

6 WORLD

- Rahul 'undermining' achievements of India, its people: FM Sitharaman
- Four, including minor girl, held for planned Govindpuri fire that killed 3

8 NATION

- People's Party of Arunachal opposes AP Freedom of Religion Act
- Peace unlikely in Manpur unless people possessing illegal arms are disarmed: CM

Peace agreement with Islamic Republic of Iran is now complete, announces Trump • Strait of Hormuz to be opened on Friday • Stocks leap worldwide, oil prices drop

'Geart Deal' to end war to be signed on June 19

ISLAMABAD/WASHINGTON, June 15: President Donald Trump has announced that the US and Iran have finalised a deal to end their 107-day war, which triggered a global energy crisis.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said that his country would host the signing ceremony of the deal between the US and Iran in Switzerland on June 19.

However, the details of the peace deal were not immediately available. "The deal with the Islamic Republic of Iran is now complete. Congratulations to all," Trump said in a post on Truth Social on Sunday evening, easing pressure on the global energy markets. He said the deal would reopen the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway used to ferry one-fifth of the global oil supplies, and end the US naval blockade on Iranian ports.

"I hereby fully authorise the toll-free opening of the Strait of Hormuz and, simultaneously, authorise



the immediate removal of the US Naval blockade. Ships of the World, start your engines. Let the oil flow!" Trump said.

However, in a subsequent post, Trump said the Strait of Hormuz will open on Friday after the official signing of the agreement.

Meanwhile, stock markets are rallying worldwide Monday, and oil prices are easing after the United States and Iran reached a tentative deal to extend their ceasefire and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The S&P 500 rose 1.5 per cent on hopes that this time, the an-

ouncement of an Iran-US agreement will mean a long-term fix to a conflict that has sent inflation painfully upward for the entire world. The finalisation of the deal, on a day when Trump turned 80, capped a tumultuous week of war and diplomacy when the US carried out strikes on Iran and the US president, at the last minute, backed off a threat to take control of the Kharg Island, the oil export hub of the Islamic Republic.

"This Great Deal will bring peace and security to the whole region. Many presidents have tried to make peace with Iran, and all have failed before me," he said.

"The Leaders of the Region have, for the first time, found a President who can help them achieve real Peace. With the opening of the Strait upon the signing of the Deal on Friday, for purposes of mine removal, oil will flow on both ends again for the Region, and the World," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'NE transformed from frontier region to economic hub'

Sonowal: NE's decade-long turnaround under Modi one of India's biggest success stories

HT Bureau

SHILLONG, June 15: Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal has said the Northeast's shift from a "frontier region" with infrastructure gaps to an economic growth hub is one of India's most significant development stories of the last decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Speaking at the North-East India Infrastructure Summit and Exhibition 2026 here, Sonowal said the region has moved from the margins of policymaking to the centre of India's development agenda.

"From frontier region to economic growth hub, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the Northeast's transformation and it is one of India's biggest success stories," he said. The Minister said the Northeast, once seen mainly for geographical remoteness, is now



Union Minister for Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal addressing the North-East India Infrastructure Summit and Exhibition 2026 in Shillong on Monday. HT Photo

recognised as India's gateway to Southeast Asia and a key pillar of the Act East Policy.

"The Northeast is no longer a landlocked region. It is increas-

ingly becoming a logistics, trade and connectivity corridor linking South Asia with Southeast Asia," Sonowal said. Citing investment data, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam's Bamboo Craft Industry shines with GI tag recognition



By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Assam's geographical location and climatic conditions have naturally created a favorable environment for the growth of bamboo. The state's rural economy and everyday way of life have long been inseparably linked with the use of bamboo. Historically, the people of Assam have depended on bamboo for house construction, agricultural implements, fishing equipment, and various household necessities.

(Details on Page-2)

Passenger gives birth aboard train

GUWAHATI, June 15: A woman travelling on the Dibrugarh-bound Avadh Assam Express gave birth aboard the train after going into premature labour, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) said on Monday.

The delivery took place on Sunday with the assistance of a coach attendant and a nurse who was travelling on the train, an NFR release said. Both the mother and the newborn were later admitted to the Gauhati Medical College and Hospital (GMCH) here, where both were stated to be stable. The release said the passenger went into labour while travelling in train No. 15910 (Lalgarh-Dibrugarh) Avadh Assam Express as it approached Rangiya. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Infra devp will be NE's growth engine: Gadkari

Union minister announces slew of road infrastructure projects for NE

SHILLONG, June 15: Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Monday announced a slew of key road connectivity projects for the northeastern states and said infrastructure development in the region will serve as its "growth engine".

In his address at the inaugural session of the 'North East India Infrastructure Summit and Exhibition 2026', being hosted on June 15-16 at the Lariti Performing Centre in Shillong, he also said that projects should be executed in a transparent, time-bound and result-oriented manner.



"Financial audit is very important, but performance audit is more important than the financial audit. There should be transparency and swiftness in execu-

tion," the Union minister for road, transport and highways said.

He called for cultivating an administrative system that features transparency, time-bound, result-oriented work and corruption-free environment.

Gadkari emphasised that the Centre is "fully committed" to the growth and development of the northeast.

"We're committed to ensuring progress of the northeast region, equivalent to other states," he said. Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, Nagaland (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Plantation drive for 2,000 trees launched in Assam's Majuli

GUWAHATI, June 15: A drive to plant a dense forest of 2,000 native trees using the Miyawaki method was launched in Assam's Majuli district on Monday to help restore critical wildlife habitats and strengthen ecological resilience.

The plantation initiative is being undertaken by Woolah Tea, known for its patented bagless tea dips, in partnership with the Balipara Foundation, which works in the areas of ecological restoration, community-based conservation and sustainable development.

"This is Phase 1 of our 10,000 trees project as part of our stance against global hyper-

consumption and our commitment to climate action," Woolah Tea founder Upamanyu Borkakoty said. The drive is being carried out at Dhapk Gaon in Majuli and has been timed with the peak plantation season to ensure favourable soil conditions and higher survival rates of saplings, he said.

Borkakoty said Majuli, a globally recognised key biodiversity area and important bird area, has been facing severe native canopy loss due to erosion and human activities, affecting wildlife habitats. "By executing Phase 1 of the project in Majuli, Woolah is focusing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Four traditional Assam products granted GI tag

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 15: Four traditional products from Assam have been granted the Geographical Indication (GI) tag, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the GI-tagged products are Bihu Pepa, Karbi Anglong Handloom, Bah Silpa and Deori Handloom products.

"A proud moment for Assam. Our efforts to conserve and promote our rich heritage have received another boost with four items from Assam receiving the prestigious GI tag," Sarma said in a post on X. The Chief Minister also said the recognition (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Black panther seen for first time in Assam

GUWAHATI, June 15: A black panther has been sighted for the first time at Dulung Reserve Forest in Lakhimpur district of Assam, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

"A rare and remarkable sighting for Assam's wildlife. For the first time, a Black Panther has been captured on a camera trap in Lakhimpur's Dulung Reserve Forest," he said in a post on X. Sarma asserted that the presence of this elusive predator highlights the ecological (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

RNPC condemns killing of Six Nagas in Manipur

HT Correspondent

DIPHU, June 15: The Rengma Naga Peoples Council (RNPC), Karbi Anglong, Assam, has expressed deep sorrow and solidarity with the families of the six Naga people who were killed in the recent violence in Manipur.

In an official statement issued on Sunday, the council said it stands united with the bereaved families and the entire Naga community in mourning the tragic and irreparable loss of innocent lives.

The council strongly condemned the killings and described the incident as a barbaric and inhuman act of violence against innocent civilians. "Such senseless acts are an affront to human dignity and peace and at-

tacks on innocent people only deepen divisions and threaten communal harmony and coexistence in the region," the RNPC stated.

The council further urged the concerned authorities to immediately identify, apprehend and prosecute those responsible for the crime. It also stressed that justice must be delivered swiftly and impartially to ensure accountability and prevent the recurrence of such incidents. Appealing for peace and unity, the RNPC called upon all stakeholders to work collectively towards restoring peace, security and mutual respect among communities.

"At this critical juncture, unity and collective resolve are essential to safeguard the lives and rights of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

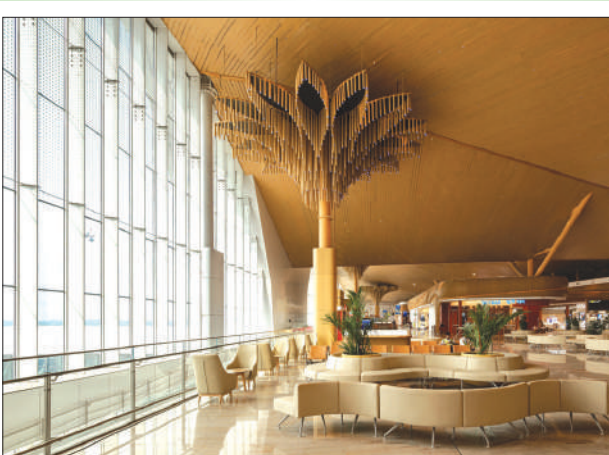
Guwahati airport's Terminal 2 among 'most beautiful' as per Prix Versailles list

LGBIA among two Indian airports in top seven list

GUWAHATI, June 15: The Terminal 2 of Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport (LGBIA), Guwahati, has been named among the world's most beautiful airports for 2026 by Prix Versailles, a leading architecture and design awards.

The Adani Group-managed LGBIA is among the two airports of India to find a place in the list of top seven, a company statement said on Monday.

The other is the Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMAI), also managed by the Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), the country's largest private airport operator.



The recognition acknowledges design, sustainability and passenger-centric planning, the statement said. The Prix Versailles is an annual global award in architec-

ture and design, presented at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris since 2015. It awards both newly launched airports and terminals for their contemporary creations that embody a rare synthesis of distinctive architecture reflecting how airports are moving beyond conventional design to offer a richer and more harmonious vision of the world.

"Guwahati's LGBIA is anchored at the vibrant intersection of South and Southeast Asia and serves as a monumental gateway to Northeast India — a region globally celebrated for its breathtaking ecological diversity and vibrant indigenous heritage. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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US Trade Representative to hold trade pact talks with Goyal next week

NEW DELHI, June 15: US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer is scheduled to visit India next week for a two-day meeting with Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on June 23-24 to discuss issues pertaining to the interim trade agreement, a top government official said on Monday.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said: "Our expectation is that discussions will be centred around giving final touches to the framework deal, which has been discussed during the visit of their (US) delegation...and also on the larger BTA (bilateral trade agreement), that has also been under discussions between the two sides." The USTR is expected to land here on June 22.

Earlier, on June 2-4, the US team, headed by its chief negotiator Brendan Lynch, held discussions with Indian officials on finalisation of the deal.

On June 5, Goyal said that India and the US are moving towards closing all the open ends of the interim trade agreement, and both sides are likely to execute the "very, very vibrant" first phase of the BTA by the middle of next month.

At the chief negotiators' level, the two sides held discussions across a wide range of issues, covering trade in goods, non-tariff measures, customs and trade facilitation, economic security alignment and other areas of mutual interest.



On February 7, India and the US issued a joint statement finalising the contours or framework of the first phase of the BTA or an interim trade deal.

According to that framework, the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent from 50 per cent. It had removed the 25 per cent tariffs on Indian goods for buying Russian oil and was to cut the remaining 25 per cent to 18 per cent under the pact.

But, on February 20, the US Supreme Court ruled against President Donald Trump's sweeping reciprocal tariffs, which were imposed under the 1977 International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

After that, the US President announced the imposition of 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days, starting February 24. It will

end on July 24. Both sides are expected to finalise the interim deal before that.

As the tariff landscape has changed in the US, both sides may wish to revisit the agreement's framework.

The February joint statement on the framework has a clause that in the event of any changes to the agreed upon tariffs of either country, the US and India agree that the other country may modify its commitments.

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

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

When the framework was agreed, India had a comparative advantage over its competitor countries, such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Now, with all US trading partners facing a uniform 10 per cent tariff, the pact requires recalibration. It is important that India gets an advantage over its competitor nations on the tariff front in the trade pact. (PTI)

Ather Energy introduces voice as a New Rider interface

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 15: Ather Energy has rolled out 'Voice on Ather' to Gen 3 and above scooters via an over-the-air (OTA) software update, introducing voice as a new way for riders to interact with their vehicles. The rollout brings voice-enabled controls to thousands of existing Ather customers and marks the company's latest step in expanding software-driven experiences on two-wheelers.

Announcing the rollout on X, Ather Co-founder and CEO Tarun Mehta said the company believes voice could become the next major interface for riders. "We believe the future could very well be one that does not need you to glance at the display at all," Mehta wrote. The launch builds on Ather's long-standing focus on connected technologies. The company was among the first manufacturers to introduce a touchscreen dashboard on a production electric scooter, helping redefine how riders interacted with their vehicles. With 'Voice on Ather', the company is now looking to make those interactions more intuitive and better suited to real-world riding conditions.

Designed to understand natural speech patterns, 'Voice on Ather' is powered by AI and allows riders to communicate with their scooter using conversational language through the Ather Halo smart helmet or any compatible Bluetooth headset. Instead of navigating menus or tapping the dashboard, riders can simply speak commands and receive responses. The feature supports a wide range of functions across navigation, vehicle settings, communication and media controls. Riders can search for destinations, start navigation, locate nearby charging stations, check travel times and access route information using voice commands. Vehicle settings such as display brightness, traction control, and MagicTwist™ can also be adjusted via voice. The interface further enables riders to place calls, manage music playback and share their live location without interacting with the screen. The significance of the rollout extends beyond convenience. Unlike cars, where occupants can interact with displays more easily, two-wheeler riders have limited opportunities to engage with screens while in motion.

Airtel secures strong shareholder backing

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 15: Bharti Airtel Limited ('Bharti Airtel' or 'the Company') today announced that nearly 100% of its shareholders have approved the ongoing transaction to consolidate its stake in key strategic subsidiary Airtel Africa plc, underscoring the highest levels of corporate governance at India's leading communications provider while reinforcing strong investor confidence. The transaction involves Bharti Airtel issuing equity shares to Indian Continent Investment Limited, a promoter group entity, on a preferential basis, in exchange for its 16.31% stake in Airtel Africa.

The proposal received resounding support from shareholders, including public and institutional investors, reflecting confidence in its strategic rationale and long-term value creation potential. The transaction, being a cashless share-swap, presents an opportunity to the Company to acquire a large block and increase its economic interest in a high-growth asset without any incremental leverage or cash outflow. It also simplifies the Group's shareholding structure, and enhances transparency, setting a benchmark in corporate governance and capital efficiency.

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'Geart Deal' to end war to

Meanwhile, Israel's Defence Minister Israel Katz said that the Israeli military will remain in southern Lebanon. He also threatened that if Iran strikes, Israel will hit Iran with "great force," local media reported.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the US was responsible for implementing the agreement, as well as a complete halt to the Israeli attacks against Lebanon, state-run IRNA news agency reported. Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi confirmed that the signing ceremony is scheduled for Friday, after which implementation mechanisms will gradually begin.

He said that Iran's commitments under the MoU are strictly conditional and reciprocal. Iran's measures will be fully aligned with the level of compliance shown by the other side, he added. Gharibabadi said that a 60-day negotiation period will follow the signing, focusing exclusively on the nuclear issue and the lifting of sanctions, including unilateral, secondary, and international restrictions.

"Following intensive talks, we are pleased to announce that the Peace Deal between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been REACHED," said the prime minister of Pakistan, which emerged as a key mediator in the US-Iran negotiations.

He added that both sides have declared the "immediate and permanent termination of military operations on all fronts, including in Lebanon."

Shehbaz thanked the US and Iran for their commitment to finding a diplomatic solution to the conflict. He also extended sincere appreciation to Qatar, Turkiye and Saudi Arabia for their support.

"With the agreement now in place, mediators will facilitate a series of meetings this week. These pre-implementation discussions will lay the foundation for the technical talks and the official signing ceremony," he said in a post on X.

Briefing the National Assembly later, Shehbaz termed the US-Iran deal as a "historic milestone" of peace.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the announcement of the deal between the US and Iran, describing it as a "critical step" towards the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

US Vice President JD Vance, American lawmakers and several Pakistani leaders hailed the announcement of the deal.

In a televised phone interview with Fox News on Sunday, Vance called the agreement with Iran "a big moment for the United States of America," but noted that more work needs to be done.

"This only happens, to be clear, if Iran delivers on their promise," Vance told Fox News. "So there's an approach here where we verify and where there are real benefits, so long as Iran meets their end of the obligation."

Indian-American Congressman Ro Khanna also welcomed the news and said it includes a provision for mutual respect of the US & Iran's sovereignty.

Welcoming the announcement, Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari called it an "important step towards strengthening multilateralism".

Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar said Pakistan looks forward to signing the peace agreement with the hope that it will bring peace to the region and beyond.

Dar, who is also the Foreign Minister, said that development sends a reassuring message to the international community and provides much-needed confidence and stability to global markets and the world economy, particularly for developing countries that are most vulnerable to regional instability.

The deal was negotiated through mediators that included Pakistan and Qatar, who initially got a two-week ceasefire agreement on April 8. The ceasefire was extended till the completion of the talks.

The US and Israel launched attacks on Iran on February 28, killing Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and several top commanders. Khamenei's son Mojtaba, who was elected as the new supreme leader, has not been seen in public since the war began. (PTI)

'NE transformed from frontier

Sonowal noted that Northeast allocation under Gross Budgetary Support rose from around ₹20,000 crore in 2014 to over ₹1.08 lakh crore in 2025-26, with cumulative expenditure crossing ₹7.3 lakh crore in the past decade.

He said nearly 10,000 km of national highways and 46,000 km of rural roads have been built since 2014, while railway investment has grown nearly fivefold. The number of operational airports in the region has gone up from nine to sixteen, with Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim getting commercial air connectivity for the first time since Independence.

On digital infrastructure, Sonowal said 96% of villages in the Northeast now have mobile connectivity and over 40,000 villages have 4G access. "Broadband has become economic infrastructure. Digital connectivity is empowering entrepreneurs, enabling digital commerce, expanding access to education and healthcare," he said.

Sonowal also flagged industrial milestones like the ₹27,000-crore Tata Semiconductor facility at Jagiroad, Assam, and the first Made-in-India chip from the state.

On waterways, he said projects worth over ₹750 crore have been completed on the Brahmaputra and Barak systems, with ₹1,170 crore more under implementation, creating multimodal links with Bangladesh, Bhutan and Southeast Asia. He added that exports of Tripura's Queen pineapple and Assam's lychee show how better connectivity is translating into farmer incomes.

"The Northeast is not India's last frontier. It is India's gateway to Southeast Asia, the Indo-Pacific and the opportunities of the twenty-first century. The Ashtalakshmi story is no longer an aspiration—it is unfolding before our eyes," Sonowal said.

Infra devp will be NE's

Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, and several other dignitaries were also present on the dais. The Union minister also announced a slew of road infrastructure projects for the northeast.

"I want to make an important announcement for you. The Silchar-Shillong (project), a greenfield alignment of 165 km, will be worth ₹23,000 crore. Then Shillong-Guwahati - this is also greenfield -- 66 km line, worth ₹8,500 crore. And Guwahati-Shillong -- this is a brownfield and greenfield project -- its DPR (is) being made, worth ₹18,500 crore. So, I am announcing projects worth about ₹50,000 crore," he said.

The Silchar-Shillong line has been approved by the Cabinet, and land acquisition is underway, Gadkari said and also announced a few projects for Meghalaya.

This includes 72 'sinking' locations (landslide-prone spots) identified in Meghalaya, which will be fixed to make stable-riding surfaces, he added.

He further said I want to assure the Nagaland chief minister and his deputy that within 15 days, "I will visit Nagaland and announce a package and resolve all issues".

In his address, Gadkari emphasised that new airports are coming up and road and rail infrastructure is being built in the northeast region. The infrastructure being developed in various fields, "will in future work as a growth engine for the northeast", he said.

Gadkari also enumerated the various ongoing national highway-related infrastructure projects underway in various northeastern states, including in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

"And I want to assure you that this is just a 'news reel', the 'real film' is yet to begin," he asserted.

This will lead to "unprecedented" development in the northeast and foster growth in the industry and business sector, while logistics cost will be reduced, according to Gadkari.

The minister also cited a recent study done by IIM Bangalore, IIT Kanpur and IIT Madras.

"Our logistics cost in India is 16 per cent; for China, it is 8 per cent, and for Europe, it is 12 per cent. The report was made four months ago, but logistics cost has come down by 6 per cent. So, it has come to 10 per cent. And, today, I can claim that our logistics cost has reached roughly the level of China," the minister said.

On the growth of the northeast, he said that in 2014, the road length in the region spanned about 10,000 km, and in 2026, it has increased to 16,290 km.

In a post on social media, Gadkari wrote that at the summit, he emphasised enhancing connectivity, promoting sustainable infrastructure, and driving investment-led growth to "unlock the northeast's economic potential", strengthen regional integration, and generate opportunities for youth and local enterprises.

"Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi Ji, we are committed to developing world-class highway infrastructure across the Northeast for faster, smoother, and safer travel," he wrote.

Later, at another event hosted at the Polo Ground, Shillong, Gadkari laid the foundation stone and dedicated to the nation six national highway projects with a total investment of ₹3,214 crore.

"Paving the path for a stronger and more connected Northeast!" he said in another post. Earlier in the day, Gadkari also attended a CEO roundtable and inaugurated an exhibition by various companies for the summit hosted at Lariti Performing Centre here. (PTI)

Plantation drive for 2,000

its resources where the climate crisis is hitting hardest. The river island is currently facing severe native canopy loss due to intense erosion and human footprint. This degradation has threatened regional wildlife, including endangered vulture species and local Hog deer populations, of vital nesting, roosting and shelter corridors," Borkakoty maintained.

The Miyawaki method is an afforestation technique developed by Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki. It involves planting native tree and shrub species densely together to create highly biodiverse, multi-layered "pocket forests." These forests grow up to 10 times faster and are 30 times denser than conventional plantations.

"By planting 20 distinct indigenous species, including local canopy and fruit-bearing trees -- at close 3ft x 3ft intervals across a 0.25-hectare plot -- the project forces rapid, multi-layered growth. This creates a self-sustaining, dense biosphere that accelerates canopy formation, maximises niche utilisation and drives rapid carbon sequestration to actively fight the climate crisis," the Woolah founder said.

Describing the initiative as the beginning of a long-term restoration effort, Borkakoty said the project would include community-led protection measures, monitoring and gap-filling over the next year to maximise survival rates and support future phases of the 10,000-tree programme. (PTI)

Four Traditional Assam

comes at a time when Assam's traditional products and cultural heritage are gaining wider appreciation and visibility across the globe.

"This comes at a time when Assam's heritage and products are making waves globally and garnering appreciation from everyone," he added.

Sarma said the GI certification would help in ensuring better returns for artisans and producers while safeguarding the authenticity of the products in the marketplace.

"This certification will ensure that the producers related to it will get the right value for the products and only the authentic products are in the markets," he avowed.

A GI tag is awarded to products that are closely linked to a specific geographical region. It helps establish the authenticity of the product and provides legal protection against imitation.

