

6 WORLD Zelensky says Russia is shifting air defences to Moscow FTA with UK most comprehensive agreement so far: Piyush Goyal 8 NATION Emergency dark period which saw Indian democracy brutally crushed: Modi CM Adityanath accuses Congress of 'strangling democracy' during Emergency

Assamese language: The road ahead

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The future of the Assamese language has emerged as one of the most important cultural and social questions confronting Assam today. Language is not merely a tool of communication; it is the carrier of a community's collective memory, historical experiences, worldview, and cultural inheritance. For centuries, Assamese has served as the foundation upon which the identity of the Assamese people has been built. It has survived political upheavals, colonial interventions, demographic transformations, and social change, continuously adapting itself to new realities while retaining its essential character. Yet the challenges facing Assamese in the twenty-first century are markedly different from those encountered in the past. Globalization has expanded opportunities for communication across national and linguistic boundaries, but it has also intensified the dominance of a few globally influential languages. Technological advancement, migration, changing educational preferences,

Details on page-2

Arunachal calamity: Search operation to resume today ● Six dists remain cut off from state ● Khandu announces ex-gratia for family of deceased

Four missing persons remain untraced

ITANAGAR, June 25: The search and rescue operations for four people who went missing following a flash flood triggered by incessant rain in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district, were suspended for the day on Thursday evening, an official said. The rescue efforts will resume on Friday morning, he said. Despite extensive efforts conducted throughout the day, the missing persons could not be traced, State Disaster Management Secretary Dani Sulu said in a statement. An IAF helicopter was pressed into service to ferry State Disaster Response Force and police personnel to the district, besides evacuating stranded tourists and patients, officials said. Efforts are also being made to reopen the roads blocked by debris brought in by the flash flood and landslides. The flash flood struck the NEEPCO Colony area at Poosa in Keyi Panyor on Wednesday morning, damaging houses, disrupting road connectivity and triggering landslides at several locations.



As many as six districts - Keyi Panyor, Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey, Lower Subansiri, Kamle and Upper Subansiri - have been cut off from the rest of the state due to heavy rainfall, the officials said. Landslides have also been reported on the Itanagar-Hoj-Yazali stretch of National Highway-13. Despite the difficult terrain and road blockages caused by landslides, search operations resumed on Thursday morning, with personnel of the district administration, police, SDRF, NEEPCO, ex-servicemen and local volunteers pressed into service, Sulu said. An IAF helicopter was deployed to airlift additional SDRF personnel and equipment to the Pitapool area to strengthen the ongoing rescue efforts. According to preliminary assessments, around 18 residential units in and around the NEEPCO Colony were damaged in the flood. A 35-year-old woman's body was found on Wednesday, while 17 people suffered injuries. The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) said Thursday's operation is focused on locating the four missing persons, and efforts are underway to restore

road connectivity. Two excavators have been deployed to clear the sludge and boulders blocking the road towards Potin. The Border Roads Organisation (BRO) is continuing road clearance work from the Kimin side, while highway restoration is also progressing from the Hoj side. The state home department said that continuous rainfall and landslides have blocked several key roads in Keyi Panyor and Papum Pare districts, including the Sagalee-Hoj route, Pitapool-Toru Road, Pitapool-Hoj Road and the Kimin Bypass at multiple locations. Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the state government is closely monitoring the situation in Keyi Panyor district, with all agencies engaged in rescue, relief and restoration efforts. He said the first road blockade from the Pitapool side and another near Possa Bridge have been cleared, improving access to the affected areas. Efforts are underway to hand over the body of the deceased to the family members, the CM said in a social media post. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Restrictions on commercial LPG withdrawn: Assam chief secy

GUWAHATI, June 25: Assam Chief Secretary Ravi Kota on Thursday announced that all restrictions on commercial LPG cylinders have been withdrawn with immediate effect, following improvement in the West Asia war crisis. The Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas (MoPNG) has communicated to all states after a review of the situation, and decided to relax the restrictions on sale of commercial LPG cylinders, Kota said in a post on X. "The Government of India has reviewed the temporary LPG supply restrictions imposed during the recent West Asia crisis and has decided to restore commercial LPG supplies to pre-crisis levels," he added. Some of the key directives communicated by the MoPNG are withdrawal of sectoral restrictions on non-domestic (commercial) packed LPG and resuming supplies of commercial LPGs at pre-crisis levels, Kota said. "Bulk LPG supplies may be restored up to 50 per cent of pre-crisis consumption levels. Consumers with access to PNG are to continue or transition to PNG as a long-term measure," he added.



