

6 NATION

- Amit Shah launches new version of FCRA portal, e-OCI Card
- Opposition demands SIT report be made public

7 NORTHEAST

- Flash floods, landslides wreak havoc in Arunachal's Lower Siang district
- Governor hails Mizoram peace accord as global model of reconciliation, peace building

Assam flood situation remains grim ● 46,000 people affected

One person dies, CM assures all help

GUWAHATI, June 30: The flood situation in Assam remained grim on Tuesday with one person killed in the deluge and more than 46,000 people affected in six districts, an official bulletin said.

Two major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, were flowing above the danger level, with damage to infrastructure also caused in different parts.

The Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), in its flood bulletin, said one woman died in flood waters in Sissibor-gaon in Dhemaji district, the first casualty in the deluge in the state this year.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma assured of all assistance to the affected areas, with ministers touring the flood-hit districts.

"We are leaving no stone unturned in our flood response. While I continue to monitor the situation closely, my Cabinet colleagues are



on the ground overseeing relief efforts, protection measures & ensuring timely assistance," Sarma said in a post on X.

Water Resources Minister Susanta Borgohain and Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Keshab Mahanta visited several af-

ected areas and interacted with the people to ensure timely relief.

"As part of the Assam government's ongoing flood response, I visited the flood-affected areas along the Chakrang River in Gohpur today, following the directions of Hon'ble Chief Minister Dr @hi-

mantabiswa Dangoria," Borgohain, who was accompanied by Mahanta, said in a post on the social media site.

"Necessary instructions were issued to the concerned authorities to take immediate flood protection measures," he added.

The ASDMA bulletin said 46,938 people in 10 revenue circles and 221 villages of six districts of Dhemaji, Nalbari, Dibrugarh, Chirang, Lakhimpur and Biswanath are reeling under flood waters.

Dhemaji is the worst-hit with 45,841 people affected by the deluge.

The number of affected people was 45,500 in five districts on Monday.

The Brahmaputra was flowing over the danger level at Neamatighat and the Disang at Nanglamuraghat.

More than 450 displaced people were (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Border issue with Assam: M'laya govt reconstitutes 3 panels

Committees to complete field surveys and submit recommendations within 45 days

SHILLONG, June 30: The Meghalaya government on Tuesday reconstituted three regional committees to examine the six unresolved sectors of its boundary dispute with Assam, including violence-hit Langpih in West Khasi Hills and the Lapangap-Mukroh in West Jaintia Hills district, officials said.

The panels were directed to complete field surveys and submit their recommendations within 45 days, they said.

The move is aimed at expediting the second phase of the boundary settlement process after the governments of Meghalaya and Assam signed the first memorandum of understanding (MoU) in March 2022.

In the MoU, six of the 12 areas of difference -- Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pilangkata and Ratacherra -- involving around 36.79 sq km of disputed territory were resolved.

Meghalaya received about

18.51 sq km, while Assam retained about 18.28 sq km.

The remaining six areas -- Langpih, Borduar, Nongwah-Mawtamur, Deshdoonreah, Block-II, and Block-I/Psiar-Khanduli, including the Lapangap-Mukroh sector, -- were left for resolution in the second phase.

A notification issued by Chief Secretary Dr Shakil P. Ahamed on Tuesday superseded an earlier order issued on March 20, 2023.

Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong will head the regional committee for Ri-Bhoi district to examine the disputed Block-II area.

Power Minister Metbah Lyngdoh will lead the panel for Langpih, while Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar will head the committee for the West Jaintia Hills sector, covering Block-I and Psiar-Khanduli, including the Lapangap-Mukroh area.

The panels have been tasked with conducting joint field surveys

with their Assam counterparts.

The committees are to verify village records, examine demographic and historical evidence, prepare an inventory of public assets, and consult residents and stakeholders, an official statement said.

Langpih witnessed one of the deadliest episodes of the Assam-Meghalaya boundary dispute in May 2010, when four Khasi villagers were killed in firing allegedly by Assam Police following clashes in the contested area.

In November 2022, six people, including five Meghalaya residents from Mukroh and an Assam forest personnel, were killed in a violent clash.

Lapangap also remained a flash-point, witnessing repeated stand-offs over cultivation rights, road construction and the deployment of security personnel, including an incident in which one person was killed recently.

Non-use of Assamese language in LGBIA irks 3 retired officers

Violation of govt directives flagged

GUWAHATI, June 30: Former top police officers and a bureaucrat of Assam have flagged the issue of not using Assamese, the local language, for public announcements at the Guwahati airport, the only facility connecting foreign destinations to the North Eastern region.

They maintained that official directives from the Ministry of Civil Aviation make the use of regional languages mandatory in airport communication, alongside Hindi and English.

A letter was sent to the chief airport officer of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBIA) by ex-Assam DGP Kuladhar Saikia, retired IPS officer Jyotirmoy Chakrabarty and former Assam Civil Service officer Mukul Chandra Gogoi on June 26, which was shared with the media on Tuesday.

They said that during recent visits to Terminal 2 of the Airport, "we

noted with concern that public announcements are being made exclusively in English and Hindi, omitting Assamese -- the principal regional language and the lingua franca of Assam and much of North-East India".

They said that inclusion of Assamese is not merely a matter of linguistic recognition or regional passenger convenience, but it will also ensure that passengers fully understand and promptly comply with vital safety instructions in the event of an emergency in the terminal building.

The retired officers urged the chief airport officer to ensure the constituent use of Assamese in all public announcements, in full alignment with the guidelines of the Civil Aviation ministry.

When contacted by PTI, officials at the LGBIA maintained that announcements in the regional language (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Arunachal flood toll rises to four, over 90,000 affected; CM Khandu, union ministers make aerial survey

ITANAGAR, June 30: The flood situation worsened in Arunachal Pradesh, as one more person died, taking the toll to four, while 21 others were injured in the state, where 90,499 people were affected in almost all 28 districts, the authorities said on Tuesday.

Two persons also remained missing as heavy rain, causing flash floods and landslides, battered the state over the past seven days, damaging houses, roads, bridges and public infrastructure, a report of the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) said.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu, and Union ministers Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Kiren Rijiju undertook an aerial and ground assessment of the flood-ravaged Keyi Panyor district during the day.

The development came a day after Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke to Khandu over the phone to take stock of the flood situation across the state.

On Monday, the deluge affected at least 12 districts.

According to the SEOC report, around 90,499 people in 251 villages under 202 circles of the northeastern state have been affected since June 24.



Upper Siang district reported the highest number of affected people at 47,357, followed by Siang (23,715), Kra Daadi (8,171) and East Kameng (5,895).

According to a delayed report, one person died in a landslide at Sarti village in Anjaw district on June 28.

The three other deaths occurred in the flash flood that struck Possa in Keyi Panyor district on June 24.

The report said that 21 people were injured in the Keyi Panyor disaster, while two women are still missing.

"Warmly welcomed Hon'ble Union Ministers Shri Shivraj Singh Chouhan Ji and Shri Kiren Rijiju Ji on their visit to

Arunachal to assess the flood situation and the damage caused by the recent calamity," Khandu said in a post on X.

Chouhan, the Union agriculture minister, and Rijiju, Union parliamentary affairs minister and an MP of the state, reviewed the damage caused by the floods, assessed the ongoing relief measures and interacted with state officials to take stock of the rehabilitation efforts being undertaken in the affected areas, officials said.

The CM expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi for deputing the ministers to the state.

Chouhan later said the two ministers had come to the state at the direction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to assess the situation on the ground and ensure that all support is extended to the affected people.

He said standing crops, including paddy, oranges and bananas, had also suffered extensive losses, badly affecting the livelihoods of farmers.

"We have spoken to our brothers and sisters here and witnessed the extent of the destruction. The losses are enormous," the Union agriculture minister said. The SEOC report said that (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

One held with 37 kg of smuggled gold in Guwahati: Assam Police

GUWAHATI, June 30: A suspected international gold smuggling network has been busted in Guwahati by Assam Police and one held with over 37 kg of gold worth Rs 54 crore, in the largest such haul by the force, an official statement said on Tuesday.

It said smuggling links to the Middle East and Myanmar with domestic network across different cities, have been revealed, with further investigation on.

The Assam Police statement said a raid was carried out in Kharghuli area of the city on June 29-30, leading to the seizure and arrest.

Suspected gold bars/ pieces weighing 37.064 kg and worth over ₹ 54 crore were seized during the operation.

Also recovered during the raid were 13 grams of silver nodules/flakes, four mobile phones, ₹ 3,755 cash and bags used for concealment. One accused, hailing from Sangli in Maharashtra, who was staying in Guwahati, has been arrested, the statement said, adding that he had no legal documents for the consignment. It said investigation has revealed international gold smuggling links to the Middle East and Myanmar, with domestic connections to Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata and Bangalore.

"We are still investigating further links to unearth the full syndicate, past deliveries and financial trails," the statement added. (PTI)

Grenade hurled at railway work site along Assam-Nagaland border

DIPHU, June 30: A grenade was allegedly hurled at a railway construction site along the Assam-Nagaland border in Karbi Anglong district, officials said on Tuesday.

The incident took place on Monday afternoon at Rongaphar Siding in the Dhanstri area, where railway work is currently underway, they said.

The grenade failed to explode, and no injuries or damage were reported, they said.

A police team has been dispatched to the spot, and an investigation has been started to ascertain the circumstances surrounding the incident and identify those responsible, they added. (PTI)

Young gharial found in river in West Karbi Anglong

GUWAHATI, June 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said a young gharial has been spotted in the Kekaidong river in West Karbi Anglong, and projected it as proof of a steady revival of Assam's natural ecosystems.

The sighting comes less than two months after another Gharial, a species that was believed to have disappeared from the state, was seen in the Kaziranga National Park.

"Healthy rivers tell their own story. The sighting of a juvenile Gharial in the Kekaidong River, West Karbi Anglong, reflects the steady revival of Assam's natural ecosystems," Sarma said in a post on X.

"It encourages us to remain steadfast in protecting the rich biodiversity that defines our state," he added.

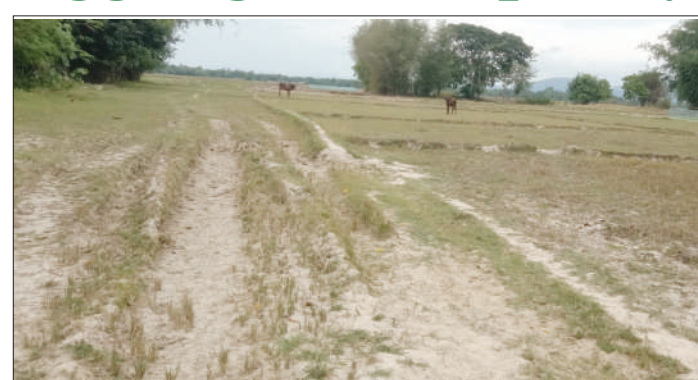
Gharials are critically endangered, large South Asian crocodiles known for their exceptionally long, thin snout and a diet that is largely fish. (PTI)

Dry spell leaves Howraghat farmers struggling to sow paddy

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, June 30: Farmers in the greater Howraghat and Bakaliaghat regions, whose livelihoods depend largely on agriculture, are facing a severe drought-like situation due to a prolonged dry spell and the lack of irrigation facilities. Despite the onset of the monsoon, many farmers have been unable to sow paddy, raising fears of heavy crop losses. They warned that if adequate rainfall does not arrive soon, hundreds of bighas of fertile agricultural land may remain uncultivated this season.

According to local residents, vast stretches of farmland have dried up due to acute water scarcity. The worst-affected villages in the Howraghat region include Gorokhiya Pukhuri, Dakshin



Dighalpar, Kachu Pukhuri, Santipur, Howraghat Tiniali, Gorjoga, Paschim Choonpora, Mazgaon, Kanki Ingti, Belguri, Borbil, Samaguri, Hidibonglong, Miribali, Polakamati, Durgapur, Ongaon, Amani, Padum Pukhuri, Rongkut and Uttar Borbil.

A similar situation has been reported from Dengao, Dokmoka, Parkhova and Nomati, as well as the Kaki area in Hojai district. While a few farmers attempted to save their crops by pumping water from private ponds using motorised pumps, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

CM pays tributes to Kargil war hero Captain Jintu Gogoi

GUWAHATI, June 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday paid tributes to Captain Jintu Gogoi, who was killed in the Kargil War, and said his legacy continues to inspire generations.

The Army officer hailed from Golaghat district.

In a post on X, the chief minister said, "Humble tributes to Shaheed Captain Jintu Gogoi (Vir Chakra) on his Martyrdom Day."

"His unwavering devotion to Maa Bharti and his supreme sacrifice during the Kargil War embody the highest ideals of courage, duty and patriotism. His legacy will continue to inspire generations," he added.

Captain Gogoi was killed in action on the intervening night of June 29-30 (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Ashok Singhal reviews health services at AMCH

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 30: Assam Health and Family Welfare Minister Ashok Singhal on Tuesday visited Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) to review healthcare services during his first official visit to Dibrugarh after assuming charge of the department.

The minister began his visit with an inspection of the Super Speciality Block, Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block and the Casualty Ward at AMCH. During the visit, he interacted with patients to assess the quality of medical care, the availability of medicines, cleanliness and other essential healthcare facilities.

Later, Singhal chaired a high-level review meeting attended by the Principal, Superintendent, heads of departments, senior fac-

ulty members and doctors of AMCH.

The meeting focused on evaluating the hospital's infrastructure, human resources, patient care management and the progress of ongoing expansion projects. The minister also issued directions aimed at enhancing the quality and efficiency of healthcare services.

Singhal also chaired a review meeting with officials of the Dibrugarh District Health and Family Welfare Department, where the progress of key public health programmes—including non-communicable disease (NCD) screening, the tuberculosis elimination campaign, and maternal and child health initiatives—was reviewed.

He urged officials to achieve programme targets within stipulated (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Monthly average rainfall over India expected to be below normal in July: IMD

NEW DELHI, June 30: The monthly average rainfall over India is expected to be below normal during July, the India Meteorological Department said on Tuesday in its monthly forecast.

The weather department stated that July is most likely to see 94 per cent of the long-period average rainfall (1971-2020). The LPA rainfall over India in July is about 280.4 mm.

LPA refers to the rainfall recorded over a particular region for a given period, such as a month or a season, averaged over a long period, typically 30 to 50 years.

Some areas of northwest and northeast India, east-central India and the eastern peninsular region are likely to receive normal to above rainfall, the IMD said.

In a statement, Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, director general of meteorology at the IMD, said, "During July, below-normal rainfall is

likely across most parts of the country except some areas of northwest and northeast India, east-central India and the eastern peninsular region, where normal to above-normal rainfall is likely."

In June, India as a whole witnessed a rainfall deficit of about 40 per cent, with Central India worst affected with a deficit of 50.4 per cent. The country experienced the fifth-lowest (99.5 mm) rainfall in June since 1901.

This below-normal rainfall during the monsoon season occurred due to five main factors, according to Mohapatra.

First, an unfavourable phase of the Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO), which is a moving system of wind, cloud, and pressure that brings rain as it circles the equator.

During a favourable phase, the MJO brings more clouds to southern India, which are then carried northwards (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Its finely detailed shell and lustrous finish reflect generations of craftsmanship

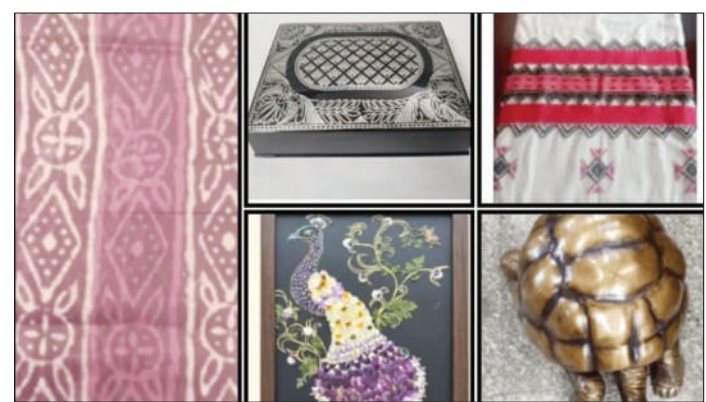
Kanchivaram, Maheshwari silk part of PM's gifts to Seychelles leaders

NEW DELHI, June 30: Kanchivaram silk fabric, Maheshwari silk stole and Toda embroidered shawl were some of the gifts that Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave to the top leadership of Seychelles and their spouses during his just-concluded visit to the island nation.

Modi was in Seychelles on a three-day visit from June 27 to 29, during which he attended the golden jubilee celebrations of the national day of that country, and held bilateral discussions with President Patrick Herminie, further strengthening the friendship between the two countries.

The Prime Minister gifted the Seychelles president a Muradabadi brass tortoise, an example of the renowned brassware tradition of Moradabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Handcrafted by skilled artisans of Moradabad, which is celebrated globally as India's 'brass city', the



gift showcased the region's exceptional expertise in metal casting, engraving and finishing.

