water conservation, and renewable energy use in tea processing factories. International buyers today are willing to pay premium prices for products that demonstrate lower carbon footprints and stronger environmental compliance. The same principle applies to Assam's expanding horticulture sector, where organic fruits, spices, medicinal plants, and aromatic crops can create new export opportunities if backed by proper certification, quality control, and modern logistics.

Likewise, sustainable fisheries based on scientific pond management, biodiversity conservation, and efficient water use can significantly improve rural livelihoods without degrading natural ecosystems. The state's rich bamboo resources present another remarkable opportunity. Once regarded merely as a traditional material, bamboo is now increasingly recognised worldwide as a renewable substitute for timber, plastic, and even construction materials. With suitable investments in research, design, value addition, and market access, Assam could become an important supplier of eco-friendly bamboo products ranging from engineered furniture to biodegradable packaging materials. The handloom sector, deeply rooted in Assamese cul-

ture, can similarly benefit from the growing global demand for natural fibres, eco-friendly dyes, and ethically produced textiles. These sectors together illustrate that a green economy does not necessarily demand abandoning traditional occupations; rather, it encourages their modernisation through sustainability, innovation, and higher productivity while preserving cultural identity.

Urban development represents another decision frontier in Assam's green transition. The state's rapidly expanding towns and cities



DEGREE OF THOUGHT By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

face mounting pressures from population growth, traffic congestion, inadequate waste management, air pollution, and unplanned construction. If these challenges remain unaddressed, urban centres could become significant contributors to environmental degradation and public health crises. However, they also offer opportunities to demonstrate how economic growth and environmental responsibility can coexist. Sustainable urban planning requires more than the construction of roads and buildings; it demands integrated approaches involving efficient public transportation, non-motorised mobility, rainwater harvesting, energy-efficient buildings, urban forestry, waste segregation, wastewater treatment, and climate-resilient infrastructure.

Guwahati, as Assam's principal urban centre, has already begun introducing electric buses and cleaner mobility initiatives, but much greater investment will be necessary to reduce dependence on fossil fuel-based transportation. Smaller towns should avoid repeating the mistakes of larger metropolitan cities by integrating sustainability principles into their development plans from the outset. Municipal solid waste management deserves particular attention because growing consumption patterns have generated increasing volumes of plastic, electronic, and organic waste. Instead of viewing waste merely as a disposal problem, Assam can adopt circular economy principles that convert waste into valuable resources through recycling, composting, biogas production, and waste-to-energy technologies. Such initiatives would simultaneously reduce landfill requirements, lower greenhouse gas emissions, generate employment, and improve public sanitation. Equally important is the protection and restoration of

urban wetlands, rivers, and green spaces, which perform indispensable ecological functions by regulating floods, improving air quality, supporting biodiversity, and enhancing the quality of urban life. Sustainable cities are not measured solely by economic output but by their ability to provide healthier, safer, and more resilient environments for future generations.

No discussion of Assam's development vision can ignore the immense ecological value of its forests, rivers, wetlands, and extraordinary biodiversity. These natural assets represent far more than environmental treasures; they constitute essential economic capital supporting agriculture, tourism, water security, climate regulation, and millions of livelihoods. Assam is internationally known for its national parks, wildlife sanctuaries, and diverse ecosystems that attract visitors from across the world. Yet increasing human pressure, habitat fragmentation, illegal encroachment, pollution, and climate change threaten these fragile ecosystems. A green development strategy therefore requires treating conservation not as an obstacle to economic progress but as a foundation for sustainable prosperity. Ecotourism offers one example of this integrated approach. Unlike conventional tourism, ecotourism seeks to generate income while protecting biodiversity, supporting local communities, preserving indigenous cultures, and educating visitors about environmental stewardship. Community-managed tourism initiatives surrounding wildlife habitats, wetlands, and cultural landscapes can create employment opportunities while reducing incentives for unsustainable resource extraction.

Furthermore, healthy forests provide invaluable ecosystem services by storing carbon, preventing soil erosion, regulating rainfall, maintaining river systems, and reducing the severity of floods and droughts. These benefits rarely appear in conventional economic statistics, yet they save enormous public expenditure and contribute directly to long-term economic stability. Emerging global carbon markets may also create new financial opportunities for regions capable of demonstrating effective forest conservation and ecosystem restoration. Assam's abundant natural wealth therefore should be viewed as productive capital requiring careful management rather than unrestricted exploitation. Conservation policies must balance ecological integrity with the legitimate developmental aspirations of local communities through par-

ticipatory governance, scientific monitoring, and equitable benefit-sharing mechanisms.

Ultimately, the success of Assam's green economy will depend not merely on government policies or technological innovations but on the collective choices made by its citizens, businesses, educational institutions, financial organisations, and civil society. Sustainable development cannot remain confined to official documents or conference discussions; it must become an integral part of everyday economic behaviour and public consciousness. Schools and universities have an especially important responsibility in preparing future generations with environmental literacy, scientific thinking, entrepreneurial skills, and practical understanding of sustainability challenges.

Financial institutions can accelerate green investments by expanding access to climate finance, renewable energy loans, sustainable agriculture credit, and incentives for environmentally responsible enterprises. Businesses must increasingly recognise that environmental responsibility strengthens long-term competitiveness by improving resource efficiency, reducing operational risks, enhancing consumer confidence, and opening access to international markets. Citizens, too, influence the success of the green transition through responsible consumption, waste reduction, energy conservation, and participation in community environmental initiatives. The journey will inevitably involve difficult choices, competing priorities, and short-term economic adjustments.

Nevertheless, the long-term costs of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, climate disasters, and resource depletion would be far greater than the investments required for sustainable transformation today. Assam stands at a decisive historical moment where development pathways chosen during the present decade will shape its economic resilience, environmental security, and social well-being for generations to come. If the state successfully integrates ecological wisdom with technological innovation, inclusive governance, and economic ambition, it can emerge not only as a leading green economy within India but also as a model demonstrating that sustainable development is both economically viable and socially desirable. Such a vision would honour Assam's rich natural heritage while creating new opportunities for prosperity, resilience, and human dignity in an increasingly uncertain world.

Assam's fight against drugs needs a broader strategy

By: Siddharth Roy

Assam's campaign against drugs has emerged as one of the most visible anti-narcotics initiatives in the country. Large-scale seizures, frequent arrests and the destruction of confiscated narcotics have signalled a strong political and administrative commitment to dismantling drug trafficking networks. For a State located along one of India's most strategically sensitive corridors, these efforts deserve recognition. Yet the real measure of success will not lie in the quantity of drugs seized but in whether Assam can reduce both the demand for narcotics and the social conditions that allow the illicit trade to flourish.

Assam occupies a unique geographical position. It serves as the gateway to India's Northeast while sharing international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh and maintaining close connectivity with other northeastern States that lie near Myanmar. This location has made Assam a vital economic and cultural crossroads, but it has also exposed the State to transnational trafficking networks operating across the region. The proximity of the Golden Triangle—one of the world's largest narcotics-producing regions—has long posed security challenges for the Northeast, making Assam an important transit point for illicit drugs destined for markets across India.

Recognising this threat, the State has intensified its anti-drug operations over the past few years. Law enforcement agencies have intercepted substantial consignments of heroin, methamphetamine and other narcotic substances, while coordinated intelligence operations have targeted organised trafficking syndicates. Such enforcement is indispensable because drug trafficking today is no longer an isolated criminal activity. It is closely linked to organised crime, money laundering, arms smuggling and, in some instances, insurgent financing. Weakening these criminal networks contributes directly to national security.

However, enforcement alone cannot guarantee lasting success. Every successful seizure demonstrates the efficiency of policing, but it also reveals the persistence and adaptability of trafficking networks. Criminal organisations continuously alter routes, recruit new couriers and exploit technological innovations to evade detection. A strategy centred solely on arrests risks becoming reactive rather than preventive.

The more difficult challenge lies on the demand side. Assam, like many other States, has witnessed increasing concerns over substance abuse among young people. Drug dependence is rarely the product of a single factor. Unemployment, mental health challenges, family instability, peer pressure and social isolation often create conditions in which addiction takes root. Unless these underlying vulnerabilities are addressed, enforcement will continue to confront an endless stream of new consumers.

Educational institutions therefore have an important responsibility. Schools and colleges should move beyond occasional awareness campaigns and integrate comprehensive substance-abuse education into broader health and life-skills programmes. Young people need factual information about addiction, opportunities to develop emotional resilience and access to counselling services before experimentation develops into dependency.

Healthcare must become another central pillar of Assam's anti-drug strategy. De-addiction centres remain unevenly distributed, while trained mental health professionals continue to be in short supply. Addiction should not be viewed merely as a criminal issue but also as a medical and psychological condition requiring sustained treatment and rehabilitation. Expanding community-based counselling, improving access to affordable treatment and supporting families affected



by addiction would strengthen recovery while reducing relapse. Border management deserves equal attention. Assam's geographical position makes cooperation with neighbouring States and central agencies essential. Intelligence sharing, coordinated surveillance and the use of advanced technologies such as drones, artificial intelligence and data analytics can strengthen interdiction efforts. At the same time, closer collaboration with neighbouring countries remains indispensable because trafficking networks operate across borders rather than within administrative boundaries.

Economic development also has an important role to play. Regions vulnerable to trafficking often face limited employment opportunities, encouraging some individuals to participate in illegal networks. Skill development, entrepreneurship and improved connectivity can provide sustainable alternatives, particularly for young people in border districts. Anti-drug policy should therefore be viewed not only as a law-and-order issue but also as part of a broader development strategy. Civil society organisations, religious institutions, youth clubs and community leaders can significantly strengthen prevention efforts. Their local credibility allows them to reach vulnerable populations more effectively than government agencies alone. Community participation also helps reduce the stigma surrounding addiction, encouraging affected individuals to seek treatment without fear of social exclusion.

Technology presents both opportunities and challenges. While traffickers increasingly exploit encrypted communication platforms and digital financial systems, law enforcement agencies can employ data analytics, forensic technologies and integrated intelligence platforms to anticipate rather than merely respond to criminal activity. Investment in cyber capabilities should therefore complement conventional policing.

Assam's experience also carries lessons for the rest of the country. The State has demonstrated that political commitment and coordinated enforcement can significantly disrupt trafficking networks. Yet lasting success will depend upon recognising that the fight against drugs extends beyond seizures and arrests. A comprehensive strategy must integrate law enforcement with healthcare, education, community engagement, border security and economic opportunity.