Black panther seen for

significance of Assam's reserve forests. The development also reflects the success of sustained conservation efforts in protecting Assam's wildlife habitats, he added. (PTI)

Passenger gives birth aboard

On receiving information, railway staff at Rangiya station initiated coordinated efforts to provide emergency medical support as soon as the train arrived.

With the help of the coach attendant and Krishnama Goldsmith Bezbaruah, a nurse from Jorhat Christian Mission Hospital who happened to be travelling on the train, the baby was safely delivered on board, it said.

A medical team led by the divisional medical officer of Rangiya Division attended to the mother and the newborn immediately after the train reached the station.

The duo was initially taken to the Rangiya Railway Hospital, and as the baby was born prematurely, the mother and child were subsequently referred to the GMCH through a railway ambulance. (PTI)

RNPC Condemns Killing

every Naga individual," the council added. Reaffirming its commitment to the Naga community, the council said it would continue to stand with the victims and pursue justice through democratic and lawful means.

"The blood of innocent lives must not be forgotten and stressed that justice delayed would amount to justice denied," it added.

The statement was jointly signed by RNPC president Kenilo Rengma and general secretary Chenobu Seb.

Guwahati airport's Terminal

"The architectural language of the airport's Terminal 2 is guided by the biophilic elegance of the 'Bamboo Orchid', honouring the region's rich biodiversity through a highly functional, sustainable envelope," the statement said.

The Terminal 2 of the only international airport in North East region was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December last year.

Along with LGBIA and NMIA, the five other international airports named in the list are Guangzhou, China; Frankfurt am Main, Germany; Kandal Stung, Cambodia; Pittsburgh, United States; and San Diego, United States.

"We are honoured to see our airports recognised on a global platform and remain committed to delivering world-class experiences that position India among the leading aviation markets of the world. The recognition validates our focus on developing infrastructure which is at par with the best in architectural excellence with functionality, sustainability and operational efficiency," a spokesperson of AAHL said. (PTI)

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Assam's Bamboo Craft Industry shines with GI tag recognition

Different species of bamboo such as Jati, Bhaluka, Makal, and Kak are found abundantly in the forests of Assam, and each variety is used differently according to its structure and durability. Bamboo craftsmanship is not merely a means of livelihood; it is a technical skill passed down from one generation to another without formal education. The making of everyday essentials such as kula, chalongi, kharahi, dola, japi, jakoi, and khaloi requires precise measurements and technical expertise. This skill remains an inherent characteristic of the artisans and craftsmen of rural Assam. Recently, Assam's bamboo and cane craft industry received the prestigious Geographical Indication (GI) tag. Today, on June 15, the Honorable Chief Minister of Assam officially announced this achievement. Undoubtedly, this recognition will pave the way for structural and economic transformation within the bamboo sector. A GI tag is a legal recognition granted under the framework of intellectual property rights recognized by the World Trade Organization, providing protection to products that originate from a specific geographical region and possess qualities unique to that area. The significance of Assam's bamboo craft receiving this recognition lies in the acknowledgment that these products embody a distinct standard and style of craftsmanship that cannot be replicated or compared with products from any other part of the world. From a commercial perspective, a GI tag helps producers establish a unique brand value for their products. When facing competition from cheaper, machine-made goods, GI-tagged products offer consumers assurance regarding authenticity and quality. As a result, consumers are more willing to pay a fair price, directly contributing to increased earnings for the original artisans. The transformation of bamboo craftsmanship from a traditional practice into an industrial sector has been strongly influenced by international market demand. Across the world, awareness regarding environmentally friendly and sustainable products has grown significantly. Bamboo is increasingly regarded as an excellent alternative to plastic and other synthetic materials. Since bamboo is one of the fastest-growing plants, its use does not have adverse environmental consequences. This global perspective has opened enormous export opportunities for Assam's bamboo industry. Demand for bamboo products such as home décor items, furniture, and kitchenware has risen considerably in Europe, America, and other Western countries. Artisans in Assam are no longer confined to producing only traditional items; they have begun creating modern products tailored to contemporary market preferences, including lampshades, trays, fruit bowls, modern tables and chairs, and even bamboo-based alternatives for certain hardware applications. In this international expansion, the GI tag functions as a powerful catalyst. International buyers place significant importance on the origin and authenticity of products during export transactions. GI-certified products create a sense of legal and commercial credibility among buyers. Furthermore, government and non-government organizations gain greater opportunities to showcase these products effectively at national and international trade fairs. Through initiatives such as the National Bamboo Mission and various schemes of the Government of Assam, artisans are being trained to improve product quality. These training programs provide knowledge on scientific bamboo harvesting methods, modern bamboo treatment and preservation techniques, and improved finishing processes using machinery. Bamboo treatment is particularly important because traditionally manufactured products are vulnerable to insect infestation. However, treatment with chemicals such as boric acid and borax can extend the lifespan of these products by several decades, an essential requirement for entering international markets. Despite the recognition offered by the GI tag and the opportunities presented by global markets, Assam's bamboo industry continues to face several practical challenges. The first challenge involves ensuring a continuous supply of raw materials and maintaining price stability. Although bamboo is abundant in Assam, large-scale purchases by paper mills and other industries often create shortages for small artisans. In addition, transportation systems and the taxes and duties associated with bamboo increase production costs. The second challenge concerns maintaining a balance between handcrafted and machine-produced goods. Countries such as China and Vietnam have captured significant portions of the global market by manufacturing bamboo products in large quantities at lower costs through advanced machinery. To remain competitive, artisans in Assam may need to partially mechanize their production processes. Large international orders can only be secured if product design, dimensions, and quality standards are consistently maintained. At the same time, it is equally important to educate consumers about the uniqueness of handcrafted products and the value of human labor embedded within them. The future of Assam's bamboo industry will depend upon the successful integration of tradition and technology. Transforming the legal protection offered by the GI tag into tangible economic success requires a carefully planned business model. Such a model must reduce the influence of intermediaries and connect artisans directly with markets. E-commerce platforms can bring about a revolutionary change in this regard. Today, young people in rural areas are increasingly familiar with the internet and digital marketing. They can establish systems that allow them to sell their products directly to customers across the world. Achieving this will require improved packaging and reliable courier services. Additionally, cluster development schemes can establish Common Facility Centers in designated regions, enabling artisans to access modern machinery on a rental basis. Such facilities would significantly reduce the burden of capital investment on individual craftsmen. Ultimately, bamboo craftsmanship may evolve beyond the production of simple goods and emerge as a cornerstone of a vast green economy. Bamboo-based plywood, bamboo boards, and construction materials have already gained recognition as sustainable alternatives to timber. The Government of Assam and industrial agencies need to attract private investment for the establishment of large-scale bamboo-based industries. Projects involving the production of charcoal, bio-gas, and other value-added products from bamboo waste can transform the sector into a zero-waste industry. Taken as a whole, the GI tag has provided Assam's bamboo craft industry with a global identity that extends far beyond symbolic recognition. It represents a powerful instrument for integrating the state's rural economy with a modern and competitive commercial framework. With proper planning, stronger market linkages, and sustained technological support, this traditional industry possesses every possibility of emerging as one of the principal drivers of Assam's economic advancement.

BTC distributes financial aid to families of Bodoland martyrs in Udalguri

BTC launches first phase of financial assistance programme, providing ₹ 5 lakh each to 204 families of Bodoland martyrs.

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 15: The Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) on Monday distributed financial assistance to the families of Bodoland martyrs at a programme held at Bishnu Rabha Kristi Sangha in Udalguri district.

Under the initiative, financial assistance of ₹ 5 lakh each was sanctioned to 204 beneficiaries in the first phase. During the programme, cheques were ceremonially handed over to six beneficiaries representing the families of Bodoland martyrs.

BTC Deputy Chief and MLA Rihon Daimari attended the event as the chief guest, while Speaker of the Bodoland Territorial Legislative Council (BTCLC) Tridip Daimari and BTC Executive Member Fresh Mushahary were present as guests of honour.

Udalguri District Commissioner Jay Vikash and other dignitaries also attended the programme.

In his welcome address, Mushahary reiterated the BTC government's commitment to addressing the concerns and welfare of the families of Bodoland martyrs.

He said the administration, under the leadership of BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary, remains dedicated to honouring their sacrifices and extending support to their families.

Addressing the gathering, Rihon



Daimari paid tribute to the Bodoland martyrs and said the formation of the Bodoland Autonomous Council (BAC), the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) and the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR) was made possible through their sacrifices.

He stated that the financial assistance programme was being implemented in fulfilment of a commitment made by the BTC government and assured that all genuine families of Bodoland martyrs would be covered in a phased manner.

Daimari appealed to families whose names have not yet been included in the beneficiary list to remain patient, assuring them that the government would continue the

process until all eligible beneficiaries are covered.

He also urged recipients to utilise the financial assistance judiciously for their livelihood and long-term welfare.

Speaker Tridip Daimari expressed gratitude to the martyrs and their families for their sacrifices and assured continued support from the BTC government.

The programme was also attended by BTC MCLA Ratan Rabha, Superintendent of Police Padma Nath Baruah, BTC Secretary Bhaskar Jyoti Manta, senior officials, representatives of various organisations and members of the martyrs' families. The event concluded with a vote of thanks followed by the National Anthem.

BJP to remain closely connected with people over next five years: Dilip Saikia

State BJP chief says party will intensify grassroots engagement and focus on implementing poll promises

HT Correspondent
SIVASAGAR, June 15: Assam BJP president Dilip Saikia on Monday said the party would remain closely connected with the people over the next five years and work towards strengthening its grassroots organisation while ensuring the implementation of commitments made during the elections.

As part of the party's organisational outreach programme, Saikia visited Sivasagar and Charaideo districts, where he interacted with party workers and office-bearers.

During the meetings, he discussed the BJP's resolve to further strengthen its grassroots network and urged party workers to dedicate themselves to public service.

He also emphasised the importance of holding organisational meetings on fixed dates every month to maintain regular contact with people and address local issues.

Saikia said the BJP remains committed to the development of Assam while safeguarding the state's civilisation, culture and heritage.

He asserted that the party would make every effort to fulfil the promises made to the people during the elections and ensure



that developmental initiatives reach all sections of society.

Referring to programmes undertaken to mark Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure, Saikia said large-scale tree plantation and cleanliness drives had been carried out across the country.

He claimed that around 1.15 lakh saplings had been planted as

part of the campaign.

Addressing reporters later, the BJP leader said the 21st International Yoga Day would be observed in every district of the state.

He also stated that he would raise the demand in Parliament for recognition of Piyali Phukan and Jewram Dulia Baruah as among the earliest martyrs of India's freedom struggle.

Commenting on the national economy, Saikia expressed optimism about India's growth prospects and said the country's economy was expected to register significant growth over the next five years.

The meetings were attended by district BJP president Bitupon Raidongia, Sonari MLA Dharmeswar Konwar, Nazira MLA Mayur Borgohain, Mahmorā MLA Suruj Dihingia, Rhituparna Baruah and Pulak Gohain, among others.

KA admin reviews road safety and anti-drug measures

HT Bureau
DIPHU, June 15: District Commissioner of Karbi Anglong Aranyak Saikia and Senior Superintendent of Police Pushpraj Singh on Monday chaired the monthly review meetings of the District Road Safety Committee (DRSC) and the Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) at the conference hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Diphu.

Representatives from various departments, including Public Works Department (Roads), National Highways, Transport, Health, Excise and Education, participated in the meetings.

The deliberations focused on strengthening road safety measures, improving inter-departmental coordination and intensifying efforts to create a drug-free and disciplined society.

Officials reviewed the implementation of ongoing road safety initiatives and discussed measures to promote responsible driving practices and reduce road accidents across the district.

The NCORD meeting also assessed efforts to combat substance abuse and emphasised the need for sustained coordination among departments and enforcement agencies to curb the drug menace.

National seminar on Indo-Myanmar border issues to be held in Guwahati

Two-day seminar in Guwahati to deliberate on challenges and policy approaches concerning the Indo-Myanmar border region

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 15: A two-day national seminar on "Indo-Myanmar Border Issues and the Way Forward" will be held at the North Eastern Regional Centre of the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR) at Khanapara on June 17 and 18.

The seminar is being jointly organised by Seemanta Chetana Mancha Purvottar and the Assam Rifles, in collaboration with the North Eastern Regional Centre of NIRDPR, Dibrugarh University, the University Development Council of Manipur University and Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh.

According to the organisers, the seminar will bring together academicians, researchers, policymakers and security experts to deliberate on various issues concerning the Indo-Myanmar border and explore possible policy measures for the region.

The inaugural session is expected to be attended by Pradeep Joshi, All India Co-Prachar Pramukh of the Rashtriya Swayamse-

vak Sangh; former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command of the Indian Army, Rana Pratap Kalita; and Nagaland Education and Tourism Minister Temjen Imna Along, among other dignitaries.

The valedictory session will be attended by Muralidhar Bhinda, All India Convener of Seema Jagaran Manch, and Director General of Assam Rifles, Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, along with other distinguished guests.

During the two-day programme, researchers and university faculty members will present papers in technical sessions centred on the theme of the seminar.

The event will also feature panel discussions and deliberative sessions on various aspects of border management, security, development and regional cooperation.

The organisers have appealed for public support and participation to ensure the success of the seminar and its discussions on issues affecting communities living along the Indo-Myanmar border.

Poetry must reflect people and society, says Dilip Kumar Phukan



HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 15: Noted poet and novelist Dilip Kumar Phukan said poetry and literature must remain rooted in the lives of ordinary people and reflect the realities of society while addressing a lecture programme organised by Tezpur Jana Sanskritik Parishad as part of its Silver Jubilee celebrations recently.

The programme, held at Baliram Lahkar Hall of the Asomiya Club, was organised on the theme "Subject Matter, Form and Direction of Poetry" and also featured the release of the first issue of the 23rd year of the poetry journal Prayas.

The event was presided over by noted poet and president of Tezpur Jana Sanskritik Parishad, Raju Barua.

Delivering the keynote address, Phukan spoke extensively on the subject matter, form and ideological foundations of poetry and literary creation.

Emphasising the social role of literature, he said poetry should reflect people and society and transcend the boundaries of everyday existence.

He observed that natural phenomena such as sunrise, sunset, rivers, hills and seas become art only when they are interpreted and transformed through creative expression in literature and other art forms.

Speaking on the relationship between literature, ideology and social change, Phukan referred to the transformation of Ratnakar into Valmiki and remarked that society views the transformation of a criminal into a socially conscious individual as progress, whereas the reverse signifies social decline.

He also discussed literary traditions, symbolism, socialism and neo-romanticism, stressing that literature ultimately exists for the people.

The latest issue of Prayas was formally released by distinguished poet Bhabesh Mishra, who said readers often remember poetry more than the poet and urged writers to use literature as a medium to convey meaningful messages to society.

Describing poetry as one of the most challenging forms of creative expression, Mishra concluded his address by reciting his poem Kitaap (Book), which received an enthusiastic response from the audience.

Emerging poets Enisha Upadhyay, Mampi Das, Grishma Kakati and Dhananjay Das also presented their original compositions during the programme.

In her presidential address, Raju Barua expressed gratitude to the people of Tezpur for their support throughout the Parishad's journey and appealed for their continued guidance and participation in its future activities.

The event was attended by several prominent literary, cultural and social personalities, including writer Dr Satish Chandra Bhattacharya, social worker Minakshi Bhuyan, novelist Dr Bhupen Saikia, Asam Sahitya Sabha central committee member Mahendra Kumar Nath, writer Rubul Sarma, cultural activist Anil Bhattacharya, Asomiya Club president Pankaj Bora, writers Dr Kankan Deka and Dr Dulal Chandra Das, writer Siraj Khan, poet Gayatri Devi Borthakur and Maloy Nath of Ellora Vigyan Mancha, among others.

The proceedings were conducted by Swapan Majumdar, secretary of Tezpur Jana Sanskritik Parishad.

Deepak Mittal elected Lions Club of Gauhati president

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 15: Lion Deepak Mittal has been elected unopposed as the president of the Lions Club of Gauhati for the Lionistic year 2026-27, ending what could have been the first contested presidential election in the club's 57-year history.

According to club sources, Lion Ajay Poddar withdrew his candidature a day before the scheduled election. Following the withdrawal, Election Officer Lion Bijay Harilalka informed Club President Lion Rajesh Hansaria, after which Mittal was declared elected unopposed.

A social worker based in Guwahati, Mittal was born in Shillong in

1972 and has been serving on the club's board since 2011.

Over the years, he has been associated with several service-oriented initiatives, including the establishment of a ₹ 1 crore corpus fund for the Gauhati Lions Eye Hospital along with Lions D.P. Bajaj, Manoj Bhajanka and Surendra Jain. He also played a key role in launching the "Bag of Hope" food grain distribution project, which has provided assistance to more than 1,500 underprivileged families. Apart from his involvement with the Lions Club, Mittal serves as an executive member of Shree Gauhati Gausala and Marwari Sammelan, Guwahati Sakha.

Golden Jubilee celebrations of Salakati High School conclude

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, June 15: The two-day Golden Jubilee celebrations of Salakati High School concluded recently, commemorating the institution's 50-year contribution to educational development in the greater Salakati area of Kokrajhar district.

The celebrations brought together former and current students, teachers, parents and local residents to mark the school's journey since its establishment in 1976.

The institution received provincialisation in 2013 after serving the region for 37 years.

A public meeting held on the concluding day was attended by Kokrajhar MLA Sewli Mohilary as the chief guest.

During the programme, she unveiled a commemorative souvenir titled Sonali, published to mark the Golden Jubilee celebrations.

Addressing the gathering, Mohilary congratulated the school community on completing five decades of service and lauded the institution's role in spreading education across the region.

She encouraged students to remain focused on their goals and strive for excellence while becoming responsible citizens.

The MLA also emphasised that the medium of instruction—whether English, Assamese or Bodo—should not be viewed as a barrier to quality education, adding that dedication and values are key to success.

Speaking on the occasion, BTC Executive Member and president of the Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee, Derhasat Basumatary, highlighted the school's contribution to education despite facing infrastructural challenges over the years.

He assured that the BTC government would continue to support the institution's development. Basumatary announced that Salakati High School would be upgraded to a senior secondary school within the next two years.

He further informed that a two-storey academic building is being constructed with central government funding and that a 100-seat hostel under construction on the school campus is expected to be inaugurated after the summer vacation.

Among those present were Durga Hasda, Headmistress Rashmi Rekha Narzary, CRC Sanjiv Kumar Roy, Principal Hindu Basumatary, Golden Jubilee Celebration Committee executive president Nripen Chandra Roy, representatives of social organisations, former teachers, parents and local residents.

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Puniram Saikia selected for Sainik Shilpi Bishnu Prasad Rabha Award

HT Correspondent
NAGAON, June 15: Veteran poet, writer and social activist Puniram Saikia has been selected for the prestigious Sainik Shilpi Bishnu Prasad Rabha Award for the year 2026-27.

The award will be presented during the Bishnu Prasad Rabha Divas celebrations on June 20.

The programme is being organised by Nagaon Zila Sahitya Sammilani in collaboration with Bharatiya Gana Natya Sangha, Kalangpar Branch, with support from Nagaon Nartan Kala Niketan.

The announcement was made by the organisers, including president Risheshwar Thengal Saikia and secretary Nijora Saikia.

Eighty-year-old Puniram Saikia is a well-known figure in Nagaon's literary and social circles.

He has authored several poetry collections, including Samay Pa-



pori, Sendur and Prabhati, and has remained actively engaged in literary and public life for decades.

Saikia participated in several significant socio-political movements, including the Language Movement, the Food Movement and the

campaign for establishing the state capital in central Assam.

In later years, he drew attention for leading a week-long hunger strike in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in protest against the relocation of the proposed

AIIMS for central Assam from Raha.

Since his retirement in 2002, he has continued his literary pursuits while actively raising concerns about corruption, administrative irregularities and environmental issues.

He also wrote to the Chief Minister and the Prime Minister highlighting the decline of muga silk cultivation in Nagaon district.

Known for his commitment to environmental conservation, Saikia regularly plants saplings at public functions and has pledged to donate his body for medical research.

The announcement of the award has been widely welcomed by members of Nagaon's literary and intellectual community, many of whom described it as a fitting recognition of Saikia's lifelong contribution to literature, social activism and public welfare.

OBITUARY

Jina Saikia



Jina Saikia (72), a retired employee of Assam Power Distribution Company Ltd, noted writer, and singer, passed away peacefully at her residence at Panigaon Sankar Mission Path in Nagaon town, on Sunday night. She had been suffering from a prolonged illness for several years.

A former Cultural Secretary of Nagaon Girls' College, Saikia was actively involved in the Assam Agitation. She authored two books and her essays were regularly published in leading newspapers. Known as a gifted singer, she also earned great acclaim as a recitation artist.

Saikia was the wife of Jadav Saikia, former President of Nagaon Press Club and noted sports journalist. Her demise has cast a pall of gloom over Nagaon.

Tributes poured in from across the district. MLA of Nagaon-Batadroba constituency Rupak Sarma, MP of Dhubri Rakkibul Hussain, General Secretary of Nagaon Sports Association Tapan Das, Treasurer Asim Bhowal, Nagaon Press Club, Nagaon Print Media Association, and Nagaon Lekhika Sangstha were among the many individuals and organisations that expressed deep grief at the passing of the enterprising woman.

She is survived by her husband Jadav Saikia, only daughter Nidarshana Saikia, son-in-law, grandchildren, and a host of relatives.

Class X student found dead on riverbank in Tezpur

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 15: A Class X student who had been missing since Sunday was found dead on the banks of the Dipota river in the Arimora area of Besseria on Monday morning, prompting public outrage and demands for a thorough investigation.

The deceased was identified as Jonak Jyoti Mahanta.

According to family members, the teenager had been missing since Sunday morning.

The recovery of the body, which reportedly bore visible injury marks on the face, has raised suspicions of foul play among the victim's family and local residents.

Relatives have alleged that the boy was murdered and have urged the authorities to treat the case accordingly.

Tension prevailed in the area following the discovery of the body, with residents gathering at the Bebejia Police Outpost on Monday afternoon to demand justice.

Protesters called for the case to be investigated as a murder and urged the police to arrest those responsible without delay.

Police have launched an investigation into the incident and sent the body to Kanaklata Civil Hospital, Tezpur, for post-mortem examination.

In a significant development, police have detained two students for questioning in connection with the case.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Nothing can have value without being an object of utility. - Karl Marx

Promise of 'great settlement'

President Donald Trump has announced that the US and Iran have finalised a deal to end their 107-day war, which triggered a global energy crisis. Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif on Monday said that his country would host the signing ceremony of the deal between the US and Iran in Switzerland on June 19. The promise of a 'great settlement' from Trump has been enough to pull oil prices lower, calm equity markets and revive hopes that the Strait of Hormuz may return to normal traffic. Yet it shows how fragile the relief remains. A diplomatic opening can move prices in an instant, but a durable settlement is still measured not by words, but by tanker movements, insurance rates, military restraint and the willingness of adversaries to accept terms that each can sell at home. The stakes are unusually large because Hormuz is not merely a regional waterway. It is one of the principal arteries of the world economy, carrying a share of oil and gas flows large enough to affect inflation, fiscal policy, trade balances and political stability far beyond the Gulf. That is why analysts' warning of oil reaching \$150 a barrel if the closure extends beyond 30 days cannot be treated as another speculative upper bound. Oil markets can absorb shocks for a time through inventories, rerouting, emergency releases, weaker demand and covert shipments. But the longer a chokepoint disruption continues, the more those buffers erode. The danger is not a straight-line rise in prices; it is a non-linear break in confidence once traders conclude that the shortage is no longer temporary. At that point, the market prices not only lost barrels but also fear, insurance, military risk and the cost of replacing secure supply chains with improvised ones.