Its finely detailed shell and lustrous finish reflect generations of craftsmanship.

In Indian philosophy, the tortoise is a timeless symbol of wisdom, stability, resilience and longevity. These ideals resonate deeply with

Seychelles, whose natural heritage is inseparable from the iconic Aldabra giant tortoise, one of the world's largest and longest-living tortoise species.

Modi also visited the enclosure of the giant tortoise at the Seychelles National Botanical Garden during his visit.

The Prime Minister gifted

Veronique Herminie, the First Lady of Seychelles, a Maheshwari silk stole and a Bidriware box.

The Maheshwari silk stole is a graceful expression of India's handloom heritage, renowned for its lightweight texture, elegant drape and distinctive woven patterns.

Originating in Maheshwar in Madhya Pradesh, this textile tradition is celebrated for its fine craftsmanship and harmonious blend of silk and cotton yarns.

Characterised by geometric motifs, striped borders, and subtle colour combinations, Maheshwari weaves reflect a refined aesthetic that has been preserved for generations.

The Bidriware box is an exquisite example of India's celebrated metalcraft tradition, renowned for its distinctive contrast of lustrous silver inlay against a deep black metallic surface. Bidriware originated in Bidar, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

US-Iran thaw to provide tailwinds for growth: RBI

MUMBAI, June 30: The Reserve Bank on Tuesday said the interim peace deal between Iran and the US can provide tailwinds to Indian economic growth.

In its bi-annual financial stability report released on Tuesday, the central bank also said that the growth in gold imports has decelerated "substantially" in May 2026 over April.

It, however, flagged that fiscal deficit can come under pressure because of the higher prices of energy and other commodities, their limited pass through to pump prices, excise duty cuts and higher outgo on subsidies. "... the interim peace deal has laid the foundation for cessation of this conflict and normalisation of supply chains, which could provide tailwinds to growth," the report said.

The country entered the recent bout of global turbulence triggered by the West Asia conflict with stronger macroeconomic fundamentals, it said, conceding that while India's resilience provides an important buffer, some impact is inevitable given the country's substantial dependence on imported



energy.

The RBI said most of the high-frequency indicators for April-May 2026 point to continued resilience in economic activity which suggests that growth has remained "firm" in Q1FY27.

"Nevertheless, elevated oil and other commodity prices and weaker global growth could adversely affect India's domestic growth in 2026-27," it said.

Several measures undertaken by the Government, including support to MSME and export sectors, are expected to help sustain economic activity, while mitigating the impact of external shocks, the central bank said.

On the inflation front, it said a combination of conflict-driven supply shock and projected weak monsoon due to El Niño can push headline inflation to the higher end

of the tolerance band or around 6 per cent in Q3FY27 and also worsen inflation expectations.

The recent decline in net FDI (foreign direct investment) may reflect the tightening of global financial conditions, it said, adding that foreign portfolio flows to India have also been under pressure.

Asserting that India's external sector remains "resilient", the FSR said, "The recent measures announced by the Government and the RBI are expected to bolster capital inflows. Therefore, even if the CAD widens, stronger capital inflows are likely to mitigate the funding constraint."

The report also stated that fiscal deficit could come under pressure on higher prices of energy and other commodities, limited pass-through of oil price increase, excise duty cuts, and higher outgo on account of subsidies.

Gross non-performing assets of banks reduced to 1.8 per cent at the end of March, a multi-decadal low, the report said, adding that banking system gross NPAs may inch up to 1.9 per cent by March 2028 under the baseline scenario. (PTI)

Stock markets decline for 2nd day as IT shares lead losses

MUMBAI, June 30: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined on Tuesday due to selling in IT, oil & gas and select banking shares amid uncertainty over the next round of US-Iran negotiations in Doha.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 249.70 points, or 0.33 per cent, to settle at 76,478.67, paring its opening gains.

During the day, it fell by 398.98 points, or 0.51 per cent, to a low of 76,329.39. The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 80.50 points, or 0.34 per cent, to end at 23,865.75.

The delayed onset and sluggish progress of the southwest monsoon, fresh foreign fund outflows and decline in blue-chip IT stocks weighed on market sentiment, analysts said.

Among Sensex shares, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, HCL Tech, Tech Mahindra, ITC and Hindustan Unilever were the major laggards.

Maruti, Titan, Bajaj Finance and Eternal were among the gainers.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 1,350.10 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, rose by 0.23 per cent to USD 73.32 per barrel.

"The domestic market remained in a consolidation phase, trading within a narrow range and exhibiting a mixed trend. Although geopolitical concerns have eased, the fragile nature of the US-Iran peace deal continues to weigh on sentiment, preventing any meaningful directional move," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Sectoral performance was mixed but tilted to the

downside, with IT emerging as the primary drag, he said.

"On the domestic front, the current monsoon trend -- pointing to the worst deficit in a decade -- raises concerns about agricultural output and allied sectors, further impacting sentiment amid expectations of weak Q1FY27 earnings," Nair added.

Broader markets also advanced as the BSE Small-Cap Select index rose by 0.59 per cent MidCap Select index rose by 0.46 per cent.

Sectorally, BSE Focused IT tanked 2.62 per cent, followed by IT (2.48 per cent), PSU Bank (0.68 per cent), Bankex (0.25 per cent), Top 10 Banks (0.23 per cent), Metal (0.18 per cent), Utilities (0.12 per cent) and Private Banks index (0.12 per cent).

Really jumped 1.23 per cent, while Services (1.01 per cent), Consumer Durables (0.98 per cent), Consumer Discretionary (0.81 per cent), MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (0.59 per cent), Healthcare (0.58 per cent), Capital Goods (0.55 per cent) and Commodities (0.32 per cent) were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended higher, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index settled lower.

Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory, US markets ended higher on Monday, with the Nasdaq Composite surging 2.07 per cent and S&P 500 climbing 1.18 per cent.

On Monday, the Sensex declined 372.10 points, or 0.48 per cent, to settle at 76,728.37.

The Nifty dropped 109.75 points, or 0.46 per cent, to end at 23,946.25. (PTI)

ICICI Prudential launches 10-year life cover plan

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 30: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched a new 10-Year Life Cover under its ICICI Pru iProtect Smart Plus product, aimed at individuals with defined financial commitments such as home loans, business loans and children's education expenses.

The company said the new proposition is designed to provide financial protection during the first decade of major financial obligations, a period when income dependence and financial responsibilities are often at their highest.

The plan is intended for home loan borrowers, self-employed individuals with fixed-term business loans and parents planning for their children's education.

It seeks to provide affordable life insurance coverage that aligns with these time-bound financial commitments.

Announcing the launch, chief product officer Vikas Gupta said many important financial goals are linked to specific timelines, making protection during those years especially important.

A key feature of the plan is that the sum assured remains unchanged throughout the 10-year policy term, ensuring beneficiaries receive the full life cover amount if required.

General Elections.

Over his career, he has also served on several key financial and regulatory bodies, including the Central Board of the Reserve Bank of India, the Financial Stability and Development Council, and the boards of the State Bank of India and NABARD.

The Board has also approved a revised notice for the Bank's 32nd Annual General Meeting, scheduled for August 5, 2026, to include the shareholder resolutions related to Kumar's appointment.

The Bank said Kumar's extensive experience in public policy, governance and financial sector reforms is expected to strengthen its leadership and support its commitment to sustainable growth, robust governance and long-term value creation.

between 2017 and 2020.

He played a key role in strengthening the banking sector through large-scale bank recapitalisation, resolution of non-performing assets (NPAs), consolidation of public sector banks, governance reforms and financial inclusion initiatives.

During his tenure, Kumar spearheaded the implementation of the "4R Strategy"—Recognition, Resolution, Recapitalisation and Reforms—which significantly improved the health of India's banking system.

He also led initiatives aimed at strengthening regulatory oversight, depositor protection, risk management and operational efficiency across financial institutions.

Kumar later served as the 25th Chief Election Commissioner of India and supervised the 2024

HDFC Bank appoints Rajiv Kumar as part-time chairman

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 30: HDFC Bank has appointed former Finance Secretary Rajiv Kumar as an Additional (Independent) Director and Part-time Chairman of the Bank, subject to regulatory and shareholder approvals.

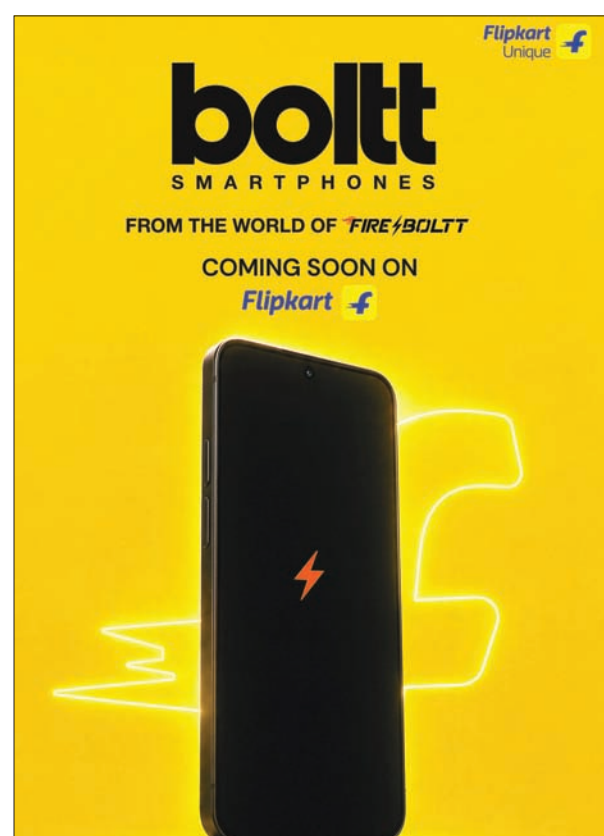
The Bank's Board of Directors approved Kumar's appointment as an Additional (Independent) Director for a four-year term with effect from June 30, 2026, subject to shareholders' approval.

It also approved his appointment as Part-time Chairman for a three-year term, subject to the approval of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI).

A 1984-batch IAS officer, Kumar is widely recognised for leading major banking and financial sector reforms during his tenure as Secretary of the Department of Financial Services

Fire-Boltt enters smartphone segment with new 'boltt' brand

Made-in-India smartphones to debut on Flipkart with affordable 4G and 5G models



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 30: Wearables brand Fire-Boltt has announced its entry into India's smartphone market with the launch of boltt, a new Made-in-India smartphone brand that will be available through Flipkart and other retail channels.

The move marks Fire-Boltt's expansion from the connected wearables segment into the broader consumer technology market.

The company said the new brand has been developed by leveraging consumer insights gained from its ecosystem of more than four crore users.

Manufactured in India and designed specifically for Indian consumers, the boltt smartphone range aims to combine local manufacturing with accessible technology and wide market reach through Flipkart's distribution network.

The upcoming portfolio will include both 4G and 5G smartphones under the Evo and Ace series.

The company said the devices will focus on reliability, performance, innovation and affordability while catering to the evolving needs of Indian consumers.

Announcing the launch, boltt founder and chief executive officer Arnav Kishore said smartphones have become

central to the way people communicate, work and learn, and that the company sees significant opportunities for a homegrown brand that understands Indian users.

"Over the years, millions of consumers have welcomed Fire-Boltt into their daily lives, helping us build one of India's largest connected consumer ecosystems. boltt is the next chapter in that journey. We are bringing together our consumer insights, technology expertise and commitment to India to create smartphone experiences designed for the country and built for its future," he said.

Flipkart senior director Mukund Kedia said the e-commerce platform remains committed to making quality smartphone experiences accessible to consumers across metropolitan as well as smaller towns.

He said Flipkart's nationwide logistics and distribution network would support the rollout of boltt's affordable 4G and 5G smartphone portfolio, enabling customers across the country to access devices offering durability, performance and innovation.

The company said further details regarding the boltt smartphone lineup and launch schedule will be announced in the coming weeks.

Contd. from Page 1...

One person dies

taking shelter in four relief camps, while another six relief distribution centres were also operational. Crop land of 3809.0243 hectares also remained under flood waters.

More than 88,000 animals, including 50,000 big ones, have been affected by the deluge.

Infrastructure, including several roads, have been damaged in the current wave of floods, as per the ASDMA bulletin.

Arunachal flood toll

as many as 342 kutchha houses, 82 pucca houses and 37 huts have been damaged across the state. It also recorded the deaths of 130 poultry birds, 613 small animals and six large animals.

The monsoon fury has also caused extensive damage to infrastructure, with 80 roads, 12 bridges, 18 culverts, 147 water supply schemes, 21 power lines, 60 electric poles, seven flood protection walls, four hydropower projects, four government buildings and two hospitals affected.

Several roads in Keyi Panyor, Papum Pare, East Siang, Upper Siang, Pakke Kessang, Lower Dibang Valley and Kra Daadi remain blocked or are under restoration.

The report added that 1,010 hectares of forest area and 312.2 hectares of agricultural and horticultural land have been affected by the rain-related disasters.

Rescue and relief operations are continuing with the deployment of the NDRF, SDRF, state police, Indian Air Force, civil aviation helicopters and local volunteers.

Stranded people have been rescued from Keyi Panyor and Lower Dibang Valley, while relief camps have been opened in the worst-hit areas.

Relief materials, including food grains, medicines and other essential supplies, are being distributed to affected families, the report added. Governor K T Pariaik on Tuesday stressed the need for a "whole of the state" approach to deal with the natural calamity.

At a meeting held at Lok Bhavan earlier in the day, Chief Minister Pema Khandu briefed the governor about the prevailing flood situation in the state and the relief and safety measures being undertaken for affected communities. Pariaik also lauded the dedicated services of the State Disaster Response Force, district administrations, public works, civil aviation and disaster management departments, the Indian Red Cross Society, volunteers and locals for their efforts in rescue, relief and rehabilitation operations. (PTI)

Violation of govt

have been in practice for a long time. They said that the airport is in the process of implementing an automated announcement system that includes Assamese-language announcements.

"During the implementation and testing phase, certain discrepancies were identified in the wording and pronunciation of a few announcement scripts. To ensure accuracy and maintain the quality of passenger communication, the matter was taken up for rectification," an official said.

The automated Assamese announcement system is expected to be operational within the next 10 days.

The Adani Group-managed LGBIA has two terminals, with the second one inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December last year. The two terminals together handle about 118 flights daily on an average, catering to around 19,000 passengers. (PTI)

Dry spell leaves

the continued dry weather and inadequate groundwater recharge have left even those paddy saplings at risk of drying up.

Local residents expressed concern over the alleged lack of action by the Irrigation Department. They said a minor irrigation dam was constructed at Karakok Bey village several years ago. To channel water from the dam to farmlands in villages such as Dakshin Dighalipar, Gorokhiya Pukhuri and Kanki Ingti, villagers dug a temporary earthen canal on their own.

"It is deeply disheartening that despite repeated appeals through the media to concrete this makeshift canal, the department has turned a blind eye. Because of the government's apathy, thousands of farmers are forced to struggle for water year after year," a local farmer alleged.

Residents recalled that the Assam government had declared 27 districts drought-hit in 2009 and that the Howraghat-Bakaliaghat region had witnessed a similar crisis in 2015. In view of the present situation, farmers have urged the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and the Assam government to take immediate measures.

The affected farmers have demanded that the government conduct an on-the-spot assessment, declare the region drought-hit if warranted, and provide compensation to those affected. They have also sought the installation of deep-bore tube wells to help save the current sowing season.

The farmers further appealed to Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC Dr Tuliram Ronghang and Assam Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma to sanction the concreting of the Karakok Bey irrigation canal on a priority basis. They said the project would provide long-term irrigation support to the region and help safeguard the livelihoods of hundreds of farming families.

CM pays tributes

in 1999 while leading his troops to evict the enemy from Ridge Line Kala Pathar in Batalik sub-sector during 'Operation Vijay'. The 29-year-old officer took down two enemy soldiers before making the supreme sacrifice for the nation. (PTI)

Ashok Singhal reviews

timelines, strengthen field-level monitoring and ensure greater accountability in delivering quality healthcare. Commending the dedication and hard work of doctors, nurses, healthcare workers and district health officials, Singhal said he would revisit Dibrugarh in the near future to conduct a detailed assessment of the progress of various health sector initiatives.

The minister was accompanied by Industries, Commerce and Cultural Affairs minister Bimal Borah and Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan.

Apart from this, Health and Family Welfare commissioner and secretary P. Ashok Babu, additional secretary Dr Pranati Gogoi, director of Medical Education Dr Manoj Kumar Choudhury, director of Health Services (Family Welfare) Kamaljit Talukdar, Dibrugarh Additional District commissioner Pranjal Barua, joint director of Health Services Dr Trishna Bora, senior Health Department officials, and members of the National Health Mission's District Programme Management Unit (DPMU), who presented detailed reports on the district's healthcare performance and ongoing initiatives.