Ultimately, the objective should not simply be to intercept narcotics before they reach the market. It should be to build a society in which fewer young people become vulnerable to addiction in the first place. Assam has taken important steps in confronting a complex challenge. The next phase requires moving from a strategy focused primarily on supply reduction to one that addresses demand, rehabilitation and social resilience with equal determination. Only then can the State's fight against drugs become not merely a policing success, but a lasting public policy achievement.

(The author is a civil engineer, consultant (invitee) to Rashtriya Raksha University under the Ministry of Home Affairs, short story writer, columnist (for various leading publications) and a contemporary affairs commentator. He can be reached at siddharth001.roy@gmail.com)

The Fragile Balance: Development, disasters and the future of humanity

By: Lalit Garg

The recent devastating earthquake in Venezuela has shaken not merely one nation but the conscience of humanity as a whole. While the number of deaths and missing persons may continue to change with time, the enormity of the tragedy remains unquestionable. Thousands of families are enduring the unbearable pain of losing their loved ones. On every such occasion, the world expresses sympathy, sends relief materials, and launches assistance campaigns. Yet, one question repeatedly confronts us: Do we truly learn any lasting lessons from every major disaster, or do we simply mourn for a few days, engage in brief discussions, and then return to the same reckless path of unbridled development and blatant disregard for nature?

Natural disasters do not arrive according to a calendar. They neither choose countries, nor seasons, nor convenient moments. When the earth trembles, rivers overflow, mountains crumble, or oceans unleash their fury, grand claims of development, towering skyscrapers, and the arrogance of technological advancement collapse within moments. In such times, a nation's true strength lies not in its economic prosperity but in its preparedness, sensitive governance, and the awareness of its citizens. The Venezuelan tragedy has also highlighted a positive aspect. Modern technology provided early warnings in some regions a few seconds before the tremors were felt. Though this may seem insignificant, in the midst of a disaster, these precious seconds can determine the difference between life and death. Science is making continuous progress in this direction. What is needed is to make such early warning systems more accurate, faster, and more widespread so that a greater number of lives can be saved.

For India, this issue is not merely an international news story. Our country itself has repeatedly suffered from earthquakes, floods, landslides, cloudbursts, cyclones, and tsunamis. The 1993 Latur earthquake, the 2001 Bhuj earthquake, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 2013 Kedarnath disaster, the land subsidence crisis in Jorhat in 2023, and the recurring floods and landslides in the Himalayan region remain etched in our collective memory. All these events convey a single message: nature can never be taken lightly. Scientists may still be unable to predict with certainty the exact date, time, and location of an earthquake. However, they have consistently warned that nearly sixty percent of India's landmass falls within varying levels of seismic risk zones. The Himalayan region, Delhi-NCR, the North-East, Gujarat, and several other areas are considered particularly vulnerable. This clearly means that even if precise prediction is impossible, comprehensive preparedness is entirely achievable. Unfortunately, we continue to focus more on relief and rehabilitation after disasters rather than on preparedness before they occur.

Today, concrete jungles are rising rapidly in almost every Indian city. Multi-storeyed residential complexes, commercial buildings, sky-scrapers, and smart cities have become symbols of modern development. Cities such as Mumbai, Gurugram, Noida, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and now Jaipur have joined the race for vertical expansion. However, the most crucial



question remains: Are these buildings designed merely for normal conditions, or are they capable of withstanding major natural disasters as well? The real test of any building comes when the earth shakes, when flash floods strike, when fierce winds blow, or when nature reveals its destructive power. A structure deserves to be called a symbol of true development only if it can protect human lives during such crises. Height, glamour, and modern amenities alone do not guarantee safety.

India already has standards and regulations for earthquake-resistant construction. The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) has laid down clear guidelines. The problem lies not in the absence of regulations, but in their implementation. Are all multi-storied buildings genuinely being constructed in accordance with these standards? Is the quality of construction material independently and objectively verified? Are structural safety audits conducted after completion? If the answers to these questions are not fully satisfactory, concern is inevitable. Growing irregularities and corruption in the construction sector have further aggravated the situation.

In many instances, land mafias, builder lobbies, and profit-driven interests have violated environmental norms by constructing green belts, water bodies, riverbanks, and ecologically fragile zones. These very constructions often become the cause of future tragedies. The demolition of the illegally constructed Super Tech Twin Towers in Noida, ordered by the Supreme Court, symbolized the extent to which regulations had been ignored. The larger question is: if a structure was illegal, who allowed it to be built in the first place? Why did the administration remain silent until its completion? Can the lives of millions be put at risk merely for the economic gains of a few? This is not merely a legal question; it is also a profound moral issue.

Urban development authorities, municipal corporations, development trusts, and agencies responsible for approving construction cannot limit their role to merely signing building plans. Every construction project must undergo rigorous technical, environmental, and structural scrutiny. Compliance with safety standards is not a bureaucratic formality; it is a solemn responsibility to protect human life. Another serious concern is climate change and humanity's increasing interference with nature. Cutting

mountains to build roads, obstructing the natural flow of rivers, indiscriminate deforestation, encroachment, mining, and unplanned urbanization have severely disturbed ecological balance. Consequently, incidents of landslides, flash floods, urban flooding, and forest fires are increasing. Recurrent disasters in the Himalayan region are warning us that the model of development must not be anti-nature; it must be in harmony with nature.

It is equally dangerous to assume that regions which have never experienced a major earthquake in the past will remain safe forever. Humanity still does not fully understand the dynamics operating beneath the Earth's surface. Therefore, considering any region entirely safe solely on the basis of historical experience may prove disastrous. Today, urban planning cannot focus solely on earthquakes. Excessive rainfall, urban flooding, strong winds, rising temperatures, and other natural challenges must also be integrated into city planning. The cities of the future must be developed on the principle of multi-layered resilience and safety.

Investing in preventive safety measures is far more prudent and humane than spending billions on relief and rehabilitation after disasters strike. Governments alone cannot shoulder this responsibility. Citizens, too, must become aware of disaster management. Regular mock drills should be conducted in schools, offices, and residential complexes. Modern warning systems must reach even the remotest villages. Natural disasters cannot be prevented, but the devastation they cause can certainly be minimized. This requires a coordinated effort involving scientific research, advanced technology, robust construction standards, strict monitoring, transparent governance, and informed citizens.

Nature never asks how expensive a building is, who constructed it, or in which city it stands. It tests only the strength of the structure and the foresight of humanity. The Venezuelan earthquake is a warning—a call to redefine development. A truly developed nation is not one that possesses the tallest buildings, but one that has the safest structures, the most responsible urban planning, the most sensitive governance, and the most vigilant citizens. For providing relief after a disaster is merely a compulsion of governance, whereas preparing in advance for disasters is the hallmark of a visionary nation and a responsible state.

Evasive Peace: How the US-Iran ceasefire is unravelling each day continuing conflict

By: Asad Mirza

The ink on the Islamabad Memorandum was barely dry when missiles and drones began flying again across the Persian Gulf. A week of tit-for-tat strikes between Washington and Tehran, compounded by Israel's relentless pounding of Lebanon, has exposed the US-Iran ceasefire of June 2026 as a fragile construct held together more by diplomatic exhaustion than by genuine strategic convergence.

When US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed the Islamabad Memorandum on June 17, 2026 - Trump at the Palace of Versailles following the G7 summit, Pezeshkian in Tehran - the world was offered a tantalising vision: the most dangerous military confrontation in the Middle East since the 2003 Iraq war, finally winding down.

The deal, mediated over months by Pakistan and Qatar, established a 60-day ceasefire framework to negotiate a permanent end to the 2026 Iran war. Less than two weeks later, that vision lies in tatters, the victim of broken pledges, Iranian provocations, Israeli defiance, and the mercurial impulses of a US president who has threatened Iran with annihilation one day and dangled trade incentives the next.

To understand the current crisis, it is essential to grasp how fitfully the ceasefire has operated since its earliest iteration. The initial two-week truce brokered by Pakistan on April 7-8, 2026, was violated by both sides almost immediately. Low-intensity skirmishes never stopped. Trump extended the ceasefire "indefinitely" on April 21, yet US forces launched strikes on Iranian targets in May, targeting what CENTCOM described as "missile launch sites and Iranian boats attempting to emplace mines" in Bandar Abbas - framed publicly as self-defence. Iran retaliated against shipping. Each side accused the other of being the original aggressor; both were right.

The June 17 memorandum was supposed to move beyond this cycle. Instead, it has accelerated it. On June 26, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps struck a Singapore-flagged cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz with a drone. Trump called it a "foolish violation" of the ceasefire agreement and, true to his rhetorical style - "You'll find out" - ordered the US military to respond.

US Navy and Air Force jets struck ten Iranian military targets in and around the strait, hitting surveillance infrastructure, communication systems, air defence sites, drone storage facilities, and minelaying capabilities. Iran's foreign ministry declared these strikes a "clear violation" of the June 18 memorandum, stating that the conduct demon-



strated that "the US regime places no value on its commitments."

Iran then launched ballistic missiles and drones at US facilities - the Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait and the US Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. Kuwait's air defences scrambled to intercept incoming fire; sirens blared across Bahrain. The US struck again, a second wave of attacks targeting Iranian coastal infrastructure. By June 28, both sides had agreed to halt strikes before renewed peace talks - but only after two days of the most intense exchanges since the April ceasefire. This is not a ceasefire. It is a managed escalation masquerading as diplomacy.

No actor has done more to sabotage the fragile US-Iran diplomatic architecture than Israeli Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. From the moment peace talks gained traction, Israel moved in the opposite direction in Lebanon, where its war against Hezbollah has continued with a ferocity that has killed more than 4,000 people, displaced over one million, and flattened dozens of southern villages.

Iran has consistently made one demand non-negotiable: a cessation of Israeli attacks in Lebanon must be part of any broader deal. Netanyahu has just as consistently refused, insisting that the ceasefire with Iran "does not include Lebanon" - a position that has infuriated Tehran and repeatedly brought negotiations to the brink of collapse. In early June, when Netanyahu threatened to bomb Hezbollah's stronghold in Beirut's Dahieh district, Iran suspended indirect negotiations with

the US entirely, warning that "without fully restraining America's rabid dog in Lebanon, there will be no ceasefire." The bluntness of the language reflected genuine fury.