A \$150 oil price would be an unmitigated setback for a global economy already conditioned by years of war, sanctions, supply-chain redesign and high borrowing costs. Energy-importing countries would face a direct deterioration in their current accounts, while governments would confront the old dilemma of either passing costs to consumers or absorbing them through subsidies. The first option raises inflation and public anger; the second worsens fiscal balances. Central banks, already wary of declaring victory over inflation too early, would find it harder to cut rates. Companies would delay investment. Households would reduce discretionary spending. For poorer countries, the shock would be sharper because fuel imports compete directly with food, debt service and structural spending.

The crisis also exposes a structural imbalance in globalisation. The world has diversified technology supply chains, financial flows and manufacturing platforms, but energy security still rests on narrow maritime corridors. Alternative routes exist for some Gulf output, yet they are not sufficient to replace Hormuz at scale, especially for liquefied natural gas. A prolonged closure would therefore hit crude, LNG, petrochemicals, fertilisers and shipping costs simultaneously.

Are your summer mangoes safe? A hidden danger you should know

The arrival of summer brings with it the vibrant, sweet, and juicy mango, often celebrated as the King of Fruits. Mangoes are not only loved for their divine taste but also admired for their impressive health benefits. Rich in essential vitamins like C and A, packed with antioxidants, and full of dietary fiber, mangoes help boost immunity, improve skin health, support eye health, and promote healthy digestion. Natural enzymes present in mangoes, such as amylase, assist in breaking down complex carbohydrates, making digestion smoother and more efficient. Furthermore, their high water content provides a refreshing boost to keep the body hydrated during the scorching summer months.

However, while mangoes are a symbol of good health, not all mangoes sold in the market are safe to consume. A dangerous practice that most consumers are unaware of is the use of calcium carbide to forcefully ripen mangoes. This chemical intervention, while making mangoes look appealing, can severely compromise health. During the mango season, from April to July, markets across India overflow with a rich variety of mangoes—Alphonso, Gulab Khaas, Banganapalli, Dasherri, Himsagar, Langra, Chaunsa, and more. Each variety has its own unique traits; for instance, Dasherri is renowned for its fibrous texture and sweet tang, while Langra is admired for its sweetness with a slightly fibrous bite. Himsagar and Chaunsa, both exceptionally sweet, are known for their relatively long shelf life. Though Alphonso primarily comes from Maharashtra, states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal (especially Malda and Murshidabad) produce many of the other celebrated varieties.

Amidst the colourful display of mangoes in markets, it becomes difficult for consumers to distinguish between naturally tree-ripened fruits and those ripened through chemical processes. Using simple observations, however, we can protect ourselves. Naturally ripened mangoes mature on trees, facing natural weather conditions, and often show slight imperfections in their appearance. They possess a characteristic aroma and rich taste. In contrast, artificially ripened mangoes tend to have a uniformly bright yellow or orange color, sometimes with an unnatural shiny appearance. They might lack the deep fruity fragrance and instead have a chemical-like smell. Their tex-



AUTHOR

By: Mowsam Hazarika

ture is often softer or mushier due to chemical-induced breakdown of the fruit's cellular structure. Sometimes, bruises or injection marks may be visible on their skin.

To help ensure that the mangoes we buy are safe, a few simple tests can be performed at home. Submerging mangoes in a bucket of water can help identify them: naturally ripened mangoes usually sink, while artificially ripened ones tend to float. Another method involves soaking mangoes in a solution of baking soda and water; if the mango's color noticeably changes afterward, it may indicate chemical treatment. Although there is also a flame test where chemically ripened mangoes can emit sparks, it is risky and not advisable to try at home without proper precautions.

Eating mangoes ripened with calcium carbide can lead to a range of health problems. The chemical releases acetylene gas, which accelerates the ripening but also exposes the fruit to arsenic and phosphorus, both toxic substances. Consumption of such mangoes can cause stomach irritation leading to pain, nausea, and digestive discomfort. Moreover, acetylene gas is harmful to the nervous system, potentially causing symptoms like tingling, numbness, and even peripheral neuropathy. Long-term effects could include hormonal imbalances, especially impacting male reproductive health. Repeated exposure to arsenic and phosphorus residues might also cause severe symptoms like vomiting, diarrhea, skin ulcers, kidney damage, and even neurological problems. Beyond these, those consuming chemically ripened mangoes often report mouth ulcers, gastric issues, burning sensations in the eyes and throat, and extreme weakness.

The science behind forceful ripening involves calcium carbide reacting with moisture to release

acetylene gas, which mimics the effect of ethylene (the natural ripening hormone). However, acetylene not only fast-tracks ripening but also alters the mango's natural properties, affecting both flavor and nutritional value. Health experts like Dr. Suparna Mukherjee from Narayana Health City, Bangalore, strongly warn against consuming mangoes ripened using calcium carbide. She recommends selecting mangoes with natural variation in colour and fragrance and soaking them in clean water for at least an hour before consumption to reduce any chemical residues.

Government authorities like the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) have repeatedly highlighted the dangers of calcium carbide, noting its carcinogenic potential and urging strict measures against its use. In a recent instance on April 17th, the Goa Food and Drug Administration conducted an inspection of wholesale mango markets and found significant evidence of calcium carbide use, leading to a seizure of hundreds of mango crates. The mango samples have been sent for further laboratory testing, and the discovery has raised serious concerns regarding food safety and consumer health.

Despite these alarming facts, mangoes themselves are not to be feared. Instead, the key is to remain cautious and informed. Mangoes are a nutritional treasure, and by purchasing from trusted sources, choosing seasonal fruits, and verifying their ripeness naturally, we can continue to enjoy the full bounty of summer without fear. After a hot day, few things are as satisfying as a chilled mango milkshake, a naturally cooling, hydrating, and energizing drink that offers a much healthier alternative to carbonated beverages.

However, for people with conditions like diabetes, caution is needed. Due to their high natural sugar content and glycemic index, mangoes can cause blood sugar spikes if consumed in large amounts. Experts advise diabetic individuals to enjoy mangoes in moderation and ideally pair them with protein or fiber-rich foods to slow down sugar absorption.

The message is simple but vital: enjoy the King of Fruits, but make informed choices. By opting for organically grown and naturally ripened mangoes, washing them thoroughly, and staying alert to signs of chemical tampering, we can savor every delicious bite without compromising our health. Let mangoes remain the symbol of a joyful, healthy summer, as they were always meant to be.

Consumerism and the Middle Class

The most sensitive and dynamic driving force of the modern economic system is the middle class of society. This class is not only large in number, but it also acts as the foundational pillar of a country's economy, culture, and social values. Since the last decade of the twentieth century, the wave of globalization and economic liberalization has dramatically transformed the socio-economic landscape across the world, and its most direct impact has been on the middle-class society. The middle class, once known for thrift, limited needs, long-term savings, and a simple way of life, has gradually been pushed by the capitalist market system toward a new culture, commonly referred to as consumerism. Consumerism is not merely the act of purchasing goods from the market; it is a deep-rooted mentality and a social disorder where a person's identity, worth, and social status are determined by the value of material possessions they consume. In this entire process, the market has been subtly controlling the psychology of the middle class. In earlier economic societies, people depended on the market only to fulfill natural and essential needs, but the modern capitalist system first creates artificial scarcity or desire in the minds of consumers and then sells products as solutions to those manufactured needs. The middle class becomes the primary victim of this cycle, because while they do not possess unlimited wealth like the upper class, they carry a strong psychological aspiration to improve their social standing and emulate the higher strata of society. In contrast, the lower class is still engaged in the struggle for basic necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, which leaves the middle class as the main carrier of both the economic burden and the consumption engine of this modern market-driven system.

Earlier, it was a norm for middle-class families to save a significant portion of their income for future security, children's education, and healthcare protection. Luxurious consumption or unnecessary expenditure was considered socially undesirable, even shameful. However, the post-liberalization era made the entire market so attractive, open, and competitive that old social values and moral boundaries began to erode. Multinational companies, in order to sustain their massive production cycles, were in constant search of

a large and stable consumer base. They strategically identified the middle class, as it was aspirational and psychologically more vulnerable to influence. Through new marketing strategies, colorful advertisements, and psychological manipulation, the idea was deeply embedded in the minds of the middle class that greater consumption is the ultimate measure of happiness, success, and prosperity. As a result, society gradually developed a self-centered mindset where individuals began prioritizing artificially created desires over real needs.

Advertising has played a crucial, powerful, and subtle role in the expansion of consumerism. Modern advertisements no longer merely highlight the functional qualities of a product; instead, they associate products with hidden emotions, social prestige, ego, and self-worth. A luxurious car, an expensive house, or a high-end mobile phone is portrayed as something without which a person has no identity or dignity in society. Such artificial insecurity has



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

been successfully implanted in the subconscious mind of consumers. Since the middle class constantly seeks upward mobility in society, they are the first and easiest targets of this market manipulation. The aspiration to imitate the lifestyle of the upper class has gradually transformed the middle class into invisible slaves of consumerism. In this process, necessity becomes secondary, while external display and appearance dominate decision-making. People often replace perfectly functional clothes, vehicles, or mobile phones simply because a new model has entered the market, without any real need. Due to this manufactured dissatisfaction, individuals are never content with what they possess and remain trapped in an endless cycle of consumption.

The rapid rise of consumerism has also been significantly fueled by credit cards, EMIs (Equated Monthly Installments), and easy loan policies offered by commercial banks. In earlier times, people would save money for years before purchasing significant goods, ensuring financial stability before spending. However, the modern financial system has reversed this process entirely, promoting the idea of "use now, pay later" as a lifestyle norm. This has significantly increased the purchasing power of the middle class in the short term, but simultaneously trapped them in long-term debt

cycles. The tendency to spend future income in the present has created a silent economic vulnerability. While outwardly their lifestyle may appear affluent and sophisticated, internally they live under constant psychological pressure of monthly EMI payments and financial obligations. This debt system creates a persistent fear of job loss or income disruption, making individuals risk-averse and financially constrained in their long-term decisions.

In the present era, digital platforms, e-commerce ecosystems, and social media have taken consumerism to an entirely new and more dangerous level. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube are no longer just means of communication or entertainment; they have evolved into global exhibition spaces. People continuously showcase their consumption patterns—expensive products, foreign travels, luxury hotel stays, and branded lifestyles. This constant display generates psychological pressure among viewers, particularly within the middle class, leading to insecurity, dissatisfaction, and a sense of inadequacy, widely recognized in modern psychology as FOMO (fear of missing out). Observing others' luxurious lifestyles repeatedly often pushes individuals to imitate them, even through borrowing or debt, leading to emotional and financial instability. Once trapped in this market cycle, individuals gradually forget that real happiness does not depend on material accumulation or display.

Consumerism has also deeply impacted the internal structure of middle-class families and their traditional social fabric. Earlier, family systems were based on cooperation, emotional bonding, and shared values. In contrast, modern materialistic society has weakened these foundations significantly. A silent competition has emerged even within families, where education costs, branded goods, modern furniture, and lifestyle products have become symbols of status. To sustain this continuous pressure, earning members of the family are forced to work excessively, often neglecting their health and emotional relationships. As a result, despite all material comforts, families are increasingly experiencing emotional distance. Human relationships are slowly being replaced by material possessions, where love and care are often expressed through expensive gifts rather than genuine emotional presence.

Consumerism has also created a severe and irreversible impact on the natural environment. The core philosophy of consumer culture is "use and throw." Instead of repairing or reusing goods, people are encouraged to dis-

card and replace them frequently. This has led to massive wastage of natural resources. From the growing mountains of electronic waste to persistent plastic pollution, much of the environmental crisis is rooted in unchecked consumption patterns. The market continuously produces newer and more attractive goods, while consumers discard functional items in pursuit of status and novelty. This cycle is fundamentally unsustainable, as the planet's resources are limited. Uncontrolled consumerism is pushing humanity toward a global environmental catastrophe, including climate change and global warming, the consequences of which will be borne by present and future generations alike.

From an economic perspective, consumerism may temporarily boost a country's GDP, as rising demand increases production and creates employment. However, when this growth is primarily driven by credit-based consumption rather than real income, it leads to a fragile and unstable economic structure. Excessive household debt makes the economy vulnerable to even minor shocks such as pandemics, wars, or global recessions. Historical evidence shows that major economic crises in countries like the United States and across Europe were significantly influenced by uncontrolled consumer debt and speculative consumption patterns. Therefore, an economy built solely on consumption without strong foundations of production, savings, and real wealth creation cannot remain stable in the long run.

In light of this complex and alarming situation, the middle class must reassess and redefine its way of life and value system. Moving away from blind imitation of consumerist culture and adopting a more rational, disciplined, and conscious lifestyle has become essential. A clear distinction must be made between real needs and artificially created desires. Instead of chasing the illusion of happiness projected by markets, attention should be directed toward genuine life standards such as health, education, mental peace, social responsibility, and financial security. The habit of living on credit for a luxurious lifestyle not only weakens individuals financially but also erodes the moral and structural strength of society. A new cultural and educational awareness is necessary, where a person's dignity is measured not by brands or possessions but by knowledge, ethical values, financial honesty, and meaningful contribution to society. Only then can the middle class free itself from the invisible chains of consumerism and re-establish itself as a truly responsible and powerful force in society.

Pioneering a New Era of holistic learning and educational revolution

By: Lalit Garg

Today, the world stands at a crucial crossroads in education. While the expansion of knowledge has reached unprecedented heights, the erosion of human values has accelerated at an equally alarming pace. Science and technology have undoubtedly made life more comfortable and convenient, yet they have also been accompanied by growing challenges such as mental stress, violence, excessive competition, ethical crises, and the gradual decline of human sensitivity and compassion. A fundamental question echoes throughout the educational landscape: Is the current education system truly shaping human beings, or is it merely producing professionals and consumers? At such a critical juncture, the initiative of establishing Acharya Mahashraman International Schools by the Jain Shwetambar Terapanthi Mahasabha emerges as a beacon of hope, a fresh vision, and a transformative educational philosophy. This is not merely a project to establish schools; it is a grand movement to reconnect education with its original purpose.

The Mahasabha has set an ambitious goal of establishing nearly one hundred schools across India. At present, construction and academic activities are progressing rapidly in schools located in Sridungargarh, Gangashahar, and Nokha in Rajasthan, as well as Bhuj in Gujarat. The objective behind these institutions is not simply to create modern educational campuses but to cultivate an educational culture that harmoniously integrates knowledge with values, science with wisdom, and success with sensitivity. The educational vision of the Terapanth order has always been broad, humane, and farsighted. Within this tradition, education has never been viewed merely as a means of employment; rather, it has been regarded as the foundation for the holistic development of an individual. The Acharyas of Terapanth consistently emphasized that the true purpose of education is to enrich the human being from within. An education that develops the intellect while neglecting the heart remains incomplete. Likewise, an education that imparts knowledge without building character can ultimately become a threat to society.

Acharya Tulsi recognized this need long before it became a global concern. Through the Anuvrat Movement, he sought to place morality at the center of social life.

He firmly believed that the genuine development of individuals, society, and the nation could only rest upon a strong ethical foundation. To integrate moral values into education, he introduced innovative initiatives such as moral education curricula and ethical education examinations. These programs were not merely academic exercises; they were social transformation movements. Through them, millions of students found inspiration to embrace values such as truth, nonviolence, discipline, self-restraint, honesty, and responsibility in their daily lives. Acharya Mahapragya further advanced this philosophy by giving it a more scientific and practical framework. Through the concept of Jeevan Vigyan (Science of Living), he presented an educational model that linked learning with the development of the body, mind, emotions, and consciousness. Jeevan Vigyan did not merely prepare students to succeed in examinations; it equipped them to lead stress-free lives, maintain emotional balance, cultivate self-discipline, and develop positive thinking. At a time when the world is increasingly focusing on mental health and emotional education, it becomes evident that the principles of Jeevan Vigyan were far ahead of their time.

Acharya Mahashraman has elevated this entire tradition to new heights. His personality embodies a remarkable synthesis of knowledge, spirituality, discipline, non-violence, and human compassion. In his vision, education cannot remain confined to intellectual development alone; it must also awaken the moral, spiritual, and human potential hidden within every individual. This is precisely why the institutions established in his name possess the potential to become not only centers of modern education but also centers that impart a meaningful philosophy of life. The guiding motto of Acharya Mahashraman International Schools—"Knowledge, Values, and Character"—perfectly reflects one of the greatest needs of our time. While most educational institutions today focus extensively on knowledge and skills, the dimensions of values and character often receive inadequate attention. As a result, intellectual advancement continues, but moral and human crises also deepen. These schools aim to address this imbalance through a meaningful and effective educational approach. Their objective is not merely to provide information but to transform knowledge into wisdom and wisdom into

character. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 similarly emphasizes the importance of holistic education. The policy places special importance on multidimensional development, life skills, Indian knowledge systems, value-based learning, and overall personality development. However, the success of any policy ultimately depends on the institutions that implement it. In this regard, Acharya Mahashraman International Schools have the potential to emerge as living and effective models of the NEP. Alongside modern curricula, scientific temper, technological competence, and preparation for global competitiveness, these schools will place equal emphasis on ethics, self-discipline, coexistence, and spiritual awareness.

According to Mahendra Nahata, President of the Jain Shwetambar Terapanthi Mahasabha and a distinguished industrialist, this project has been developed as one of the Mahasabha's flagship educational initiatives. Its objectives and long-term vision make it far more comprehensive than an ordinary school project. Nahata believes that in the future, technical knowledge alone will not be sufficient. In the age of artificial intelligence, automation, and digital technologies, machines may perform countless tasks, but qualities such as compassion, sensitivity, ethical judgment, meaningful relationships, and inner balance can only be nurtured by human beings. Therefore, education must educate not only the mind but also the heart and soul.

His belief that these schools can enrich India's National Education Policy with a spiritual dimension is particularly significant. Here, spirituality does not imply religious narrowness or sectarianism. Rather, it refers to self-awareness, ethical living, tolerance, human unity, and inner harmony. This perspective is increasingly relevant to the global community, where discussions on educational reform are increasingly centered around mental well-being, social responsibility, and value-based living. One of the greatest challenges facing modern education is that it is producing successful individuals who are often not fulfilled, intelligent minds that are not always sensitive, and capable professionals who may not necessarily possess strong character. Consequently, societies across the world are grappling with rising levels of stress, depression, violence, intolerance, and social fragmentation. What is urgently needed is an educational model that prepares students not merely for competition but for life

itself—one that helps them discover not only a career but also a purpose; one that teaches them not only how to earn a living but also how to live meaningfully.

Acharya Mahashraman International Schools represent a significant step in this direction. They aspire to create a harmonious balance between science and spirituality, modernity and culture, technology and ethics, competition and cooperation, achievement and compassion. Such a vision may well become the foundation of future education. Across the world, there is a growing search for educational systems that can nurture not only knowledgeable individuals but also wise and responsible citizens. Indian educational philosophy has championed this ideal for centuries. From the ancient Gurukul tradition to contemporary spiritual thought, India has consistently viewed education as a means of holistic human development.

If the Acharya Mahashraman International Schools ever accorded to their envisioned framework, they could emerge as an inspiring model not only for India but for the entire global educational community. Just as certain nations have become renowned for their distinctive educational systems, India too can present to the world a unique model of value-based holistic education. Such a model would demonstrate that education is not merely the accumulation of knowledge but the formation of life; not merely the expansion of information but the development of consciousness; not merely preparation for a career but cultivation of character. In essence, the establishment of Acharya Mahashraman International Schools should not be viewed merely as an educational project. It is a creative extension of Acharya Tulsi's Anuvrat Movement, Acharya Mahapragya's Science of Living, and Acharya Mahashraman's vision of nonviolence and human welfare. It is an effort to reconnect education with its true purpose. It is a vision of a future in which schools are not merely institutions that confer degrees, but centers that shape the finest possibilities of humanity.

If this vision becomes a reality, it will not only provide a new direction to India's educational system but also offer the world a humane, ethical, and spiritual model of education—one capable of nurturing generations that are more intelligent, more compassionate, and more deeply human. That, ultimately, is the true significance, purpose, and promise of this remarkable initiative.

Resilience Begins Upstream: Nature-Based solutions and the Siang catchment

Whatever is finally decided about the dam, the catchment above it needs attention now

By: Ananva Bhatia

Much of the public conversation around the Siang has narrowed to a single structure, the proposed Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP), and to how best to take it forward. But it has tended to crowd out a quieter question, one that does not depend on its outcome: what is the condition of the catchment above the river, and what would it take to strengthen the basin's resilience to flood, landslide and sediment risks in a changing climate, so that any investment in the region rests on stable ground? In a young and fragile Himalayan system, resilience is shaped as much by the slopes, forests and springs of the upper catchment as by any engineering at the valley floor. This is where nature-based solutions belong in the discussion, not as a slogan, and not as a rival to build infrastructure, but as a part of the resilience portfolio we can begin on now, at lower cost and with far less regret.

The physical setting leaves little margin for error. The Siang (known as the Yarlung Tsangpo before it crosses into India) and the Brahmaputra are some of the youngest, most tectonically active, and most erosion-prone terrain on Earth. Several parts of the northeast receive between roughly 2,000 and 4,000 millimetres of rain in a year, and when that

volume falls on steep, seismically stressed slopes, the river carries an extraordinary load of sediment. Although precise calculation methods differ, the Brahmaputra consistently ranks among the world's most significant sediment-transporting river systems, carrying an estimated 402 to 710 million tons of suspended load annually (Goswami, 1985; Subramanian & Ramanathan, 1996). Climate change is accelerating these hydrological dynamics simultaneously. According to the most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) assessment, the region faces heavier and more erratic monsoon rains, accelerating glacial retreat, and an increased risk of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOFs) across the Hindu Kush Himalayas, representing the exact combination of environmental pressures that a degraded catchment is least equipped to absorb.

Catchment studies offer an old and well-tested response to exactly this situation: treatment should begin upstream and move downstream, because that is the direction in which damage travels. The upper areas control infiltration, the generation of sediment, and the timing of flow. When forest cover is lost on the slopes, flood peaks become larger downstream. Accelerated erosion in the headwaters leads to increased sedimentation

and instability in the river channels on the plains. The most lasting results come from treating the catchment as a whole, from the upper slopes down to the valley floor, rather than from work in the lower reaches alone. A more sustainable approach moves from the ridge down toward the river.

In practice, this requires a series of interventions that are neither new nor complex. These include afforestation and assisted natural regeneration on degraded upper slopes; management of spring sheds to recharge the small mountain aquifers that supply villages and sustain rivers during dry months, an approach detailed by ICIMOD and India's initiatives to revive Himalayan springs; bio-engineering techniques for stabilising unstable slopes and gullies, including bamboo-based methods promoted under the National Bamboo Mission; and the protection and restoration of wetlands and floodplains, which help store floodwater and trap sediments before it enters the river channel. Additionally, establishing riparian buffers along riverbanks is essential. Each of these actions can be measured, implemented gradually, and importantly, each delivers benefits in its own right while helping to safeguard the larger infrastructure planned for the region.