Monthly average rainfall

by the monsoon winds, leading to enhanced rainfall. Second, there were no low-pressure systems (LPSs) formed during June. LPSs are essentially areas where atmospheric pressure is lower than in their surrounding regions.

Given that winds travel from high-pressure to low-pressure areas, these systems act like a magnet, pulling in moisture-laden winds, helping trigger rainfall, and pushing the monsoon inland.

Third, most of the typhoon systems that formed during June recurred to the North-Northwest direction, which led to subdued LPS over the Indian Ocean region.

Fourth, the emergence of El Niño conditions this month also negatively impacted the rainfall activity.

El Niño is one of the three phases of the El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) — a climate phenomenon characterised by changes in sea temperatures along the central and eastern tropical Pacific Ocean, accompanied by fluctuations in the atmosphere overhead.

While El Niño, which leads to less monsoon rainfall in India, is known to have a warming effect over the planet, its opposite phase, La Niña, usually results in a cooling effect. ENSO also has a neutral phase.

As Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) conditions are currently neutral, they cannot help to counter the El Niño's negative impact — positive IOD conditions typically result in more rainfall.

Speaking about the advancement of the southwest monsoon, Mohapatra noted that conditions are favourable for further movement into the remaining parts of Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, and Ladakh, and more parts of Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh in the next 2-3 days.

During this period, the monsoon is also likely to advance into the entire Daman and Diu, Jammu and Kashmir, most parts of Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, and Punjab, and some parts of Rajasthan.

As for temperatures in July, the IMD has said that maximum temperatures are expected to remain above normal across most parts of India, except a few isolated areas in West Central India, where normal to below-normal maximum temperatures are likely.

"Meanwhile, the minimum temperatures are also expected to be above normal over most regions of the country, except some isolated pockets of Central and Northeast India, where normal minimum temperatures are likely," the IMD said. (PTI)

Kanchivaram, Maheshwari silk

Karnataka, from which it derives its name. The craft involves casting an alloy of zinc and copper, engraving intricate patterns onto the surface, and inlaying them with silver.

Modi presented Sebastian Pillay, the vice president of Seychelles, an orchid painting from Sikkim.

The painting combines Sikkim's rich floral heritage with its vibrant artistic traditions. The artwork depicts India's national bird, the peacock, adorned with delicate orchid blooms amid intricate floral vines, celebrating the harmony of nature and artistic expression.

The artwork holds special significance due to its connection with both India and Seychelles. While the peacock symbolises India's natural and cultural heritage, the orchid is the national flower of Seychelles, a nation known for its unique island biodiversity and commitment to environmental conservation.

Modi gifted Lina Pillay, the Second Lady of Seychelles, a Kanchivaram silk fabric, which is one of India's most celebrated handloom traditions, renowned for its luxurious texture, vibrant colours, and craftsmanship.

Originating in the historic temple town of Kanchipuram in Tamil Nadu, the textile is woven from fine mulberry silk and distinguished by its durability, lustrous finish and intricate 'zari' work.

This fabric features a rich maroon field embellished with elegant gold 'zari' motifs, complemented by a striking border in red, green and gold. The ornate weaving, intricate detailing, and harmonious colour palette reflect the distinctive aesthetic traditions of Kanchipuram.

Modi also gifted the speaker of the Seychelles national assembly, Azarel Ernesta, a Toda embroidered shawl, a distinguished textile tradition of the Toda community, the indigenous pastoral people of the Nilgiri Hills in Tamil Nadu.

The embroidery technique, known as Pukhoor, is unique to the Toda people and is executed entirely by hand. Traditionally worn during ceremonies and important social occasions, the shawl is a symbol of identity, continuity and preservation of indigenous knowledge.

It reflects India's rich cultural diversity and the enduring creativity of its artisan communities — values that resonate with Seychelles' commitment to preserving its unique cultural heritage and traditions. (PTI)

Hagrama Mohilary directs officials to expedite pending works, stresses field monitoring and flood mitigation

BTC chief reviews development projects in Chirang

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 30: Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Chief Hagrama Mohilary on Tuesday reviewed the progress of various development projects in Chirang district and directed officials to expedite pending works to ensure their timely completion.

The review meeting, held at the conference hall of the District Centre in Kajalgaon, was part of the BTC government's ongoing district-wise assessment of developmental activities across the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR).

The meeting was attended by Bijni MLA Anrup Kumar Dey, BTC Members of Legislative Council (MCLAs) James Basumatary, Sukursing Mushahary, Kalilur Rahman and Dhananjay Basumatary, Additional Principal Secretary Pranjit Kumar Wary, Secretary Anup Brahma, Joint Secretary Pallavi Kachari and senior officials from various BTC departments.



Mohilary reviewed the physical and financial progress of projects funded by the Central and State governments, including schemes under the State Own Priority Development (SOPD) programme being implemented by the Panchayat and Rural Development Department, the Public Works De-

partment (Roads and Buildings) and the Municipal Administration. Expressing concern over the slow pace of several ongoing projects, the BTC Chief directed departmental heads to take immediate corrective measures to speed up implementation and ensure that development benefits

reach the people without delay. He also urged Executive Members and MCLAs to conduct regular field inspections of project sites to monitor progress, assess ground realities and ensure accountability among officials and executing agencies.

Continuous monitoring by public representatives, he said, would help improve both the pace and quality of implementation.

Mohilary further instructed all departments to work in close coordination to ensure the smooth execution of development projects across the district.

Referring to the recent floods, the BTC Chief appreciated the prompt visits made by Executive Members, MLAs and MCLAs to the affected areas.

He said the BTC government is making necessary arrangements to provide relief and assistance to affected families while undertaking measures to control river erosion and reduce flood-related damage in vulnerable areas.

Sonitpur reports 71 road accidents in June, five fatal

District Road Safety Committee reviews accident data, DC directs coordinated measures to improve highway safety



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 30: Sonitpur district recorded 71 road accidents, including five fatal cases, during June 2026, according to data presented at the monthly meeting of the District Road Safety Committee (DRSC) chaired by District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das on Tuesday.

The meeting, held at Conference Hall-I of the District Commissioner's Office, was attended by Additional District Commissioner James Aind, Additional Superintendent of Police Moushumi Kalita, Tezpur Municipal Board Chairperson Ramen Tamuli, DRSC Member Secretary and PWRD Superintending Engineer Ajit Kumar Medhi, along with officials from the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), Public Works Department (National Highways Division), Transport Department, Tezpur Municipal Board and other departments.

At the outset, the District Commissioner directed all departments to ensure timely and accurate reporting of road accidents, accident-prone black spots and road safety interventions.

Stressing the need for coordinated efforts to reduce accidents, he reviewed the road safety situation on the Singri-Asom Mala Road in Dhekiajuli and instructed the concerned agencies to examine immediate engineering measures.

Das directed the Public Works Department and other executing agencies to assess the feasibility of installing streetlights, reflectors, speed breakers and rumble strips wherever required in accordance with prescribed state and national guidelines. He asked the agencies to submit a detailed report to the district administration and the DRSC at the earliest.

The meeting also reviewed the implementation of the District Highway Safety Task Force (DHSTF) mechanism in compliance with directives of the

Supreme Court.

Officials made a detailed presentation on the enforcement framework under the Control of National Highways (Land and Traffic) Act, 2002, highlighting measures for removal of encroachments, regulation of unauthorised parking and strengthening technology-based surveillance.

The District Commissioner instructed NHIDCL and the National Highways Division of the PWD to identify encroachments along national highways and initiate action by issuing notices to violators in accordance with existing norms.

He also emphasised the need for regular inspections, prompt enforcement and close coordination among all concerned agencies.

The committee further discussed traffic management measures, including regulating the movement of heavy vehicles, particularly trailer trucks, during peak hours at congestion-prone locations to improve traffic flow and road safety.

Directions were also issued for the identification and removal of dead roadside trees.

According to data presented during the meeting, including information available on the Integrated Road Accident Database (iRAD) portal, 71 road accidents were reported in Sonitpur district during June, of which five were fatal.

The meeting concluded with members of the committee extending their best wishes to Joint Director of Health Services Dr Biman Sharma on his superannuation and wishing him a healthy and fulfilling retired life.

One injured in leopard attack near Demow

HT Correspondent
DEMOW, June 30: A man was seriously injured after being attacked by a leopard at Paleng Araltoli near Demow on Monday evening, triggering concern among local residents.

According to sources, the victim, identified as Achuk Changmai, was walking through the area when the leopard suddenly attacked him, inflicting serious injuries.

Changmai was immediately rushed to Demow Model Hospital, where he received primary treatment before being referred to a hospital in Dibrugarh for advanced medical care.

Following the incident, the village headman and officials of the Sivasagar Forest Range took prompt action by installing a cage at Araltoli on Tuesday in an effort to capture the leopard and prevent further attacks.

Forest officials are monitoring the situation, while local residents have been advised to remain vigilant and avoid venturing into vulnerable areas, particularly during the evening and early morning hours.

Teen sets Assam record with 262-unit blood donation drive

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 30: Seventeen-year-old Kreeti Dhanuka has entered the Assam Book of Records after leading a record-breaking blood donation campaign that collected 262 units of blood in a single day, earning recognition as one of the state's youngest social changemakers.

The Assam Book of Records honoured Kreeti for her exceptional contribution to voluntary blood donation by presenting her with a traditional fulam gamosa, a commemorative memento and an official certificate of recognition.

The record-setting campaign was conducted simultaneously at four locations across Guwahati and required extensive planning, coordination and mobilisation of volunteers, medical professionals and partner organisations.

Under Kreeti's leadership, the initiative culminated in the collection of 262 units of blood, setting a new benchmark for youth-led voluntary blood donation drives in the state.

Assamese Sikh Association begins preparations for 206th anniversary

HT Bureau
DIPHU, June 30: The Assamese Sikh Association has begun preparations to celebrate the 206th anniversary of the Indigenous Assamese Sikh community, with plans to organise state-wide celebrations highlighting the community's rich cultural heritage and contribution to Assam.

The decision was taken at the association's second Executive Committee meeting held at the historic Mataji Gurdwara premises in Chaparmukh, Nagaon district.

Besides reviewing organisational matters, the committee unanimously resolved to commemorate the milestone through programmes to be held across the state.

Announcing the decision, Association President Rajbir Singh said chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma would be invited as the chief guest for the anniversary celebration.

He also informed that a dedicated organising committee would be constituted shortly to oversee preparations and ensure the successful conduct of the event.

During the meeting, the Executive Committee congratulated chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on assuming office for a second consecutive term. On behalf of the Indigenous Assamese Sikh community, President Rajbir Singh and General Secretary Gobind Singh conveyed their best

wishes, and the committee adopted an official resolution expressing its appreciation.

The meeting was attended by Senior Vice-President Sardar Ram Singh, advisers Sardar Jogen Singh, Sardar Ishwar Singh and Sardar Shyam Singh, Assistant Secretaries Parbinder Singh, Chandan Singh and Baldev Singh, along with Bibi Sumitra Kaur, Gyani Sher Singh, Jaspal Singh and Gurudev Singh.

The association said the 206th anniversary celebrations would showcase the unique cultural identity of the Indigenous Assamese Sikh community, which has remained an integral part of Assam's socio-cultural fabric for more than two centuries.

Bodoland University releases fourth-year FYUGP guidelines

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 30: Bodoland University has released the guidelines for the fourth year of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP), marking another step in the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

The guidelines have been prepared in accordance with the University Grants Commission's Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP), 2022, the Government of Assam's Revised Model Framework for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes (May 2023), and the Curriculum Framework for FYUGP approved by the University's Academic Council in its 13th meeting held on July 4, 2023.

The guidelines were formally released in the presence of Vice-Chancellor Prof BL Ahuja, Rector Prof Jatin Sarmah, Registrar Dr Prahalad Basumatary, Academic Registrar Dr Manjil Basumatary, deans of various faculties, heads of departments and faculty members.

Addressing the gathering, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Ahuja said the introduction of the fourth year of the FYUGP, particularly the Honours and Honours with Research pathways, reflects the transformative vision of NEP 2020 in promoting academic excellence, multidisciplinary learning, re-

search aptitude and innovation at the undergraduate level.

He said the guidelines would provide a robust framework for ensuring quality, consistency and effective implementation across the university's affiliated colleges and academic departments.

Academic Registrar Dr Manjil Basumatary said the document provides a comprehensive framework covering programme structure, eligibility criteria, credit requirements, internships, undergraduate research, research supervision, project work and assessment.

He said the guidelines had been prepared to facilitate transparent and uniform implementation of the fourth-year programme while promoting academic rigour, innovation and a strong culture of undergraduate research.

The university leadership reaffirmed its commitment to advancing the objectives of NEP 2020 by strengthening the quality and relevance of undergraduate education through the effective implementation of the fourth-year FYUGP.

It expressed confidence that the guidelines would promote academic excellence, multidisciplinary education, undergraduate research and innovation while ensuring uniform implementation across all affiliated colleges and university departments.

SBIM marks foundation day, inaugurates new classrooms

HT Correspondent
BOKAJAN, June 30: Shalom Baptist Institute & Mission (SBIM) at Sot Recho village under Bokajan subdivision celebrated its fourth Foundation Day on Tuesday with the inauguration of new classrooms and the commencement of its new academic session.

The programme, inspired by the biblical verse Proverbs 24:3—"By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established"—began with an invocation song, followed by a prayer led by Pastor Tia Longkumar seeking blessings for the institution.

Rev Dr Angam Chiru welcomed the gathering and introduced the guests.

The SBIM choir presented a gospel hymn, after which Rev Maingandai Gangmei led a thanksgiving prayer.

A scripture reading was delivered by Sangailui Meringmei, while Rev Dr Peter Thiumai delivered the sermon and offered prayers for spiritual guidance.

The occasion also marked the inauguration and dedication of the institute's newly constructed classrooms, the ordination and commissioning prayer for Rev Maingandai Gangmei as pastor, and a thanksgiving prayer for the Director's child, who secured 92 per cent marks in the Higher Secondary School Leaving Certificate (HSSLC) examination.

Nagaon faces twin threat of deforestation, rainfall deficit

Forest loss and weak monsoon raise fears of drought, threaten agriculture in central Assam

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, June 30: Nagaon district is facing a growing environmental crisis as rapid deforestation and a sharp decline in rainfall threaten to trigger drought-like conditions in one of Assam's most important agricultural regions.

According to Global Forest Watch data, Assam recorded the highest tree cover loss in the country between 2001 and 2023, with about 3.24,000 hectares of forest cover lost during the period.

Nagaon has emerged as one of the major hotspots, with extensive deforestation reported in and around the Burha Chapori Wildlife Sanctuary and along the Nagaon-Karbi Anglong border, particularly in the Salna and Kandali ranges.

Official sources said more than one lakh mature trees have been felled across Assam over the past decade, including nearly 65,000 between 2021 and 2025.

Forest officials noted that compensatory plantation drives cannot replace the ecological value of mature trees lost to infra-

structure projects, encroachment and illegal logging.

Overall, Assam lost nearly 3,600 sq km of tree cover between 2001 and 2025.

The state also continues to grapple with large-scale forest encroachment, with around 3,62,082 hectares of forest land reportedly under illegal occupation.

The shrinking forest cover has coincided with an alarming decline in rainfall.

Nagaon recorded a 74 per cent rainfall deficit between March 1 and April 29, 2025, placing it in the "large deficit" category.

The situation worsened during the monsoon, with Assam registering an overall rainfall deficit of 42 per cent between June 1 and July 28. As many as 27 districts, including Nagaon, were reported to be facing drought-like conditions.

In June alone, Nagaon received 62 to 72 per cent less rainfall than normal, making it one of the worst-affected districts in the state.

Agriculture officials said the prolonged



rainfall deficit has already disrupted paddy transplantation, a crucial activity normally carried out between mid-June and mid-July.

To mitigate the impact, the state government has begun stocking short-duration paddy varieties such as Bina-10 and Bina-11 for distribution in drought-affected districts, including Nagaon.

degrees Celsius but the heat index touching 37 to 39 degrees due to high humidity, experts cautioned that heat stress is compounding pressure on crops and water resources.

Environmentalists have called for an immediate moratorium on the felling of mature trees in the Laokhowa-Burha Chapori landscape and the adjoining Karbi Anglong border areas.

They have also demanded mandatory ecological impact assessments before forest land is diverted for development projects.

"Plantation drives cannot compensate for the loss of mature forests. Protecting Nagaon's remaining forests has now become an essential climate adaptation strategy," said a researcher familiar with the forest ecosystems of central Assam.

With forest cover continuing to shrink and the monsoon remaining below normal, experts warned that Nagaon faces a critical test of its ecological resilience and agricultural sustainability in the months ahead.