This divergence goes deeper than tactics. Reports from late May suggested that Netanyahu and his inner circle privately view the emerging US-Iran agreement as "disastrous" - fearing it will rehabilitate Iran's regional standing, release frozen assets, and leave Tehran's nuclear programme ambiguous rather than dismantled.

The deeper structural problem is the incoherence at the top of the American strategy. Between March 23 and June 9 alone, Trump claimed at least 38 times that a deal with Iran was imminent. He threatened Iran with unconditional surrender,

then offered to use frozen Iranian assets to buy American crops for the Iranian people. He declared that the US had "won" the war in late March even as Iranian missiles continued to rain down. He ordered strikes on the Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan nuclear facilities on June 21 - and three days later declared a ceasefire.

This is not strategic ambiguity as a deliberate negotiating tool; it is the erratic output of a leader operating without a coherent endgame. Trump's threats to "militarily complete the job" if Iran continues to strike - warning that the Iranian regime could "cease to exist" - serve simultaneously as deterrence and as a provocation that hardens Iranian hardliners. His administration disputes claims that peace talks have stalled even as US warplanes conduct fresh strikes, a contradiction that undermines American credibility as a guarantor of any agreement. What Trump wants from the deal is relatively clear: the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to ease energy markets and claim a grand diplomatic victory. What he is less willing to confront is the harder architecture of a durable settlement: verifiable nuclear constraints, a framework for Iran's regional proxy network, and a mechanism to restrain Israel in Lebanon.

Whatever the ultimate fate of the memorandum, the 2026 war has already redrawn the strategic map of West Asia in ways that will outlast any single ceasefire. Iran, despite surviving the war, emerges militarily degraded, economically crippled, and diplomatically isolated. Its new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, is regarded as more hawkish than his father - a dangerous variable in a country whose politics were already fractured by massive popular protests in January 2026.

The Gulf states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar - have borne severe costs from Iranian missile attacks and the Hormuz closure, and will push hard for permanent freedom of navigation guarantees. Israel's occupation of parts of southern Lebanon and its continued military presence raises the spectre of a protracted Lebanese quagmire echoing its disastrous 1982-2000 occupation.

The June 28 agreement to pause strikes and resume talks offers a slender thread of hope. But as long as Israel continues to strike Lebanon, Iran views the memorandum as unimplemented; as long as Iran harasses Hormuz shipping, the US views the memorandum as violated. The ceasefire is being undermined from within by the very parties that signed it and sabotaged from without by an ally no one can fully control. Until the Lebanon question is resolved - and until Trump decides whether he is making peace or simply performing it - the Middle East will remain suspended between war and its simulation. (IPA Service)

As China expands Nuclear arsenal, India's deterrent is outgrowing its doctrine

By: Manoj Joshi

The latest Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) yearbook has created a storm in the media teacup by listing India as possessing 12 deployed nuclear weapons. In the chart accompanying its detailed analysis of how the world's nuclear arsenals are being expanded and upgraded, it lists for the first time Indian weapons under the category "deployed". Hitherto, Indian weapons were listed in the "stored warheads" category. Till now, the only countries whose weapons were in the "deployed" category were the five "official" nuclear weapons powers - the US, Russia, China, UK, and France.

There is, in fact, nothing out of the ordinary here. From the outset, India was committed to a triad based on land, sea, and air - land-based missiles, specially configured bomber aircraft, and submarines. Its initial deployments were of aircraft-delivered weapons; it took some years to perfect missiles with nuclear warheads, and longer still to perfect submarine-based ones.

India's Nuclear Doctrine India released its official nuclear doctrine on 4 January 2003, shortly after Operation Parakram, its military standoff with Pakistan, had ended. It declared a No First Use (NFU) posture, meaning that nuclear weapons would be used only in retaliation against a nuclear attack on Indian territory, or on Indian forces anywhere, through a massive retaliatory strike. The doctrine also established a Nuclear Command Authority (NCA), whose Political Council is chaired by the Prime Minister and whose Executive Council is chaired by the National Security Adviser, along with a Strategic Forces Command (SFC) under the NCA to execute retaliatory strikes.

It stored its nuclear weapon cores and the bomb assembly separately, one under the aegis of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the other with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO).

India has followed the NFU policy for safety and effective political control of its nuclear arsenal. It stored its nuclear weapon cores

and the bomb assembly separately, one under the aegis of the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the other with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). As the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists noted in 2014, before the commissioning of the INS Arihant, India probably stored its "demated" weapons at five centralised locations, rather than bases with operational forces. When required and only after authorisation by the NCA, they were to be mated and handed over to the SFC for deployment on missiles or aircraft. This would be a smooth and well-practised process with built-in security procedures such as authorisation codes at each stage.

In a recent article, Rear Admiral (Retd) Raja Menon listed three compulsions pushing India to change its posture: transparency through satellite tracking that makes launchers difficult to hide, precision that enables even conventional missiles to destroy targets with great certainty, and speed that enormously shortens the loop between detection, decision, and strike.

The Submarine Deterrent

Nuclear submarines are the most secure means of deploying nuclear weapons because a nuclear-propelled submarine can remain undersea for virtually an indefinite period of time, limited only by its reactor cycle and food supplies. However, it is not feasible to maintain the separation of nuclear cores and the weapon assembly in the limited space of a submarine which operates hundreds, if not thousands, of kilometres from home. Once underwater, communications become difficult, and the only things that can be transmitted are target and authorisation codes via the Very Low Frequency (VLF) systems.

Making missile-carrying nuclear submarines is a difficult task, for which India has received considerable Russian help. After a quarter-century endeavour, India commissioned the INS Arihant in 2016, and a second submarine, the INS Arighat, in August 2024. Developing the submarine's K-15 missile was also difficult; India had the 750-km-range weapon ready by 2018. However, that range is too short to be of much

use. For safety, the submarine must stay in deep waters: far out in the Arabian Sea, the K-15 can barely reach Pakistan's Sindh region.

The Arihant, which can carry 12 nuclear-tipped K-15 missiles, conducted its first operational patrol in 2018. A submarine on patrol is presumed to carry ready-to-fire missiles with fully mated warheads - and it is from this that SIPRI draws its figure. With the Arihant and Arighat each carrying 12 such missiles on patrol, SIPRI counts these as 12 deployed warheads. But this is an inference, not inside knowledge: SIPRI is assuming the missiles are armed and ready simply because the submarines are on patrol.

A submarine on patrol is presumed to carry ready-to-fire missiles with fully mated warheads - and it is from this that SIPRI draws its figure.

There are, in fact, good reasons to doubt that these two vessels carry an operational deterrent at all. They are better understood as technology demonstrators and training platforms. India has only recently commissioned the INS Aridhaman, a stretched version of the earlier vessels capable of firing the longer-range K-4 missile, still under operational validation, with a range of 3,500 km. A fourth submarine is due in 2027. India will only achieve a mature submarine-based deterrent once it perfects the S-5 - the fifth vessel, with a displacement more than twice that of the Arihant.

Storing and Securing the Arsenal

Given its NFU policy, India must ensure that no surprise attack can disarm its limited arsenal - small compared to the thousands held by the US and Russia, and the hundreds held by China. For this reason, it has carefully hidden its storage sites and missiles.

In the case of Pakistan, the Federation of American Scientists (FAS) and Institute for Science and International Security have identified several storage locations - military garrisons in Akro and Pano Akil (Sindh), Gujranwala and Sardogha (Punjab), Khuzdar, Kenji and Kori (Balochistan), Masroor Depot (Karachi), Tarbela and Haripur (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). Pakistan, moreover, does not



maintain an NFU posture.

Quite likely, like Pakistan, India houses some of its warhead storage and assembly sites within existing military bases, where security can be assured. So far, however, experts have identified only one potential site, in Morki, Rajasthan, which could be an underground missile facility or a warhead storage area. Given the requirements of mated warheads, there is also very likely a facility within or close to INS Varsha - the underground naval base India has developed some 50 km south of Visakhapatnam.

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the need to win over global public opinion in the aftermath of the test. The second was to present India's arsenal as more restrained and defensive than Pakistan's. The third was practical: to build an arsenal that would not bankrupt the country, since more aggressive postures, such as launch-on-warning or launch-on-attack, would require an expensive and extensive surveillance and early-warning network.

Over time, however, NFU has revealed certain weaknesses, some of which grew sharper as Pakistan developed Theatre Nuclear Weapons (TNWs). How, for instance, would India respond to a Pakistani tactical strike on an Indian military column operating inside Pakistan - a scenario that the January 4, 2003, doctrine had to address. And if any nuclear attack invites the same massive retaliation, what stops an adversary from striking with everything at once rather than holding back?

Nuclear postures do not evolve in isolation; as one power's arsenal becomes more sophisticated, it drives changes in the postures of others. China, for instance, has historically maintained an NFU posture, but it is now rapidly expanding its arsenal. Beijing says the growth in its warhead numbers and the modernisation of its missiles are aimed at ensuring the sur-

vivability and effectiveness of its deterrence against adversaries such as the US.

For India, China's modernisation creates mounting pressure to strengthen its own deterrent. New Delhi may eventually find itself compelled to expand its warhead inventory and develop capabilities such as a satellite-based missile surveillance system to preserve strategic balance.

These shifting realities have also revived debate over India's own nuclear doctrine. In 2014, there was speculation that the incoming government would revise the doctrine, though this was quickly denied. Former External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, who had defended NFU in 1998-99, noted in a speech to the Parliament in 2011 that the framework is "very greatly in need of revision" and that concepts of "NFU", "no first use against non-nuclear powers", and "credible deterrence with minimum force" had been "overtaken by events".

New Delhi may eventually find itself compelled to expand its warhead inventory and develop capabilities such as a satellite-based missile surveillance system to preserve strategic balance.

Many former officials and ministers have advocated an adjustment of the doctrine. Among them

were Manohar Parrikar, former Defence Minister; Shiv Shankar Menon, former National Security Adviser; Lt Gen (Retd) Balraj Nagal, former commander of the SFC; and Admiral Arun Prakash, former Navy chief and chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. They have advocated shifts ranging from a posture of 'launch on warning' to possible pre-emption of adversary attacks.

What emerges, then, is not the picture SIPRI's chart implies - a settled arsenal of twelve deployed warheads - but a nuclear posture in gradual transition. India's submarine force is still maturing, its warheads remain largely demated, and its doctrine, on paper, continues to rest on No First Use. Yet the direction of travel is clear. Canisterisation, the demands of greater readiness, and above all, China's rapid nuclear expansion are steadily pushing India towards a more operationally ready deterrent.