None of these counters the importance of storage infrastructure. In many ways,



it is essential for the proper functioning of such systems. The primary threat to the effective operation and lifespan of any large reservoir on a Himalayan River is sediment, the very sediment that well-maintained upper catchments help to stabilise. A reservoir in a catchment that is rapidly shedding soil will fill with sediment more quickly, lose capacity sooner, and provide less flood moderation and dry-season regulation than it was designed to offer. Therefore, catchment treatment is not in competition with a project like SUMP; rather, it is nearly a prerequisite for achieving the expected lifespan outlined in the engineering studies. Additionally, if the project does not move forward or faces significant delays, as has been the case, the investment in catchment treatment will still yield benefits, including reduced flood damage, improved groundwater recharge, more consistent lean-season flow, and enhanced livelihoods from restored forests and springs.

Nature-based solutions work best alongside large-scale storage, not in place of it. A project on the scale of SUMP

brings what catchment measures alone cannot: firm power of around eleven thousand megawatts and large-scale flood-moderation capacity for the basin. These are essential functions. However, the figures involved - the modelled reductions in lean-season flow, and the projected flood benefits will be firm up as the project's detailed technical studies are completed, which is the normal course at this stage and the step that gives the basin's communities well-grounded numbers to rely on.

The honest perspective is that flood control and water security in this basin will be achieved through a combination of approaches: catchment restoration, wetlands and floodplain management, early-warning systems for glacial and flash floods, demand-side water management, and, where evidence truly supports it, engineered storage solutions. Each of these strategies should be evaluated on its own merits, and the entire process should involve transparent studies on environmental, social, sedimentation, and GLOF impacts, with the findings made publicly available.

There is one more important reason to prioritise the catchment area, and it relates to both people and hydrology. Nature-based projects are inherently local and participatory. These initiatives are built around local participation, giving communities a direct stake in the basin's future. They provide visible benefits such as improved water in springs, greater slope stability, and income generated from the work itself, directly benefiting the villages that would otherwise bear the risks of any large-scale development. In a region, where earning and keeping local confidence is central to getting any large project right, this consideration is significant.

While we should continue to debate the dam, it's essential to recognise that the river won't wait for that discussion to conclude. The work of strengthening the landscape through which the river flows must begin without delay. In a delicate, transboundary Himalayan catchment area, the most sustainable resilience is developed from the ridgeline downward, not only at the dam site but throughout the entire living environment that nourishes the Siang River.

The intelligent Himalayan shield: A data-driven architecture for the Siang Upper Multipurpose Project

By: AN Mohammed

The Siang Upper Multipurpose Project (SUMP) in Arunachal Pradesh stands among the largest under planning hydropower and water management infrastructures in the Himalayan region. Envisioned as a strategic multipurpose reservoir for flood control, hydropower generation, and climate resilience, the project's installed capacity at roughly 11,000-11,200 MW, supported by a reservoir with storage in the range of about 9.0-9.2 billion cubic metres (BCM). At this scale, SUMP is not merely an infrastructure project—it is a potential cornerstone of a new approach to managing Himalayan river systems under growing climatic uncertainty.

Yet the very context that necessitates such large-scale infrastructure—the increasing non-stationarity of Himalayan hydrology—also challenges traditional engineering paradigms. Climate change is reshaping precipitation patterns, accelerating glacier retreat, and amplifying extreme hydrological events. In such a setting, approaches based solely on historical river behaviour are becoming progressively insufficient. The question, then, is not only how large infrastructure can be built, but how intelligently it can be operated. To meet this challenge, projects like SUMP would benefit from embedding digital technologies—Artificial Intelligence (AI), Earth Observation (EO) and Big Data analytics—to transition from a static concrete structure into a highly adaptive, climate-informed entity. These tools can help transform a static reservoir system into an adaptive, climate-informed infrastructure platform capable of responding to rapidly changing upstream and downstream conditions.

At the core of this technological transition, one promising direction is the development of a "Digital Twin" of the river basin—a continuously updated virtual representation combining hydrology, climate, infrastructure, ecology and flood dynamics. The Siang River contributes about 25 to 33 percent to 615 billion cubic metres (BCM) of average annual flow of the Brahmaputra system. By fusing Global Climate Models (GCM) and hydrodynamic simulations with AI and Big Data, this digital architecture allows operators to run complex, real-time simulations to predict reservoir operation strategies and ecological responses. For example, modern global AI platforms synchronize real-time data across extensive watersheds to predict river levels and automatically suggest optimal dam discharge scenarios. This ensures that flood absorption capabilities are maximized precisely when needed, without compromising downstream groundwater dynamics, floodplain fertility, or river morphology.

The value of such intelligence extends beyond operational efficiency. In complex river basins like the Siang, upstream-downstream linkages are critical. Beyond hydrological management, AI provides critical, pre-emptive advancements in structural safety. Large dams require continuous, rigorous monitoring, especially in regions where climate-driven landslides and erosion may increase

sediment inflow into reservoirs. Through AI-powered Structural Health Monitoring (SHM), continuous, high-frequency data streams from embedded wireless IoT sensors—such as piezometers measuring pore water pressure and inclinometers measuring lateral movement—are analysed by machine learning algorithms. Instead of relying on reactive, scheduled human inspections, this AI-driven approach detects microscopic anomalies in vibration, stress and temperature. This predictive intelligence identifies multi-sensor correlations, allowing for the detection of structural fatigue or external environmental loading at the sub-millimetre level, effectively neutralizing physical threats long before they can materialize. Such systems do not replace engineering judgment, but they strengthen it by enabling earlier detection of potential risks and facilitating preventive maintenance.

Simultaneously, AI and Earth Observation technologies are actively mitigating the risk of sudden natural disasters. The Eastern Himalaya is already experiencing increased risks of Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) and frequent flash floods. To protect both the infrastructure and downstream communities, automated early warning systems with sufficient lead time are critical. AI models ingest real-time upstream meteorological data, river gauge measurements, and satellite imagery, enabling the long-term monitoring of glacier retreat and glacial lake evolution. By integrating continuous Earth Observation data—including microwave, optical sensors and altimetry—AI can detect flood inundation and calculate exact volumes of impact even under cloudy monsoon conditions. This pre-emptive intelligence, combined with in-situ hydrological measurements and weather data feed into early warning and decision-support systems allows operators to proactively lower reservoir levels, utilizing the massive 9.2 BCM flood buffer to safely absorb sudden waves and protect the socio-economy of communities and the sustenance of local biota.

Finally, the integration of intelligent algorithms ensures that massive clean energy generation actively coexists with ecological conservation. The Siang basin lies within the Eastern Himalayan biodiversity hotspot, supporting endemic species, migratory fish habitats, and indigenous ecological landscapes. While large dams inherently alter ecological flow regimes, AI forecasting algorithms can optimize the hydropower generation schedule across the project's multi-gigawatt turbines. By predicting natural inflow variations alongside regional energy demand peaks, the AI calculates the exact, micro-managed release schedules required to generate maximum electricity. Simultaneously, it maintains the critical ecological flow regimes needed for nutrient transport processes and biodiversity sustenance. Ultimately, for complex mountain river systems like the Siang, these technologies are essential for balancing development, ecological conservation, and long-term climate resilience.

(The author is a former Vice President, Reliance Power Ltd. & Consultant, SLHEP-NHPC)

Energy insecurity to resilience: Bangladesh's renewable transition imperative

By: Anasua Basu Rav Chaudhury, Shreva Das

The disruption of the global gas supply chain through the Strait of Hormuz has emerged as a major threat to Bangladesh, an import-dependent country. Most of South Asia's developing economies rely heavily on imported fossil fuels for power generation, transport, industry, and household consumption, with Bangladesh importing one-third of its total gas supply from Qatar and Oman as liquefied natural gas (LNG). It is anticipated that the Middle East crisis will drive up Bangladesh's fossil fuel import bill by USD 4.8 billion — a 40 percent increase from 2025 — as the country depends on fossil fuels for nearly 98 percent of its electricity generation. While the government has reduced gas supply by 150-200 mcmcf compared to the previous month as a precautionary measure — against a daily demand of 4,000 mcmcf (Million Cubic Feet), with current supply already below 2,700 mcmcf — this has significantly hurt the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector, which accounts for 80 percent of Bangladesh's export earnings.

Bangladesh's inability to adequately cope with external shocks to global energy markets reflects structural vulnerabilities: a heavy dependence on fossil fuels, insufficient energy diversification, and an underdeveloped renewable energy infrastructure.

Bangladesh's energy insecurity has persisted since COVID-19, when the country saw a nearly 50 percent drop in electricity consumption during the first wave, and had to grapple with a dollar crisis that forced it to stop importing LNG from the spot market during the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022. Bangladesh's inability to adequately cope with external shocks to global energy markets reflects structural vulnerabilities: a heavy dependence on fossil fuels, insufficient energy diversification, and an underdeveloped renewable energy infrastructure. The central challenge, therefore, is not only to navigate the energy crisis stemming from the Middle East conflict, but to develop a resilient energy architecture capable of withstanding an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment. Against this backdrop, this essay analyses the structural vulnerabilities of Bangladesh's energy system revealed by recent external shocks, and argues for renewable energy expansion and regional energy cooperation as key pillars of long-term energy security.

Bangladesh's Fossil Fuel Dependence

Bangladesh regularly imports fossil fuels to meet base-load electricity demand, with natural gas, oil, and coal accounting for approximately 57.37 percent, 32.39 percent, and 2.76 percent, respectively, of total electricity generation. While indigenous natural gas is a principal source of energy supply — supporting industry, domestic use, and fertiliser production — it is at risk of exhaustion within the next decade if new reserves are not discovered. Average electricity demand in Bangladesh is growing at 10 percent annually, with the industrial sector accounting for the greatest share. However, nearly 50 percent of its enterprises cannot access consistent energy, resulting in low levels of production. Consequently, Bangladesh imports approximately 20.69 lakh tonnes of crude oil to meet its electricity requirements, of which nearly 63 percent comes from the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, Bangladesh's renewable energy infrastructure — primarily solar, hydro, wind, and biomass — remains underdeveloped. It is estimated that Bangladesh will require 57,000 MW of electricity generation to meet demand by 2040. Currently, however, renewable energy accounts for just 4.56 percent of total electricity generation, and the overall contribution of renewables to total electricity demand by 2040 is projected to reach only 10 percent — well short of the 40 percent target.

China in Bangladesh's Renewable Transition

Dhaka, however, remains steadfast in positioning itself as a regional hub for renewable energy. The former Minister of Power, Energy, and Mineral Resources, Nasrul Hamid, stated that Bangladesh needed international investment of US\$80-100 mil-



lion to drive its transition towards renewable energy. China, through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investments, has emerged as the biggest player in Bangladesh's clean energy projects. In 2020, Bangladesh's North-West Power Generation Company Limited and Chinese engineering contractor National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) formed a joint venture for renewable energy, with plans to build 450 MW of new solar capacity and a 50 MW wind farm. Following a public-private partnership model, the MoU stipulated that Bangladesh would provide land while the Chinese government would invest around US\$500 million in the projects.

The newly elected BNP government has announced its aim to generate 10,000 MW of renewable energy-based power by 2030, as part of its 3F-3R (Fallen Fossil Fuel - Rising Resilient Renewables) framework — signalling a structural shift in Bangladesh's energy policy. It is estimated that meeting this target would require an investment of USD 9.36 billion across solar, wind, biomass, and biogas projects. Currently, Chinese investment accounts for 50 percent of total FDI in Bangladesh's renewable energy sector, underscoring Beijing's dominant role in Dhaka's clean energy transformation.

Despite its potential, renewable energy investment remains constrained by land acquisition challenges, inadequate technology and knowledge-sharing frameworks, currency depreciation, and complex financing and due diligence processes. Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) have previously served as a key determinant of investment flows through sovereign guarantees, well-structured arbitration, and balanced risk coverage. However, the interim government's decision to discontinue the Implementation Agreement — which offered sovereign backing for investor commitments — removed a critical layer of payment security precisely when renewable investment was beginning to scale.

Despite its potential, renewable energy investment remains constrained by land acquisition challenges, inadequate technology and knowledge-sharing frameworks, currency depreciation, and complex financing and due diligence processes.

Furthermore, sole dependency on China for renewable investment risks creating a monopolising effect on Bangladesh's power and energy sector. Chinese investments in Latin America's energy transition have been linked to the extraction of strategic resources such as lithium, and Beijing's push to dominate the clean energy technology supply chain economically insulates its energy pricing from global fluctuations — enabling a persistent tool of diplomatic, political, and economic leverage over purchasing states like Bangladesh. The clean energy transition must therefore also be guided by diversification strategies to avoid over-dependency on a single partner, particularly by harnessing neighbourhood ties.

India and BBIN in Bangladesh's Renewable Future India and Bangladesh have steadily expanded energy cooperation since establishing their first cross-border electricity grid in 2013 — 500 MW through the Bheramara-Bahrampur interconnection, and another 160 MW through the Tripura-Comilla interconnection. Bangladesh currently imports nearly 15 percent of its electricity from India through multiple interconnections. In 2022-23, Bangladesh signed three deals to purchase 2,656 MW of electricity from Indian power plants in Jharkhand, West Bengal, and

Tripura. The two countries have also collaborated on shared generation projects, including the 1,320 MW Rampal power plant. Despite political uncertainties following the 2024 change of government in Bangladesh, energy cooperation has largely remained resilient, with continued imports of electricity and petroleum products from India.

Drawing on India's successful power trade arrangements with Nepal and Bhutan, Bangladesh can leverage India's cross-border electricity trade framework to develop trilateral renewable energy-sharing agreements and new transmission interconnections.

The growing commitment to low-carbon development presents a new opportunity to deepen bilateral energy ties. High costs associated with imported coal-based power have encouraged Bangladesh to explore renewable energy imports, including hydropower from Nepal and Bhutan transited through Indian territory. The BBIN (Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal) subregion possesses immense renewable energy potential, particularly in hydropower, solar, and wind. However, electricity trade remains largely bilateral. Drawing on India's successful power trade arrangements with Nepal and Bhutan, Bangladesh can leverage India's cross-border electricity trade framework to develop trilateral renewable energy-sharing agreements and new transmission interconnections. Bangladesh has, notably, already signed an agreement to import 1,000 MW of renewable energy from India.

Solar energy cooperation offers another promising avenue. While India has emerged as a global leader in solar deployment, Bangladesh has pioneered one of the world's largest off-grid solar programmes. India surpassed 100 GW of installed solar capacity in 2025, a 3,450 percent increase over the past decade from 2.82 GW in 2014. Bangladesh, meanwhile, operates the largest off-grid solar programme in the world; its Solar Home Systems initiative has provided electricity to over four million rural households and enabled small rural businesses to operate more efficiently. Joint initiatives in solar manufacturing, technology standardisation, procurement, capacity building, and knowledge sharing could therefore strengthen renewable energy development in both countries. Such cooperation would also advance the objectives of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), including solar applications in agriculture, mini-grids, rooftop systems, energy storage, and green hydrogen. In the long run, enhanced India-Bangladesh renewable energy cooperation could serve as a foundation for broader regional energy connectivity within the BBIN subregion, improving energy security, grid resilience, and sustainable economic development.

In the long run, enhanced India-Bangladesh renewable energy cooperation could serve as a foundation for broader regional energy connectivity within the BBIN subregion, improving energy security, grid resilience, and sustainable economic development.

Toward a Resilient Future

As Bangladesh grapples with import dependency and repeated price and supply shocks, short-term crisis management is no longer sufficient. A more resilient future can only be shaped by its ability to diversify its energy basket — particularly by expanding renewable energy capacity through neighbourhood engagement. India, as well as the broader BBIN subregion, are practical partners for developing cross-border solar grid connectivity, joint renewable infrastructure financing, and regional power transmission networks linking Nepal and Bhutan's hydropower to Bangladesh through Indian territory.

Diversified sourcing with a focus on renewable energy, supported by regional partnerships, can offer a long-term, practical buffer against geopolitically induced energy disruption. Enhancing investor confidence through clear guidelines for public land acquisition in renewable energy projects under the public-private partnership (PPP) model, waiving import duties on solar accessories, reducing tariffs on battery energy storage systems (BESS), and reworking the weaknesses of the current Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) structure are all integral to developing a regional ecosystem that fosters an effective energy transition. (Courtesy:ORF)

India and Slovakia elevate ties to comprehensive partnership, sign 11 pacts

BRATISLAVA, June 15: India and Slovakia on Monday elevated their ties to a comprehensive partnership and firmed up 11 agreements to expand the bilateral cooperation in a range of areas such as migration, digital technology and defence following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Slovak counterpart Robert Fico.

The two leaders also agreed to work towards the "earliest" implementation of the India-European Union free trade agreement that is expected to significantly shore up the bilateral economic engagement.

Modi is in Bratislava as part of his week-long visit to Europe. It is the first visit to the European nation by an Indian prime minister.

"We have decided to elevate our relations to the status of a Comprehensive Partnership. This symbolises our shared beliefs, shared priorities, and shared future," he said in his media statement.

The comprehensive partnership aims to take bilateral relations to a new level, strengthen existing cooperation mechanisms and explore new avenues for deepening cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally.

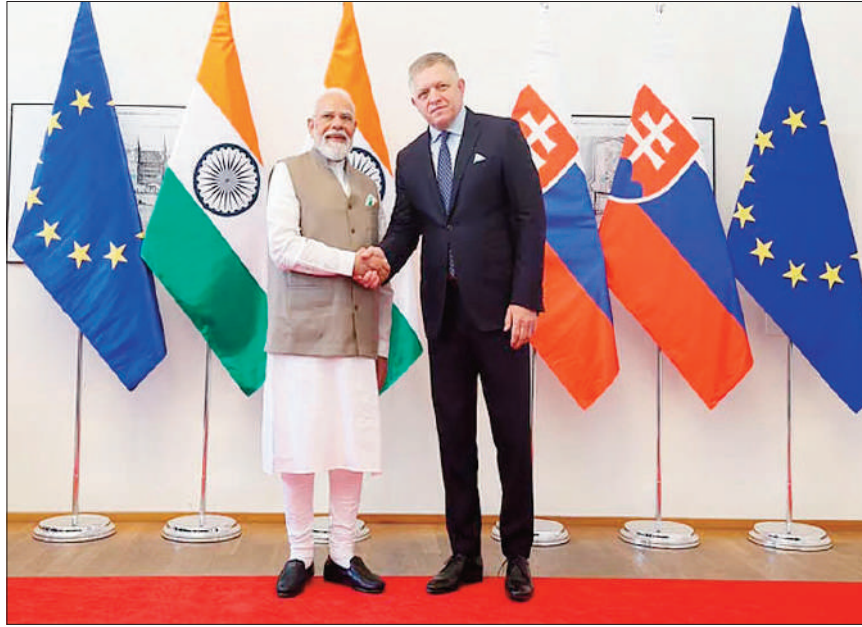
The prime minister said he and Fico discussed ways to give a "new direction" to the ties.

Modi and Fico also agreed to enhance cooperation in the energy sector with a view to promoting energy security, sustainability and resilience through diversification of energy sources, including nuclear energy and geothermal power.

"Our potential is vast. Our aspirations are even greater. Automobiles, railways, advanced manufacturing, and green technologies are areas of particular interest to us," he said.

"Today, we combined our strengths on all these issues and took several important decisions for the benefit of the people of both countries."

Modi also said that the defence cooperation between India and Slovakia is a testa-



ment to the "deep mutual trust and strategic convergence" between the two sides.

A Letter of Intent was finalised on defence cooperation following the talks between the two leaders.

The prime minister said it will give new momentum for cooperation between the defence industries of the two sides.

"India and Slovakia are also moving forward with close coordination on the global stage. We agree that all disputes and tensions should be resolved peacefully," he said.

"We also agree that global institutions need to redefine themselves to address the realities and challenges of the 21st century. We will work to strengthen global efforts in this regard," he added.

Modi also conveyed his appreciation to PM Fico for the cooperation Slovakia extended in finalising the India-EU free trade agreement.

"We will work towards its earliest imple-

mentation so that industries, startups, and traders of both countries can derive maximum benefit from it," he said.

In his remarks, PM Fico hailed the India-EU FTA, describing it as one of the "most ambitious" trade pacts ever signed.

"Slovakia not only welcomes this agreement, but it will take the necessary and practical steps for the implementation of this agreement," he said.

The agreements inked following Modi-Fico talks are set to provide for deeper bilateral cooperation in areas of labour migration, defence, digital technologies, higher education and quantum communication.

In the meeting, the two leaders, recognising the growing geopolitical, economic and technological importance of the Indo-Pacific, acknowledged the value of a stronger partnership between India and Slovakia in support of mutually beneficial cooperation, regional connectivity, open international

trade, freedom of navigation, and peaceful resolution of disputes, according to a joint statement.

Modi and Fico expressed support for the orderly, safe and legal mobility of skilled professionals and welcomed the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of labour migration to facilitate mobility.

The two sides also agreed to work towards the early conclusion of a Social Security Agreement, which would contribute to safeguarding the welfare and social protection of working professionals engaged in mobility between India and Slovakia.

The statement said Modi and Fico supported comprehensive reforms of multilateral institutions, particularly the UN Security Council. In this context, India appreciated Slovakia's continued support for India's permanent membership in a reformed and expanded UN Security Council.

The two leaders also unequivocally condemned terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism, and strongly condemned the Pahalgalam terror attack.

They agreed to establish a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and called for concerted international efforts to combat terrorism in a comprehensive and sustained manner, the joint statement noted.

It said the leaders reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation in counterterrorism, including within the framework of the UN and called for strong and decisive action against terrorists and terrorist entities, including those designated by the United Nations Security Council 1267 Sanctions Committee.

Modi and Fico further underscored the importance of holding perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of terrorist acts accountable and agreed to work closely towards the early finalisation and adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) within the UN framework. (PTI)

Trump heads to G7 summit with wind at his back after announcing agreement aimed at ending Iran war

EVIAN-LES-BAINS (FRANCE), June 15: President Donald Trump is headed to the French Alps on Monday to meet with fellow world leaders at the Group of Seven summit after announcing an agreement that he says will bring an end to the US war with Iran.

Trump and Iranian officials had been saying for days they were making progress toward reaching a deal, but even on Sunday, things appeared to be on shaky ground after a new round of strikes between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

With the agreement, the Republican US president is due to arrive in Evian-les-Bains on Monday with wind at his back for talks with G7 leaders, including some who've been sharply critical of his managing of the 15-week-old conflict, which has led to a surge in global energy prices.

Polls show American voters largely disapprove of the conflict, which has made some Republicans nervous about the political impacts it could have on November's midterm election.

"Ships of the World, start your engines," Trump said in a social media post celebrating the deal that he said would lead to the US ending its blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 20 per cent of the world's crude had flowed before the conflict. "Let the oil flow!"

Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazem Gharibabadi, however, said the Iranian closure of the strait would continue until the agreement is signed.

Neither the White House nor Iran published the final agreement or revealed many details. Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, whose country served as a mediator in the negotiations, said there would be "pre-implementation discussions" this week to lay the ground for 60 days of technical talks on Iran's nuclear program.