ABSU urges Vice President to expedite 125th amendment bill

Delegation discusses Bodoland's development priorities, seeks early passage of constitutional amendment

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 30: A delegation of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), accompanied by Rajya Sabha MP Pramod Boro and Kokrajhar Lok Sabha MP Joyanta Basumatary, met Vice President of India and Rajya Sabha Chairman CP Radhakrishnan in New Delhi recently and urged the early passage of the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill.

The delegation, led by ABSU president Khwrmwdao Wary, included general secretary Khanindra Basumatary and Lok Sabha MP Joyanta Basumatary.

During the meeting, the delegation highlighted the developmental needs of the Bodoland region and stressed that the early enactment of the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill would strengthen local governance and fulfil the long-term aspirations of the people.

The delegation also outlined its vision for the region's future, emphasising inclusive development, improved governance, better educational and infrastructure facilities, enhanced employment opportunities and sustainable economic growth.

The leaders underscored the need for continued cooperation between the Centre and regional stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of development initiatives.

The Vice President was briefed on several issues of



public importance affecting the Bodoland region.

The delegation expressed hope that the concerns raised during the meeting would receive due consideration and contribute to the region's overall development.

Following the meeting, the ABSU leaders thanked Vice President Radhakrishnan for providing them the opportunity to present their views and discuss matters relating to the welfare and future progress of Bodoland. "The meeting was meaningful. We urged the concerned authorities to take the necessary steps for the implementation of the 125th Constitutional Amendment Bill," the ABSU leadership said in a statement.

Morigaon Hospital gets four-bed paediatric ICU

HT Correspondent
MORIGAON, June 30: Morigaon district received a major boost to its healthcare infrastructure on Tuesday with the inauguration of a four-bed Paediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU) at Tilak-Hemram-Gunaviram Civil Hospital.

The facility was inaugurated by MLA Ramakanta Deuri in the presence of District Commissioner Anamika Tewari, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Health) Nitisha Bora, Joint Director of Health Services Dr Dilli Ram Adhikary, Additional Chief Medical and Health Officer (Family Welfare) Dr SB Bora, Superintendent of the Civil Hospital Dr Jitendra Kumar Nath, National Health Mission District Programme Manager, Quality Consultant, District Community Manager and other health officials and hospital staff.

Officials said the newly established PICU would significantly strengthen specialised healthcare services for critically ill children in the district and reduce the need for referrals to hospitals outside Morigaon.

They expressed hope that the facility would particularly benefit economically weaker families by providing access to advanced paediatric critical care closer to home.

NFR introduces smart IoT-based lift monitoring at major stations

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 30: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has introduced a smart Internet of Things (IoT)-based online lift monitoring system at major stations under the Rangiya Division to enhance passenger safety, reliability and operational efficiency. The system, known as the Indian Railways Native IoT-based Yield Analysis, Telemetry, Recording and Control (IR-NIYANTRAC), has been developed by the Centre for Railway Information Systems (CRIS).

It enables centralised, real-time monitoring of lift operations and marks a significant step towards strengthening passenger amenities through digital innovation.

The IR-NIYANTRAC platform continuously tracks the operational status of lifts, instantly detects faults or abnormalities and generates real-time alerts for maintenance personnel. The system facilitates quicker fault diagnosis, faster restoration of services and preventive maintenance, thereby minimising downtime and ensuring safe and uninterrupted lift operations for passengers.

Officials said the intelligent monitoring platform also supports data-driven asset management, helping improve the efficiency and performance of station infrastructure.

The project has been fully implemented under the Rangiya Division, covering four lifts at two major railway stations. Two lifts each at Rangiya and New Bongaigaon stations have been integrated into the monitoring system.

NFR said the successful deployment of the smart monitoring platform reflects its continued focus on technological innovation, operational excellence and passenger-centric services.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated. - Confucius

Fragile peace pact?

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.

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 demonstrated 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.

B'deshi migrants are having hard times in all parts of the world

By: Ashis Biswas

In recent years, migration has become more difficult for Bangladeshi immigrants, in the context of unsettled economic/political conditions worldwide, the continuing Ukraine war and the US/Iran conflict. Somewhat worryingly for the present BNP Government it seems the hard times will continue for Bangladeshis as the situation in the country's 'near abroad' -- Nepal and India -- has also worsened sharply, migration-wise.

Despite enjoying good relations with Bangladesh, Nepal is deporting 15 Bangladeshis for not only overstaying illegally, but for running a digital crime syndicate from the Kathmandu suburbs. This follows the detection and arrest only some days ago of 24 Bangladeshis for illegal entry, overstay and related reasons.

Nepalese authorities, alerted by intelligence agencies about the syndicate, have been surprised by the high-tech criminal activities of Bangladeshi migrants so close to their national capital. The detection and punishment of foreign nationals who enter the country illegally or overstay, is not uncommon. But most of these 15 people had come into the country on tourist visas and then stayed on. They were operating their racket, using smartphones, chips, sim cards, computers and sundry other equipment from three rooms in a hotel.

However, a few were also working in the garment factories in the nearby Sitapaila and Daltu areas. This seemed to suggest that the members of the gang did not arrive as a single team. Some had come earlier and helped organise the set up as others turned up later. Police are trying to ascertain whether this was just a one-off operation or there were bigger brains financing the group, serving dubious criminal/political interests. Preliminary reports indicate that the members had targeted and harassed various people within the local Indian community, getting them involved in honeypots and subjecting them to various forms of blackmail.

As with official authorities elsewhere, it is usually not difficult for tourists to secure permission to visit Nepal. Most tourists observe the rules. But as this incident is being probed, a section of the police and security officials is worried about criminals using the territory of Nepal as a base for their criminal operations. People still talk of how the Pak intelligence agency ISI used facilities in Nepal to carry out the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane to Afghanistan via Pakistan years ago.

In the present instance the choice of Nepal could be explained as a move by Bangladeshis miscreants to create tensions and misunderstanding between Kathmandu and Delhi, according to security analysts in Kolkata. There is already a suggestion according to some reports that from now on, papers/document of Bangladeshi visitors would be checked more rigorously to prevent further crimes.

Nepal apart, illegal Bangladesh migrants have had a hard time while trying to enter other countries. From India alone, nearly 5000 people were detected and deported from West Bengal, Tripura and other areas after the Assembly elections in West Bengal, while the fate of another 3000 people currently held in various centres is yet to be decided. There have been sporadic incidents of violence and spells of tension at the international border in pockets where GOI is trying to put up a barbed wire fence well within Indian territory.

News about Bangladeshi migrants from other countries too, have hardly brought cheers for Dhaka in recent times. In the UK alone, nearly 11,000 would be migrants who tried to secure political asylum to ensure permanent settlement, were sent back, during the last 18 months. Of the total 21525 Bangladeshis applying from 2023 for asylum in the UK, only 5% or so were allowed in, according to officials. The number of applicants again, had increased by 154% in a single year-- surely, a measure of the average Bangladeshis' desperation to quit home and settle abroad.

The US sent back 39 Bangladeshis who lacked official identity documents some time ago, while Libyan officials have deported 140 Bangladeshis since Dec 2023. In Oct 2024, Malaysia arrested 21 Bangladeshis who had entered the country posing as 'athletes'. In the UAE some time ago, 57 Bangladeshis were arrested and given long prison terms for allegedly demonstrating against -- of all things -- domestic policies of the Bangladesh government. And now the BNP government has been in touch with UAE authorities to ascertain why such long term sentences were declared.

Indian Border Security force and other agencies thwarted over 1100 attempts made by illegal migrants trying to get in from Bangladesh. (IPA Service)

Future of Agriculture in Assam

Agriculture has always been the backbone of Assam's economy, society, and cultural identity. Long before industries and urban centres began shaping the state's economic landscape, the fertile plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys sustained millions of people through farming. Even today, despite rapid urbanisation and the expansion of the service sector, agriculture continues to provide livelihoods to a significant share of Assam's population. Paddy fields stretching across the countryside, tea gardens that have earned global recognition, mustard fields blooming in winter, and the cultivation of vegetables, fruits, spices, fisheries, and livestock together present an image of a state blessed with abundant natural resources. Yet beneath this richness lies a complex reality. Agriculture in Assam stands at a crossroads where traditional strengths are increasingly challenged by climate change, fragmented landholdings, recurring floods, riverbank erosion,



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

declining profitability, labour shortages, and changing market dynamics. The future of agriculture in the state will therefore depend not simply on producing more crops but on creating a resilient, technology-driven, environmentally sustainable, and economically rewarding agricultural system. This transformation is no longer a matter of choice; it has become an urgent necessity. Across India, agriculture is undergoing a gradual transition from subsistence farming to market-oriented production supported by scientific research, digital technology, improved logistics, and value addition. Assam cannot remain isolated from this transformation. The state's unique geographical position, rich biodiversity, abundant rainfall, and diverse agro-climatic conditions offer enormous opportunities to build an agricultural economy that is both competitive and sustainable. However, those opportunities can only be realised through thoughtful planning, long-term investment, scientific innovation, and effective public policy. Farmers must no longer be viewed merely as cultivators of crops but as entrepreneurs who manage risks, adopt new technologies, respond to market signals, and contribute directly to economic growth. Such a change in perspective is essential if agriculture is to remain attractive for younger generations who increasingly seek employment outside the farm sector. The future of Assam's villages, food security, and rural prosperity will ultimately depend on whether agriculture evolves from a survival activity into a profitable enterprise capable of generating stable incomes while preserving the state's invaluable natural resources.

One of the greatest challenges confronting agriculture in Assam today is climate uncertainty, which has fundamentally altered the rhythm of farming across the state. For generations, farmers depended upon relatively predictable seasonal cycles to plan cultivation. Today, those patterns have become increasingly erratic. Floods arrive with greater intensity, prolonged dry spells interrupt sowing seasons, unseasonal rainfall damages standing crops, and riverbank erosion continues to consume fertile agricultural land every year. These environmental disruptions have transformed agriculture into an increasingly risky occupation, particularly for small and marginal farmers who possess limited financial capacity to

absorb repeated losses. Climate change is no longer an abstract environmental concern discussed only by scientists; it has become an everyday agricultural reality affecting planting decisions, crop productivity, household incomes, and food security. Assam therefore needs a comprehensive climate-resilient agricultural strategy rather than isolated relief measures after every natural disaster. Improved flood forecasting, scientific water management, drought-resistant crop varieties, better drainage systems, elevated storage facilities, and climate-smart farming practices should become central components of agricultural planning. Equally important is the conservation of wetlands, forests, and river ecosystems that naturally regulate water flow and support biodiversity. Environmental protection and agricultural development should not be treated as competing priorities because each depends upon the other. Technological advancement will also play a decisive

role in strengthening climate resilience. Satellite-based weather forecasting, drone-assisted crop monitoring, soil health mapping, precision farming, artificial intelligence for pest prediction, and mobile-based advisory services can help farmers make informed decisions while reducing unnecessary costs. Digital platforms now enable cultivators to receive weather alerts, scientific recommendations, and market information directly on their mobile phones, narrowing the gap between research institutions and the farming community. However, technology alone cannot solve structural problems unless farmers receive adequate training, extension support, and affordable access to modern equipment. Strengthening agricultural universities, research centres, Krishi Vigyan Kendras, and extension networks is therefore essential to ensure that scientific knowledge reaches even the most remote villages. Investment in knowledge is as important as investment in irrigation, roads, and machinery because informed farmers are better equipped to adapt to changing climatic and economic conditions. The agriculture of the future will reward those who combine traditional wisdom with scientific innovation rather than relying exclusively on either.

The future of agriculture in Assam will also be determined by the state's ability to move beyond the long-standing dependence on paddy cultivation and develop a diversified rural economy. While rice will continue to remain the principal food crop, excessive dependence on a single crop exposes farmers to both climatic and market-related risks. Assam possesses remarkable agro-climatic diversity that supports the cultivation of tea, horticultural crops, spices, medicinal plants, bamboo, fruits, flowers, pulses, oilseeds, and high-value vegetables. Alongside crop production, fisheries, dairy farming, piggy, poultry, sericulture, and beekeeping offer significant opportunities for supplementary income. An integrated farming system that combines multiple agricultural activities can provide year-round employment while reducing the financial risks associated with crop failure. Such diversification also contributes to nutritional security and strengthens rural economies by creating multiple income streams for farming households. At the same time, agriculture must increasingly be connected with food processing, storage, packaging, branding, and marketing. One of the greatest weaknesses of Assam's agricultural



economy is that much of its produce is sold in raw form, allowing the largest share of profits to be captured elsewhere in the supply chain. Value addition through processing industries can transform this situation by generating employment, reducing post-harvest losses, and increasing farmers' earnings. Products such as Joha rice, Boka Chaul, Assam lemon, Bhut Jolokia, orthodox tea, turmeric, ginger, and organic fruits possess considerable national and international market potential when supported by quality certification, attractive packaging, and effective branding. Cold storage facilities, modern warehouses, efficient transport networks, and digital marketplaces are equally essential if farmers are to receive fair prices throughout the year instead of being forced to sell immediately after harvest. Farmer Producer Organisations can further strengthen the bargaining power of small cultivators by enabling collective marketing, bulk purchasing of inputs, and easier access to institutional finance. Rural entrepreneurship should therefore become a central pillar of agricultural policy. Instead of viewing agriculture merely as cultivation, young people should be encouraged to establish agribusiness enterprises, food-processing units, custom hiring centres, drone service companies, seed production ventures, organic farming clusters, and digital agricultural startups. Such enterprises have the potential to create skilled employment while modernising rural economies. Financial institutions, universities, private investors, and government agencies must work together to create an ecosystem where innovation is rewarded and agricultural entrepreneurship becomes a respected career choice rather than a last resort.

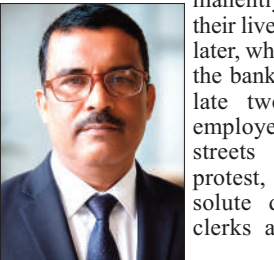
Equally important is the human dimension of agricultural transformation. Sustainable development cannot be achieved through technology and infrastructure alone unless farmers themselves become active participants in the process of change. The average landholding in Assam remains relatively small, making mechanisation and large-scale commercial farming difficult for individual households. Cooperative approaches, shared farm machinery, community irrigation systems, and stronger farmer organisations can overcome many of these structural limitations. Access to affordable institutional credit must also improve, enabling farmers to invest in quality seeds, irrigation equipment, mechanisation, and modern cultivation techniques without becoming trapped in cycles of informal debt. Crop insurance should become more effective and accessible so that farmers affected by floods, droughts, pests, or other natural

calamities can recover quickly instead of abandoning agriculture altogether. Particular attention must also be given to women farmers, whose contributions to agriculture remain substantial despite often receiving limited recognition, financial support, or ownership rights. Expanding access to training, credit, technology, and leadership opportunities for women can significantly strengthen agricultural productivity while promoting inclusive rural development. Young people likewise represent the future of Assam's agricultural sector. For many educated rural youths, farming is no longer viewed as an attractive profession because it is associated with uncertainty, low returns, and physical hardship. This perception will change only when agriculture becomes profitable, technologically advanced, and socially respected. Educational institutions should therefore integrate agricultural entrepreneurship, climate-smart farming, digital agriculture, and agribusiness management into their programmes so that future generations acquire the skills necessary for a modern rural economy. Public investment in agricultural research, rural infrastructure, renewable energy, irrigation, storage facilities, and market connectivity must continue with long-term consistency rather than short-term political considerations.

Ultimately, the future of agriculture in Assam is inseparable from the future of the state's economy, environment, and social stability. A resilient agricultural system will not merely produce food; it will generate employment, reduce rural poverty, strengthen food security, preserve biodiversity, encourage entrepreneurship, and support balanced regional development. Assam possesses fertile land, abundant water resources, rich biodiversity, favourable climatic conditions, and generations of farming knowledge that together provide a strong foundation for agricultural progress. What is now required is the vision to combine these natural advantages with scientific innovation, responsible governance, modern infrastructure, sustainable resource management, and market-oriented reforms. If this transformation is pursued with commitment and continuity, Assam can emerge not only as a leading agricultural state in India but also as a model of how economic growth, environmental conservation, and rural prosperity can advance together. The future of agriculture in Assam will therefore be shaped not simply by the crops harvested from its fields, but by the collective determination to build an agricultural system that is productive, resilient, inclusive, and prepared for the opportunities and challenges of the decades ahead.

Will AI replace human jobs?