Whether this ultimately leads to a formal revision of the doctrine remains uncertain. For now, the official policy has not changed. But as India's capabilities evolve, the gap between its declared doctrine and its operational posture is widening. That quiet evolution, rather than a single figure in a SIPRI table, is the story worth watching. (Courtesy: ORF)

8 new Rajya Sabha members take oath; Kharge re-appointed LoP

NEW DELHI, June 29: Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and BJP leader Tarun Chugh were among the eight newly-elected members of the Rajya Sabha who took oath on Monday.

Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan administered the oath of office to the new members.

Kharge was also re-appointed as the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha with effect from June 26.

Holding a copy of the Constitution in his hand, Kharge took the oath separately in Radhakrishnan's chamber.

The Congress chief later said that he will continue to raise the concerns, aspirations and the voice of people in the House with sincerity and conviction, apart from holding the government accountable.

Radhakrishnan congratulated Kharge and said the Upper House would benefit from his long experience.

Radhakrishnan later administered oath/affirmation to seven other newly elected/re-elected members in the Rajya Sabha chamber - Mansingh Meraman Parmar, Tarun Chugh, Alka Singh, Jitendra Meghji-hai Kanariya, Rajendra Hiralal Jain, M Nagaraja and Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi.

Four members took oath/affirmation in Hindi, one in Kannada, one in Punjabi and one in Manipuri. While two members are from Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur and Rajasthan sent one member each to the Upper House.

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson



Sonia Gandhi, Wayanad MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, general secretaries K C Venugopal, Mukul Wasnik, Jairam Ramesh and Naseer Hussain were present during Kharge's oath-taking.

Kharge's wife, daughter and granddaughter along with her spouse were also present, sources said.

Health Minister J P Nadra, who is also the Leader of the House, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman Harivansh were also present on the occasion, along with Pratul Patel and Rajya Sabha Secretary General P C Mody.

"Vice President and Rajya Sabha Chair-

man, C P Radhakrishnan, administered oath to Mallikarjun Kharge at the Parliament House today," Radhakrishnan's office posted on X along with pictures of the oath-taking ceremony.

Kharge said on X, "I had the privilege of taking the oath of office as a Member of the Council of States, again. It is a matter of immense pride and responsibility to continue serving this august Upper House as the Leader of the Opposition."

He also extended his gratitude to Radhakrishnan and Harivansh for their continued support.

"I also express my heartfelt gratitude to the leadership of the Indian National Con-

gress, especially CPP chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, my fellow colleagues and MPs in the Congress, and to the countless party workers and supporters whose unwavering faith and encouragement have sustained me throughout my long journey in public life and Parliamentary service," Kharge said.

The Congress chief also said that he was equally grateful to the floor leaders of all the political parties, especially the INDIA bloc colleagues.

"I look forward to even stronger coordination during the forthcoming Monsoon Session so that together we can make the government of the day more accountable," he said.

Kharge was later re-recognised as the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha.

"Consequent upon the expiry of his term of office as a member of the Rajya Sabha on June 25, 2026, Mallikarjun Kharge ceased to be the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha w.e.f. June 26, 2026.

"On his re-election to the Rajya Sabha, w.e.f. June 26, 2026, the Chairman of Rajya Sabha has accorded recognition to Mallikarjun Kharge, Member and Leader of the Indian National Congress (INC) in Rajya Sabha, as the Leader of Opposition w.e.f. June 26, 2026, in accordance with the provisions of Section 2 of the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977, and for all purposes of the said Act," Rajya Sabha Secretary-General Mody said in a bulletin. (PTI)

Haryana, Rajasthan sign pact in Shah's presence for implementation of Yamuna Water Project



NEW DELHI, June 29: Haryana and Rajasthan on Monday signed an agreement in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah for the construction and implementation of the Yamuna Water Project, officials said.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed on May 12, 1994 by the Yamuna basin states -- Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and the National Capital Territory of Delhi -- regarding allocation of the surface flow of the river.

After its creation in 2000, Uttarakhnad was also included in the MoU.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma, Haryana Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil and senior officials from the central government and the state governments were present during the ceremony.

Addressing the meeting, Shah said the project seeks to facilitate the conveyance of Rajasthan's allocated share of Yamuna waters through an underground pipeline system from the Western Yamuna Canal, enabling the state to effectively utilise the water allocated to it under the 1994 MoU on the sharing of utilisable surface waters of the Upper Yamuna Basin.

The agreement will ensure that 580 Million Cubic Meters (MCM) of water will be supplied from the Yamuna Canal to Rajasthan through three underground pipelines from July to October, he said.

Shah said this agreement has today resolved the nearly three-decade-old water-related problem faced by the people of Haryana and Rajasthan.

The home minister said the

agreement is an excellent example of the mantra 'Solution through Dialogue', given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"This agreement demonstrates that if states move forward with the spirit of cooperative federalism, even a problem persisting for three decades can be resolved easily," he said.

Shah said that under today's agreement, approximately 580 Million Cubic Meters (MCM) of water will be supplied from the Yamuna Canal to Rajasthan through three underground pipelines from July to October.

These three pipelines have a diameter of more than 3.6 metres and will provide drinking water to the people of both Rajasthan and Haryana.

Shah said the agreement is an excellent example of a "win-win situation" for both states.

The agreement has carefully addressed financial responsibilities, cost-sharing, water allocation, water release protocols and maintenance arrangements, he said.

This scientifically comprehensive agreement also beautifully incorporates the operation and maintenance of infrastructure, monitoring systems, transparency measures and a robust dispute resolution mechanism, the home minister said.

He said that the framework of this agreement, prepared by Haryana, Rajasthan and especially the Central Water Commission (CWC), will stand as a dispute-free agreement for many decades to come.

Shah said that a resolution was achieved in just a few days under the chairmanship of Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil. (PTI)

India leads major democracies in electoral transparency: CEC

SRINAGAR, June 29: Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar on Monday said India was leading the world's major democracies with a transparent electoral process in which every stage of the exercise is audited by the political parties and candidates.

"We discussed the components of the world's most transparent electoral process -- preparation of the voter list, polling and counting. These are concurrently audited by all political parties and candidates," Kumar, who is on a three-day visit to Kashmir, told reporters here.

Earlier in the day, Kumar addressed a gathering of booth-level officers (BLOs) in Budgam district, about 12 km from Srinagar.

He said India currently holds the chair of International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), an intergovernmental organisation that supports sustainable democracy worldwide.

"Seeing this process of Indian elections, in 2026 Bharat is currently leading all the large democratic countries of the world, and is also the chairperson of International IDEA," he said. The Chief Election Commissioner described BLOs as the pillars of democracy. (PTI)

Three labourers killed, nearly a dozen injured in Jaipur

JAIPUR, June 29: Three labourers were killed and about a dozen others injured after a wall of an under-construction septic tank collapsed on them in Jaipur's Chandwaji on Monday, police said.

Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma has expressed grief over the incident and ordered immediate relief and rescue operations.

The incident occurred while the workers were inside a sewerage pit at the construction site. Additional Superintendent of Police (Jaipur Rural) Ranveer Singh said.

The injured were rushed to a nearby hospital, where two labourers were declared dead. Another succumbed to injuries during treatment. The deceased were identified as Rinku (35), Savita (39) and Ramji (40). Police personnel from Chandwaji police station, along with other officials rushed to the spot and launched a rescue operation with the help of locals residents. Debris removal was continuing, Singh said. (PTI)

CM Mohan Yadav mastermind behind Madhya Pradesh land scam: Congress

NEW DELHI, June 29: The Congress on Monday alleged that Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav is the "mastermind" behind the "massive land scam" perpetrated for personal gain, and asserted that the party will persist with its quest for accountability.

Congress general secretary in charge of communications, Jairam Ramesh, said the party will continue to demand Yadav's resignation to hold him accountable.

"There is no doubt whatsoever that the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh is the mastermind behind this massive land scam perpetrated for personal gain," Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on X.

The Congress will persist in its struggle, demanding the Madhya Pradesh CM's resignation to hold him accountable, as this is the only way to ensure that he is made answerable, Ramesh said. His remarks followed an X post by Madhya Pradesh Congress chief Jitu Patwari in which he questioned the chief minister's "silence" on the issue.

"Chief Minister, Time is flying! Yet, your 'silence' remains! The Madhya Pradesh Congress gave you three days to answer public's questions! The second day has already passed! The



eyes of the entire state are still fixed on you!" Patwari said in his post in Hindi.

There has been no response from the chief minister on the questions raised in the people's court, Patwari said.

"Ministers have spoken! The organisation has spoken! Official clarifications have been issued, but the public wants to know -- when will the chief minister speak himself?" the Congress

leader said.

"If everything is based on facts, then come before the public! If the Indian Express report is incorrect, then go to court! If the allegations are baseless, present the evidence before the people!" he said.

Also, remember that "silence" is never an answer in a democracy, Patwari said.

"Only one day remains now! The people of Madhya Pradesh are eagerly awaiting your 'answer'! If the 'silence' is not broken even then, the Congress will hold a 'Corruption Meeting' on June 30th! It will launch a 'Jawab Do' (give an answer) campaign with the public, based on the principle that asking questions is the right of the people! The decision is yours now!" Patwari said.

A report published in the Indian Express last week claimed that Yadav's family and their real estate firms acquired at least 137 plots spanning 168 acres in Ujjain for ₹ 45 crore in two years since December 2023 -- mostly in areas benefiting from road projects and land-use changes that his government announced.

The Congress has demanded a judicial probe by a sitting Supreme Court judge into the allegations, and questioned the silence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the matter. (PTI)

Jharkhand treated like grazing ground to extract minerals: CM

RANCHI, June 29: Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Monday alleged that the state has been treated like a "grazing ground to extract mineral resources" and contribute to the nation's and world economy, but there has been little concern about how people of the state could stand on their own feet.

Soren made the remarks while distributing appointment letters among 1,042 newly recruited teachers here at an event.

"Teachers play a big role in showing direction to society and build a better environment to live in," he said. He said leading states in the country are all ahead in the education sector.

"We could also have progressed in the field, but unfortunately, the state has been treated as a grazing ground to extract mineral resources and contribute to the country's and the world economy. But, there has been little concern about how the people of the state could stand on their own feet," Soren said.

He said the government is making all efforts to expedite education in the state.

"Now, youths of Jharkhand are pursuing higher studies not only in the best colleges of the country but also abroad. We want a knowledgeable society and educated upcoming generations," he said.