Deal could change G7 dynamic

Sealing an agreement before jetting off to the summit could change the dynamic of the gathering for Trump. He's had friction with French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni over failing to consult them before the decision to go to war.

Meanwhile, Trump has pushed back on the four European leaders — members of the NATO military alliance — for their lack of support for the US in the conflict.

Trump is expected to discuss with leaders the demining of the Strait of Hormuz, the White House says. Britain and France have expressed interest in assisting with the demining once the conflict is paused. Fear of potential mines is among the reasons tanker traffic has come to a halt during the war, and quickly clearing them will be crucial to regaining the confidence of commercial vessels.

Macron on Monday said France was ready to move "very quickly" to deploy assets, including mine-clearing vessels, to the region to help.

He added that a French aircraft carrier and an accompanying strike group are already in the re-



gion and would be ready to assist within days of the US and Iran signing the agreement.

Macron, the summit's host, invited the leaders of three nations that aren't part of the G7 — Egypt, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates — to take part in a session on the Middle East on Tuesday, when Iran is expected to be a central focus.

The leaders of the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Canada issued a joint statement welcoming the agreement as a "moment of opportunity to restore regional stability and stabilise the global economy."

In a separate development, Trump, ahead of departing for the summit, told the New York Post he has warned Macron the US will "have no choice" but to slap 100 per cent tariffs on French wines unless Paris eliminates its digital tax on American tech companies, renewing a long-running threat from him that dates to his first administration.

Wines and spirits exported to the US from the European Union currently face a 15 per cent tariff. In an interview with broadcaster TF1, Macron said Monday that it is not "for the United States to decide what European or French law should be."

Trump is scheduled to meet with Macron after he arrives in France later Monday. Following their meeting, Macron and Trump will join the other leaders for a working dinner.

Trump faces questions about financial incentives for Tehran

Trump had fiercely criticised President Barack Obama for the 2015 nuclear agreement, which Trump argued failed to stop Tehran from advancing toward a weapon and funnelled billions of dollars into the Islamic Republic's coffers.

In 2018, Trump exited the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the European Union were also signatories to the pact.

Trump in an interview on Sunday with The New York Times pushed back on comparisons to the Obama-era nuclear deal. "We negotiated from strength," Trump said. "He was basically paying them off."

But Trump hasn't detailed how his agreement will address some key issues about Iran's nuclear program, including who will be in charge of verifying that Iran is complying with the agreement and who will destroy or remove 972 pounds (441 kilograms) of highly enriched uranium believed to be buried under nuclear sites that were badly damaged by US strikes last summer. (AP)

Prominent Cambodian opposition politician seeks Supreme Court reversal of incitement conviction

PHNOM PENH, June 15: A prominent Cambodian opposition politician emerged Monday from his Supreme Court appeal to a crowd of cheering supporters, telling them he was anxious for judges to overturn his incitement conviction so that he could get back into politics.

Rong Chhun, a top adviser to the Nation Power Party, was found guilty last year of inciting social unrest after he met villagers displaced by government construction projects. His conviction was seen as one of many legal moves taken by the government of Prime Minister Hun Manet to stifle criticism.

The 56-year-old was sentenced to four years in prison and barred from running for office and from voting. At his trial he had argued his innocence, saying all he had done was post photos of himself with the villagers and comments on Facebook.

He emerged from the morning hearing to a crowd of some 300d supporters chanting "Drop the charges, release Rong Chhun!" and holding signs with slogans calling for his freedom.

He told them that with tensions between Cambodia and neighbouring Thailand, a struggling economy and other issues facing the country, he wants to promote "national reconciliation and national unity" for Cambodia's 17 million people.

"I hope the court will grant me freedom and justice so that I can continue to practice politics in the future," he said.

Roads leading to the court were blocked by several dozen police officers at barricades, and Rong Chhun walked to the hearing accompanied by his supporters, including local and international human rights advocates.

"We are not worried about going to prison," he said. "We are willing to sacrifice everything and we are determined to use the resources our parents gave us to invest so that Cambodia can achieve true freedom and democracy."

Incitement allegations are frequently used by authorities in Cambodia against opponents.

Rong Chhun was already sentenced to two years on incitement charges in 2021, based on accusations he spread false information about Cambodia's border with Vietnam after meeting with farmers in the area. He was released later the same year by an appeals court.

Cambodia's government insists it promotes the rule of law under an electoral democracy, but political parties seen as mounting strong challenges to the ruling Cambodian People's Party have been dissolved by the courts or had their leaders jailed or harassed.

Under almost four decades of autocratic former Prime Minister Hun Sen, Cambodia was widely criticized for human rights abuses that included suppression of freedom of speech and association. He was succeeded in August 2023 by his American-educated son, Hun Manet, but there have been few signs of political liberalization.

On Monday, Tim Ratha drove several hours from Siem Reap province in the north to the capital, saying she wanted to show her support for Rong Chhun.

"He has devoted everything to us, he had no wife, no children," she the 55-year-old vegetable vendor told The Associated Press.

The Supreme Court's verdict is due June 19. (AP)

UK PM Starmer announces ban on social media apps for children under 16

LONDON, June 15: British Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday announced that social media app access will be banned for all children under the age of 16 for their "happiness and safety".

In an address from 10 Downing Street in London, Starmer said it was the right choice both as Prime Minister and as a father of young children.

He admitted that it will not be easy to impose such a ban involving some of the most powerful tech companies in the world, but the health and well-being of children were paramount.

"Today is a big moment for our country. This is a big step, real change for our children and our future because today I can announce that the government will ban access to social media for all children under the age of 16," said Starmer.

"This is not something I do lightly, and I will not present it as cost-free as if social media has brought no benefits to young people, because clearly that is wrong. But government is always about choices, and it's clear to me that a full ban is the right choice," he said.

The announcement followed a lengthy consultation process fed into by campaigners, including parents, whose children have been impacted by the harmful effects of social media apps such as TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram and YouTube. While messaging apps such as WhatsApp will not be included in the ban, gaming services and live streaming platforms where strangers can contact children unchecked will be restricted through an age verification system yet to be finalised.

"All I've ever wanted for my own children, hand on heart, is for them to be happy and for them to be safe, and I think that's what any parent wants," said Starmer.

"Social media is making children unhappy; it's making it easier for bullies to harass and abuse them. And it could even be harming their mental health, exposing them to content that is dangerous. Because that's what grabs the attention, it's designed to be addictive, of course it is. Features like the infinite scroll. They're designed to lock you in for hours; if nothing else, there's an opportunity cost to that. It stops children doing their homework, reading, playing with their friends outside, going to bed at a decent hour," he said.

Asked about the timeline for the enforcement of the ban, the UK PM told reporters that the legislative powers had been put in place for the law to come into force by Spring next year.

"It won't be easy, some technology companies want us to think that social media is unchangeable, part of an almost natural order. But we have to resist that kind of learned helplessness; we have agency, we can change it, and we will.



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"Yes, it's hard, hard to legislate for, hard to regulate, hard to enforce. That's why we sought a wide range of views on this," he said.

He expressed confidence that parents will welcome the "clear and decisive choice" because it is important to adapt the government's approach as technology changes.

"We're not just bringing forward a ban, we're taking world-leading action on gaming services and live streaming platforms where, at the moment, strangers can contact any child unchecked... Is there a situation in the offline world where you would just let your child pair up with a stranger, an adult you don't know anything about? No, so we're taking action on that," he added.

The details of how the ban will work in practice are expected to emerge as further data emerges from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The UK's action comes after Australia became the first country in the world to introduce a similar ban in December last year. (PTI)

Congo reports record one-day increase in Ebola cases, month after outbreak's declaration

KINSHASA (CONGO), June 15: Congolese authorities have reported one of the highest increase in Ebola cases in one day, as weak contact tracing, insecurity and funding gaps continue to hinder the response a month after the outbreak was declared.

The Congolese Ministry of Health said Sunday 72 new cases were reported in a 24-hour period, bringing the total number of confirmed cases to 782. This includes 181 confirmed deaths, after 32 new deaths were confirmed.

However, the number of cases in Congo is believed to be higher because the outbreak was confirmed on May 15, weeks after it is suspected to have begun, and the contact tracing coverage rate is at 56 per cent, a sharp decrease from last week.

The latest Ebola outbreak is caused by the rare Bundibugyo virus, which has no approved vaccine or treatment, unlike the Zaire virus, which was responsible for most of Congo's past 16 outbreaks



of the disease.

Fifty-six people have recovered, and the current fatality rate of the outbreak is 23 per cent, the ministry said.

The World Health Organisation said Sunday it is intensifying testing and contact tracing and treatment.

Africa's top health body said the same day it is deploying technical expertise and supporting laboratory systems, active case finding and community engagement efforts to accelerate the response to the disease outbreak.

"We remain committed to supporting affected countries until transmission is stopped. We call on partners and donors to urgently mobilise resources to strengthen the response and save lives," said the head of the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, or Africa CDC, Jean Kaseya.

The outbreak is concentrated in Congo's eastern province of Ituri, which accounts for more than 90 per cent of the cases. Cases have also been recorded in the North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, and have spread across the border to Uganda.

Nearly a million people have been displaced by conflict in Ituri, according to the UN humanitarian office, making contact tracing difficult as people flee attacks or move frequently in the vast province with dense forests, poor roads and remote villages that can take days to reach.

Tracing is also difficult among the thousands of artisanal miners who regularly move between remote sites in the mineral-rich region. (AP)

UK's ban on Palestine Action under terror legislation lawful, Court of Appeal says

LONDON, June 15: The British government acted lawfully when it banned the protest group Palestine Action as a terrorist organisation, the Court of Appeal in London ruled on Monday.

Chief Justice Sue Carr said the group was not a civil disobedience organisation, as it claimed, and that it operated with covert cells to destroy property of at defence companies and on military bases.

"In our judgment, that premise was seriously flawed. It was not a sustainable proposition to portray Palestine Action as a non-violent organisation," Carr said.

The ruling overturned a decision in February by three senior High Court judges who found that despite the group promoting its political cause through some crimes, the scale of activities did not warrant a ban.

The ban remained in place while the government to appeal.

The government outlawed the group after activists broke into a Royal Air Force base in June 2025 to protest British military support for Israel's military offensive against Hamas in Gaza, which killed tens of thousands of Palestinians. That incident followed several other acts of vandalism by the group.

Palestine Action was declared a terrorist organisation alongside the likes of al-Qaida and Hamas, making membership in or support for the group a crime punishable by up to 14 years in prison.

Since then, more than 3,300 people have been arrested at protests for holding signs saying, "I oppose genocide, I support Palestine Action." More than 700 have been charged under the UK's Terrorism Act, although no one has yet been convicted. (AP)



B'desh summons Indian diplomat

DHAKA, June 15: Bangladesh on Monday summoned India's Deputy High Commissioner and conveyed its "deep disappointment" over an incident involving an adviser of the Prime Minister at the Delhi airport, according to media reports here.

Dr Zahed Ur Rahman, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Policy and Strategy Affairs, and Information and Broadcasting, was stopped by immigration authorities at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Sunday evening when his name was reportedly flagged during a routine security check, state-run BSS news agency reported.

Citing a foreign ministry official, the news agency said that the ministry summoned Indian Deputy High Commissioner Pawan Badhe and expressed its "deep disappointment" over the incident.

Separately, Foreign Minister Dr Khalilur Rahman said that the government was taking appropriate steps regarding the matter. "It is an unexpected incident, unfortunate, too," he told reporters. (PTI)

Northeast 'daring to dream' Bamboo can drive Arunachal's economy: CM Khandu

Mega football stadium, 5-star hotels soon in Meghalaya, says CM

SHILLONG, June 15: The northeast region is "daring to dream" in shaping its growth story, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma said here on Monday and announced that in the next few years, eight new five-star hotels are set to be opened in his state.

In his address at a summit, he also underlined that the time is "crucial" for the northeast, and "we just need to connect the dots".

Sangma said the northeast today has the political will, policy and thought process to grow, and its states are "daring to dream".

"Earlier, we didn't dare to dream, but now we are, and that's the confidence we wish to convey to the investors looking to invest in our region," he said.

The "North East India Infrastructure Summit and Exhibition 2026" is being hosted from June 15-16 at Laxmi Performing Centre in Shillong.

Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, and several other dignitaries were also present on the dais.

"In the last eight years, our (state) budget has grown twice as much. And I am confident that by 2028-2029, it will grow to three times of what the volume was eight years ago," Sangma said in his address.

"Our capital expenditure, the expenditure on infrastructure and investment we do, it has grown six times in the last eight years," he said.

In Meghalaya, the state is doing today something that "we had not even thought of earlier", Sangma emphasised.

In this country, "the biggest dedicated football stadium is being built in Meghalaya, with a capacity of 40,000, and worth about Rs 800 crore investment, a FIFA-certified football stadium, which can host any international-level game," the



Meghalaya chief minister said.

He said Meghalaya is going to host the National Games next year. "We are making full preparations for it."

Sangma pointed to the several buildings and other infrastructure projects which are underway in the state.

"Our new assembly building is ready, our new secretariat building is getting built, and perhaps in a year or a year and a half, we will be able to start our administrative work from there," Sangma said.

"Meghalaya earlier didn't have a single five-star hotel. In the last

five years, we have started two five-star hotels. And, you will be happy to learn that in the next three-four years, eight new five-star hotels are set to be opened, their agreements (are) signed, and work has started on four of them," he added.

The local airport in Shillong was built but closed; it has opened again, and big commercial operations will be able to start from it in the next one to one and a half years, Sangma said.

The chief minister said the "time is right" at present for the northeast and "we just have to connect the dots".

"It is going in the right direction, and we'll have to give it the right push," he asserted.

He urged all stakeholders to come together to develop the northeast region and bring prosperity.

"We just have to ensure that there is any paralysis, we have to correct it and then move forward," he added. Before the inaugural session, Gadkari, the Union minister for road, transport and highways, also attended a CEO roundtable and inaugurated an exhibition by various companies at the summit venue. (PTI)

ITANAGAR, June 15: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday described bamboo as the state's "Green Gold" and called upon local youth to harness its vast potential for entrepreneurship, employment generation and sustainable economic growth.

Inaugurating the Arunachal Pradesh Bamboo & Cane Technology Centre at Gungu near here, Khandu said the new centre would transform the state's abundant bamboo resources into value-added products and create livelihood opportunities for youth, artisans, self-help groups and entrepreneurs, an official release said.

Arunachal possesses the country's second-largest bamboo stock and over 60 bamboo species.

"Bamboo is not a new subject for us. It has always been an integral part of the social, cultural and economic life of our tribal communities," the chief minister said, adding that the facility would serve as a hub for innovation, skill development, value addition and commercialisation of bamboo products.

Highlighting the expanding industrial applications of bamboo, the Khandu said it is no longer confined to traditional handicrafts but is now being used in furniture, construction materials, textiles, biofuel and even aviation fuel.



He credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi for reforms that removed bamboo from the category of trees under forest regulations, making its cultivation and commercial use easier.

The chief minister urged unemployed youth, especially from the Gungu and Sangdupota areas, to take advantage of the training facilities at the centre and government-backed entrepreneurship schemes.

He said bamboo-based enterprises can tap national and international markets through e-commerce platforms and benefit from initiatives such as the Prime Minister's UNNATI Scheme and various MSME programmes.

Advocating bamboo-based prefabricated housing technology, Khandu said such structures are lightweight, cost-effective and environmentally sustainable, making them particularly suitable for earthquake-prone Himalayan regions.

He also stressed the need for a comprehensive bamboo policy and

directed experts and officials of the Arunachal Pradesh Bamboo Resources and Development Agency (APBRDA) to prepare a long-term roadmap for bamboo cultivation, processing, regeneration and industrial utilisation.

Emphasising the importance of skill development, the chief minister said the state must reduce its dependence on outside labour by equipping local youth with market-relevant skills. He observed that with major hydropower projects underway, Arunachal Pradesh would require thousands of skilled workers in the coming years.

Khandu also said Sangdupota and adjoining areas are emerging as a key growth corridor for the Capital region due to the presence of major educational and institutional establishments.

Responding to local demands, he assured support for improving water supply infrastructure and constructing a bridge to enhance connectivity to the Bamboo & Cane Technology Centre.

Forest Minister Wangki Lowang, local MLA Nabam Vivek, APBRDA Chairman Kipa Tatar, Vice Chairman Techi Necha, NEC Member T N Thongdok, senior officials, scientists and representatives of various boards and agencies were present on the occasion. (PTI)

Mizoram Gov calls for collective action against drug abuse

AIZAWL, June 15: Governor VK Singh on Monday called upon people to uphold the Mizo value of "Tlawmgaihna" - the spirit of selflessness, compassion and voluntary service, while stressing the need for collective action against drug abuse.

Greeting people on the 91st raising day of the Young Mizo Association (YMA), Singh said the organisation has remained at the forefront of community service since its establishment.

He commended the organisation for its continued efforts in assisting the needy, preserving and promoting Mizo culture, traditions and heritage, and supporting the government in implementing various public welfare initiatives across the state.

The governor urged people to foster unity among different sections of society, respect elders and remain connected to their rich cultural heritage.

Expressing concern over the growing threat of drug and substance abuse, Singh called for concerted efforts to combat the menace and ensure a secure and prosperous future for the younger generation.

The influential YMA marked its raising day with functions, sports and cultural events across the state.

YMA branches organised cleanliness drives in localities, villages and streets, besides extending relief assistance to orphanages, rehabilitation centres and economically weaker sections.

Central YMA (CYMA) president R Lalhgheta urged members of the organisation to strengthen their commitment to community service and intensify the fight against drug trafficking, describing drug dealers as enemies of families, communities and the state.

Established on June 15, 1935, as the Young Lushai Association (YLA), the organisation was renamed the Young Mizo Association in 1947. It was initiated by Welsh Christian missionaries.

Headquartered in Aizawl, the association is administered by a central committee and has an extensive network comprising eight sub-headquarters, 50 groups and 821 branches across Mizoram and parts of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura and Bangladesh. (PTI)

1 AP Battalion NCC begins annual training camp in Itanagar

Ten-day camp in Itanagar focuses on military training, disaster preparedness and cultural talent selection for Republic Day events

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, June 15: The 1 Arunachal Pradesh Battalion National Cadet Corps (1 AP Bn NCC), under the aegis of NCC Group Headquarters Tezpur, has commenced its Combined Annual Training Camp (CATC-47) cum Inter-Battalion Selection Camp for the Cultural Team for the Pre-Republic Day Camp 2027 at Rajiv Gandhi Government Polytechnic College (RGGPC), Itanagar.

The camp, which began on June 13, will continue till June 22 and is being attended by 250 NCC cadets.

The participants are being guided by a team comprising 11 military staff, two Associate NCC Officers (ANOs) and two Caretaker Training Officers (CTOs) under the leadership of the Commanding Officer of 1 AP Battalion NCC.

According to officials, the camp is aimed at familiarising cadets with the challenges and discipline of camp life while instilling the values of unity, discipline, national integration



and esprit de corps.

The training programme includes physical training, field craft and battle craft, small arms firing, musketry, yoga sessions and lectures by distinguished personalities.

The activities are designed to enhance the cadets' physical fitness, mental resilience, leadership qualities, teamwork and self-confidence, contributing to their overall development.

The camp is also serving as an inter-battalion pre-selection platform for the NCC Cultural Troupe for the Pre-Republic Day Camp 2027.

The selection process seeks to identify talented cadets who can represent the region's rich cultural heritage and artistic traditions at the national level.

In addition, the camp features training under the Yuva Aapda Mitra (YAM) Scheme, an initiative of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) aimed at equipping young volunteers with disaster response and emergency management skills.

As part of the programme, cadets are receiving training in relief, rescue and response mechanisms for disasters such as floods, earthquakes and cloudbursts.

The sessions are being conducted by qualified instructors from the State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA), Arunachal Pradesh.

Officials said the camp reflects the NCC's commitment to promoting discipline, leadership, fitness and social responsibility among youths while preparing them to contribute effectively to society during emergencies and national events.

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Tripura mulling handing over some schools to private bodies to improve education: CM

AGARTALA, June 15: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Monday said the state government is considering amalgamating some schools and handing them over to reputed organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission to improve the quality of education.

The NITI Aayog, in a recent report, pointed to a shortage of more than 8,000 teachers in government-run schools in the northeastern state. "We are planning to merge some schools and entrust their management to organisations or societies like the Ramakrishna Mission so that students receive quality education," Saha told reporters.

He said many students, particularly in tribal areas, prefer English-medium institutions, leading to lower enrolment in government-run schools.

"We are trying to create an environment in government schools comparable to that of private institutions to attract more students. The

government is spending more than private schools," he said.

Most government schools in Tripura are Bengali-medium, while a majority of private schools offer English-medium education. In 2021, the state government converted 125 schools into Vidyajyoti Schools under the CBSE curriculum to improve educational standards.

The chief minister also said the dropout rate in the state has been steadily declining and highlighted the government's efforts to encourage girls to continue their education. Describing child marriage as a major social concern, Saha said the government has launched several initiatives to keep girls in school and help them become self-reliant.

As part of those efforts, the state has expanded its bicycle distribution programme for class 9 girls by removing the family income ceiling, making more students eligible for the benefit, he said. (PTI)

AFFIDAVIT

By an Affidavit sworn before the Notary Public, Diphu Judicial Court I have declared and affirmed that my actual name is Jyoti Rekha Baruah which is recorded in Aadhaar Card vide no. 487807475957. But by mistake in bank passbook of Assam Gramin Vikash Bank Vide A/C No. 7419010019957 it has been recorded as Jyoti Rekha Hazarika. The name of "Jyoti Rekha Baruah" and Jyoti Rekha Hazarika is the same and single person. Jyoti Rekha Baruah C/O:- Shasanka Hazarika Vill:- Sikaripather P.O.+P.S:- Bakalia

AFFIDAVIT

By an Affidavit sworn before the Notary Public, Diphu Judicial Court I have declared and affirmed that my name is Smt. Rima Saikia. But by mistake in Assam Gramin Vikash Bank Vide A/C No. 7419010026624 it has been recorded as Smt. Rema Medhi instead of Rima Saikia. The name of "Smt. Rima Saikia" and "Rema Medhi" is the same and single person. Rima Saikia W/O:- Akan Medhi Vill:- 1No. Balijan P.O.+P.S:- Bakalia

RMSA 2016 teachers urge Nagaland govt to implement pay scale as directed by courts

KOHHIMA, June 15: The RMSA Teachers 2016 batch on Monday urged the Nagaland government to immediately implement the pay scale directed by the courts, alleging that despite exhausting all legal remedies, the administration has failed to comply with the judgment even after four years.

Addressing a press conference here, RMSA 2016 batch spokesperson Renbemo L Patton said the teachers secured a favourable judgment from the high court on March 16, 2022, directing the state government to grant them a pay scale of ₹ 9,300-34,800 with a grade pay of ₹ 4,200 per month.

Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) teachers are secondary school educators whose positions were created under the Centre's flagship RMSA scheme.

He noted that the government subsequently challenged the judgment before the Supreme Court through a Special Leave Petition (SLP), which was dismissed on May 22, 2025. A review petition filed thereafter was also dismissed on January 15 this year.