In today's digital era, no acronym commands our collective attention quite like AI. These technologies, once confined to science fiction, are rapidly materialising before our eyes. Machines can now reason with sophisticated logic, draft complex essays, compose evocative musical scores and paint breathtaking digital art. While this technological leap has streamlined daily workflows, it has simultaneously triggered deep-seated anxieties regarding the future of human labour and the survival of the global workforce. To fully comprehend this debate, we must define what Artificial Intelligence actually entails. AI is a technology that enables machines to learn from vast pools of data, analyse intricate patterns and respond autonomously in a manner that mimics human cognitive functions. This specialised capability ensures that modern AI is no longer a passive, conventional tool. It has evolved into an active, transformative force, aggressively reshaping institutional structures, economic frameworks and our deep-rooted work culture.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Lalit Nath

The footprint of AI in our daily lives is already immense. On personal devices, predictive algorithms anticipate our thoughts, while media platforms automatically surface content based on brief viewing histories. Today, however, AI has graduated from consumer entertainment into the engine rooms of global enterprise. It can analyse dense corporate portfolios, scan thousands of pages of legal documents to produce flawless summaries in seconds and converse like a human to troubleshoot complex technical anomalies. This accelerating capacity has triggered a massive paradigm shift in the workplace.

However, the current AI revolution is fundamentally distinct from the industrial or computing revolutions of the past, it is far more competent and incredibly swift. Traditional computers required explicit human intervention, rigid coding and direct data inputs to generate results. AI, by contrast, is defined by its ability to self-improve through machine learning without human aid, making independent, data-driven decisions at an exponential scale. The direct impact of this autonomy is already visible in the job market. Roles that rely on routine, predictable rules—such as data entry, basic bookkeeping, back-office administration and frontline customer service—are genuinely facing a crisis of obsolescence. From a commercial standpoint, large corporations realise that routine tasks requiring a team of multiple salaried employees can now be exe-

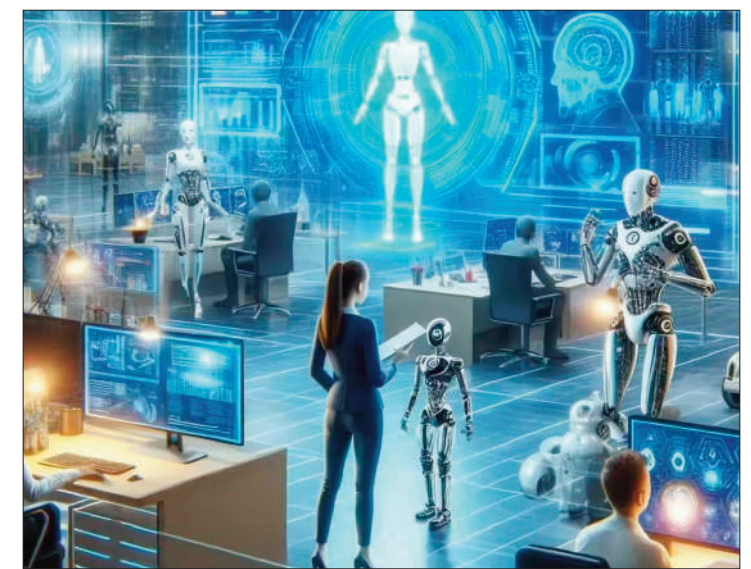
cutted by AI software flawlessly and at a fraction of the cost. Witnessing this exponential growth, many fear that artificial intelligence will eventually swallow the vast majority of jobs, leaving humanity stranded in mass unemployment. But this dystopian view is a half-truth. While AI can execute data-driven tasks with lightning speed, it remains a technological system devoid of independent consciousness, ethical judgment and empathy. Human creativity, moral values, imagination, circumstantial intuition and the emotional intelligence required to forge interpersonal connections are traits that AI can never fully replicate.

The field of medicine serves as an excellent case in point. In a hospital, an experienced physician's compassionate demeanor and reassuring words often hold as much therapeutic value as the medicine itself. Healthcare is not merely a mechanical process of diagnosis, it is a profound human interaction where a patient's emotional vulnerability must be weighed equally with their physical symptoms. AI might analyse millions of medical records to suggest a precise treatment, but it cannot hold the hand of a terrified patient. Machines can analyse data, but only humans can touch hearts.

The same principle holds true for education. An ideal educator does not merely distribute textbook facts. A teacher reads the room—perceiving through a student's body language who has understood the lesson and who is silently struggling. This human touch cannot be substituted by any digital interface. Education is an intellectual and spiritual bond where the seeds of character are sown alongside academic knowledge. Consequently, professions anchored fundamentally in human relationships—like teachers, doctors, nurses and mental health counselors—will remain perma-

nently relevant. Furthermore, human beings possess the unique gift of original creativity born out of lived experience—joy, sorrow, struggle and love. A machine can arrange words or blend colours based on existing historical patterns, but it cannot express the profound, original nuances of life. Therefore, core creative domains like literature, music and the fine arts will remain an exclusive human domain.

Similarly, high-stakes leadership and public administration require decisions that extend far beyond mathematical analytics. Leaders must weigh legal frameworks against moral values and long-term socio-economic impacts. AI can project potential scenarios, but it cannot comprehend the subtle human dynamics required to make value-based final calls. In moments of crisis, visionary leadership depends entirely on human wisdom and ethical discernment. Leading economists suggest that while AI will inevitably phase out certain mechanical jobs, it will simultaneously unlock millions of advanced employment opportunities. The future world will demand a highly skilled workforce capable of building AI software, mastering



prompt engineering and analysing machine-generated data to foster societal progress. Hence, the job market is not hurtling toward extinction, but rather undergoing a wholesale transformation. To remain relevant, we must proactively acquire contemporary technical and intellectual skills. We must clearly understand that AI itself will not steal jobs, rather, the individual who knows how to leverage AI effectively will outpace and replace those who do not.

To prepare the younger generation, our educational infrastructure must revolutionise its traditional methods. Rote learning and memorisation are utterly obsolete strategies today. Modern education must pivot immediately toward teaching students how to utilise new technology ethically, solve complex problems, and think critically. Artificial Intelligence is akin to a high-speed bullet train—stopping it is simply not an option. We cannot cower in fear, we must learn to harness this power. By keeping machines under strict human oversight while magnifying our core human virtues, the era of Artificial Intelligence will not be defined by joblessness, but as a golden age of human progress.

The rise of Eye candy and fall of female characters in Indian cinema

By: Devendra Neeraj Shekhawat

There is a saying that women should be respected and celebrated. Yet in today's cinema many actresses are increasingly being reduced to eye candy, glamour additions or item girls rather than being treated as fully developed characters.

As a movie lover I find this trend deeply disappointing.

Recently I have seen discussions surrounding the way actresses are portrayed on screen. Whether it is controversies regarding casting couch allegations, reports of harassment within the industry or filmmakers unnecessarily sexualizing characters one question continues to bother me: when did Indian cinema stop writing women?

A recent example that sparked debate was the portrayal and presentation of Janvi Kapoor in Peddi. Similarly films like Housefull 5 again raised questions about whether actresses are being given meaningful roles or simply being used as glamorous additions to attract audiences. While commercial cinema has always had elements of glamour there is a difference between presenting a character and reducing them to nothing more than a visual attraction.

The disappointing part is that this is not a talent problem. Indian cinema has some of the actresses in the world. The problem lies in the writing. Actresses are performers.

In fact female centric films have repeatedly proven how talented actresses really are when they are given strong material to work with. These roles allow them to showcase their range, screen presence and acting abilities far beyond what a typical commercial film offers. When the story is built around a character, audiences get to see actresses carry entire films on their shoulders and time and again they have succeeded. Female centric films are examples.

There was a time when female characters were not just present in a story; they were the story. Think about Vidya Balan in Kahaani. The entire film revolved around her character, her determination and her journey. Priyanka Chopra carried Mary Kom with strength and conviction. Taapsee Pannu challenged norms in Thappad. Alia Bhatt delivered performances in Raazi and Darlings. Kangana Ranaut's role in Queen became a symbol of self discovery and independence. Sonam Kapoor brought courage and resilience to Neeraj. Films like No One Killed Jessica proved that female led stories could be both powerful and commercially successful. Recently Sai Pallavis performance in Gargi reminded audiences how compelling a well written female character can be.

These performances were not remembered because of songs or dance numbers. They were remembered because of the acting. They were remembered because these actresses were given characters with depth, purpose, emotions and meaningful journeys. Actresses deserve roles.

This raises another question: if audiences appreciate written female characters and if actresses continue to prove themselves through powerful performances why are many producers and directors still falling back on outdated formulas? Perhaps some believe glamour sells faster than storytelling.

Perhaps some producers think audiences only come to watch the hero. Perhaps it is simply easier to write characters as love interests rather than giving them complete story arcs. Whatever the reason may be it feels like a missed opportunity. By reducing actresses to supporting decorations around the hero, filmmakers are wasting some of the talented performers in the industry. Indian cinema has talented actresses.

Another troubling aspect of the conversation is the reality many women continue to face behind the scenes. Over the years numerous actresses



have spoken about harassment, exploitation, unfair treatment and casting couch experiences within film industries. While not every filmmaker or producer is involved in practices the fact that these stories continue to emerge is deeply concerning.

Another issue that is becoming harder to ignore is the way many films frame actresses. Instead of focusing on their personality, emotions, or role in the story, the camera often seems more interested in their appearance. Unnecessary glamour shots, double meaning dialogues, and vulgar jokes have become so common that many viewers barely question them anymore. As a viewer, I find these moments uncomfortable because they add little to the story and often reduce women to visual attractions rather than meaningful characters. Indian cinema should be remembered for its storytelling and progress, not for how often it objectifies actresses. Great female characters stay with us because of who they are and what they bring to the

story, not because of how they are presented on screen. Women should not have to fight for respect both on screen and off screen. An actress should be valued for her talent, work and dedication to her craft not for how glamorous she looks in a song sequence. The industry must continue to create more professional environments where women can work without fear of exploitation or discrimination.

Today many mainstream films seem interested in giving the hero a backstory, motivations, emotional depth and character growth while the heroine is left with a few scenes, a romantic track and a couple of songs. In cases if the female character were removed from the film the plot would barely change. That is a sign for an industry that once produced some of the most memorable women characters in cinema.

The issue is not that every film needs to be centric. The issue is that every character deserves purpose. Female characters should have dreams,

flaws, motivations, struggles and arcs of their own. They should influence the story of simply existing within it. Actresses deserve better.

Cinema is one of the powerful storytelling mediums in the world. The way women are portrayed on screen influences how audiences perceive them off screen. When actresses are repeatedly reduced to glamour and appearance, storytelling suffers. So does representation.

Indian cinema does not lack actresses. It does not lack audiences to watch female driven stories. What it lacks, at least in mainstream films today, is the willingness to write women as complete human beings.

Because at the end of the day actresses deserve better than being remembered for a song, a dance sequence or a glamorous appearance. They deserve roles. They deserve characters. Most importantly they deserve the same respect, depth and opportunities that great storytelling promises every performer. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Teen pregnancy, contraception and the unequal responsibility placed on Rajasthan's marginalised women

By: Malvika Mudgal

About a year and a half ago, in a small village in Dholpur district, I came across a wedding celebration. Wanting to congratulate the soon-to-be bride, I stepped into the mehendi celebration. Out of curiosity, I asked the girl her age, and she promptly replied, "Eighteen years." There was an air of silence, her mother and relatives seemed nervous. I congratulated her and the family. My experience and understanding of cultural norms told me she was certainly younger than 18 years. Barely a year later, she was pregnant with her first child. When I gently asked if she had planned the pregnancy, she looked at me nervously. That awkward silence said everything.

Working with the Jagan Foundation in eastern Rajasthan, I have heard too many stories like hers. The names and faces change, but the pattern remains painfully familiar: girls from poor and marginalised families had almost no real say in when they marry, whether they use contraception or when they start planning a family.

The NFHS-6 data, released recently, only confirms what we have been seeing on the ground. Beneath all the government talk of improving maternal health and falling fertility rates, a troubling picture is emerging — especially in Rajasthan.

Rajasthan's disturbing trend

According to NFHS-6, the percentage of girls aged 15-19 in Rajasthan who were already mothers or pregnant at the time of the survey has gone up from 3.7% in NFHS-5 to 4.7%. At the same time, modern contraceptive use among married women has fallen from 62.1% to 57.1%. Interestingly, overall contraceptive use increased slightly, but that rise came largely from greater reliance on traditional methods.

This decline is particularly significant because it comes at a time when Rajasthan's fertility rate has stabilised, suggesting that many couples may be trying to avoid pregnancies without access to reliable modern methods.

Nationally too, modern contraceptive prevalence has slipped, while dependence on less reliable traditional methods has increased. These are not just dry numbers. They point to something worrying: despite years of schemes and campaigns, young girls in many parts of the country are still being pushed into early motherhood.

Why are teenage pregnancies rising?

The rise in adolescent pregnancies is particularly striking because it comes at a time when Rajasthan has reported improvements in girls' education, declining fertility rates and a gradual reduction in child marriage. The trend suggests that marriage alone does not explain early motherhood.

Public health experts increasingly point to gaps in adolescent reproductive health services and counselling. While programmes such as the Rashtriya Kishor Swasthya Karyakram (RKSK) were designed to provide adolescent-friendly health services, their reach and visibility remain uneven, particularly in rural areas. Many girls have limited access to confidential counselling on reproductive health, contraception and family planning.

In the communities where I work, marriage is often followed by immediate pressure to have a child. Newly married girls frequently describe expectations from husbands, mothers-in-law and extended families to prove their fertility soon after marriage. Even where awareness exists, the social space to delay pregnancy is often missing.

As a result, adolescent motherhood con-

tinues to persist despite improvements in other development indicators.

Sunita Devi (name changed), an ASHA worker in Dholpur district, says the challenge is rarely a lack of awareness alone. "In my village, currently there are two pregnant girls who around 16-17 years old. Most girls know that having a child immediately after marriage is difficult, but very few are in a position to say no. Often, the pressure comes from within the family. Mothers-in-law want a grandchild quickly, and many husbands are reluctant to discuss contraception," she says.

According to her, frontline health workers frequently find themselves negotiating not with young women but with entire families. "We counsel girls, but the final decision is usually taken by someone else," she says.

I have often seen newly married girls attend health camps or community meetings but remain silent when conversations turn to contraception. Later, when spoken to privately, many admit they would prefer to delay their first pregnancy but feel unable to challenge family expectations. The gap between awareness and decision-making remains one of the least discussed barriers in reproductive health.

The problem runs deeper than awareness campaigns alone.

Inequality shapes reproductive outcomes

In tribal and remote districts, weaker health infrastructure, lower female literacy levels, limited mobility and economic vulnerability often combine to restrict reproductive choices.

The overlap of poverty, low education and rigid social norms creates a perfect storm. Often for young girls, marriage and motherhood often come as a package deal, whether the girl is ready or not.

This is why teenage pregnancy cannot be viewed solely as a health issue. It is also linked to poverty, education, social exclusion and gender inequality. In many of the villages where I work, the girls most likely to become mothers during adolescence are often the same girls who leave school early, have limited mobility outside their homes and come from families struggling with poverty. The inequalities visible in reproductive health are often the same inequalities visible in education, nutrition and employment.

Public health expert Chhaya Pancholi argues that the persistence of teenage pregnancy among vulnerable groups reflects deeper structural inequalities. "When a girl becomes pregnant in adolescence, it is rarely an isolated event. It is usually the outcome of multiple disadvantages — poverty, interrupted education, early marriage, limited mobility and weak access to reproductive health services. That is why teenage pregnancy must be viewed not only as a health concern but also as a development and social justice issue," she says. Pancholi adds that while India has improved maternal health outcomes substantially over the last two decades, progress has been uneven. "The girls most likely to become adolescent mothers are often the same girls who are least likely to complete school, access quality healthcare or participate in decisions affecting their own lives," she says.

The consequences are harsh and long-lasting. Adolescent mothers face greater risks of anaemia, complications during delivery and delivering underweight babies. Many drop out of school permanently, ending whatever chance they had at a better life. This, in turn, affects their children, who often start life at a disadvantage.

For a state like Rajasthan, which is trying hard to improve its development indicators,

this rise in teenage pregnancies is a serious setback — affecting education, health, women's workforce participation and the much-talked-about demographic dividend.

Beyond service delivery: The question of agency

For years, the Rajasthan government has measured success in maternal and child health through indicators such as institutional deliveries, antenatal care coverage and overall fertility reduction. Schemes such as Mukhyamantri Rajshri Yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and the State Strategy and Action Plan for Prevention of Child Marriage have contributed to visible progress on paper.

The real challenge now is not just ensuring girls survive pregnancy, but ensuring they have the information, support and autonomy to delay it. Are adolescent girls receiving reproductive and sexual health counselling under RKSK? Are schools effectively implementing age-appropriate health education? Are frontline workers adequately trained and supported to engage with families on delaying marriage and first pregnancies?

Over the years, I have seen health centres improve, institutional deliveries increase and frontline workers become more active in villages. These are important gains. Yet many adolescent girls still have little say in when they marry or when they have their first child.

What needs to change

NFHS-6 should force us to look beyond rosy press releases. Keeping girls in school, delaying marriage, creating better livelihood opportunities and making health services truly adolescent-friendly are all important. But none of this will work unless we seriously challenge the deep-rooted social norms that continue to define a girl's worth through marriage and motherhood.