The CM said around 55,000 people had been given appointments in the previous term of his government, and recruitment started two months after he took oath for the second term.

Appointment letters have been given to 9,812 teachers in the past six months, an official said.

Expressing concern over the current political scenario, Soren said, "An atmosphere is being created solely to serve political interests. This is not a healthy environment. Some forces with a twisted mindset are intent on spreading hatred and igniting fire in society, which could end up causing trouble for everyone. The fire of hatred does not discriminate based on caste or religion. It simply does its job and runs its destructive course." (PTI)

SIR deletion cannot become ground for passport denial: John Brittas to Jaishankar

NEW DELHI, June 29: CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas has sought the intervention of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar over what he described as a larger constitutional concern arising from the denial of passport renewal based on exclusion from the electoral roll during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise in West Bengal.

In a letter to Jaishankar on Monday, Brittas referred to the case of senior journalist and former The Telegraph editor Rajagopal Ramadas, whose passport renewal was allegedly denied after his name was deleted from the electoral roll during the SIR. Brittas emphasised that this issue extends beyond a single individual and raises important questions about how decisions related to electoral rolls can affect rights defined under a separate statutory framework.

He explained that Ramadas was issued an Indian passport in 2005, which was renewed in 2015, with no changes to his identity, parentage, address, or nationality recorded. He said the alleged reason cited by the Regional Passport Office for denial was only "voter list deleted from SIR".

The CPI(M) MP argued that the SIR process relates to the preparation of electoral rolls and is not an adjudication of citizenship under the Citizenship Act. He asserted that deletion from an



electoral roll, particularly when such a decision is under challenge, cannot automatically become the basis for refusing passport renewal.

Brittas pointed out that while a passport may not definitively prove citizenship, its issuance represents a statutory determination by the Passport Authority under the Passports Act of 1967 and should not be deemed insignificant simply because another authority under a different law has made a provisional administrative finding.

He referenced Supreme Court rulings, including the landmark case of Maneka Gandhi vs Union of India, which established that the right to travel abroad is part of personal liberty under

Article 21 of the Constitution. Any restrictions must adhere to standards of fairness, reasonableness, and non-arbitrariness.

Questioning the alleged role of police verification, he said it is meant to provide information regarding identity, address and antecedents and cannot become a mechanism for determining citizenship solely based on electoral status.

He underscored that the Passports Act outlines specific grounds for passport refusal, and neither exclusion from an electoral roll nor the pending status of proceedings under the SIR is listed as a statutory disqualification.

He urged the External Affairs Ministry to ensure that the application is examined on its own merits under the Passports Act and sought clarification to passport authorities that exclusion from electoral rolls during SIR proceedings does not, by itself, constitute a ground for denying passport renewal.

Describing the issue as one affecting public confidence in the integrity of sovereign documents issued by the Republic of India, Brittas urged the Ministry to reconsider the case strictly in accordance with the Passports Act, 1967 and to ensure that independent statutory satisfaction under that Act is not replaced by administrative findings recorded under an entirely different legal regime. (PTI)

LG performs 'pratham puja' to mark ceremonial start of Amarnath Yatra, 'maha yagya' held in Jammu

JAMMU/SRINAGAR, June 29: Pratham pujas were held on Monday in Jammu and at the cave shrine of Amarnath, marking the ceremonial start of the annual pilgrimage beginning July 3.

Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha performed traditional rituals at the cave shrine while another pratham puja was held for the first time in Jammu city as a part of 'maha yagya' on the banks of the Tawi river.

The annual 57-day pilgrimage is scheduled to begin on July 3 from the twin routes -- the 48-km traditional Pahalgam track in south Kashmir's Anantnag district and the shorter but steeper 14-km Baltal route in central Kashmir's Ganderbal district.

The first batch of pilgrims will be flagged off from the Bhagwati Nagar base camp in Jammu on July 2. It will culminate on August 28 on Raksha Bandhan.

At the Amarnath shrine, Sinha performed the pratham puja, sought the blessings of Baba Barfani and prayed for peace, prosperity, health and well-being

of all. Sinha said the administration, the Amarnath shrine board, Army, police, security forces, local communities, service providers and volunteers are working in complete synergy to ensure a safe, hassle-free and a memorable pilgrimage for devotees.

With significantly upgraded infrastructure, enhanced facilities and invaluable support of people, the authorities are fully prepared to welcome the devotees for a spiritually fulfilling journey, he said.

The Shri Amarnath Ji Shrine Board (SASB) organises the pratham puja at the cave shrine on Jyeshtha Purnima annually.

DGP Nalin Prabhat, Special DG (coordination) S J M Gillani, SASB CEO Mandeep Bhandari and Kashmir Divisional Commissioner Anshul Garg accompanied Sinha to the cave shrine.

In Jammu, a 'maha yagya' held at the newly developed Tawi riverfront saw the participation of scores of sadhus, heads of religious organisations and senior civil and police officials amid Vedic chants



and offerings into the sacred fire.

Yatra registration and pilgrim facilitation services have been shifted from the congested railway station area to the riverfront, where authorities have established registration counters, langars and other amenities for devotees.

Head of the Jammu's Ram temple,

Mahant Rameshwar Dass, said holding the pratham puja in the city was a significant way to begin the pilgrimage.

"The people of India wholeheartedly welcome this initiative. The Tawi riverfront offers a vast space where lakhs of devotees can gather. From now onwards, registrations will be conducted here with

all necessary facilities," he told reporters here.

Recalling the difficulties faced by pilgrims in previous years, Dass said many devotees had to stay in inadequate accommodations near the railway station, with some even spending nights on footpaths.

"The arrangements are now much better and will continue to improve. There has always been tremendous enthusiasm for Baba's Yatra, and I believe this year the number of pilgrims will be higher than ever before," he said.

President of the Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh unit of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rajesh Gupta, said the special prayers on Jyeshtha Purnima has been an annual tradition and this year coincided with the inauguration of the new registration arrangements at the Tawi riverfront.

"Our only prayer is that a large number of pilgrims undertake the yatra and that it is completed peacefully, safely and without any obstacles," Gupta said.

A religious leader said the yagya in

Jammu complemented the pratham puja at the shrine.

"In Sanatan tradition, every auspicious undertaking begins with Vedic rituals for the best outcome. The Tawi riverfront has become a beautiful spiritual destination and devotees visiting Jammu before proceeding to Kashmir will have a unique experience," he said.

He said Jammu, the abode of Goddess Bhagwati, and Kashmir, the abode of Lord Shiva, together symbolise the divine Ardhanarishvara, reflecting the spiritual unity of the pilgrimage.

Authorities conducted a full-scale dry run of the Amarnath Yatra convoy along the Jammu-Srinagar National Highway to assess security, logistics and inter-agency coordination ahead of the pilgrimage.

Jammu Divisional Commissioner Ramesh Kumar and Inspector General of Police, Jammu, Bhim Sen Tuti flagged off the convoy from the Bhagwati Nagar base camp at 5 am and travelled in one of the buses to review arrangements firsthand. (PTI)

No immediate need for major cabinet reshuffle in Mizoram: CM Lalduhoma

AIZAWL, June 29: Mizoram CM Lalduhoma on Monday ruled out the possibility of a major cabinet reshuffle, saying his ministers have only recently become fully established in their respective departments and there was no immediate need for sweeping changes.

Speaking at a function at the office of the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM), he said speculation had been rife about a major reshuffle as his government completed half of its five-year term.

"Many people expected a major reshuffle at this stage, but our ministers have been working hard and are only now becoming fully established in their departments. Therefore, we do not see the need for a major reshuffle," he said.

His remarks come days after he took over the Personal and Administrative Reforms portfolio from minister K Sapdanga, a move that sparked speculation about differences between the two leaders.

Lalduhoma clarified that the change had been decided earlier on the recommendation of the ZPM's Political Affairs Committee and was not linked to any internal rift.

The CM said the government had already carried out around 10



minor administrative changes to improve coordination among departments.

Such adjustments, he said, would continue whenever necessary.

Emphasising the ZPM's identity as a "People's Movement", Lalduhoma said the government must always keep people at the centre of governance.

"Our party workers worked tirelessly to form this government, but we must never forget that it is the people who trusted us, prayed for us and gave us their mandate," he

said, adding that citizens should remain the government's highest priority.

The CM also urged party workers to assess the government's performance based on its policies and governance rather than individual expectations.

He said the government still had considerable work ahead in tackling corruption, reforming institutions and improving governance despite completing half of its term.

Lalduhoma said the government has prepared the 'Vikshit Mizoram 2047' vision document in line with the 'Vikshit Bharat' roadmap, with the goal of ensuring the state contributes at least 1 per cent to the country's GDP by 2047.

He said he had never prayed to remain CM for a longer period, but instead prayed that someone "better, stronger physically and spiritually" would lead the state in the future.

Lalduhoma further praised the ZPM's internal leadership structure, noting that the party's Val Upa Council (Council of Elders) is responsible for selecting its chief ministerial candidate, a process he described as a distinctive feature. (PTI)

Arunachal CM flags off 'Op Arunoday' trekking expedition



ITANAGAR, June 29: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu flagged off 'Op Arunoday', a joint military-civil trekking expedition, from the historic Jaswantgarh War Memorial in Tawang district on Monday, a defence spokesperson said.

The initiative, organised by the Indian Army's Gajraj Corps and the National Institute of Mountaineering and Adventure Sports (NIMAS), aims to open a new trekking route between Thingbu and Bajrang Peak (Pt 5583).

Defence PRO Lt Col Athul Sreedharan said the first-of-its-kind initiative is designed to promote adventure tourism, bolster military-civil cooperation, and generate sustainable livelihood opportunities for local border communities.

The flagging-off ceremony was preceded by a solemn wreath-laying ceremony at the Jaswantgarh War Memorial, where tributes were paid to the brave soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty.

Before sending off the team, Khandu interacted with the expedition members and residents.

Lt Col Sreedharan added that 'Op Arunoday' reflects the shared commitment of the Indian Army, NIMAS, and the state government toward boosting tourism, improving connectivity, and supporting the holistic development of the state's border areas. (PTI)

Sikkim to partner with Toyota to eliminate manual scavenging with mechanised sanitation push

'The project seeks to strengthen sanitation infrastructure through the introduction of modern mechanised equipment, reducing dependence on manual intervention while enhancing the safety, efficiency and dignity of sanitation workers,' the Urban Development department said

GANGTOK, June 29: To eliminate manual scavenging and modernise urban sanitation, the Sikkim government's Urban Development department on Monday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Toyota Kirloskar Motor Pvt Ltd to procure advanced mechanised sewage and waste collection equipment under the company's Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme for 2026-27.