Patton said the teachers had suspended a three-week agitation last year after receiving a written assurance from the government on September 11, stating that the pay scale would be implemented immediately after the review petition was dismissed.

"More than five months have passed since the dismissal of the review petition, but the government has still not complied with the court's directive," he said.

According to Patton, the government had sought further legal opinion from the Advocate General, who reportedly advised that all legal remedies had been exhausted and that the state was now required to comply with the judgment. He expressed concern that the matter had again been referred to the Cabinet, which was allegedly examining possible anomalies in a case that had already been settled by the courts.

"We are not asking for anything beyond what has already been granted by the Supreme Court. We are only seeking the implementation of our rightful dues," he said, appealing to the government to avoid further confrontation by complying with the court order.

RMSA 2016 batch president Imlitemjen reiterated that both the high court and the Supreme Court had upheld the teachers' claim for the pay scale.

He stated that the departments concerned, including finance and personnel and administrative reforms (P&AR), had reportedly given their concurrence before the matter was forwarded to the Cabinet. (PTI)

NU study generates new insights into Angami Naga traditional farming system

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 15: A Nagaland University study has generated new insights into how traditional knowledge continues to guide and facilitate terrace farming among the Angami Naga population.

Though shifting agriculture is the predominant mode of farming in Nagaland owing to the undulating topography, the Angami Nagas have an ancient tradition of terrace cultivation.

Unlike previous studies, which focused on the technicalities of terrace farming, the present study goes deeper into the underlying social, cultural and ecological knowledge system that supports the practice.

The findings of the study will also support national efforts toward food security and sustainable agriculture.



The results of this study may also help to implement development policies and projects that would otherwise hinder indigenous people from using their culturally sensitive agricultural methods.

The findings are based on doctoral research work conducted by Ketekhoto Neihu

farming. The terrace farms are built using traditional construction methods, which reduce soil erosion and enable proper utilisation of water.

The continued use of organic inputs, rather than chemical inputs, reflects efforts to protect the environment and human health.

Highlighting the significance of the research, the lead researcher, Dr Yamsani said the study found that the Angami Naga population continues to practice farming in close association with cycles and signs of nature.

Yamsani said while these forms of agricultural practice are still strong, it is important to point out the new challenges being faced by farmers such as changing patterns of rainfall and climate variability.

under the supervision of Dr Srikanth Yamsani, assistant professor at the Tribal Research Centre, department of sociology at Nagaland University.

Most of the research focuses on traditional practices in soil conservation, water management, and organic

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This is to inform the Public that Auction of pledged Gold Ornaments will be conducted by SBFC Finance Limited on 23.06.2026 at 10:30 am. below the Branch address. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to Loan Accounts of our various Customers who have failed to pay their dues. Our notices of auction have been duly issued to these borrowers. The Gold Ornaments to be auctioned belong to all linked accounts & ID of our various Customers mentioned below with branch details.

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BONGAIGAON Branch Address: Bongaigaon SBFC Finance Limited, North Bongaigaon, B.O.C. Gate, Chapaguri Road, Indian Bank Branch Building, 2nd Floor, Bongaigaon, Ward No - 10, Pin - 783300, State - Assam, AP00606074, AP00715190, AP00756828, AP00767140, AP00797706, AP00781467, AP00788286, AP00894265

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DPDR/BTC/15FC/Baksa(T)/VII-32/2026/4 Dated Kokrajhar the 15th June 2026

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders with a validity period of 180 (one hundred eighty) days from the date of receipt in prescribed form affixing non-refundable court fee stamps of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight and paise twenty five) only subsequently to be drawn up in printed F-2 form are hereby invited from the Govt, registered Contractor/Firm from Electrical, PWD (Roads/Building) other Department under Class-II & Class-I (A, B, C) category from according to tender limit of eligibility for the following works and will be received in the office of the undersigned up to 2.00 pm on 9/07/26 and will be opened on the same date and place at 2.15 pm in the presence of willing contractors or their authorised agents.

Sl. No	Name of Scheme	Tender Value (Rs.)	Earnest Money (ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	Cost of Tender	Pre-Bid Meeting	Time for completion period
1	Const of Community Toilet at Santipur Sub-Centre (ID)-788, Activity Code-126144230	Rs.1,00,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	330.00		90 Days
2	Const of Community Toilet at Barpham village Bathou Mandir (ID)-812, Activity Code-126144443	Rs. 11,00,000/-	(ST, SC, OBC-1 % & Gen-2%)	330.00		90 Days

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent up to 12.00 Noon on all working days from 16/06/26 to 9/07/26 in the office of the undersigned on payment of in the form of Banker Cheque/Demand draft of any nationalized Bank (Preferable SBI) duly pledged to the Director, P&RD, BTC, Kokrajhar. The Cost of tender (Non-Refundable) must be in the form of Demand Draft/ Banker Cheque of a Nationalized Bank drawn in favour of the Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar and payable at SBI, Kokrajhar Court para, Kokrajhar to be deposited 0.03%.

Sd/- Panchayat & Rural Development
BTC, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/549

ANKITA BHANDARI CASE

Ex-BJP MLA Suresh Rathore arrested

DEHRADUN/HARIDWAR, June 15: Former BJP MLA Suresh Rathore has been arrested in connection with a probe into a viral audio-video clip related to the alleged naming of a 'VIP' in the Ankita Bhandari murder case, police said on Monday.

Superintendent of Police (City) Pramod Kumar told PTI that Rathore was detained from his office in Buggawala, Haridwar, and brought to the Dalanwala police station in Dehradun before being formally placed under arrest.

The development follows a press conference held by Rathore three days ago, where he had stated that the Uttarakhand High Court had quashed two of the four FIRs registered against him at the Bahadurabad and Jhabhera police stations.

The FIRs had been filed against Rathore over the alleged circulation of objectionable audio and video clips on social media related to the case.

Rathore had stated that investigations into the remaining two



cases, registered at the Dalanwala and Nehru Colony police stations, were still underway, and asserted that he was fully cooperating with the authorities.

The Uttarakhand High Court had on June 4 quashed two of the four FIRs filed against Rathore in the case.

A single bench of Justice Rakesh

Thapliyal, however, had allowed the police investigation to continue in the remaining two FIRs.

The complainants, Dushyant Gautam and Aarti Gaur, countered that the circulated material was deliberately aimed at tarnishing their reputation.

Gautam, BJP national general secretary and Uttarakhand in-

charge, was allegedly identified by Rathore as the "VIP" in the clips made public in connection with the case. Speaking to reporters in Haridwar on Friday, the former legislator had denied releasing any audio or video clips on social media or making remarks against senior party leaders or the chief minister.

Expressing regret if his statements had caused hurt, Rathore alleged that a conspiracy had been orchestrated to damage his political career.

On Saturday, State Minister Deshraj Karnwal held a press conference, calling Rathore's claims regarding the high court relief "misleading".

Ankita Bhandari, a 19-year-old receptionist at a resort in Pauri district, went missing and was found dead in September 2022. The incident triggered widespread protests across Uttarakhand, leading to the arrest of three persons, including the resort owner, who were subsequently convicted for her murder. (PTI)

Khan Sir got my brother murdered: Rival tutor

PATNA, June 15: Celebrated Patna-based tutor and social media influencer Faisal Khan, better known as Khan Sir, was on Monday accused by his rival Raushan Anand of having orchestrated the "murder" of his brother Prince Yadav, who has died under mysterious circumstances in Nepal.

Anand made the sensational claim soon after being released on bail in connection with the vandalism that took place at one of the coaching centres run by Khan earlier this month.

"Patna police arrested me on the basis of a false complaint by Khan. While I was in jail, he got my brother murdered. I seek justice for Prince," Anand told reporters.

The Bihar police was tight-lipped over the death of Prince in Nepal's Biratnagar, about which conflicting reports have appeared in the media.

Some of these reports claimed that Yadav had "escaped" to Nepal, fearing his own arrest in connection with the attack on Khan's premises, and was found dead at a Biratnagar hotel.

Some other reports suggested that Yadav was wounded in retaliatory fire by Khan's bodyguards here on June 3, and he succumbed to in-



juries at a hospital in Biratnagar, more than 300 kms away, where close aides had rushed him fearing further retribution from his brother's rival.

Khan, who could not be traced since an FIR was lodged against him upon the statement of one of his injured bodyguards that they had opened fire under pressure from their influential boss, came out with a video message debunking the allegations.

"I am saddened by the news of the death of Prince Yadav. I offer my condolences to his brother Raushan Anand, though he is levelling false charges against me," said Khan.

Nonetheless, Anand insisted that Khan be made to undergo a "narco test", which would ascertain culpa-

bility. The muckracking between the two fierce rivals continued even as the court, which granted bail to Anand, urged them to have "healthy competition".

Senior advocate Ramakant Sharma, who was leading the team of lawyers for Anand, told PTI video, that the additional chief judicial magistrate granted bail to his client, "accepting our contention that he was not present at the site of the incident".

"The court also noted that both parties happen to be teachers and must behave in a manner that is appropriate. Their conduct must not be such as that of criminals," Sharma said. BJP MP Manoj Tiwari, who hails from Bihar and was in the state capital, said, "We used to hear terms like coaching mafia. Now it is on full display. Let law take its own course."

JD(U) leader and minister Sunil Kumar, who held the education portfolio in the previous Nitish Kumaar government, told reporters that the police were investigating the entire matter, including the death of Prince Yadav, and all the guilty persons will be brought to book. (PTI)

Centre issues notice to Kerala Waqf Board over Munambam land issue, says BJP leader



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 15: BJP's Kerala state president Rajeev Chandrasekhar on Monday said that the Union Ministry of Minority Affairs has issued a notice to the State Waqf Board over the registration of the disputed Munambam land on the UMEED portal.

In a statement here, Chandrasekhar said he had submitted a detailed complaint to Union Minister for Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju, alleging that the Kerala Waqf Board had unilaterally uploaded details of several properties, including the 404-acre disputed land at Munambam, on the Unified Waqf Management, Empowerment, Efficiency and Development (UMEED) portal.

According to Chandrasekhar, the law authorises only the concerned Mutawalli, or Waqf property trustee, to upload such records on the portal.

He claimed that, in the Munambam case, the authority rests with Farook College and alleged that the Waqf Board's action was illegal and beyond its powers.

The BJP leader said the Centre's decision to seek an explanation from the Waqf Board came after his representation and reflected the seriousness with which it viewed complaints raised by Munambam residents and various organisations.

Chandrasekhar reiterated that the BJP has consis-

tently stood by the people of Munambam and is committed to protecting their property rights and livelihoods.

He argued that uploading the disputed land on the UMEED portal while ownership issues remain pending before legal forums raises serious legal and administrative concerns.

The Nemoni MLA also said that the BJP would intervene in similar Waqf-related land disputes across Kerala, including in Thaliparamba, and pledged to pursue legal and administrative action to protect the interests of what he described as the rightful landowners.

Calling the Centre's intervention "a significant step forward" in the people of Munambam's fight for justice, Chandrasekhar said the BJP would continue to pursue the issue through all available legal and administrative channels.

The Munambam controversy escalated after the Kerala State Waqf Board registered the disputed land on the Centre's UMEED portal, prompting protests and political criticism.

The 404-acre property in the Ernakulam district is at the centre of a long-running ownership dispute involving residents, mostly Christians, and Waqf authorities.

Responding to the controversy earlier, Kerala State Waqf Board Chairman K S Hamza had clarified that uploading the land details on the UMEED portal was only a technical and mandatory legal procedure and would not determine the final ownership of the property.

He said any decision on ownership would ultimately be subject to government and court rulings.

Residents of Munambam have maintained that the land was not originally a Waqf property and have expressed concerns that its classification could affect their ownership rights and land titles.

The dispute has led to prolonged legal proceedings, administrative scrutiny and political debate over whether due process was followed in declaring and registering the land as Waqf property. (PTI)

Inspired by Modi's appeal, Maharashtra family not to buy gold for son's wedding

NEW DELHI, June 15: Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal, a family in Maharashtra's Wardha has decided against buying gold jewellery for their son's wedding and instead to refurbish a 'mangalsutra' for their future daughter-in-law. In a letter addressed to Modi, Satish Gaurishankar Choubey, who runs a puja materials shop at Pulgaon in Wardha, said his family has decided against buying a new mangalsutra for the bride after being influenced by the prime minister's call for responsible spending in the national interest.

"Inspired by the prime minister's appeal, we have decided that we will not buy any new gold jewellery for the wedding of my son Yash, a software engineer, on July 1," Choubey said.

According to Choubey, whose family migrated to Maharashtra from Rajasthan's Jhunjhunu decades ago, discussions were underway in the family to buy a new mangalsutra for the bride.

However, his wife Seema Choubey decided to polish and refurbish her own mangalsutra and gift it to the would-be daughter-in-law.

In the letter, Choubey said it was not just about saving money, but a conscious effort to show that even ordinary citizens can contribute to national causes by making small personal choices.

The family felt that responding positively to the prime minister's call was their way of participating in a greater national effort, he said. (PTI)

Noida Airport begins passenger flights; first flight from Lucknow

NOIDA, June 15: Noida International Airport on Monday received its first landing with an IndiGo flight arriving from Lucknow, officials said.

The event was shortly followed by the first takeoff from the greenfield project by a flight to Lucknow. The plane carried 172 villagers from the Jewar region whose land was acquired by the state government for the first phase development of the airport.

With the commencement of the flight operation at Jewar, Delhi NCR joins a select group of global megacities served by multiple airports.

Union Civil Aviation Minister K Ram Mohan Naidu said what seemed impossible ten years ago was made possible by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He said that if India wants to become a developed nation, it must have a strong transport network.

Modi laid the foundation stone for this airport on November 25, 2021. On March 28, 2026, he inaugurated the airport.

"We want to see Noida International Airport grow, not only as a transit hub or a hub for transportation, but as an aeropolis. When we say aeropolis, we want to see multiple industries come around this area and create a strong economic base, which is not only going to be catering to the country but also internationally," Naidu said.

IndiGo flight 6E 2278 took off from Chaudhary Charan Singh International Airport, Lucknow, at 7.12 am and landed at Noida International Airport at 7.58 am, according to airport officials.

The arrival marked the beginning of flight operations at the Jewar-based airport, an ambitious project aimed at enhancing air connectivity between western Uttar Pradesh, the National Capital Region, and other parts of the country. The first flight took off around 8.10 am and had on board, among other passengers, Jewar MLA Dharendra Singh and officials of the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority, including its CEO Rakesh Singh, additional CEO Shailendra Bhatia, PCS officer and former Jewar SDM Abhay Singh.

Officials said the new air connectivity is expected to benefit business travellers, students, professionals and other passengers by providing an additional travel option and supporting regional development.

The airport has been developed with a focus on creating a multimodal transport hub, with connectivity through air, road and other modes of transport, officials added.

In a statement, Alok Singh, IndiGo's chief strategy officer, termed the opening of the airport a new chapter in India's aviation story.

"For IndiGo, the privilege of being the launch carrier at NIA is more than a commercial milestone; it is a commitment to western Uttar Pradesh, to the broader Delhi NCR, and the millions of travellers for whom this gateway opens new possibilities. We are proud to be here from day one," Singh said. (PTI)

12 cultural, heritage sites chosen for national Yoga Day 2026 celebrations

NEW DELHI, June 15: From the banks of Ganga river in Haridwar to the ancient ruins of Hampi and the historic precincts of Delhi's Red Fort, 12 iconic landmarks across the country will serve as the focal points of India's International Day of Yoga (IDY) 2026 celebrations.

The main Yoga Day event will be held in Kolkata on June 21, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi leading the celebrations.

Union Ayush Ministry has identified 12 culturally and historically significant sites to conduct national-level yoga events in synchronisation with the main event as the country observes the International Day of Yoga, Union Ayush Minister Prataprao Jadhav said.

The initiative seeks to bring together India's rich civilisational heritage and the timeless practice of yoga under a shared national framework, he said.

The selection of these sites also complements the theme "Yoga for Healthy Ageing," underscoring the idea that wellness is a lifelong journey, Jadhav stated.

"Just as these monuments have endured across centuries, yoga continues to offer practices that support physical vitality, mental resilience, and healthy ageing across generations," Jadhav told PTI.

The select venues are the Red Fort in Delhi, Har Ki Pauri in Haridwar, the Konark Sun Temple in Odisha, the Hampi Group of Monuments in Karnataka, Leh Palace in Ladakh, the Shore Temple at Mahabalipuram in Tamil Nadu, Samath in Uttar Pradesh, Kanchari Fort in Assam, the Charminar precincts in Hyderabad, the Gateway of India in Mumbai, Nalanda Mahavihara in Bihar, and the Sabar-mati Riverfront in Ahmedabad.

Though separated by geography, language and history, these landmarks will be united through a

common purpose -- promoting health, harmony and collective well-being through yoga.

"The flagship events will be synchronised with the main national celebration of IDY 2026 in the presence of the prime minister, creating a unique nationwide experience that connects citizens across states and Union Territories," Jadhav said.

Each location reflects a distinct chapter of India's cultural journey.

Sarnath and Nalanda evoke the country's traditions of knowledge and contemplation, the minister said.

The Konark Sun Temple and Mahabalipuram's Shore Temple stand as enduring symbols of artistic and architectural excellence.

Har Ki Pauri and the Sabar-mati Riverfront represent living public spaces where spirituality and community intersect, while the Red Fort, Charminar, Gateway of India, and Leh Palace embody significant milestones in India's historical narrative, he stated.

Against these backdrops, yoga practitioners will gather to perform the Common Yoga Protocol, transforming heritage spaces into venues of collective wellness.

"The simultaneous observance will demonstrate how yoga continues to serve as a bridge between India's past and present, linking centuries-old traditions with contemporary aspirations for healthier lifestyles," Jadhav said.

The initiative also highlights yoga's unique ability to transcend boundaries.

Whether practised in the Himalayan landscape of Ladakh, on the banks of the Ganga in Haridwar, amid the ruins of Hampi, or in bustling metropolitan centres such as Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad, yoga remains a unifying force that connects people across regions and generations, Jadhav said. (PTI)

NCPI claims to be Bengal's largest parliamentary bloc, party office traced to Howrah

KOLKATA, June 15: Less than a day after the otherwise obscure Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI) shot to national prominence following the merger of 20 rebel TMC MPs with the organisation, it took to social media on Monday to claim it was the "largest parliamentary bloc from West Bengal".

An address of the Tripura-based registered unrecognised party was located in the Sankrail area of Howrah district, with the property being owned by one Uttiya Kundu and his wife, Shewly, who, local residents said, had migrated to the area from Nadia district around eight years ago.

A significant contingent of central paramilitary forces was found deployed outside the property

since Monday morning.

"With 20 Lok Sabha seats, NCPI emerges as the largest parliamentary force from West Bengal, shaping the state's voice at the national level," the party said in a social media post.

"The numbers speak for themselves. Leadership, representation, and the mandate of the people continue to define the future of West Bengal and India," the post added.

A graphic representation of the division of MPs from West Bengal's total Lok Sabha strength of 42 -- with NCPI currently having 20 Seats, BJP 12 seats, TMC eight and Congress one -- was posted to back that claim.

The party, in its social media posts, separately

welcomed all 20 rebel TMC MPs with an accompanying message that their "long-term political experience, grassroots contacts and commitment to people would strengthen the party and make it prosperous".

A graffiti of 'Jago Biswa' was seen prominently splashed across one of the walls of the building, which the party said was its registered address in the state. A wall graffiti stating 'Unorganised Women Workers' Association' was also found displayed on one of its walls.

On the property's main gate, a signage qualified Uttiya Kundu as an "Editor of a Bengali newspaper, a Maths teacher, an auditor, health consultant, and yoga volunteer". (PTI)

India's climate tech funding rose from USD 315 million to USD 2.6 billion in 5 years: Report

NEW DELHI, June 15: Climate tech funding in India rose from USD 315 million in 2020 to USD 2.6 billion in 2025, with the growth largely driven by increased transactions in sectors such as electric mobility, renewable energy, and energy-transition infrastructure, according to a new report.

The India Climate Tech 2026 Report also stated that over the years, investor interest has increasingly shifted from funding climate innovation in isolation to backing companies enabling large-scale implementation of the energy transition.

The report was recently released by Tracxn, a data intelligence platform for private market research. It highlighted that with roughly 85 per cent of India's crude oil imported, technologies like renewable energy, electric mobility, battery storage, and critical minerals are now being viewed not only



as climate solutions but also as tools for improving energy security.

This change is being supported by several government initiatives, such as PM E-DRIIVE, a ₹ 10,900 crore programme extended to 2028, which aims to accelerate electric-vehicle adoption and charging infrastructure.

Another initiative is the Carbon

Credit Trading Scheme, effective October 2026, which has established a compliance carbon market covering around 490 industrial units across nine sectors.

In addition, the Rare Earth Permanent Magnets (REPM) scheme, a ₹ 7,280 crore programme, has strengthened domestic clean-energy supply chains, according to the report.

"India's dependence on imported crude oil and critical clean-energy inputs aligns directly with policy initiatives such as PM E-DRIIVE, the REPM scheme, and broader critical-mineral programmes. As a result, policy support, private capital, and energy-security priorities are increasingly converging around the same set of climate tech sectors," said the report.

"This creates a stronger and potentially more durable investment case than one based solely on climate objectives," it added.

The report also revealed that climate tech companies in India have raised around USD 791 million across 74 funding rounds.

However, USD 524 million out of the total funding was concentrated in just five late stage deals, which shows that investors backed proven, well-researched, and large scale deployment businesses. (PTI)

SC stays proceedings before HCs on pleas challenging transgender law



NEW DELHI, June 15: The Supreme Court on Monday stayed further proceedings before the high courts on petitions challenging the provisions of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justice V Mohana agreed to hear the Centre's petition seeking to consolidate and transfer all pending pleas challenging the Act from various high courts to the apex court.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre, told the bench that the issue relates to constitutional validity of a central Act.

"Issue notice," the bench said, adding, "further proceedings before the high courts shall remain stayed".

On May 27, Mehta had mentioned the matter before the top court and sought an urgent listing of the transfer petitions.

The top law officer had said that since multiple high courts were currently seized of the matter, there was a significant risk of "divergent views" and conflicting judicial rulings on the validity of the federal legislation.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026, has come under intense legal scrutiny from human rights activists and members of the LGBTQ+ community.

The primary bone of contention is the removal of the concept of "self-identification" of gender, a right previously upheld by the Supreme Court in its landmark NALSA judgment.

The 2026 Amendment reportedly mandates medical or administrative interventions for gender recognition, which the petitioners argue violates the right to dignity, privacy, and bodily autonomy.

On May 4, the apex court had sought responses from the Centre and others on separate pleas challenging the validity of the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026.

On March 25, Parliament passed a bill to amend the law on the protection and rights of transgender persons, which excludes social orientations from the ambit of the statute. It received the President's assent on March 30.

The Act provides for graded punishment based on the gravity of harm inflicted on such people.

The petitioners challenging the validity of the Act have referred to the apex court's 2014 judgement which had upheld the transgender persons' right to decide their self-identified gender. (PTI)

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ETHNICITY OFTEN INFLUENCES CASTING, SAYS GIRIJA OAK, CALLS IT 'STRANGE PERCEPTION GAME'



Actor Girija Oak, known for her work in the Marathi and Hindi film industries, says that perceptions of ethnicity play a role in casting decisions, sometimes benefiting artists and at times going against them.