We also need to bring men into the conversation on family planning instead of placing the entire physical, emotional and social burden on women.

For a middle-class girl in a city, an early pregnancy might mean a delayed career. For the girls I meet in Dholpur and surrounding areas, it often means the end of dreams of becoming a teacher, a nurse or simply living with dignity and independence.

The challenge today is not only to ensure that women survive pregnancy and childbirth. It is to ensure that girls and women can participate in decisions about their own futures. In the communities where I work, many young women know what they want from life. What they often lack is the power to make those choices a reality.

The 16-year-old girl I met in Dholpur will probably never read NFHS-6. She may never know that policymakers are debating fertility rates, contraceptive prevalence or adolescent health indicators. What she does know is that some of the most important decisions in her life were made before she had a chance to make them herself.

Whenever I meet adolescent girls through our work, I am struck by how similar their aspirations are. They want to study, earn an income, support their families and build independent lives. Very few tell me that they dream of becoming mothers at 16.

Until girls like them can decide when to marry, when to become mothers and whether to have children at all, India's reproductive health story will remain incomplete. NFHS-6 is not merely a health survey. It is a reminder that reproductive choice, like education and economic opportunity, remains deeply unequal — and that women-led development cannot be achieved without women-led decisions. (Courtesy: The Wire)

Women empowerment in rural India: Challenges, initiatives & impact

By: Guneev Puri

In rural India, women face multifaceted challenges, including limited education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

According to recent statistics, nearly 80% of rural women are engaged in agricultural activities, yet they often lack ownership rights and face wage disparities.

Educational gaps persist, with a significant percentage of women in rural areas experiencing limited schooling. Addressing these issues is crucial for transforming the socio-economic landscape.

It is necessary to understand that women empowerment in rural India is not just a matter of gender equality, but an investment in societal progress.

When women are empowered, communities flourish. Education and skill development for rural women lead to enhanced livelihoods and improved family well-being.

Moreover, women play pivotal roles in community development, and their empowerment fosters a cycle of positive change, breaking the chains of poverty and nurturing a more equitable and prosperous society.

Empowered women become catalysts for sustainable development, creating a ripple effect that uplifts entire communities.

Women and Empowerment: Relationship

The relationship between women and empowerment is symbiotic and transformative.

Empowering women goes beyond merely addressing gender disparities; it involves fostering an environment where women can exercise control over their lives and make choices that shape their destinies.

Empowerment encompasses various facets, including education, economic independence, healthcare access, and the dismantling of societal stereotypes.

As women gain knowledge and skills, they become catalysts for change within their communities, breaking down barriers and inspiring others.

Empowerment is not a one-size-fits-all concept; it recognizes and respects diverse aspirations and potentials.

When women are empowered, they contribute significantly to societal progress, economic growth, and the overall well-being of communities.

It is a dynamic relationship where the strength and resilience of women fuel the engine of empowerment, creating a positive feedback loop that propels societies toward greater equality, justice, and prosperity.

Ultimately, the relationship between women and empowerment is a cornerstone for building a more inclusive and harmonious world.

Types of Empowerment Women Need!

While everyone discusses women's empowerment, it is crucial to understand the different facets of empowerment. Here, we discuss the various ways women need to be empowered in rural India.

1. Educational Empowerment for Women

Providing women with equal access to education is fundamental for empowerment.

This includes ensuring enrollment and addressing factors like retention and quality of education.

Education equips women with knowledge and skills, enabling them to make informed decisions and participate actively in various spheres of life.

2. Economic Empowerment for Women

Facilitating economic opportunities for women is crucial. This involves promoting entrepreneurship, ensuring fair wages, and eliminating workplace discrimination.

Access to financial resources, credit, and vocational training can empower women economically, fostering independence and contributing to overall community development.

3. Political Empowerment for Women

Encouraging women's political participation is essential for a balanced and representative society.

This includes promoting women's involvement in decision-making processes, ensuring equal representation in political bodies, and addressing barriers that hinder their political engagement.

4. Healthcare Empowerment for Women

Women's health and well-being are integral components of empowerment. Ensuring access to quality healthcare, and reproductive rights, and addressing maternal and child health issues are vital.

Comprehensive healthcare empowers women to lead healthy lives, pursue opportunities, and contribute actively to their communities.

5. Social Empowerment for Women

Tackling societal norms and stereotypes is crucial for social empowerment. This involves challenging gender-based discrimination, promoting inclusivity, and fostering a culture that respects and values the contributions of women.

Social empowerment encompasses addressing issues like violence against women and promoting a supportive environment for personal and professional growth.

Empowering women across these dimensions creates a holistic and transformative impact, fostering a society where women can thrive and contribute meaningfully to all aspects of life.

How to Empower Women in Rural India?

Empowering women in rural India requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses the various challenges they face. Here are seven steps to empower women in rural India:

Promote Education

This is the need of the hour before all else. The quality of life for women in rural areas can improve significantly with access to good education.

Focus on establishing and maintaining schools in rural areas, ensuring they are accessible and welcoming to girls.

Provide incentives such as scholarships, free textbooks, and meals to encourage enrollment and attendance.

Community awareness campaigns can target parents and local leaders to emphasize the importance of educating girls and breaking cultural barriers that may hinder their access to education.

Enhance Vocational Training

Introduce vocational training programs that align with the needs of rural women. These programs can cover a range of skills, including agricultural techniques, animal husbandry, handicrafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship.

Establish training centers within or near rural communities and collaborate with local industries to create job placement opportunities for women who complete these programs.

Access to Healthcare

Improve healthcare infrastructure in rural areas by building clinics and training local healthcare professionals. Conduct health awareness campaigns that focus on maternal and child health, family planning, and hygiene.

Mobile healthcare units can reach remote areas, ensuring women have regular access to medical services. Collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local communities to create sustainable healthcare solutions.

Facilitate Economic Opportunities

Encourage women's participation in local markets by organizing training sessions on entrepreneurship, marketing, and financial management.

Establish women's cooperatives to pool resources and share knowledge. Microfinance programs that provide small loans to women, enabling them to start or expand their businesses can be very helpful too.

Support initiatives that connect rural women to larger markets, ensuring fair pricing for their products and services. Empowering women economically benefits them individually and contributes to their communities' overall economic development.

Address Land Rights

In many rural areas, women often face challenges in asserting their land rights due to entrenched patriarchal norms.

Advocacy efforts should focus on legal reforms that ensure equal land ownership for women. This includes implementing and enforcing laws guaranteeing women the right to own and inherit land.

Simultaneously, awareness campaigns can educate women about their rights, empowering them to assert their claims.

Land ownership not only provides economic security but also enhances women's decision-making power within their families and communities.

Technology Inclusion

Introducing technology in rural areas can significantly empower women by expanding their access to information, markets, and educational resources.

Initiatives should include providing training programs on digital literacy, introducing mobile applications for agricultural information, and facilitating access to online learning platforms. Technology can also serve as a tool for financial inclusion, enabling women to access banking services and government schemes more conveniently. (Courtesy: Naukrigob)

Amit Shah launches new version of FCRA portal, e-OCI Card

NEW DELHI, June 30: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday launched a new version of the FCRA portal and e-OCI Card and said they will enhance facilities for citizens and resolve the difficulties faced by those receiving foreign donations through the portal.

The Home Minister said that in recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of applications and in the flow of donations. He asserted that "due to FCRA law, monitoring on foreign contributions coming with wrong intentions will increase".

Speaking on the occasion, the Home Minister said that before 2014, the FCRA system was entangled in files and procedures and lacked proper oversight, which is critical for both national security and development.

He said that after the government was formed under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, the system was strengthened.

The Home Minister said that after taking over, Prime Minister Modi had said that the government would work on the principle of



"Minimum Government, Maximum Governance".

"When the intention is clear, the policy is transparent, and there is a mindset to embrace technology, then all forms of governance become very easy for honest people, a strict surveillance system is put in place for wrongdoers, and the country can be made increasingly secure," the Home Minister said.

He said both the new initiatives launched today will prove to be highly beneficial in increasing the convenience of citizens.

Shah said they will enhance facilities for citizens and, in particu-

lar, will resolve the difficulties faced by those receiving donations through the FCRA portal.

"The renewal of the FCRA portal today will greatly enhance ease of operations for organisations," he said.

Keeping this in view, reducing paperwork and ensuring effective, real-time monitoring of foreign contributions are very important for the country's security, he said.

Shah said that with the launch of this new system, the need to physically submit documents will be eliminated.

"Facilities such as e-Sign-based

authentication, OCR (Optical Character Recognition), and the NGO Darpan bank account integration system will be ensured," he said.

Shah said that since all this data will be hosted on 'MeghRaj' (Government Cloud), the possibility of data theft will be greatly reduced.

Along with this, an FCRA mobile application, an AI-powered chatbot, and a dedicated online dashboard for banks will also be launched in the coming months, he said.

The Home Minister said that the initial problems faced in the OCI system have been resolved in this new system through the new e-OCI 2.0 card, and it will bring great convenience to more than 50 lakh OCI cardholders.

"After 20 years, when a new passport is issued, there will be no need to re-issue the OCI booklet, and the cardholder's registration number will also become unique."

"Moreover, with the digital OCI card, the problem of losing or damaging documents will be eliminated, and cardholders will be able to carry out real-time verification themselves," he said. (PTI)

Cong accuses PM, Adityanath of protecting those 'embezzling' Ram temple donations

Opposition demands SIT report be made public

NEW DELHI, June 30: The Congress on Tuesday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and the BJP-RSS machinery of protecting those involved in the alleged embezzlement in Ram Temple donations and demanded that the SIT report be made public.

The Congress also termed the "theft" in the donations as an attack on the faith of 100 crore Hindus and asked Modi to own responsibility the same way he grabbed credit for the temple construction.

The opposition party said Lord Ram will punish those accused of embezzlement in Ram temple funds and for their 'sins' while the people of the country will hold the BJP accountable.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh alleged that the only dream of Modi and his companions is "chanting the name of Ram, while making others' wealth their own".

"The entire country is anguished

by the loot of donations in the Shri Ram Temple. Due to pressure from the citizens, an FIR was filed after the SIT report, but even after so many days, the main accused - due to their connections with RSS-BJP - are roaming freely in the open," he said.

He termed as utterly condemnable, putting Congress leaders en route to pay obeisance at Lord Shri Ram Temple under house arrest in a dictatorial manner. Congress leader Ajay Rai has claimed he was being put under house arrest.

"The citizens demand immediate strict action against the guilty in this matter, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and the entire BJP-RSS machinery are engaged in protecting the thieves involved in this donation theft scandal and suppressing the case."

"Prime Minister ji, those who are protecting the guilty in this loot from the Shri Ram Temple are equally culpable. For this vile act,

Lord Shri Ram will surely punish you, and the people of the country will also hold you accountable," Ramesh said in a post on X.

Addressing a press conference, Congress leader Supriya Shrinete described the theft of sacred donations in the Ram Temple at Ayodhya as a 'cardinal sin' (maha paap), claiming that never before in the history had the faith of Hindus been attacked like this.

"This isn't just some donation theft or scam, this is a cardinal sin, an attack on the faith of Hindus all over the world," she said.

Questioning the silence of the prime minister, she asked him to own responsibility for the theft the same way he claimed credit for everything, right from the 'Shilanyas to Pran Patishtha'.

"If the prime minister takes credit for a task, he must also take responsibility for it. So why is Prime Minister Modi silent on the issue of donation theft? In this matter, Prime Minister Modi's silence raises several big questions," she said. (PTI)

Venugopal seeks privilege proceedings against Rajnath for 'misleading' Parliament

NEW DELHI, June 30: Congress leader K C Venugopal on Tuesday wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla demanding that privilege proceedings be initiated against Defence Minister Rajnath Singh for "misleading" Parliament by saying that no Indian soldier was martyred post the Pahalgam terror attack last year.

In his letter to the speaker, Venugopal gave a notice of privilege under Rule 223 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Lok Sabha against the defence minister for having "misled" the House.

Venugopal said that on July 28, 2025, during discussions on the terrorist attack in Pahalgam and the Operation Sindoor that followed, Rajnath Singh said that no harm was caused to the Indian soldiers. Later, Venugopal said, a statement was issued that said six armed forces personnel had died

during Operation Sindoor.

"The aforesaid position clearly indicates that the minister of defence stating on the floor of the House that there had been no casualties during Operation Sindoor was clearly misleading and incorrect."

"It is well established that misleading the House or withholding information by a minister on the floor of the House constitutes a breach of privilege and contempt of Parliament."

"In view of the foregoing, I request that privilege proceedings be initiated against the minister of defence in the matter," Venugopal, who is the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament, said.

In a post on X, Venugopal claimed that during the debate on Operation Sindoor in Lok Sabha, Singh lied to the people of India. "It was a straightforward, clear-

cut lie to mislead the House. How could he, in July 2025, say that no Indian soldier was martyred, and then a year later the forces announce that we have lost 6 jawans?" the Congress leader asked.

"It is a grave insult to the families of these six martyrs and the entire armed forces that the people of India were not told of their bravery and ultimate sacrifice."

"They died in service of our nation while defending it against our enemies, and the so-called nationalist government simply lied about their martyrdom," Venugopal said.

The names of six military personnel - five from the Indian Army and one from the Indian Air Force - who died in the line of duty during Operation Sindoor last year, were recently inscribed on a wall at the National War Memorial as a tribute to the fallen heroes. (PTI)

SC directs status quo on Karnataka HC order which directed enhancement of ethanol allocation

NEW DELHI, June 30: The Supreme Court on Tuesday directed status quo with regard to an order of the Karnataka High Court which directed enhancement of ethanol allocation for the Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2025-26.

The top court was hearing a plea filed by an oil marketing company which claimed that the high court's order would destabilise the national policy of 20 per cent ethanol blending for petrol.

A bench of Justices MM Sundresh and Sheel Nagu issued notice on the plea filed by the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd challenging the high court order.

The high court had directed the Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited, Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited and Indian Oil Corporation Limited to consider and decide a representation submitted by a dedicated ethanol manufacturer seeking enhance-



ment of ethanol allocation for the Ethanol Supply Year (ESY) 2025-26.

The high court had held that dedicated ethanol plants, which were established pursuant to government policy and are contractually bound to supply ethanol exclusively to Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs), cannot be denied the benefit of preferential allocation contemplated under the Long-Term Offtake Agreement (LTOA). Attorney General R Venkatar-

mani submitted that HC's order directing OMCs to consider enhancement of ethanol allocation to VINP Distilleries and Sugars would destabilise the national policy. The top law officer submitted that the 20 per cent ethanol blending programme in petrol is still an ongoing experiment and the impact of the policy would become clearer by next year.

Venkataramani pointed out that the ethanol supply contracts were concluded in October 2025.

He said the ethanol allocation exercise attained finality on October 17, 2025, and allocations were communicated to 378 suppliers for a total supply of 1,050 crore litres of ethanol, of which 680 crore litres had already been supplied by them by June 18.

If one supplier's quota was enhanced, other similarly placed would claim parity which would open litigation floodgates, he said. (PTI)

SIR process lacks transparency: AAP

NEW DELHI, June 30: The entire SIR process of the Election Commission is designed in a "non-transparent manner, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) alleged on Tuesday as the special review of electoral rolls began in Delhi.

AAP's Delhi unit chief Saurabh Bharadwaj cited the issues raised by the party when names were deleted from the voter list before the 2025 assembly election.

"In the past, we have asked the Election Commission to provide us a list of names deleted from the list with address, but they have refused to do so. We cannot verify whether the people whose names were deleted from the list actually live there (at the addresses mentioned in the electoral roll) or not," Bharadwaj said at a press conference at the party office.

"The entire SIR process is planned in a way that there is no transparency in it," Bharadwaj added. (PTI)

CJP PROTEST DAY 11

Dipke claims police blocking entry; Wangchuk's health deteriorates on fast



NEW DELHI, June 30: The protest by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) at Jantar Mantar entered its eleventh day on Tuesday, with CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke alleging heavy police deployment and restrictions on the entry of supporters to the protest site.

Activist Sonam Wangchuk's health condition deteriorated, with his blood sugar levels dipping on the third day of his hunger strike at the protest venue. In a post on X,

Dipke claimed that police were preventing people from entering the protest venue and that several core team members were being denied access. He alleged that transport arrangements were also being blocked to stop supporters from reaching Jantar Mantar.

"Heavy police deployment at Jantar Mantar. The police are not allowing people to enter, and many of our core team members are being denied entry. What are they

planning to do?" he said.

Dipke also questioned whether the government was obstructing transport to hinder people from joining the protest, asserting that the agitation was being restricted. Additionally, he raised concerns about the Rajasthan Paramedical Council examination paper leak, accusing the government of repeatedly failing to conduct examinations properly.