An official statement said that the agreement, signed in the presence of Urban Development minister Bhoj Raj Rai, is aimed at strengthening Sikkim's sanitation infrastructure by replacing hazardous manual cleaning practices with advanced mechanised systems, improving worker safety, efficiency and dignity.

Addressing the programme, Rai hailed the partnership as a milestone in the state's sanitation drive and stressed that while modern technology would transform sanitation services, skilled manpower would be key to its success. "The adoption of advanced technology will significantly improve sanitation services while safeguarding the health and well-being of sanitation workers. However, technology alone cannot ensure success. Comprehensive training of operating personnel is essential for the efficient operation, maintenance and long-term sustainability of the equipment," the minister said.

According to a press statement, the initiative forms part of Sikkim's commitment to ending manual scavenging and is being implemented under the provisions of The Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and Their Rehabilitation Act, 2013, along with directions issued by the

Supreme Court.

Commissioner-cum-Secretary of the Urban Development department Jitendra Singh Raje said the initiative reflects Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang's vision of promoting inclusivity and preserving human dignity by deploying technology in hazardous occupations.

He said replacing unsafe manual practices with mechanised systems demonstrates the government's resolve to provide safer working conditions while improving the quality of urban sanitation services. He also highlighted the role of digital technology in monitoring and maintaining robotic sanitation equipment for efficient and accountable service delivery.

During the interaction session, Toyota Kirloskar Motor's Country Head and Executive Vice President (Corporate Affairs) Vikram Gulati presented the company's CSR initiatives and explained the legal process for declaring a state manual scavenging-free. Project Vice President (Corporate Affairs) Nao Uzawa shared Japan's experience in deploying technology for safe and efficient sanitation management.

Officials from Toyota also briefed participants on the operation, maintenance, technical features and skilling requirements of the proposed mechanised equipment.

"The project seeks to strengthen sanitation infrastructure through the introduction of modern mechanised equipment, reducing dependence on manual intervention while enhancing the safety, efficiency and dignity of sanitation workers," the Urban Development department said in its press statement. (PTI)

State govt to aid reforms of tribal councils in Meghalaya: Conrad



SHILLONG, June 29: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Monday announced the launch of reform initiatives in the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) and Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) to modernise governance, improve financial management and make the councils more transparent and citizen-friendly.

The chief minister said the reforms have been initiated after the two autonomous district councils expressed their willingness to

strengthen their institutional systems and improve governance.

"We had recently asked them to work closely with the government to modernise their systems and introduce key reforms. Glad that the two councils accepted the proposals and the reform process has now begun," Sangma said in a post on social media.

According to the chief minister, the reform agenda will focus on framing service rules, strengthening financial management, streamlining administrative processes and

accelerating digitisation of the councils' functioning.

He said the changes are aimed at making the councils more efficient, transparent and responsive to the needs of the people.

The reforms will also simplify access to public services and enable citizens to pay taxes and other fees through easier and more convenient systems, he said.

Sangma expressed confidence that the initiatives would significantly improve the functioning of the district councils and enhance service delivery across the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo Hills regions.

The JHADC and GHADC are governed by Executive Committees headed by the ruling Meghalaya Democratic Alliance party.

The two are among the three Autonomous District Councils in Meghalaya constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to safeguard the rights, customs and traditional institutions of the indigenous tribal communities. (PTI)

MLA Wanglin Lowangdong inaugurates Boys hostel

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, June 29: The newly constructed Boys' Hostel at Eklavya Model Residential School (EMRS), Khela, funded by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India under the Scheme for Grant to State Tribal Education Agencies (SJETA), was inaugurated by Wanglin Lowangdong, MLA of the 57th Borduria-Bogapani Assembly Constituency and Advisor to the Minister for Forest & Climate Change, Government of Arunachal Pradesh on Sunday.

EMRS, Khela is a co-educational residential school functioning under the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS), Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India, and is managed by the Arunachal Shiksha Vikas Samiti (ASVS).

The inaugural ceremony was attended by Techu Aran, Deputy Commissioner, Tirap, Tumwang Lowang, ZPM, Khela-Bunting, Necha Wangsu, ZPM, Khonsa Block; Wanglee Rangyang, ZPM, Kapu; Aditya, IPS, Superintendent of Police, Tirap; Taro Jeram, Executive Engineer (PWD); Chasum Wangchadong, Chairperson, Nocte Women Association (NWA); Chawang Lowang, former ZPC; Sontung Lowang, Chairperson CMWS, BJP President Tirap Unit Lankham Wangsu along many senior public leaders, PRI members, Chiefs, Gaon Burahs (GBs), government officials, teachers, students, parents.

The programme commenced with a welcome song, followed by the welcome address delivered by the Principal of the school. In his address, the Principal highlighted the remarkable progress and achievements of EMRS, Khela, and reaffirmed the institution's commitment to providing quality education while ensuring the holistic development of every student.

He informed the gathering that, in addition to academic excellence, the school actively promotes a wide range of co-curricular activities, including yoga, parade, drawing, cultural programmes, games, and sports, to foster discipline, creativity, leadership, and overall personality development among students.

Two NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) insurgents surrender in Kheti Area



HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, June 29: Two cadres of the NSCN-K (Nikki Sumi) faction surrendered before the Assam Rifles and Tirap Police during an intelligence-based operation in the Kheti area of Tirap district on Saturday.

According to an official statement, the operation was launched by the Khonsa Battalion of the Assam Rifles based on specific intelligence inputs regarding the presence of insurgents in the area.

During the operation, the two cadres voluntarily laid down their arms and surrendered before the security forces.

The surrendered cadres have been identified as SS Lt. Longmo Konyak (32), son of Lungpi Konyak and a resident of Phumching in Nagaland's Mon district, and SS Sgt. Maj. Naikai Wangsu (23),

son of Thakngam Wangsu and a resident of Chanu village in Arunachal Pradesh's Longding district.

The security forces recovered two pistols with magazines, eight live rounds, two mobile phones with SIM cards and an Aadhaar card from the surrendered cadres.

The cadres, along with the recovered items, were handed over to Khonsa Police for legal formalities and further action under the government's rehabilitation policy for surrendered insurgents.

According to the Assam Rifles, the surrender reflects the success of sustained intelligence-based operations and coordinated efforts with Tirap Police to encourage insurgents to return to the mainstream.

The force reiterated its commitment to maintaining peace, security and normalcy in the region.

ICAR pushes climate-resilient farming in Sikkim under Khet Bachao Abhiyan

GANGTOK, June 29: In a bid to strengthen climate-resilient agriculture in the Himalayan region, a wing of the ICAR stressed the need for sustainable farming practices in the hills.

The event was organised by the Sikkim centre of the ICAR Research Complex for North Eastern Hill Region (NEH), at Kusson village in Upper Dzongu area of North Sikkim under the Mera Gaon Mera Gaurav (MGMG) initiative and Khet Bachao Abhiyan, an initiative of the central government.

According to an ICAR statement, the programme, held on Sunday, brought together 17 farmers and agricultural scientists to promote sustainable farming practices, efficient resource management and scientific interventions tailored to the fragile hill ecosystem.

It said that the interaction was led by Dr Ashok Kumar, Head of the Regional Centre, and Dr Saurav Saha, Senior Scientist (Agricultural Physics).



Addressing the farmers, Kumar stressed the need for wider adoption of improved agricultural technologies, integrated farming systems and resource-conserving practices to boost productivity and improve rural livelihoods. "Farmers should make effective use of scientific interventions for sustainable agricultural development," he said, urging cultivators to embrace modern, climate-smart farming techniques.

During the technical session, Saha highlighted the role of mulching in conserving soil moisture, suppressing weeds and improving soil health. He also emphasised the efficient utilisation of organic resources, improved vegetable cultivation, scientific nursery management and the use of quality planting materials to enhance crop yields and produce quality.

The scientist further advocated Integrated Nutrient Management

(INM) through the balanced application of organic manures, compost, biofertilisers and green manure to maintain soil fertility and sustain long-term crop productivity.

A field visit formed a key part of the programme, with scientists assessing crop conditions and offering location-specific recommendations on nutrient management, moisture conservation and sustainable cultivation practices.

The programme concluded with an interactive session in which farmers raised local agricultural challenges and shared field experiences. The scientists assured them of continued technical guidance and extension support under the MGMG programme and Khet Bachao Abhiyan, the statement said.

The Khet Bachao Abhiyan seeks to create awareness about soil health management, balanced use of fertilisers, natural farming practices, water conservation and scientific crop management. (PTI)

Three militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 29: Three militants belonging to two proscribed outfits have been arrested from Manipur's Thoubal and Imphal West districts, police said on Monday.

Thokchom Bango Singh (44), a self-styled captain of the People's Liberation Army, was arrested on Saturday with a pistol and 97 bullets, an official said.

On the other hand, two active cadres of KCP (PSC) were apprehended from Thoubal and Imphal West districts. Kojiam Lamyanba Meitei (23) was arrested from Sangprou in Imphal West district and Lourenbam Rojit (19) from Ningel Lamkhai area in Thoubal district, police said. All have been arrested on the charge of extortion, they added. (PTI)

Man arrested with drugs worth ₹ 7.5 crore

AGARTALA, June 29: A man was arrested with drugs worth ₹ 7.5 crore in North Tripura district, police said on Monday. During a routine check in the Damcherra police station area on Sunday night, a suspicious vehicle was intercepted, SP Avinash Kumar Rai said.

"During the search of the vehicle, 1.5 lakh yaba tablets were found. The contraband is valued at approximately ₹ 7.5 crore," he said.

"A thorough investigation is underway to identify and apprehend all persons involved in the trafficking network," he added.

Damcherra, which shares a border with Mizoram, is being used as a corridor by the drug peddlers. Yaba tablet, known as 'crazy medicine' in Thai, is a highly addictive drug, containing a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine. (PTI)

Assam Rifles Public School students visit Golden Pagoda, Pangsau Pass

HT Correspondent

KHONSA, June 29: Assam Rifles Public School (ARPS), Khonsa, under the aegis of the Khonsa Battalion of the Assam Rifles, organised a two-day educational tour as part of its Summer Camp-2026 to provide students with experiential learning beyond the classroom. On June 27, the students visited the Golden Pagoda in Namsai, where they learned about the region's cultural and spiritual heritage and explored the monastery's architecture.