"I haven't done any Marathi work in the last few years, and of late, more Hindi projects have come my way. I've always been offered a variety of roles. Maybe I don't look Maharashtrian, or maybe I do to some people. Sometimes your ethnicity can work in your favour, and sometimes it can work against

you. It's a strange game of perception," the Nagpur-born actor told PTI in an interview.

Oak has appeared in several notable projects, including "Goshta Choti Dongraevadhi", "Gulmohar", "Baji", "Taare Zameen Par", "Shor in the City", "Jawan", "Inspector Zende", and the recently released "Bharat Bhagya Viddhaata".

She pointed to her casting in the 2025 series "Perfect Family" by casting director Mukesh Chhabra as an example of how industry stereotypes can be challenged.

In the series, Oak portrays Neeti Karkaria, a daughter-in-law navigating the complexities and tensions of a dysfunctional Punjabi family.

"Some people cast me for Maharashtra characters because I can speak the language well and mix it with 'Bambaiya Hindi'. Although I don't speak that way in real life, I can work on it if the character requires it.

"So, if language and appearance are the only considerations, then it ultimately comes down to how people perceive me. But, overall, it has worked in my favour," she added.

The 38-year-old actor shared that she was recently approached to play the mother of a 40-year-old male lead, a proposal that left her surprised.

Reflecting on how differently she has been viewed over time, she re-

called meeting filmmaker Atlee during the casting of "Jawan", when he remarked that she looked very young and should be part of Shah Rukh Khan's core team in the film.

"So, I don't know how I'm perceived, where I'm placed in terms of age, ethnicity, region," explained Oak, who played the role of Iskra, one of the six core female vigilantes who make up the vigilante squad working alongside Shah Rukh Khan's character in the 2023 super-hit action-thriller.

The actor is grateful for her role in "Inspector Zende", where she starred opposite actor Manoj Bajpayee, for giving her renewed recognition.

"Suddenly, a section of the audience has watched my work, and a new audience base has connected with me. The best outcome of this is that I do a lot of theatre, and every time I have a show, at least three people come up to me and say, 'We're watching theatre for the first time because we saw you on social media or watched one of your films.'

"So, this kind of cross-pollination between mediums is the best reward," she explained.

Oak is receiving widespread acclaim for her portrayal of a nurse in "Bharat Bhagya Viddhaata", which hit theatres on Friday.

The film revolves around a story

about the nurses and ward boys of Cama Hospital, who became the nation's quiet saviours during the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.

The film, fronted by actor Kangana Ranaut, also features Smita Tambe and Esha Dey as nurses. It is written and directed by Manoj Tapadia.

To accurately portray the tension on screen, Oak and her co-stars, including Ranaut, Tambe and Dey, underwent workshops to ensure the technical aspects of medical professionals were depicted authentically.

Real nurses were brought to the set to teach the cast as to how to handle syringes, administer injections, saline, etc., smoothly, Tambe informed.

Dey said she visited a hospital privately to speak with actual staff members, and added that she was amazed to see how shy and unaccustomed they were to the spotlight.

"I feel grateful that we are representing such people, who are not able to talk about themselves because nobody has really acknowledged their work. We always remember doctors, but we don't remember which nurse was there at my birth," she added.

The film is produced by PEN Studios, Manikarnika Films, and Paramhans Creations, in association with Eunoia Films LLP and Floating Rocks Entertainment Pvt Ltd. (PTI)

RENOWNED MAND FOLK SINGER GAVRI DEVI DIES



Renowned Mand folk singer Gavri Devi, who earned nationwide recognition for her contribution to traditional music, has died at the age of 98.

The musician breathed her last at her residence in Pali on Thursday evening. She had remained active in Mand singing for several decades and captivated audiences across the country with her performances.

Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma expressed grief over Devi's death, calling it an irreparable loss to Rajasthan's cultural heritage and the folk music.

"The news of the demise of Pali's renowned Mand singer Gavri Devi is extremely sad. Her passing is an irreparable loss to the folk music world and the cultural heritage of Rajasthan," Sharma said.

Sharma said Devi gave Rajasthan's rich cultural traditions a new identity through her melodious voice and dedication to folk music.

"Her invaluable contribution to the preservation and promotion of folk art will always be remembered. Her musical legacy will continue to inspire future generations," he added.

Former chief minister Ashok Gehlot also condoled her death, saying Devi played a significant role in popularising Mand singing across the world.

"Gavri Devi performed Mand singing for several decades and became synonymous with this folk art. Her demise is an irreparable loss to Rajasthan's art and culture sector," he said.

One of Devi's most popular songs is "More Bole Re".

Mand singing, one of the oldest music traditions to originate from Rajasthan, blends melodious notes, storytelling and folk music traditions. The most recalled song in the Mand style is the ever popular "Kesariya Baalam". (PTI)

What sustained Partition veterans is love in their hearts: Imtiaz Ali on 'Main Vaapas Aaunga'

When does despair over a lost homeland fade into nostalgia, trauma into memories that speak not of hatred but romance and dreams? That is what Imtiaz Ali says he explores in his new film "Main Vaapas Aaunga", a remembrance of romance set against the turmoil of Partition.

The film reunites Ali with his "Amar Singh Chamkila" star Diljit Dosanjh and also features Naseeruddin Shah as a 95-year-old recalling his past. Vedang Raina stars as his younger version and Sharvari as the woman he is forced to leave behind with the promise that he will return.

"I feel that this is the personal story of thousands and thousands of people. When they crossed the border, when they came to this side from the other, against their choice, they carried their 'potlis', trunks, jewellery and money. But they carried love in their hearts," Ali told PTI in an interview at the agency's headquarters in Delhi.

"This love later became memories, which then became a kind of a personal jewel that they could return to at any moment when they felt too down or depressed," he added.

The Partition of the subcontinent, possibly the largest mass migration in global history, has been explored frequently in Hindi cinema. There is "Garam Hawa", "Gadar", "Pinjar", "Earth" and "Train To Pakistan", some outright commercial and others more contemplative. Ali's film is the latest in the series and one he hopes will shed light on how people managed to carry forward such love despite their enormous pain and suffering.

"We can only guess how hard their lives

would have been in reality. We can talk about the turbulence, we can talk about the violence they might have seen. But it's very difficult to ascertain the despair they went through. What I realised after talking to hundreds of Partition veterans is that what sustained them is the love in their hearts," Ali said.

"Main Vaapas Aaunga", which released on Friday and has music by AR Rahman, is set in present day India with the 95-year-old on his deathbed but unable to let go because of a memory he has not shared with anyone. The film pieces together the upheaval of Partition through his grandson.

"Doctors are puzzled about why this man who is battling so much pain is not giving up... His grandson is also puzzled. And he pieces together the story that is going on in the old man's mind. And that's how we go to 1947," said Ali.

As a line was drawn through the subcontinent, millions of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims left their homes and travelled to the other side of the newly established borders of India and Pakistan. It was a time of mayhem and bloodshed. Lakhs of people were killed. Many lakhs survived, their scars never really healing. And even so, these people who went



through immense suffering only have "beautiful memories and they don't talk about hatred", Ali said.

The director-writer, who has set several of his films, including "Jab We Met" and "Love Aaj Kal", in Punjab, met many people who survived Partition. The thoughts crystallized when he was shooting his 2024 biopic "Amar Singh Chamkila", also starring Diljit, in Punjab.

"I met hundreds of people. Actually, I was driving into various places in Punjab to meet people who have seen Partition from their own eyes and have an account to tell and they have good enough memories to share.

"And then I learnt they are only talking

about good things, beautiful things that they miss. They are talking about trees in their gardens. They are talking about the girl who would come to their father's shop and they would go secretly to look at her... or the river bank they would spend time with friends. Somebody has written a poetry about that... beautiful things, tender things."

The treasure trove of personal memories are those that remain till the end, Ali said.

"Though they knew the data, they know what has happened, their obsession is still with that beautiful thing they also kept in their hearts. And that sustained them through their hardships."

"Main Vaapas Aaunga" centres around one such couple, a Sikh man and a Muslim woman. And that itself is a reflection of those days that were ironically more liberal than today, said Ali.

"See, we feel that the 'purana zamana' (olden times) was very backward and conservative. But that was not the case. I found in my research that students who were educated in Lahore and all these colleges in Delhi and other places, were very modern, very liberal," he said. Though this was not true of all society, the urban elite were certainly exposed to a lot of influences and most of them were educated abroad, Ali said.

"For instance, if you see Raj Kapoor's interviews or Dilip Kumar's or Dev Anand's, their English is immaculate because their teachers were English made. And that is also a loss that happened in Partition," he said, recalling the three legendary Bollywood actors all of whom were born in now Pakistan. (PTI)

HOLLYWOOD CINEMATOGRAPHER GEORGE RICHMOND INJURED IN PARAGLIDING CRASH IN HIMACHAL PRADESH, UNDERGOES SURGERY

Cinematographer George Richmond, best known for his work on Hollywood blockbusters such as "Free Guy" and "Deadpool & Wolverine", underwent a successful surgery and is recovering at PGIMER here, days after he was injured in a paragliding accident in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu district.

Richmond, 54, was among a group of five on a long-distance cross-country flying expedition from Kangra district's Bir Billing to the Deo Tibba region when he reportedly crashed in the rugged mountainous terrain near Deo Tibba.

Richmond sustained serious injuries during the accident on June 8 and was rescued in an operation involving local authorities in Himachal and the Indian Air Force (IAF). He was later shifted to the PGIMER.

"The Postgraduate Institute of Medical Education and Research (PGIMER), Chandigarh, has successfully undertaken the multidisciplinary management of renowned British cinematographer George Richmond, best known for his work on Deadpool & Wolverine, following a devastating cervical spine injury sustained during a paragliding accident in Himachal Pradesh," a PGIMER statement issued here late Friday evening, said.

It said the cinematographer suffered a catastrophic spinal injury comprising a fracture of the C1 vertebra along with a fracture-dislocation at the C5-C6 level, resulting in quadriplegia.

Such injuries represent one of the most severe forms of spinal trauma, carrying a significant risk of life-threatening respiratory compromise due to the proximity of spinal seg-

ments controlling diaphragmatic function, it said.

The surgery was led by Dr Vishal Kumar, Additional Professor, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, and involved removal of the damaged intervertebral disc and fractured elements causing neural compression. Reconstruction was performed using an interbody cage packed with bone graft substitute material, followed by stabilization with a cervical plate and screws.

After the accident, fellow paragliders alerted the local administration, and a coordinated search and rescue operation was launched.

The rescuers successfully evacuated Richmond from the accident site and brought him to a nearby safer location. He was later airlifted by an IAF chopper to Kullu where he was provided with initial medical care.

As a cinematographer, Richmond frequently worked with British filmmakers Matthew Vaughn and Dexter Fletcher, contributing to projects such as the "Kingsman" franchise and the Elton John biopic "Rocketman".

Richmond is currently stable, conscious and communicating effectively, the PGIMER statement said.

He continues to remain under close observation by a dedicated multidisciplinary team comprising doctors, nurses, rehabilitation specialists and allied healthcare professionals. Early mobilization in a wheelchair has been planned as part of his comprehensive rehabilitation programme.

Richmond was brought to the Advanced Trauma Centre, PGIMER, in the early hours of June 9 and was admitted under the care of the Department of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Immediate resuscitation was initiated in accordance with Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) protocols. Following comprehensive clinical and radiological assessment, the patient was stabilized and transferred to the High Dependency Unit for intensive monitoring and further management.

PGIMER director Vivek Lal said, "Such complex spinal injuries demand not only advanced surgical expertise but also meticulous planning, cutting-edge infrastructure and coordinated teamwork across departments. This case exemplifies PGIMER's preparedness to manage the most challenging medical emergencies while adhering to the highest international standards of patient care. We remain committed to supporting Mr. Richmond through every stage of his recovery and rehabilitation."

Providing details of the surgical management, Prof Vijay Goni, Head, Department of Orthopaedics, PGIMER,



stated, "The patient presented with a highly complex cervical spine fracture-dislocation associated with significant neurological impairment. Following detailed evaluation and stabilization, a carefully planned surgical strategy was executed.

"A major milestone was achieved through fluoroscopy-guided closed reduction of the cervical fracture-dislocation, a technically demanding procedure that successfully restored spinal alignment and eliminated the need for a combined anterior and posterior surgery, thereby reducing surgical morbidity." (PTI)

Dawood Ahmadzai: Afghanistan's loss became France's gain

NEW DELHI, June 15: There were days when Dawood Ahmadzai could only shed tears while watching a Hashmatullah Shahidi hit a cover drive or a Mohammed Nabi bowl a classical off-break.

At times he would wonder what went wrong that his former Afghanistan U19 teammates like Shahidi and likes of Nabi, Gulbadin Naib or Najibullah Zadran, with whom he played competitive cricket were all making waves on the international circuit and T20 leagues while he was trying to figure out if there was any cricket left in him.

"There were many times when I cried watching them on television. They were my teammates. We played together. Sometimes I would think about what happened to my journey and how different things could have been," Ahmadzai, now 32, was a trifle emotional while speaking to PTI.

"Of course, I wanted to wear that Afghanistan shirt," he said. "Those players are my friends and teammates. I played a lot of cricket with them. But life took me somewhere else."

That "somewhere else" was France where the leg-spinner took refuge after having played for the Afghanistan U-19s.

But his journey was far from straightforward. After leaving Afghanistan, Ahmadzai rebuilt his

cricket career from scratch in Europe. There were years when he travelled 11 hours by bus from Paris to Amsterdam to play club cricket in the Netherlands because train tickets were a luxury he couldn't afford.

Healthy and filling meal at times became rarity. "When you start from zero, you have nothing," he tells you.

"I would travel 11 hours by bus, play the match and then travel another 11 hours back. I always believed that this difficult time would pass. I never thought about leaving cricket. This is the only thing that makes me happy."

That perseverance has turned Ahmadzai into a pioneering figure in French cricket.

He recently became the first French international cricketer to claim more than 50 T20I scalps, a landmark for someone who had wondered if there would be meaningful opportunity coming his way.

Yet personal milestones are not what drive him. His focus remains fixed on a far bigger goal.

"I want to help France play a World Cup," he said citing the Italian example.

"Italy have shown that European countries can make it. We hope France can do it too."

With advent of European T20 Premier League, Ahmadzai believes that he can show his wrist spin



artistry to a broader audience while rubbing shoulders with game's greats while he gearing up to represent Acel United Brussels.

In Brussels franchise, he will have former Proteas great Mark Boucher as the head coach and a mentor with whom his thoughts align.

As Boucher speaks about the future of associate cricket, he keeps returning to one example. Afghanistan.

"The moment players started getting opportuni-

ties in leagues around the world, there was belief throughout the country that cricket could change lives."

"The IPL has shown the world what franchise cricket can do," he said.

"SA20 has done the same in South Africa. These tournaments create opportunities for players to learn and improve much faster."

The learning extends well beyond what happens in the middle.

"When players share dressing rooms with international stars, they learn things that coaches can't always teach," Boucher explained.

"They learn professionalism, preparation, how to train, how to handle pressure and how to think about the game. When players like Rashid Khan and Mohammad Nabi started travelling around the world, they brought knowledge and experience back home," he said.

"Younger players saw that pathway and started believing they could do it too."

That same principle is what organisers hope tournaments such as the European T20 Premier League can achieve.

The competition has attracted established names including Jason Roy, Alex Hales, Rilee Rossouw and Sheldon Cottrell, but Boucher believes the real

value lies in the opportunities being created for players from emerging cricket nations like Ahmadzai.

"The stars bring attention, but the associate players gain exposure," he said.

"They get to train and play alongside experienced professionals every day. That's how careers change."

Ahmadzai could not agree more.

"I always say associate countries have talent," he said.

"What they need is exposure. Sometimes people don't trust what you can do because of where you come from. When they finally see you play, then they realise."

Boucher is careful not to predict how quickly European countries can close the gap with the bigger cricketing nations.

With family commitments back home, he is not looking beyond his current assignment in Belgium.

But he is convinced that meaningful progress requires patience.

"You can't judge these projects after one year," he said.

"You need a long-term vision. Five years, maybe longer. Every successful competition had to start somewhere," he signed off. (PTI)

Bhullar finishes as best-placed Indian at tied 31st in Morocco

RABAT (MOROCCO), June 15: Experienced golfer Gaganjeet Bhullar emerged as the best-performing Indian at the International Series Morocco here, closing with a final-round 1-over 73 to finish tied 31st at the USD 2 million Asian Tour event.

Bhullar, one of India's most decorated professionals with 11 Asian Tour victories and four AM Green IGPL wins, put together rounds of 70, 74, 68 and 73 for a four-day total of 6-under-par.

Despite not being able to mount a challenge for the title over the weekend, the seasoned golfer was the highest-placed Indian in a field that included several of the Tour's leading names.

The final round proved challenging for the Indian contingent. Karandeep Kochhar, another winner on the AM Green Indian Golf Premier League, struggled to a closing 78 and slipped to tied 61st.

Ajeetesh Sandhu also found the conditions difficult and carded a 77 to finish alongside Kochhar in tied 61st position.

The week, however, highlighted the difficulty of the Moroccan layout, with seven other Indian players failing to make the cut after the opening two rounds. Bhullar's consistency over four



days ensured that India remained represented in the upper half of the leaderboard, even as sev-

eral compatriots exited early.

The tournament produced a memorable winner in Hong Kong's Taichi Kho. The 25-year-old secured his first International Series title and second Asian Tour victory after a composed final-round performance.

Kho (68) finished at 19-under-par, edging out former Masters champion Bubba Watson (70) in a tense finish.

Bubba Watson's last win came in 2018.

Kho's victory carried additional significance as it boosted him to second place in the Asian Tour Order of Merit standings and third in The International Series Rankings. The win also helped him recover from the disappointment of losing in a playoff on the Japan Golf Tour the previous week.

For India, the tournament yielded mixed results. Bhullar's top-31 finish demonstrated his ability to remain competitive on demanding international layouts, while Kochhar and Sandhu will look to rebound quickly in upcoming events.

With a busy stretch of tournaments ahead on the Asian Tour calendar, the Indian contingent will hope to convert promising performances into stronger finishes in the weeks to come. (PTI)

GM Mitrabha Guha tops regional qualifier to qualify for Esports Nations Cup

RIYADH, June 15: Indian Grandmaster Mitrabha Guha topped the regional qualifiers to book a place in the Indian chess contingent for the Esports Nations Cup here in November, joining compatriot Nihal Sarin in the squad.

Sarin had secured a direct invitation through the Champions Chess Tour (CCT) Leaderboard.

Chess at ENC will feature 128 players competing for a prize pool of USD 600,000 (Rs 5.7 crore). The competition will begin on November 2 and conclude with the playoff final on November 8. The ENC will run till November 29.

The first stage will consist of all 128 players competing in a round-robin group stage featuring 16 groups of eight players each. The second stage will see 64 players advance to a single-elimination playoff bracket.

Of the 128 participants, 64 players received direct invitations through the official CCT rankings, ensuring representation from 64 different countries and territories.



Among the players already confirmed for the ENC 2026 are some of the biggest names in world chess, including Norwegian superstar Magnus Carlsen, Poland's Jan-Krzysztof Duda, France's Alireza Firouzja, and the United States' Hikaru Nakamura.

The field will also feature Switzerland's Alexandra Kosteniuk and Estonia's Mai Narva, who became the first women to officially qualify for the event.

Another 61 players qualified through regional qualifiers operated by Chess.com, while the final three players earned their places through wildcard slots.

Every country and territory can be represented by up to two players at the Finals.

The regional qualifier for the West Asia, India, and Central Asia began with an open nine-round Swiss stage. The top eight players advanced to a double-elimination knockout bracket, from which four players secured qualification to the ENC 2026.

Among the Indian participants, Mitrabha emerged as the standout performer, finishing atop the Swiss standings as the only unbeaten player in the field with six wins and three draws from nine rounds.

His result earned him a place in the Upper Bracket quarterfinals, where he defeated Syria's Malek Koniakhli before overcoming Iran's Artin Ashraf in the Upper Bracket semifinals to secure qualification for the ENC 2026 Finals. (PTI)

Asian Games: Sumit Nagal, Sahaja Yamalapalli to lead Indian tennis contingent

NEW DELHI, June 15: India's top-ranked singles players Sumit Nagal and Sahaja Yamalapalli will spearhead the country's tennis campaign at the 20th Asian Games in Japan as the All India Tennis Association (AITA) on Monday picked a six-member men's and women's squad for the continental showpiece.

The team was selected by the AITA's selection committee under the chairmanship of Nandan Bal and features a mix of experienced campaigners and emerging talent, with the federation banking on a blend of current form and future potential for success in Japan.

The men's squad comprises world number 277 ranked Nagal, young Manas Dhamne (ranked 378), last Davis Cup tie's hero Dhakshinewar Suresh (ranked 478). There are three doubles specialists in the squad led by Yuki Bhambri (world number 24), N Sriram Balaji (world number 61) and Anirudh Chandrasekar (world number 90).

Karan Singh, Rithvik Bollipalli and Niki Kaliyanda Poonacha have been named as reserves.

In the women's section, India number one and world number 332 Sahaja Yamalapalli, Vaishnavi Adkar (396), Vaidehee Choudhari (417) are the singles players in the squad.

Rutuja Bhosale (ranked 125), Prarthana Thombare (181) and Ankita Raina (185) have been selected, with Zeel Desai and Shruti Ahlawat listed as reserves. AITA secretary general Sunder Iyer said the selection committee had carefully assessed performances on the professional circuit before finalising the squad.

"The Selection Committee has carefully evaluated performances across the professional circuit and selected a team that combines experience, current form and future potential. We are confident that this group of athletes will represent India with distinction at the Asian Games in Nagoya," Iyer said. The Asian Games will be held in Aichi-Nagoya from September 19-October 4.

AITA also extended its congratulations to the selected players and pledged full support in their preparations for the Games. (PTI)

Cucurella joins Real Madrid from Chelsea

NEW YORK, June 15: Real Madrid announced the signing of Marc Cucurella from Chelsea on Monday, the day the left back is set to play for Spain in its opening match at the World Cup.

The 27-year-old Cucurella — one of the world's most easily recognizable players because of his long, curly hair — has signed a six-year contract, Madrid said, and for a fee that the BBC reported to be 60 million euros (\$70 million).

It could be the first of a slew of signings made by Madrid since the hiring of Jose Mourinho as coach last week and the re-election of Florentino Pérez as the club's president. Pérez has already said he wants to sign Liverpool center back Ibrahim Konaté and Inter Milan right back Denzel Dumfries.

Cucurella joined Chelsea from Brighton in 2022 — the year the London club was bought by its current American ownership — and has established himself as one of the best left backs in the world, helping Spain to win the European Championship in 2024. He is part of the Spain squad at the World Cup in North America, with the team's first group match against Cape Verde in Atlanta. (AP)

Goa to host 350 players from 16 nations at 5th Asia Cup Bridge C'ship



PANAJI, June 15: Around 350 bridge players from 16 countries across the Asia-Oceania region will compete for top honours at the 5th Asia Cup Bridge Championship, to be held here from June 21 to 27.