"Double engine-double leak," he said, adding that the BJP government was not capable of conducting examinations. Meanwhile, Wangchuk's health showed signs of strain, with his blood sugar level reportedly dropping to 66 on the third day of his hunger strike, which began on Sunday.

CJP spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka stated that Wangchuk's condition must be taken seriously, warning that any adverse outcome would hold Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan responsible. On Monday, Wangchuk had

said the protest was not anti-national and had urged authorities to respond with sensitivity rather than force, warning that public trust would erode otherwise.

He reiterated his demand for accountability and reforms in the education system, including the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

The protest also continued to see participation from six students associated with the All India Students' Association (AISA), who were on an indefinite hunger strike from a separate stage at the venue. They entered the second day of their fast on Monday.

The students include Neha, AISA All India President; Danish, JNUSU Joint Secretary; Manish, AISA Uttar Pradesh President; Deepak, AISA Delhi University Vice President; Hrishikesh, President of Barak Hostel, JNU; and Aameen, former CC member of AUD Students Council. (PTI)

TVK govt will be stable, says Minister Nirmal Kumar

CHENNAI, June 30: TVK leader and Electricity Minister C T R Nirmal Kumar on Tuesday asserted that his party's alliance partners have extended their complete support and the government will be stable. The TVK emerged as the single largest party by winning 108 seats, falling a simple majority of 118, in the April 23 Assembly elections. The Congress with five MLAs, VCK and IUML with two each joined the government. The CPI(M) and CPI with two MLAs each have extended unconditional support.

Speaking to reporters here, Kumar said, "This marks the first time a coalition government has been formed in Tamil Nadu, and going forward, coalition rule will undoubtedly be the norm here."

With regard to the resignation of several AIADMK MLAs, the minister alleged that AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and DMK chief M K Stalin tried to form a government in the state after the April 23 polls, which could not be accepted by the leaders of both parties. (PTI)

Gen Dhiraj Seth takes charge as new Army Chief

NEW DELHI, June 30: General Dhiraj Seth, an accomplished military officer with the rare distinction of heading two operational Army commands along the western front, took charge as the new Chief of the Army Staff on Tuesday, officials said.

Gen Seth assumed the reins of the 1.3 million-strong force at a time when it is forging a path to become a self-reliant and future-ready Army while meeting challenges on the borders.

The general officer succeeded General Upendra Dwivedi, who retired on Tuesday after an illustrious career spanning over 40 years in the armed forces.

Gen Seth is an alumnus of the National Defence Academy (NDA), Khadakwasla. He was commissioned into the Armoured Corps in December 1986.

Prior to becoming the 31st Chief of the Army Staff (COAS), he served as the Vice Chief of the Army Staff.

Gen Seth took over as the COAS at a time when the global geo-strategic environment remains dynamic, with challenges in the security domain becoming more pronounced due to technological advancements and the ever-changing character of modern warfare.

On his elevation to the rank of an Army Commander, he served as the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the South Western Command (based in Jaipur) and the Southern Command, earning the rare distinction of commanding two operational commands along the western front, the defence ministry earlier said. (PTI)



Can't accept party post when loyal leaders sidelined: AIADMK leader

CHENNAI, June 30: Former state minister S P Velumani on Tuesday expressed frustration over the AIADMK leadership sidelining "loyal leaders", saying he can't accept a position in the party when others who sacrificed were being sidelined. In a video that went viral, he contended that those who strived and worked hard for the party deserved due recognition. Velumani, amidst speculation that he would quit the party, said that he cannot accept the post of deputy general secretary in AIADMK.

Velumani, along with another former minister C Ve Shanmugam, had openly rebelled against the leadership diktat and voted in favour of the TVK government during the floor test in the Assembly on May 13. Both, who then had the backing of 23 AIADMK legislators, struck a defiant tone, saying the party should support TVK in the government formation.

Later, except Shanmugam, all other rebel MLAs got pacified, agreed to accept the leadership of General Secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami and to work together. But, later, six legislators have quit the party so far, and four of them joined the TVK, while it is speculated that Dr C Vijayabaskar and M R Vijayabaskar, both former ministers, would join the ruling dispensation soon.

On June 25, Palaniswami appointed Velumani as deputy general secretary of the party. He was earlier removed from organisational posts for rebelling against the leadership.

"How can I accept a position for my personal gain when those who have been loyal to the party and stood with me to build the party are left behind?" Velumani could be heard saying in a video that went viral.

In the clip containing his speech to his supporters in Coimbatore, Velumani said: "Those who have been loyal to me, including leaders like C Ve Shanmugam, Vijayabaskar, Veeramani, and Thangamani, are being left behind or ignored by the party leadership". (PTI)

IIT-Kharagpur develops 'CliMed' framework for dengue risk assessment

NEW DELHI, June 30: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur, have developed CliMed, a climate-informed and spatially explicit modelling framework for dengue risk assessment over India, according to officials.

The model brings together daily climate information, land-use characteristics, human population data, settlement context and mosquito-species suitability to generate interpretable risk signals for Aedes-borne dengue transmission, they added.

ANV Satyanarayana, a professor at IIT-Kharagpur's Centre for Ocean, River, Atmosphere and Land Sciences (CORAL), explained that dengue risk is shaped by several interacting conditions.

Temperature influences mosquito biting, development, survival and the time required for the virus

to become transmissible inside the mosquito, he said.

"Rainfall can create breeding opportunities, while very heavy rainfall may also disturb immature stages. Humidity affects mosquito activity and survival. Land use, settlement pattern and population distribution determine whether suitable mosquito conditions are likely to translate into meaningful human exposure."

"CliMed has been designed to read these factors together, rather than treating dengue risk as a simple statistical association between weather and reported cases," he explained.

The current implementation focuses on the two major Aedes vectors associated with dengue: Aedes aegypti, an important urban vector and Aedes albopictus, a species often relevant in peri-urban, vegetated and comparatively cooler en-



vironments.

"By representing both species in the same modelling framework, CliMed can highlight how local climate and land use conditions may favour different components of the vector system across seasons and regions. CliMed is intended to support preparedness by adding an environmental and biological layer

favourable for transmission," he said. The model produces more than one indicator because dengue risk has more than one dimension. A count-oriented output estimates where newly exposed people may be concentrated and is influenced by population, settlement exposure and susceptibility assumptions.

"Reading these indicators together helps distinguish likely burden concentration from ecological transmission pressure. This distinction is important for planning. In a densely populated area, even moderate transmission suitability may correspond to a larger population-linked burden."

"In another location, the population-linked count may remain comparatively stable while climate-vector pressure increases, indicating a need for closer surveillance, vector-control readiness and local validation," he said. (PTI)

Governor hails Mizoram peace accord as global model of reconciliation, peace building

AIZAWL, June 30: Governor Vijay Kumar Singh on Tuesday hailed the historic Mizoram peace accord as one of the finest global models of successful conflict resolution and peace-building.

He also urged people of the state to preserve and strengthen the hard-earned peace that has transformed the state over the past four decades.

Addressing the ruby jubilee celebration of 'Remna Ni', marking the 40th anniversary of the signing of the Mizoram peace accord, Singh said that the Peace Accord remains a landmark achievement and stands as a shining example of reconciliation, statesmanship and democratic commitment.

The event was jointly organised by Zoram Research Foundation and Aijal Club in Aizawl.

The governor noted that Mizoram has remained completely free from major disturbances since the signing of the accord, which was a

testament to the collective resolve of its people, making it a globally recognised model for peace-building.

"There is progress without any hesitation. This peace process involves everyone, and this achievement belongs to the people of Mizoram," Singh said.

He observed that the accord successfully ended two decades of insurgency and paved the way for lasting peace, political stability and socio-economic development in the state.

"The success of the Mizoram Peace Accord has often been cited as a model of effective conflict resolution and peace-building not only in India's Northeast but across the world," he said.

Emphasising that peace must not be taken for granted, Singh urged the citizens to continuously understand, nurture and strengthen it. Reflecting on the events that led to the insurgency, including the

devastating famine of the late 1950s, the governor emphasised the need for governments to respond promptly to public grievances.

He said that authorities must address people's hardships in time to prevent larger crises from escalating. Singh also noted that Mizoram has emerged as one of India's most peaceful states after former underground groups embraced the democratic process, allowing democratic institutions and development to flourish.

The Mizoram peace accord was signed between the Centre and the erstwhile underground Mizo National Front (MNF) led by late Laldenga on June 30, 1986, ending two decades of insurgency in the region.

The MNF was founded in 1959 to protest against the alleged inaction of the Centre towards the famine situation in the Mizo areas of the Assam state in late 1950s. (PTI)

Flash floods, landslides wreak havoc in Arunachal's Lower Siang district

ITANAGAR, June 30: Flash floods and landslides affected more than 3,100 people across 14 villages in Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Siang district, officials said on Tuesday.

District Information and Public Relations Officer (DIPRO) Augusti Jamoh said the disaster has extensively damaged wet rice cultivation fields, private properties and public infrastructure across the Nari-Koyu assembly constituency.

Road connectivity has been completely snapped in several villages, including Tabiripo Saku, Loglu, Rotte, Rame and Koyu Village, leaving nearly 500 households isolated. However, no loss of life or injuries has been reported so far, he said. The district administration, in coordination with the Army, ITBP, BRO, state police and local volunteers, has launched relief operations and is working on a

war footing to restore road connectivity, he added.

Kurung Kumei DIPRO David Koyu, a resident of the affected Rotte village, said a significant portion of the area was washed away, causing extensive damage to paddy fields, horticulture gardens and agricultural land, the primary source of livelihood for local residents.

Several vehicles were swept away in the deluge, while a large number of livestock, including pigs and poultry, were also lost, he said. The disaster forced villagers to flee their homes and take shelter in nearby paddy huts, where many remained stranded. During the chaos, two houses were destroyed in a fire that broke out while the occupants were away, Koyu said.

He said the village's hanging bridge was washed away and approach roads and culverts extensively damaged, leaving Rotte



completely cut off. The village's water supply system was destroyed, while electricity poles and power lines were swept away.

Locals and students' organisations appealed to the government for the urgent restoration of road connectivity, construction of a

temporary bridge, supply of food grains, and restoration of drinking water and electricity.

A comprehensive assessment of the damage is also being carried out to facilitate compensation and rehabilitation for the affected families, officials said. (PTI)

Manipur DGP directs officers to strengthen operational preparedness, coordination



IMPHAL, June 30: Manipur DGP Mukesh Singh directed police officers to strengthen operational preparedness and coordination to effectively tackle the state's evolving security challenges, according to an official statement.

Singh made the remarks while interacting with officers and commanders of the Special Commando Unit at the Police Headquarters in Imphal on Monday evening. During the interaction, he stressed the need for enhanced operational readiness, adherence to professional standards and coordinated efforts to deal with emerging security concerns.

Singh also visited Kakching and Chandel districts earlier in the day, and reviewed the security situation prevailing there.

He instructed police personnel to ensure effective investigation, speedy disposal of cases, sustained operations against anti-national elements and drug traffickers, and intensified efforts to recover illegal arms and ammunition.

In Kakching, the DGP assessed the district police's preparedness to prevent any untoward incidents in vulnerable areas during the ongoing farming season.

He also held discussions with officers of the district police, CAPFs and central agencies, stressing the importance of prompt investigations, expeditious disposal of cases and sustained action against anti-national elements and narcotics traffickers. He also called for intensified drives to seize illegal arms and ammunition.

Later, at the headquarters of the 8th Manipur Rifles at Leikun in Chandel district, Singh chaired a review meeting on deployments at various posts and outposts, static guard arrangements and law and order duties.

He emphasised professionalism, discipline and healthy work practices, while encouraging officers and personnel to maintain a harmonious working environment within the unit, the statement said. (PTI)

Tripura CS emphasises security mechanisms to protect digital assets

AGARTALA, June 30: Tripura Chief Secretary JK Sinha on Tuesday stressed the need for continuous vigilance, robust security mechanisms and capacity building to safeguard critical digital assets.

Addressing a workshop on 'Strengthening Cyber Security Frameworks for State Data' at Pragna Bhavan here, he said the rapid expansion of e-Governance initiatives and digital public infrastructure has led to the generation and processing of vast volumes of institutional and critical data.

"Therefore, institutional data and cyber security are key priorities. We have to ensure continuous vigilance, robust security mechanisms and capacity building to safeguard critical digital assets," he said.

Sinha said cyber security is a governance imperative, requiring coordinated action across departments, continuous risk assessments, legacy system modernisation and data protection measures.

He expressed confidence that the workshop would generate actionable recommendations

to further strengthen the state's cyber resilience and contribute meaningfully to the development of a national framework for securing state data.

On the growing instances of cybercrime, DGP Anurag Dhankar said a total of Rs 83 crore was defrauded by cybercriminals from the northeastern state in the past eight years.

"Out of which, Rs 15.43 crore has been frozen due to timely information from the affected people and Rs 1.50 crore has so far been refunded," he said, adding that data has also become a potential target for cybercriminals.

Asserting that the police are playing the role of a law enforcement agency to act against cyber fraudsters, he said the police will act accordingly based on whatever recommendations emerge from the workshop on the cyber security framework.

Presenting an overview of the state's cyber security ecosystem, IT Director Jeya Ragul Geshan outlined the ongoing efforts to strengthen cyber resilience across the government ICT infrastructure. (PTI)

Nagaland integrates UHWCs with existing health units

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 30: The Nagaland government has integrated the urban health and wellness centres (UHWCs) with existing health units such as sub-centres and primary health centres to provide healthcare and basic diagnostic services at the neighbourhood level.

Director of municipal affairs Temjenrenla Kechu said this at an orientation programme on the effective implementation of the 15th Finance Commission health grants components, organised by the directorate of municipal affairs and the National Health Mission (NHM) Nagaland, in Kohima on Tuesday.

He said six additional health centres have been planned for the purpose in the state this year.

Kechu said the UHWCs are envisioned as the first point of healthcare access at the community level, including during emergencies,



with referral linkages to designated polyclinics for specialised services.

Kechu outlined the objectives of the 15th Finance Commission health grant and the rationale behind the orientation programme.

She said the Government of India introduced the grant to strengthen basic healthcare services in urban and rural areas through local bodies, alongside the existing health infrastructure.

Kechu said the grant is implemented through the departments of rural development, municipal af-

fairs, and health & family welfare.

She added that under the municipal affairs department, funds have been provided for establishing new UHWCs through new construction, upgrading existing facilities, or renting buildings where land is unavailable.

Kechu said each centre is eligible for a one-time grant of Rs 25 lakh for infrastructure and Rs 3 lakh for computer and internet facilities.

She said recurring grants have also been provided for human resource development, medicines, quality assurance, infection control, operational expenses, wellness activities, branding, monitoring, and other essential services.

She stated that the orientation programme was organised to equip medical officers and urban local body officials with a clear understanding of the scheme's implementation.

Zoramthanga hails Mizoram peace accord as India's 'most successful'

AIZAWL, June 30: Mizo National Front (MNF) president and former chief minister Zoramthanga on Tuesday hailed the 1986 Mizoram peace accord as India's "most successful" peace agreement, saying its significance and value will become more evident in the future.

The MNF celebrated the 40th anniversary of the signing of the peace accord, locally known as "Remna Ni" in different parts of the state.

Addressing a function commemorating Remna Ni at Thingsultiah in Saitul district, Zoramthanga paid tribute to all those who contributed to the peace process, including the churches, civil society organisations, political parties and the people of Mizoram.

"The peace accord we are commemorating today between the MNF and the Government of India has proven, over time, to be one of the most successful peace agreements. As time goes on, its significance and

value will only become more evident," the former rebel leader turned politician said.

Zoramthanga claimed that the Mizoram peace accord had become a model for conflict resolution and continued to attract interest from neighbouring regions seeking lasting peace.

He urged the people of Mizoram to preserve and protect what he described as a time-tested and enduring peace agreement. Highlighting the importance of Article

371G of the Constitution of India, which was secured through the peace accord, the MNF president said the provision safeguards Mizoram's unique identity and special rights.

"Article 371G was earned through the sacrifices, bloodshed, suffering and perseverance of countless Mizo patriots and the people of Mizoram. It serves as a constitutional safeguard protecting the Mizo people," the former chief minister said. (PTI)

Man held in Sikkim for spreading IS ideology on social media; charged under UAPA

GANGTOK, June 30: A 19-year-old man has been arrested in Sikkim's capital on the charge of spreading the ideology of the Islamic State terror outfit through social media, police said on Tuesday. The accused has been charged under the stringent anti-terror law UAPA.

Upon receiving information earlier in June that extremist ideology was being propagated, police began an investigation, which revealed that an Instagram account -- Group of Islamic Members -- was being used to spread Islamic State ideology among the youths, officials said.

Subsequently, six people were detained for questioning, they said, adding that of them, Md. Arju (19) was arrested and charged under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), the Information Technology Act and BNS.