On the second day, they visited the historic Pangsau Pass, where they were briefed on its geographical and historical significance.

The students also visited the headquarters of the 25 Sector Assam Rifles and interacted with the Deputy Inspector General. During the interaction, the officer encouraged them to pursue excellence through discipline, dedication and education.

Sikkim CM salutes farmers on 'Asar 15'

GANGTOK, June 29: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Monday saluted the farming community on the occasion of 'Asar 15' (agriculture festival) and reaffirmed the state government's commitment to modernising agriculture while safeguarding the Himalayan state's rich agrarian traditions.

Asar 15 (also known as Asadh Pandra, Ropain Divas), is an annual agricultural festival celebrated in Nepal, Sikkim, and the Darjeeling hills on the 15th day of the Nepali month of Ashadh.

In a social media message, the chief minister conveyed his best wishes to Nepali-speaking and Nepali-related people across India and abroad, describing Asar 15 as a celebration of the "labour, dedication, unity, friendship, hope and enthusiasm of farmers".

Highlighting the significance of the day, Tamang said Asar 15 provides an opportunity to honour farmers who toil tirelessly in muddy paddy fields during the sowing season while pre-



paring the region's agricultural heritage. He also noted that the tradition of sharing dahi-chiura continues to strengthen social harmony and collective cultural identity.

"Agriculture is an important foundation of our economy. The contribution of our farmers in ensuring food security, strengthening the rural economy and building a self-reliant society is incomparable," the chief minister said.

"I believe that respect for farm-

ers, increase in agricultural production and development of modern, commercial and sustainable agricultural systems are the needs of the day," Tamang said.

Reiterating his government's focus on the agricultural sector, Tamang said efforts are underway to modernise farming through expanded irrigation, improved access to quality seeds and technology, promotion of organic farming and the development of agricultural entrepreneurship.

"Our government is also committed to attracting our youth to the agricultural sector and building a new foundation for rural economy and prosperity by linking agriculture and tourism," he added.

Expressing his "highest respect" for the state's farming community, the chief minister wished farmers happiness, peace, prosperity and continued progress, while hoping that the festival would inspire greater responsibility towards agriculture, nature and cultural preservation. (PTI)

After govt bans private practice, docs at Tripura's largest hospital seek better salary, promotion

AGARTALA, June 29: Doctors at the Agartala Govt Medical College and GBP Hospital said they were not against the recently imposed ban on private practice, but their demands, including the revision of service rules, restructuring of salaries and time-bound promotions, should also be met.

Agartala Medical College Teachers' Forum president Dr Tapan Majumder told PTI that since the government wants to transform the state's largest hospital into an institute like AIIMS-New Delhi, salary structures and other perquisites should also be

comparable.

The government's decision has affected around 350 doctors working at the facility. They stopped attending private clinics from Sunday, causing inconvenience to patients.

Amid this, an emergency meeting of the All Tripura Government Doctors' Association (ATGDA), AGMC Teachers' Forum and the Indian Medical Association (IMA) was held.

"At the meeting, we decided to meet the chief minister and the secretary of health services to raise our issues regarding the govern-

ment decision," Majumder said.

He said doctors were not opposed to the ban on private practice but expected the government to address their pending service-related demands.

ATGDA general secretary Dr Kanak Chowdhury said doctors were committed to improving healthcare services to meet public expectations.

"Currently, both the CM and the secretary of health services are outside the state. Once they return, we will meet them with our issues and are expecting a resolution at the earliest," he said. (PTI)

Eustáquio's foot delivers late strike for Canada's first World Cup knockout win

INGLEWOOD (US), June 29: The tension kept building between two teams making their first appearance in a World Cup knockout match. With no goals on the scoreboard, the minutes ticked down with extra time looming.

Then Stephen Eustáquio scored in the second minute of second-half stoppage time, and Canada beat South Africa 1-0 on Sunday.

"I shot with everything I had," Eustáquio said.

The party was on, for red-clad fans in the stands at SoFi Stadium and at watch parties across Canada, one of three World Cup hosts.

"Overall, it's pretty much a perfect knockout performance," right back Alistair Johnston said.

Hockey dominates Canada in the winter months. Now, summer belongs to the men's national soccer team.

The country's previous best men's international result was winning CONCACAF Gold Cup championships in 1985 and 2000. The women's Olympic team won gold at the 2020 Tokyo Games.

"For Canadian sports history, it's going to be a moment where you're going to kind of know where you were when that moment happened," Johnston said. "That's something that is not lost on us. We know that not only are we writing history in Canadian soccer, but in Canadian sport, and that's a magical thing."

Just when it looked like 30 minutes of extra time was coming, Johnston's pass to the right side was cleared to the edge of the



box and found Eustáquio, who drilled a clean strike into the bottom corner.

"It's just a moment of magic and something just comes over your body," Johnston said. "You see Steph sprinting away and just the whole team sprinting. It's one of those moments that you'll never forget."

Eustáquio became a Canadian hero in Los Angeles, where he played about 10 miles away in downtown for the MLS club LAFC.

The 29-year-old midfielder was born in Canada and in his younger days played for Portugal, where his late parents were from.

Eustáquio suffered back-to-back devastat-

ing blows when his mother died from brain cancer in 2023 and his father died of a heart attack in 2024. He remains close with his brother, Mauro, a former player and a coach in the Canadian Premier League.

"I couldn't think of a more deserving human being in a group of incredible human beings, maybe Steph is the most deserving to have a moment like that," coach Jesse Marsch said. "So I'm really happy for him. I think from somewhere his parents are looking down and they saw that."

In 2019, Eustáquio committed to play for the Canadian national team.

"Today, we have to enjoy the fact that we made everybody back home proud," he said. "I am over the moon."

In the next moment, Eustáquio was quick to come down to Earth.

"I don't want to say that the job is finished," he said. "We have to be humble, we have to recover well and we know that in six days we're going to have a very tough team."

Next up, Canada plays either the Netherlands or Morocco in Houston on July 4.

"We're going to get a chance now at a true Goliath next weekend," Johnston said, "and that's something that we're all extremely excited about."

Eustáquio couldn't see the clock to know about how much time was left. Even during the hydration breaks, he wasn't sure.

"There was a little bit of frustration knowing that we didn't score and they were probably going to score if they kept pushing," he said, "but Jesse was just trying to remain calm, tell the team to keep pushing."

The Canadians got a boost when their star player, Alphonso Davies, removed his substitute bib and entered in the 75th minute. He hadn't played in a World Cup match since injuring his hamstring in May with Bayern Munich in a Champions League semifinal.

Eustáquio had served as captain in Davies' absence during the group-stage matches.

"We have a special group. We feel like we are brothers," Eustáquio said. "When we fight for each other, when we play for each other, special things like this can happen." (AP)

Badminton: Srikanth ends runner-up at US Open



FULLERTON (USA), June 29: India's Kidambi Srikanth ended his impressive run with a runner-up finish at the US Open Super 300 badminton tournament after going down fighting in three games to Chinese Taipei's Su Li-yang in the men's singles final here.

The 33-year-old Srikanth, a silver-medallist at the 2021 World Championships, recovered from the loss of the opening game to force a decider but couldn't match the pace and intensity of world No. 46 Su, who is nine years his junior.

Srikanth, who had claimed six Super Series titles between 2014 and 2017, eventually lost 15-21, 21-16, 9-21 in a physical battle that lasted just over an hour here on Sunday.

"I could have played a little better maybe in the opening set. Otherwise, I feel I've played okay. The second half of third set it was just hitting really well all of a sudden," said the man from Guntur after the match.

A Rio Olympics quarterfinalist, Srikanth also ended second at the Malaysia Masters Super 500 and Syed Modi International Super 300 last year.

"I just feel like whatever I've been doing is working. I just have to keep working hard. I feel like I'm there. It's just about being able to win those crucial points," added Srikanth, who had become the first Indian to secure four Super Series titles in a single calendar year in 2017.

Playing his first final of the season, the former world No. 1 was the quicker off the blocks but a rare error, where his racquet crossed the net during a rally, appeared to disrupt his rhythm as a string of unforced mistakes allowed Su to open up a 7-2 lead.

Srikanth, however, regrouped to win eight of the next 11 points and draw level at 10-10 after a series of fast-paced rallies. His powerful smashes proved crucial, helping him edge ahead by a point at the mid-game interval

after Su smashed wide.

However, Su wrested back control after the break, quickening the pace of the rallies and using subtle deception to force errors from Srikanth. He soon extended his lead to 17-12.

A cross-court smash followed by a delicate net shot helped Srikanth reduce the deficit to 14-18, but another error handed the initiative back to Su.

Su earned six game points with a thunderous smash. The Indian saved one before sending the shuttle long as Su wrapped up the opening game in 17 minutes.

After the change of ends, the contest remained evenly poised with neither player giving an inch. From 4-4, Srikanth reeled off three straight points to move 7-4 ahead, capping one extended rally with a superb cross-court block at the net.

Another breathtaking rally followed, with Su making the Indian cover every corner of the court before restoring parity at 8-8.

A deft backhand cross-court net shot took Srikanth to 10-8, and he entered the interval with a three-point cushion after Su smashed wide.

Su responded with two thunderous smashes after the break, but Srikanth's excellent net play helped him maintain a 14-10 advantage.

The Chinese Taipei player broke the rhythm with a flat push into the corner to close the gap to 13-15 as Srikanth sprayed two shots wide.

Su then sent one long before Srikanth's cross-court return made it 18-13. The Indian won the next flat exchange and earned seven game points when Su again went wide. Although Su saved three game points, Srikanth forced the decider with a powerful down-the-line smash.

Su came out firing in the deciding game, opening with a lightning smash before putting Srikanth under sustained pressure to race to a 4-1 lead. (PTI)

Slot in Sooryavanshi: Indian think-tank needs to take hard calls and look for options

NEW DELHI, June 29: How to fit Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's generational talent into a settled side was the question that India faced at the beginning of the tour and after two unexpected losses to Ireland, the only clear answer seems to be -- find a way to do it.

The paying public has been ready to queue up at the turnstiles at least three hours before the start of an international game in the hope that the 15-year-old would be slotted in.

The Indian team management has, however, steadfastly insisted on following the process. After losing to Ireland, the process would definitely be up for a review.