Bridge Federation of India (BFI) President Prasad Keni said Goa would be hosting the quadrennial event for the second time, having previously staged it in

2018. BFI Secretary Debasish Ray said participating nations include Australia, China, Indonesia, Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Hong Kong, China, Japan, Chinese Taipei, the Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and hosts India.

Ray said Pakistan had expressed interest in participating

but did not submit its entry.

The championship will feature Team and Pairs events in the men's, women's, seniors and mixed categories. India has fielded 'A' and 'B' teams in all categories.

Expressing confidence in the host contingent, Ray, who is also captain of the Indian men's team, said the squads comprise several accomplished players and medal winners.

India has won 20 medals in the previous four editions of the championship, including eight gold, five silver and seven bronze medals.

The Indian contingent includes Asian Games medallists and seasoned campaigners such as Sumit Mukherjee, Rajeshwar Tiwari, Sayantan Kushari, Anil Padhye, Sukomal Das and Sagnik Roy.

The women's team features Monica Jajoo, Pooja Batra and Himani Khandelwal, while veteran international Kiran Nadar will spearhead India's challenge in the Mixed Pairs category. (PTI)

Struggled with depression, wanted to give up cricket: Shreyanka Patil

BIRMINGHAM, June 15: India off-spinner Shreyanka Patil has revealed that she struggled with depression and even considered quitting cricket during a challenging injury layoff that kept her out of action for more than a year.

The off-spinner, who delivered an economical spell in India's 64-run victory over Pakistan in the Women's T20 World Cup here on Sunday, credited her strong support system for helping her navigate the difficult period and make a successful return to the national side.

Shreyanka spent nearly 14 months on the sidelines after a fractured finger sustained during an Asia Cup match against Pakistan in July 2024. Her injury woes continued with severe shin issues in both legs and a fractured left thumb, before she finally returned to action for Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the WPL earlier this year.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't depressed or that I didn't think about giving up cricket. That's how I felt initially during the injury

phase. But there was a voice inside me saying, 'No matter what, I love playing this sport. I'm here only because I love playing it,'" Shreyanka told JioStar.

"So, I couldn't give up on something I love doing. I kept my head high, my dad kept talking to me, and my family supported me throughout. The atmosphere around me and the strong support system I had, I was always surrounded by great people. That kept me going."

"I love being back on the field now, and I won't let that feeling go," added the spinner who conceded just 17 runs in three overs as India defended a 170-run total with ease against arch-rivals Pakistan.

While the powerplay often tilts the balance in favour of batters, Shreyanka said she enjoys the challenge of operating in those high-pressure overs. With fielding restrictions creating scoring opportunities, her focus is on containing runs and forcing mistakes from the opposition.

"I've always enjoyed bowling in the powerplay, whether it's for my



state team or for India. It's amazing to bowl under pressure because that's what I love doing, and it's something I've successfully done in the past.

"It was fun bowling to a left-hander. We had a couple of missed chances, but Deepti's (Sharma) five-wicket haul made up for it all. It's a great win for us to start the tournament, and we did so with a convincing margin," she added.

Shreyanka stressed that India, the defending Women's World Cup

champions, must remain focused despite their dominant win over Pakistan, noting that formidable opponents such as South Africa and Australia await in the tournament.

"We know that Australia and South Africa are top teams as well. It's a World Cup, and you never know; anything can happen. So, you have to be at your best on the given day, and if you do everything right, you'll end up on the winning side," she said. (PTI)

I like pressure conditions and ICC tournaments: Deepti Sharma



BIRMINGHAM, June 15: Seasoned all-rounder Deepti Sharma says she relishes the pressure that comes with ICC tournaments after delivering a match-winning performance in India's opening Women's T20 World Cup game against arch foes Pakistan here.

Having endured underwhelming series against Australia, South Africa and England, Deepti ended her lean patch in style with career-best figures of 5/10 as India began their campaign with a commanding 64-run victory here on Sunday.

Her spell was the best by an Indian bowler in the history of the Women's T20 World Cup and was the third-best bowling figures overall in the tournament.

The performance came less than a year after Deepti's five-wicket haul in the ODI World Cup final, which helped India clinch their maiden 50-over World Cup title.

"I like the pressure conditions and ICC tournaments; I feel I have started again from where I had finished, so it feels good. I'm focusing on my process...the same things I do in practice I am applying in matches," Deepti said at the post-match press conference.

"These things help me and the only thing is that I have to keep moving forward, and not stop and day by day have to keep improving."

The 28-year-old was a part of the Indian team that reached the ODI World Cup final here in 2017.

Reflecting on her journey since that time, Deepti said, "When you look at young Deepti and now senior Deepti it feels very good. Looking back at the earlier matches and the 2017 World Cup, I learned a lot from that World Cup and I learn from every match where the errors are happening and where I can be better."

"Then I regularly talk to Avishkar sir about what always

helps me; I watch my videos, so I think there is always learning from every match — it doesn't matter whether you are winning or not."

"You are considered a good player only when you think about how to improve even your good qualities, and every match is important to me and I'm just enjoying it. So it feels good," she added.

Against Pakistan, Deepti dismissed opener Gull Feroza Ayeshu Zafar, Aliya Riaz, Nashra Sandhu, and Tasmeena Rubab, while scoring an unbeaten 12 of 9 balls.

"I kept my plans very simple and just had self-belief that whenever such situations arise, I'll have to step up. And since the wicket was slightly turning I was hitting my good balls and landing them well, and it was just about bowling back-to-back in the good areas."

"On today's pitch speed was very crucial, so I was varying it in every over, and that helped me." Smriti Mandhana and Harmanpreet Kaur rescued India with a 91-run partnership after the Women in Blue were reduced to 2/18.

"I think unbelievable batting by Smriti and special mention about that partnership, Smriti and Hari, they batted really well."

"From there we got the momentum because initially we lost early wickets, but we always thought that we have a good batting line-up so we contribute and how they batted is commendable."

India will next take on debutants Netherlands.

"I think they played today and it's a good team and first time they've qualified for the World Cup and we are not taking that game lightly, but it's a few days until that game and now we are looking good, and we are doing good and we are just focusing that each and every match is important for us and we will play our positive cricket. (PTI)

Daichi Kamada's late header gives Japan a 2-2 draw with the Netherlands in World Cup opener for both

ARLINGTON, June 15: Daichi Kamada and his Japanese teammates were minutes away from a World Cup -opening loss that wouldn't have been unexpected considering the opponent.

His tying goal will be remembered for a long time in his homeland, especially if the country with some soccer momentum reaches the round of 16 again.

Kamada scored on a header off Koki Ogawa's corner kick in the 88th minute, sending the Samurai Blue fans into a frenzy and giving Japan a 2-2 draw with the higher-ranked Netherlands on Sunday.

While the Dutch extended their unbeaten streak to 17 games in group play, the orange-clad Oranje supporters were stunned by the late goal that left them at 21-2-11 in group play at the World Cup.

"Our players managed to be tenacious but at the same time be patient and just keep calm and finding and seizing an opportunity," Japan coach Hajime Moriyasu said through an interpreter. His team reached the round of 16 for the fourth time in 2022 in Qatar.

Virgil Van Dijk and Crysencio Summerville scored off each post for the Netherlands early in the second half, while Keito Nakamura had a goal between those as part of a three-goal flurry in just 14 minutes.

A mostly uneventful first half changed quickly after the break for a crowd evenly split at AT&T Stadium, the home of the Dallas Cowboys with the retractable roof that offered relief from the muggy Texas heat, and the giant video board that fans had



a hard time keeping their eyes off.

Summerville gave the eighth-ranked Dutch the lead in the 64th minute, and Japan was running out of hope when Ogawa sent the corner that Kamada timed perfectly. The ball deflected slightly again on its way toward Bart Verbruggen, who got his hands on it with a sprawling dive but couldn't keep it from going in.

Van Dijk sent a header toward the far post on the right in the 50th minute, bending forward from inside the penalty area as he

stared at the ball before it caromed in for the Dutch captain's 13th international goal.

Nakamura answered seven minutes later for 18th-ranked Japan, turning and rifling a shot past Verbruggen from the left side of the arc after taking a pass from Takefusa Kubo.

Another seven minutes later, Summerville took a pass from Ryan Gravenberch and sent a left-footed shot to the far left post past Zion Suzuki, where it caromed in again.

"It's disappointing now because obviously conceding the lead is never good," said Van

Dijk, the second-oldest Dutch goal scorer in a World Cup at 34 years, 341 days, behind Giovanni van Bronckhorst at 35 and 151 against Uruguay in 2010. "It's extra disappointing that we conceded from a set piece so late on."

The Dutch's most recent loss before the elimination round came the last time the World Cup was in the United States in 1994, when a group play defeat was followed by a quarterfinal loss to Brazil at the Cotton Bowl in Dallas.

The pressure is always on the Netherlands to reach the elimination round, in part because it's the only country to reach the final three times without winning the World Cup.

A draw to open Group F, which includes Sweden and Tunisia, won't ease that pressure on coach Ronald Koeman, who faced several pointed questions about strategy and shot back with cryptic replies.

The Dutch beat Japan in their only other World Cup meeting in 2010.

"I'm disappointed that we didn't win, but that's because we were ahead twice," Koeman said through an interpreter. "Many people underestimated Japan, but for the 100,000th time, if you underestimate them, that's your problem. You think Japan's strength was overexaggerated before the match? Let's wait until the end of the tournament to see who's right."

The Netherlands plays Sweden on Saturday in Houston, while Japan goes to Monterrey, Mexico, to face Tunisia on Saturday. (AP)

West Indies beat Sri Lanka by 5 wickets to clinch the T20 series



KINGSTON (JAMAICA), June 15: Sherfane Rutherford reached his half-century in the last over of a dramatic run chase as West Indies completed a series-clinching five-wicket win with two deliveries to spare in the third Twenty20 international against Sri Lanka.

Rutherford was unbeaten on 54 from 40 deliveries and Jason Holder clobbered three sixes in the penultimate over, finishing 21 not out off five balls as West Indies reached 170-5 in reply to Sri Lanka's 169.

Two costly missed catches during Rutherford's innings hurt Sri Lanka's chances of taking the series after the first two games were split. West Indies went into the deciding game with an attacking focus, deciding to bowl first after winning the toss.

Shamar Joseph (5-33) backed up the decision by snaring five wickets to contain Sri Lanka's innings in a player-of-the-match performance.

West Indies won the first T20 by seven wickets and Sri Lanka won the second by 37 runs on Saturday, leaving the series in the balance.

Sri Lanka's innings

Joseph took two wickets in the sixth over and three in the last over of Sri Lanka's innings — twice missing hat-trick opportunities.

Matthew Forde took a stunning one-handed catch off his own bowling to remove Kusal Mendis (5) on the ninth delivery of the match.

Sri Lanka accelerated to be 49-1 after five overs, then Joseph struck with wickets on consecutive balls in the sixth.

Pathum Nissanka hit 26 from 17 deliveries until he top-edged a catch to Roston Chase to end the 43-run second-wicket partnership. Joseph then trapped Pavan Rathnayake lbw on the next delivery.

Dunith Wellalage anchored a lower-order rally for Sri Lanka that was undone when Wanindu Hasaranga (21 off 13 deliveries) was run out in the 19th over, ending a 49-run partnership for the seventh wicket. Wellalage was the first of three wickets to fall in the 20th, posting 43 from 28 deliveries in a run-a-minute innings.

West Indies chase

After losing Shai Hope on the third delivery of the run chase, bowled by Wellalage, West Indies raced to 52 before losing three wickets for one run in a 12-ball span that swung momentum back in Sri Lanka's favor.

Rovman Powell (33) combined with Rutherford to revive the run chase, putting on 81 for the fifth wicket until he was dismissed on the last ball of an eventful 17th over.

The over from pace bowler Dushmantha Chameera contained nine deliveries — including a no-ball and two wides — and netted 24 runs for West Indies and the wicket of Powell. It left West Indies needing 36 runs from three overs.

The equation got down to 29 required from two overs. Holder clouted Chameera for three sixes in four deliveries to end the 19th and leave West Indies needing six runs for victory.

Tour update

Sri Lanka won the preceding — and soggy — three-match ODI series 1-0 after the final two matches were rained out. Sri Lanka won the first match by 41 runs.

The teams will meet in a two-test series starting June 25 in Antigua. (AP)

England loses another pacer for 2nd test vs NZ

LONDON, June 15: England lost another fast bowler for its upcoming second cricket Test against New Zealand at The Oval with Ollie Robinson ruled out with a knee injury.

Robinson took 7-77 overall in the series opener, which England won by 115 runs, and his absence comes after England captain Ben Stokes and teammate Gus Atkinson were dropped Wednesday from the squad while they are under investigation following an incident in a nightclub.

Pacer Atkinson cleaned up New Zealand's second innings in the first Test with figures of 5-30 to clinch a hard-earned victory.

Robinson will stay with the squad and undergo rehab work on his knee ahead of the third and final Test, starting June 25 at Trent Bridge. Uncapped Henry Crocombe has been called up as cover.

The England and Wales Cricket Board are looking into what it described as "a breach of team protocols" when Stokes and Atkinson were on a night out — following the first-test win at Lord's last Sunday — during which a member of England's security staff was reportedly struck by a rugby player from English club Saracens.

The saga has heaped more scrutiny on the professionalism and culture around England's Test team following a humiliating Ashes tour, after which a midnight curfew was reportedly imposed on England's players and staff. With the 35-year-old Stokes unavailable, Joe Root — England's previous captain — will lead the team. (AP)

Iran's World Cup experience is less joyful amid war with host US, team captain says before debut

INGLEWOOD (US), June 15: Iran captain Mehdi Taremi says his team is having a challenging World Cup experience amid the multifold disruptions created by their nation's war with the U.S., the tournament's co-host.

The Iranians arrived in the Los Angeles area on Sunday from their training base in Tijuana, Mexico, just over the U.S. border — about 140 miles (225 kilometers) from the stadium where they will open group-stage play against New Zealand on Monday night. Iran's training camp was relocated from the U.S. after the war began, and the Iranian team has endured numerous distractions since then, including visa problems.

"I have felt the tension from the first moment we arrived at this World Cup," Taremi said through an interpreter. "At any tournament when there is tension, we won't have the same beautiful experience we always talk about with peace and joy. ... I know it wasn't just us. I know several countries had visa problems and changes with training camps. Before we



arrived, the feeling, the sensation people always have, how they look forward to the World Cup, I think this time maybe they haven't had the same feeling."

The U.S. attacked Iran on Feb. 28, and the initial missile strikes killed its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The war has slowed and resumed several times since then, with President Donald Trump even announcing a peace deal earlier Sunday — one that wasn't addressed at the news conference.

"This kind of tension, it undermines that joy and it undermines the message of FIFA and our people, which is that football brings about peace," said Taremi, the 33-year-old Olympiacos striker who is playing in his third World Cup. "I feel like this World Cup could have provided a better atmosphere than it has, but I hope in the future it will be better for all fans, whatever team they are supporting in the World Cup."

Iran initially planned to train in Tucson, Arizona, before the war's

outbreak, but quickly moved to Baja California. FIFA then rejected Iran's desire to play its group-stage World Cup matches outside the U.S., claiming logistics and contracts wouldn't allow it.

Iran has been beset with logistical problems since then, including the denial of visas for certain members of its delegation. A team spokesperson said Sunday that two members of its media relations group were denied U.S. visas for the opening match. Iran and its traveling fans also have faced multiple issues with match tickets.

"Without any doubt, this will impact negatively the spirit of football," Iran coach Amir Galenouei said. "Football is supposed to bring nations and cultures together. Whether we win, whether we lose, that's a personal feeling we have, but football as a game is about bringing about joy. These conditions, they have impacted our technical focus, but I have really tried to make sure that my players focus on strategy and techniques." (AP)

Deepika scores brace as India rally to beat USA 3-2 in Nations Cup

AUCKLAND, June 15: The Indian women's hockey team staged a remarkable comeback to clinch a 3-2 win over the USA in its opening Pool A match of the FIH Nations Cup here on Monday.

For India, Deepika netted a brace while Navneet Kaur also scored. Ashley Sessa and Madeleine Zimmer were on the score-sheet for the USA. The winner of the Nations Cup will be promoted to the elite Pro league, from which India were relegated last season.

The USA got off to a great start and opened the scoring through Ashley, who found the back of the net with a field goal in the fourth minute.

The Americans doubled their advantage just three minutes later when Madeleine Zimmer (7') converted a penalty corner to put India under early pressure.

Trailing by two goals, India gradually began to assert themselves in attack. (PTI)

Amad Diallo scores in 90th minute to lift Ivory Coast past Ecuador 1-0 in WC

PHILADELPHIA, June 15: Amad Diallo scored in the 90th minute to lift Ivory Coast to a 1-0 victory over Ecuador in its first World Cup appearance in a dozen years.

The teams combined to hit the crossbar three times before the Manchester United winger — who entered as a substitute in the 56th minute — broke through with a left-footed shot from just inside the penalty area that beat diving goalkeeper Hernan Galindez. Wilfried Singo set up the goal with a strong run down the right side.

Making its fourth appearance in the World Cup and first since 2014, Ivory Coast took a step toward reaching the knockout stage for the

first time. Ecuador saw its 19-game unbeaten streak end with its first loss since a 1-0 decision against Brazil on Sept. 6, 2024.

Elye Wahi hit the crossbar in the 52nd minute for Ivory Coast after Ecuador's John Yeboah and Nilson Angulo did the same in the opening half.

Ecuador, making its fifth World Cup appearance and looking to reach the knockout round for the second time, was playing a virtual home game at Lincoln Financial Field, with most of the capacity crowd of 68,274 wearing the yellow jerseys of La Tri.

Ecuador looked strong before Diallo's goal. Its best chance after halftime came in the 68th

minute on Gonzalo Plata's hard shot from about 25 yards out that was parried away by goalkeeper Yahia Fofana.

Ivory Coast was bolstered by the forward play of Yan Diomande. The Leipzig attacker created several scoring chances, particularly down the right side. That included Wahi's near goal on a flick following Diomande's hard cross.

Ivory Coast, which did not concede a goal while going 8-0-2 in 10 qualifying matches, will next face four-time World Cup champion Germany, which defeated Curacao 7-1 earlier Sunday in Group E. Ecuador will meet Curacao. Both matches will be played June 20. (AP)

Neeraj Chopra to return to action at Doha Diamond League



NEW DELHI, June 15: Fit-again Indian javelin throw superstar Neeraj Chopra on Monday announced that he will return to action at the Doha Diamond League on June 19, ending weeks of speculation about

his competition calendar for the season.

The 28-year-old has been recuperating from a back injury which has prevented him from competing so far in the year.

"The wait is over. First throw of 2026 lands in Doha! Neeraj Chopra returns to competitive action on June 19," his management firm Vel Sports announced on Instagram.

Chopra is a late addition to the event as his name was not in the list announced by the organisers on June 12. He has been training in Switzerland's Olympic Centre to prepare for the season.

"See you in Doha," Chopra wrote on Instagram.

He has not competed since the World Championships in Tokyo on September 18, 2025, when he had finished eighth with a throw of 84.03m.

Pakistan's Olympic champion Arshad Nadeem, whose participation was announced on June 12, did not figure in the latest list of competitors.

Chopra will be up against star Sri Lankan Ramesh Ramesh Tharanga Pathirage, the season leader with his stunning 92.62m at the Rome leg of the Diamond League on June 4, reigning world champion Keshorn Walcott of Trinidad and Tobago, and two-time world champion Anderson Peters of Grenada.

Others in the nine-man star-studded field are World Championships bronze-medallist Curtis Thompson of the USA, Julius Yego of Kenya, Jakub Vadlejch of Czechia, Mohamed Husein Ahmed Sameh of Egypt and Artur Felner.

In May last year, the two-time Olympic medallist Indian had breached the coveted 90m mark at the same venue. He had recorded 90.23m to finish second behind Julian Weber (91.06m) of Germany.

The Doha Diamond League was to be originally held on May 8 as the season-opening event but was postponed due to the ongoing West Asia conflict.

Chopra was on Sunday named in India's 32-member athletics squad for the upcoming Commonwealth Games, subject to achieving the Athletics Federation of India's (AFI) qualifying standard of 82.61m.

AFI selection committee chairman Adille Sumariwalla on Sunday said that Chopra was expected to return to competition within the next 10 days.

"Neeraj has recovered from his back injury. He is now training fit and is getting ready to compete probably in the next 10 days or so," Sumariwalla, a former AFI president said.

"He has requested that he will be contesting in a couple of competitions before the

Commonwealth Games and if he achieves his qualifying standard (82.61m) he be selected for the CWG."

Besides Chopra, who won gold at the 2018 CWG, Rohit Yadav and Yashvir Singh will also compete in the men's javelin throw event after meeting the qualification mark at the Indian Athletics Series in Ludhiana on Saturday.

The Commonwealth Games are scheduled to be held Glasgow, Scotland from July 23 to August 2.

Meet record breakers to get USD 5000 bonus

The Doha Diamond League organisers are hoping that men's javelin throw would be one of the highlights of the prestigious one-day meet.

Organisers announced that athletes who set new meet records will be awarded a USD 5000 bonus, an innovative concept that was first introduced in 2025.

The DL winner in each event will pocket USD 10,000, second-place finishers to get USD 6,000 and ninth-place finisher USD 500.

"Competing against the world's best athletes is a dream come true for me and I'm incredibly excited to line up in Doha where we've witnessed many memorable javelin competitions over the years," Pathirage said in a statement from the organisers. (PTI)

Sweden gets 2 goals from Yasin Ayari and pounds Tunisia 5-1

MONTERREY (MEXICO), June 15: Yasin Ayari scored twice and Sweden showed it belonged at the 2026 World Cup, pounding Tunisia 5-1 to move atop Group F.

Alexander Isak and Viktor Gyökeres each had a goal and an assist, and Mattias Svanberg also scored for Sweden, which entered ranked 39th in the world and missed the 2022 World Cup after reaching the quarterfinals eight years ago in Russia.

Omar Rekik scored for 45th-ranked Tunisia, which is playing in its seventh World Cup but has never advanced beyond the group stage.

The higher-ranked teams in the group, the Netherlands and Japan, played to a 2-2 draw earlier Sunday at Arlington, Texas.

Ayari bookended the scoring for the Swedes at Estadio BBVA with long-range goals in the seventh minute and in second-half stoppage time. He was muted in his celebration of the first goal, raising his hands out of respect for the country where his father was born.

Isak scored his 18th international goal in the 30th minute when Gyökeres found the Liverpool striker — who was sidelined much of last season with a broken leg — on a counterattack. Isak cut inside and fired a low shot past the hands of Tunisian goalkeeper Mouhib Chamakh, who struggled all night.

After Rekik stalled Sweden's momentum with his goal in the 43rd minute, Isak and Gyökeres put Sweden back in control. Isak stole the ball and found Gyökeres for a one-on-one against Chamakh that the Arsenal striker won easily for his 16th goal in his last 15 appearances for Sweden and 21st overall.

Svanberg scored in the 84th minute, a goal that was awarded after a lengthy video review.

Sweden will play the Netherlands at Houston on Saturday, while Tunisia will remain in Monterrey and face Japan the same day. (AP)