The other five were released on bail bonds, but were named in the FIR registered in the matter.

According to officials, Arju's evasive answers during interrogation raised suspicion, prompting investigators to check his belongings, which led to the seizure of a mobile phone, laptop, iPad and other electronic devices. (PTI)

Ethanol plant in Meghalaya's Byrnihat not polluting environment: PCB

SHILLONG, June 30: The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) on Tuesday said its inspection of an ethanol and distillery unit at Byrnihat found no violation of prescribed emission standards.

The probe followed public concern triggered by social media posts alleging pollution emanating from the unit in Byrnihat which had topped the list of the world's most polluted metropolitan areas in a 2024 report.

The MSPCB said it deputed its task force to inspect M/s Umiam Distillation Pvt Ltd at the Export Promotion Industrial Park (EPIP), Byrnihat, on June 29, acting suo motu without waiting for a formal complaint.

During the inspection, the task force carried out source-emission



monitoring, measuring particulate matter (PM), stack velocity, differential pressure and temperature.

Providing details, the board said the PM concentration was well below the prescribed limit under the unit's Consent to Operate (CTO).

It said that the unit's pollution-control systems, including an Electrostatic Precipitator for its captive

power plant and a Multi-Effect Evaporator coupled with a Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) system for the distillery, were found to be operational.

It also collected raw and treated effluent samples for laboratory analysis and said the liquid discharge plant was functioning, with treated water being reused in the cooling tower. (PTI)

Nurturing the roots: Lower Subansiri unites for a month-long journey into sustainable farming



HT Correspondent
ZIRO, June 30: Throughout the entire month of June 2026, a quiet but powerful transformation took root in the fields of the Lower Subansiri District. Neighbors, local leaders and agricultural experts came together for the Khet Bachao Abhiyan (Save the Fields Campaign)—a nationwide initiative brought to life locally to heal the soil, protect the environment and

secure the livelihoods of our farming families.

Agriculture is more than just an industry in Lower Subansiri; it is the heartbeat of our community. Championed under the guidance and leadership of Deputy Commissioner Oli Perme, the month-long campaign focused on a vital truth: to take care of our future, we must first take care of our earth by reducing excessive chemical reliance

and embracing sustainable, natural farming. Over the course of 30 days, dedicated teams led by District Agriculture Officer Tasso Butung walked the fields alongside local farmers. Rather than just distributing instructions, Officer Butung and his team, alongside specialists from the Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK) Yachuli, sat down with families to look at the health of their soil and offer practical, organic alternatives to harsh chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Through hands-on demonstrations, more than 600 local farmers learned the arts of vermicomposting, green manuring and water conservation. Under the guidance of the agriculture department, farmers were encouraged to transi-

tion toward "natural farming" under the Government of India's National Mission on Natural Farming—a practice that breathes life back into the earth while significantly lowering cultivation costs for everyday farmers.

The success of the Khet Bachao Abhiyan relied entirely on genuine community connection, successfully reaching 17 villages across the district. Local Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) members and Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) stood side-by-side with the visiting officers. Recognising that financial stability is deeply tied to farming, officials from NABARD, the State Bank of India, and the Lead District Manager also joined the village outreach. Together, they

worked directly with families to demystify essential financial safety nets, helping them connect with improved seeds, water-efficient farming methods, and vital government support like PM-Kisan and Kisan Credit Cards.

As the campaign concludes, the true work begins in the fields. Thanks to the vision of DC Oli Perme and the dedicated groundwork of DAO Tasso Butung, the Khet Bachao Abhiyan has sparked a vital movement in Lower Subansiri.

By blending traditional wisdom with scientific care, the district's farmers are proving that sustainable agriculture isn't just about protecting the harvest of today—it's about nurturing the earth for the generations of tomorrow.

Protest against relocation of militant group camp turns violent in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 30: Protesters clashed with security forces in Manipur's Imphal East district on Tuesday during a demonstration against the relocation of a camp of the UNLF(P), a militant outfit that signed a peace agreement with the Centre in 2023, officials said.

Residents of Uyumpok and adjoining areas in the Khundrakpam assembly constituency staged a road blockade, raising slogans against the government's decision to shift the UNLF(P) camp from Nongshum, arguing that it acted as a security buffer for the valley villages bordering the hill areas. Security forces deployed to facilitate the relocation fired several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the protesters, officials said.

The camp, established after the outbreak of the ethnic violence in Manipur in 2023, is located around 2.5 km from Uyumpok, where the demonstration was happening.

"We have been living peacefully and without fear of attacks by militants from the hills since the camp was established. If it is shifted, who will ensure our safety? Its presence has prevented armed militants from entering this side of the valley," Mangaleima Devi, a protester, said.

The UNLF (P) signed a peace agreement with the Centre in November 2023, becoming the first valley-based insurgent group to enter into a formal truce with the government.

However, despite the peace pact, several cadres of the outfit have been arrested in recent months in connection with alleged unlawful activities, including extortion, illegal possession of arms and the sale of weapons, officials said. (PTI)

1-1 TIE THROUGH EXTRA TIME

Paraguay upsets Germany on penalty kicks

FOXBOROUGH, June 30: Jose Canale scored on the first sudden death penalty kick, Orlando Gill made two key saves in the shootout, and Paraguay beat Germany 4-3 on penalties Monday to earn the biggest upset of the 2026 World Cup so far.

The round of 32 match ended 1-1 after extra time. Paraguay took the lead when Julio Enciso scored on a header late in the first half, but Kai Havertz equalized in the 52nd minute for four-time champion Germany.

"We had to analyze every player, every detail. Thanks to that I was able to only miss two penalties," Gill said afterward. "This is for all the people of Paraguay."

Paraguay, ranked 34th by FIFA, is the deepest betting long shot to win a World Cup match and did it against 12th-ranked Germany.

The Paraguayans will next face the winner of Tuesday's match between France and Sweden in the round of 16 on Saturday in Philadelphia. A win in that match would land them back in Foxborough for a quarterfinal match on July 9.

"I think we deserved one more game and to be honest considering everything that was said, everything we went through," Canale said. "What I want to highlight from our team is how united we are. ... Today was a game we really needed to show our true colors."

Germany had won six of seven penalty shootouts in major tournaments, including six straight since losing to Czechoslovakia



in the 1976 European Championship final.

In the only previous World Cup match between the teams, Germany beat Paraguay 1-0 in the round of 16 at the 2002 tournament. Nearly a quarter-century later, Paraguay has its revenge.

Paraguay had appeared in five previous knockout games but failed to score in each. It advanced only once in those previous oc-

casions, winning on penalty kicks against Japan in the round of 16 at the 2010 tournament in South Africa. It fell that year to eventual champion Spain in the quarterfinals.

Monday was Germany's first knockout game since the 2014 final in Brazil when the Germans beat Argentina 1-0 to capture their fourth World Cup title. The Germans were

eliminated from the group stage at the last two World Cup tournaments.

"We had very big plans for this World Cup. It's very difficult to disappoint again," Havertz said. "It was difficult to create chances and keep the pace."

Paraguay broke the early stalemate in the 42nd minute Monday with some perfect ball movement to setup Enciso.

Miguel Almiron split Germany's Aleksandar Pavlovic and Nathaniel Brown with a left-footed pass to Matias Galarza. Galarza sent a cross to Enciso, who was unmarked by Germany's defenders and easily headed it past goalkeeper Manuel Neuer.

In the second half, Havertz took a cross from Florian Wirtz, which he got just enough head on to redirect it past Gill.

And then in extra time, Germany appeared to take a 2-1 lead in the 102nd minute when Jonathan Tah headed in a corner kick by Nathaniel Brown that was just above the reach of Gill. But a video review ruled that Waldemar Anton has pushed Gill to the ground before the shot and the goal was disallowed.

Germany, whose 10 goals in the group stage was tied for the most of any team, struggled to find a way through Paraguay's 4-5-1 setup. The Germans had 78% of the possession in the first half.

As expected, Paraguay was without defender Omar Alderete, who left with an injury in the second half of the team's 0-0 draw against Australia. Canale started in his place. (AP)

India retain Harmanpreet as captain for Asiad despite underwhelming WC campaign



NEW DELHI, June 30: Harmanpreet Kaur was on Tuesday retained as captain of a largely predictable 15-member India squad for this year's Asian Games in Japan despite the side's earlier than expected exit from the ICC Women's T20 World Cup in England.

The Asian Games is scheduled to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan from September 19 to October 4. The Indian team's World Cup campaign ended on Sunday after a group stage loss to Australia.

The team will enter the Asian Games as defending champions, having won the gold medal at the event's previous edition in Hangzhou, China in 2023.

Both men's and women's cricket competition at the Asian Games is played in the T20 format.

Smriti Mandhana will continue to be Harmanpreet's deputy. The 37-year-old Harmanpreet, under whom India won the women's ODI World Cup last year, is facing criticism for the underwhelming show in England.

"We are advising people if they haven't already set off to travel, not to travel because the queue is effectively full," Bolton said. "By comparison to last year, it is really busy."

Williams will also play doubles with older sister Venus Williams later in the week. (AP)



Williams pondered her decision. "She is such an icon of the sport and particularly here at the championship she's one of our most special champions," Bolton added. "So it really will be the ticket to have tomorrow when she walks back on Centre Court."

Whether it was related to Williams or not, the queue (line) of would-be-spectators camping out overnight for the daily batches of Wimbledon tickets on offer had reached 10,000 people by Monday morning.

Williams will also play doubles with older sister Venus Williams later in the week. (AP)

Serena Williams' return at Wimbledon is 'the ticket to have' for the grass-court Grand Slam

LONDON, June 30: Anticipation is building at Wimbledon for Serena Williams' first singles match in nearly four years.

The 44-year-old Williams is scheduled to play an opponent less than half her age, 20-year-old Maya Joint of Australia, in the third match Tuesday on Centre Court — the patch of grass where the American stand out seven of her 23 Grand Slam singles titles.

"I think everyone's feeling the same way: Cannot wait to be watching Serena back on Centre Court again," Sally Bolton, the chief executive of the All England Club, said Monday.

Wimbledon organizers took the unusual step of holding up an eighth and final wild card spot for Williams until she accepted the invitation at almost the last possible moment the weekend before qual-

ifying began. "We were all sitting there sort of quietly keeping our fingers crossed that that's what would happen," Bolton said when asked by The Associated Press how anxious the club was while Williams pondered her

US trying to avoid another quick exit from World Cup knockout rounds

NEW YORK, June 30: Getting to the knockout rounds of the World Cup is nothing new for the United States. But that's usually where the American make a quick exit.

Wednesday's match against Bosnia-Herzegovina in Santa Clara, California, marks the eighth time the U.S. has played in an elimination round in 12 World Cups. But only once, in 2002, have the Americans won a match in the knockout rounds.

Because this year's tournament was expanded to 48 teams, the first knockout round includes 32, creating an extra round of elimination play.

Here's a look at the short and mostly unsuccessful U.S. record once the World Cup reaches the win-or-go-home stage.

Uruguay, 1930: Semifinals The first World Cup was played with 13 teams and the U.S.

advanced straight to the semifinals as winner of its group. That's where the Americans' tournament ended with a 6-1 loss to Argentina.

Italy, 1934: One and done The second edition of the World Cup was the only tournament that did not use groups for the early matches. Instead, all 16 teams played a straight knockout format. The U.S. was immediately eliminated with a 7-1 loss to host and eventual champion Italy.

US, 1994: Round of 16 The U.S. didn't qualify for the World Cup from 1954 through 1986, was eliminated in the group stage in 1990 and then got an automatic bid as the host nation in '94. A 1-1 tie with Switzerland and shocking 2-1 victory over Colombia in the Rose Bowl in the group stage earned the Americans a match against Brazil in the knockout round. (AP)

Shameena, Semwal enter quarters in Mumbai PSA Challenger

MUMBAI, June 30: India's Shameena Riaz and Om Semwal produced stunning upsets to storm into the quarterfinals of the USD 15,000 HCL-SRFI PSA Challenger squash tournament, knocking out top seed Hayley Ward of South Africa and third seed Diego Gobbi of Brazil respectively here on Tuesday.

Shameena, who grabbed the last spot on the Indian team for the Asian Games, rallied from the loss of the first game to outwit Hayley 8-11, 11-9, 11-9, 11-9. She will meet Japan's sixth seed Akari Midorikawa who scored a straight game win over Korean opponent Bo Ram Ryo.

The 22-year-old Semwal notched up a 6-11, 11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 11-9 victory over Gobbi to set up a meeting with Egypt's eighth seed Ziad Ibrahim who took out India's fifth seed Suraj Kumar Chand 11-4, 11-6, 11-5.

In other matches featuring Indians, third seed Tanvi Khanna outplayed Pooja Arthi Raghu 3-0, while fifth seed Suraj Kumar Chand lost in three games to Egypt's Ziad Ibrahim.

Results : Men's (Round-2): Salah El-torgman (Egypt) bt A Altamimi 3-0 (11-4, 11-2, 11-1); M Syafiq Kamal (Malaysia) bt Viktor Byrtus (Czech Republic) 3-0 (11-6, 11-7, 11-7); Om Semwal bt Diego Gobbi (Brazil) 3-2 (6-11, 11-6, 11-9, 9-11, 11-9); Ziad Ibrahim (Egypt) bt Suraj Kumar Chand 3-0 (11-4, 11-6, 11-5).

Women's (Round-2): Shameena Riaz (India) bt Hayley Ward (RSA) 3-1 (8-11, 11-9, 11-9, 11-9); Akari Midorikawa (Japan) bt Bo Ram Ryo (Republic of Korea) 3-0 (11-9, 11-2, 11-9); Zoe Foo (Japan) bt Rathika Suthanthira Seelan (India) 3-1 (7-11, 11-6, 11-2, 11-3); Tanvi Khanna (India) bt Pooja Arthi Raghu (India) 3-0 (11-5, 11-6, 11-6). (PTI)

Karbi Anglong marathon runner earns national recognition

Self-trained athlete from remote village secures professional contract after years of perseverance

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 30: Talent often flourishes far from urban centres, but a lack of opportunities keeps many gifted athletes from realising their full potential. For Motichand Chauhan, a long-distance runner from Longsekjan village in Belashpuri Basti of Karbi Anglong district, years of perseverance have finally earned national recognition and a professional career in athletics.

Born to Sukhraj Chauhan, Motichand discovered his passion for long-distance running during his school days.

His endurance and speed helped him win medals in school, village, district and inter-district competitions, but despite his consistent performances, he struggled to secure the recognition and support needed to pursue athletics professionally.

His breakthrough came after participating in the Tata Mumbai Marathon in 2019 and 2020, where he secured third and second positions respectively.

In one of the races, he completed the 42-km marathon in an impressive two hours and 25 minutes, drawing widespread appreciation for his performance.

Unable to find adequate opportunities in his home district, Chauhan moved to Mumbai in 2025 in search of employment.

There, he participated in another marathon organised by local organisers and emerged victorious.

His performance caught the attention of JSW Steel Limited, which recruited him as a professional athlete.

He has since signed a 15-year contract with the company and currently earns a monthly salary of ₹ 30,000.

Now 35, Chauhan continues to train with unwavering determination despite having no professional coach.

Recalling his journey, he said, "I started running during my school days. I could run long distances without stopping. I represented my school, participated in village sports organised by Bakulia Sports Association, the Langhin Marathon, district-level competitions organised by the Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA), and several inter-district and Northeast-level marathon events."

Among his notable achievements are first place in the 5,000-metre event at the Ekalavya Games and Sports Competition organised by Kalyan Ashram, Assam, at Sonapur in 2007, first place in the Karbi Anglong Rural Sports Fest in 2008, participation in the District-Level Northeast Games (2008-09), second place in the Standard Chartered Mumbai Marathon in 2013, participation in the Guwahati Half Marathon in 2018, and the Open Half Marathon Competition organised by White Doves Society in 2021, besides several other competitions.

Speaking about his training routine, Chauhan said he runs continuously for seven to eight hours, covering nearly 105 to 110 kilometres.

"I train three times a day—morning, afternoon and evening. I practise on village roads, open paddy fields and playgrounds. Sometimes I run from Longsekjan to Bakulia and even up to Silveta along NH-29, covering more than 80 kilometres to and fro," he said.

Despite his accomplishments, Chauhan said every achievement has come through self-discipline rather than professional guidance.

"I have no coach or trainer. Everything I have achieved is through self-discipline and hard work. The village roads and paddy fields have been my training ground," he said.

Chauhan is scheduled to return to Mumbai in August for intensive training with JSW Steel ahead of the Tata Mumbai Marathon 2027, where he hopes to improve his performance further.

Expressing his desire to bring laurels to his homeland, Chauhan said, "Being a son of the soil of Karbi Anglong, I want to bring glory to my district through athletics."

He has also appealed to Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang to issue a letter certifying that he belongs to Karbi Anglong, saying the recognition would strengthen his identity and credentials with his employer.