The 15-year-old prodigy couldn't be fitted into the playing eleven as India's opening duo of Sanju Samson and Abhishek Sharma hadn't done anything wrong in the T20 World Cup and deserved to play the very next series where the national team took part. (PTI)

India need to rethink T20 strategy: Muzumdar

LONDON, June 29: India head coach Amol Muzumdar admitted that the side will have to rethink its approach in the shortest format after a disappointing Women's T20 World Cup campaign which ended in a group-stage exit, saying Harmanpreet Kaur and Co were below par in all three departments throughout the tournament.

Needing a win to qualify for the semifinals, India failed to defend 170 against six-time champions Australia and crashed out in the league stage for the second successive edition here on Sunday.

"We really have to rethink our strategy or our T20 game. We really need to put our heads around what combination we are going to play," Muzumdar told reporters after the loss.

While India recorded comfortable wins over Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Netherlands, defeats to fellow semifinal contenders South Africa and Australia exposed several shortcomings.

"If I have to pinpoint on certain things in the entire tournament, I think we really need to think about our bowling and our fielding. We also need to be a little aggressive with the bat, and we could have maybe 15-20 runs as cushion (against Australia)," the coach said.

Muzumdar felt India's total was competitive but conceded that Australia were the better side on the day.

"I thought it was a good score, a par score on this pitch. We even got the momentum towards the end of that innings, and I think we carried it on the field as well. It's just that I think at the end of the day, Australia were a better side than us." (PTI)

T20WC standings crucial to women Cricket's Oly Qualification criteria: Rankings to decide for men

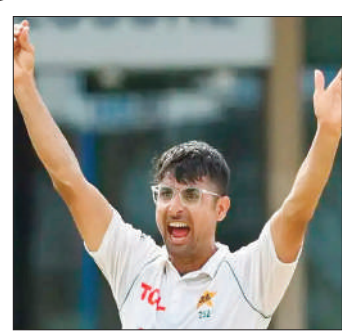
NEW DELHI, June 29: The Indian men's team will need to be Asia's highest-ranked in the ICC T20 rankings at the end of 2026 to gain automatic qualification for the Los Angeles Olympics while early slots among women will go to the continental top four from the ongoing World Cup in England.

The qualification criteria was unveiled by the International Cricket Council (ICC) on Monday. Cricket is returning to the Olympics after 100 years and will feature six teams each in men's and women's competitions.

The process hinges on rankings for men to filter four quota slots from different continents.

"These will be allocated to the highest-ranked eligible NOCs (National Olympic Committees) continentally (i.e. the top ranked NOCs from different continents), taken from the ICC Men's T20 Team Rankings, resulting in four teams in total," the ICC stated.

The cut-off date has been kept



at December 31, 2026.

For women, four quota places will be allocated to the highest-placed eligible NOCs taken continentally at the T20 World Cup "resulting in four teams in total (i.e. the top standing NOC from different continents at the conclusion of the competition)."

"Each eligible team will obtain one quota place for its NOC."

As per this criteria, Australia (Oceania), South Africa (Africa) and England (Europe) seem to have grabbed the early slots after qualifying for the semifinals.

"As Great Britain takes part in the Olympics, only one British nation, England, will be considered as part of the quotas," the ICC stated.

The West Indies is also in the ongoing World Cup's semifinal, placing it among the top four. India's fate would be known after the final standings of the tournament are completed.

However, as a composite ICC member representing multiple Caribbean nations and not recognised as an IOC NOC, it is ineligible to participate in the Olympic Games or to obtain a quota place as one entity.

West Indies comprises the NOCs of Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and the US Virgin Islands, which do not compete individually in ICC events.

The host country, USA, is guaranteed one quota place each in the men's and women's competition on the basis that they have "satisfied the ICC criteria of appearing on a ranking of 15 or better in the Rankings during the qualification period."

In addition, the Final Olympic Global Qualification Tournament (FOGQT) will be held separately for both genders, dates for which are yet to be finalised.

The next eight highest-ranked eligible teams, which have not yet qualified based on rankings, will fight it out for one slot each in the men's and women's competition.

In case the West Indies is ranked among the eight highest-ranked teams not yet qualified, the ICC will organise a West Indies Nations Regional Tournament to determine which NOC will represent the region at the Final Qualifier.

No maximum limit on continental representation applies to the final qualifier. (PTI)

of Indian women's cricket. But yet another disappointing T20 World Cup campaign has brought her future in the shortest format into focus.

Muzumdar, however, has backed the veteran. "It's up to the selectors to decide the captain. I think, yes. My short and sweet answer would be yes," he said when asked if Harmanpreet would continue as captain.

Not surprised by India's loss to Ireland: Ambati Rayudu

MUMBAI, June 29: Former India player Ambati Rayudu is not surprised by the team's 0-2 loss to Ireland as he believes that Shreyas Iyer and his men were under-prepared for the assignment, a case in point being finisher Tilak Varma's inability to get going on slower wickets.

Speaking exclusively to PTI, Rayudu, who played 55 ODIs and six T20Is for India, said the change in conditions after the IPL became too difficult for the reigning T20 world champions, who lost the second T20I by a mere one run on Sunday in Belfast.

"No, I'm not really surprised because I don't think they were prepared well enough for the conditions that they have encountered. It's always very, very difficult to go from really flat tracks to slightly spongy wickets which have

some lateral movement as well," the former batter said.

"Most of the guys are so used to having these really fast bat-swings, the in-between game and the control of the down-swing is a major concern," added the 40-year-old.

Tilak needs to use feet

Talking about other specific issues which affected the team, Rayudu said for one, Tilak Varma's lack of foot work against slower bowlers needs to be addressed. Tilak struck a valiant 55 in India's narrow loss on Sunday but the knock came off 46 deliveries and failed to provide the momentum that the team needed.

"More than his mental approach, his game against slow bowling on slow surfaces has been kind of a struggle for a while," Rayudu said. (PTI)

Another T20 World Cup setback leaves India confronting uncomfortable questions

NEW DELHI, June 29: India's elimination from the Women's T20 World Cup has inevitably put Harmanpreet Kaur's future as captain under scrutiny, and one thing appears certain -- the team is staring at a reset.

The six-wicket defeat to Australia on Sunday that knocked India out of contention for the semifinals only brought into sharp focus what had become increasingly evident -- the women in Blue, despite being pre-tournament favourites, were a side still searching for answers.

It was a second successive T20 World Cup under Harmanpreet's leadership in which India failed to reach the knockouts, reviving uncomfortable questions about the team's direction in the format.

"Rethink" was the word both Harmanpreet and head coach Amol Muzumdar used after the campaign ended. The need for a reset is difficult to ignore.

Time up for Harmanpreet as T20I captain? Less than a year after leading India to their maiden ODI World Cup title, Harmanpreet finds herself at another crossroads.

The 37-year-old remains India's most successful T20I captain and one of the defining figures



of Indian women's cricket. But yet another disappointing T20 World Cup campaign has brought her future in the shortest format into focus.

Muzumdar, however, has backed the veteran. "It's up to the selectors to decide the captain. I think, yes. My short and sweet answer would be yes," he said when asked if Harmanpreet would continue as captain.

But it is hard to ignore that under her leadership, the team underperformed in all three departments in England.

India entered the tournament without a settled combination, continued to shuffle personnel and batting positions, and frequently appeared reactive rather than proactive in pressure situations.

Whether she continues as captain would ultimately depend on how the selectors interpret India's latest World Cup failure.

Harmanpreet's own returns with the bat also merit scrutiny.

Since the 2020 T20 World Cup, the India skipper has crossed the fifty-run mark only four times in 24 innings, underlining her inconsistent form.

Her fighting knock against Australia, played with India's campaign hanging by a thread, was a reminder of her class and ability to rise on the biggest occasions. Yet, it remained her only substantial contribution with the bat in the tournament.

In the previous matches, Harmanpreet struggled to impose herself through the middle overs and was unable to provide both stability or acceleration expected from India's most experienced batter. (PTI)

Lindsey Vonn has a special understanding of Serena Williams' comeback as a fellow 40-something



LONDON, June 29: When Serena Williams played her first professional tennis match in nearly four years recently, another elite female athlete in her 40s was on hand for the occasion.

Skier Lindsey Vonn has a special understanding of what Williams is going through as she prepares to play both singles and doubles at Wimbledon at age 44.

After making her own comeback, Vonn was the top World Cup downhill last season at age 41 until her horrific crash at the Milan Cortina Olympics in February left her with a severely fractured left leg.

"There is an increasing shift in what women can accomplish at later stages in their careers or life," Vonn told The Associated Press. "I feel like we are in the same boat, where we don't need to prove

anything to anyone but we still have the ability to compete at an elite level. She (Williams) also told me that I played a role in inspiring her to come back so that of course was meaningful to me."

Vonn talked with Williams after the tennis standout's doubles victory with partner Victoria Mboko at Queen's Club in London, having watched the match from one of the VIP balconies.

"She was in great spirits. She's having fun which I loved seeing, even more than her tennis," Vonn said in a written response. "If it's bringing her joy to play, I say play as long as you want!"

Vonn has undergone eight surgeries following her Olympic crash — which nearly led to a leg amputation — and needs at least one more to repair a torn ACL in that same knee. But she's back in

the gym and has resumed physical training, while still assessing whether she'll compete again.

After nearly six years away from skiing, Vonn returned in December 2024 with a partial titanium replacement in her right knee. She had two victories and seven podium results last season.

On Centre Court at Wimbledon on Tuesday, Williams will play her first singles match since 2022 against 20-year-old Maya Joint of Australia. Then she'll play doubles with older sister Venus Williams later in the week.

So what does Vonn expect from Williams at Wimbledon?

"It's her first major singles tournament since retiring so I would expect for her to play well but not show all her cards yet," Vonn said. "I'm sure she can still win, but

I wouldn't put any expectations on her. She's the GOAT (greatest of all time) no matter what happens."

Indeed, Williams is a 23-time Grand Slam champion in singles and has won 14 more Grand Slams in doubles — all with Venus as her partner. Vonn's 45 World Cup downhill wins are the most by a male or female skier.

"It was kind of like riding a bike," Williams said Sunday of her first practice sessions back at the All England Club. "Obviously when I play, I might have a lot of things come up."

No matter the outcome, Williams shares Vonn's credo of setting the bar high to create new standards.

"You have to believe in yourself and go for any dream," Williams said, "no matter how wild it may be." (AP)