Kota also shared a letter from MoPNG Secretary Neeraj Mittal, who earlier during the day wrote to all states and union territories to inform the Centre's decision on withdrawal of the restrictions. Mittal's letter stated that all commercial and industrial consumers' data must continue to be captured by the OMCs (Oil Marketing Companies) in their databases. "A unified database may be maintained by sector across the 3 OMCs. Further, as already instructed, such commercial/bulk customers who have shifted to PNG shall remain on PNG," he told the states and UTs. If other LPG customers (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Venezuela quakes claim 164; nearly 1,000 hurt

CARACAS, June 25: Rescue teams raced Thursday to the areas hardest hit by a pair of powerful earthquakes that rocked Venezuela, killing at least 164 people, injuring nearly 1,000 and trapping many beneath collapsed buildings. Wednesday evening's 7.2- and 7.5-magnitude earthquakes were among the strongest to strike Venezuela in more than a century and could be felt throughout the region. The country's main airport was damaged and closed, while buildings were evacuated in places as far away as Brazil's Amazon, about 1,700 kilometers (1,050 miles) from Venezuela's capital, Caracas. Television broadcasts Thursday showed rescue workers using power tools to work their way into piles of rubble where buildings once stood. Panicked residents of the capital were sent pouring into the streets, and after the quakes many people walked among the debris searching for the missing among collapsed buildings



and toppled electric poles. Acting President Delcy Rodriguez, who gave the latest death toll early Thursday, said authorities were shifting rescue teams from other parts of the country to La Guaira, which sits north of Caracas on the coast. Officials were trying to make the most of the daylight hours to speed up efforts to rescue people believed to remain trapped under the rubble, she said. Footage on state TV showed three children, covered in dust but alive, pulled from the rubble in La Guaira state, which Rodriguez described as a "disaster zone" and one of the areas hardest hit by the quakes because of the large (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Another couple nabbed for celebrating birthday on Brahmaputra bridge

GUWAHATI, June 25: A day after 14 people were arrested for celebrating a birthday on a bridge over the Brahmaputra river, one more couple was apprehended for another similar act, police said on Thursday. In a post on Facebook, Guwahati Police said a couple has been arrested and their sport utility vehicle was seized as they celebrated the wife's birthday on the Kumar Bhaskar Varma Setu across the Brahmaputra in the city. A video of the birthday celebration by the couple went viral on social media after the arrest of the 14 people in the first case. "Of all the places in our Awesome Assam to celebrate his wife's birthday, Surajit Mandal & his wife Bijoya Mandal reached the bridge to cut the cake. In this connection with Bharatmukh PS Case No. 80/2026, Thar has been seized and the couple have been apprehended," it added.

On Tuesday, the police had registered a case against a local businessman, his wife and 12 others on charges of endangering public safety and creating a nuisance by celebrating her birthday on the bridge. They were arrested a day later, and four luxury vehicles were seized. "Following repeated incidents, we, Guwahati Traffic Police, would like to clarify that Kumar Bhaskar Varma Bridge is a bridge to cross the mighty Brahmaputra. It is not a pub. It is not a discotheque. It is not a restaurant. It is not a photoshoot destination," the city police said. It added that this clarification was necessary for a few "audacious romantic partners for their stupid birthday plans". The bridge is open for traffic, but closed for birthday parties, the Guwahati Police said. The six-lane bridge, built at a cost of around ₹ 3,030 crore, was inaugurated by (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Emergency tried to crush democracy, civil liberties: CM

GUWAHATI, June 25: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the Emergency imposed in 1975 was an attempt to crush India's democratic values and civil liberties. Remembering the period, Sarma paid tribute to all the "brave warriors" who struggled to protect democracy. "We remember that dark chapter in the history of Indian democracy, when in 1975 the Emergency was imposed in an attempt to crush the country's democratic values and civil liberties," he said in a social media post. "Humble salutations to all the brave warriors who struggled to protect democracy," he added. The Emergency was in force from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977, after it was proclaimed under Article 352 of the Constitution. Since 2025, the Narendra Modi government has observed June 25 as 'Samvidhan Hatya Diwas'. A gazette notification issued in this regard said the Emergency was declared on June 25, 1975, and was followed by a "gross abuse of power" by the government of the day, with people subjected to excesses and atrocities. (PTI)

India's indigenous Netra System gets final operational clearance certificate



BENGALURU, June 25: India's Indigenous Netra Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) System was on Thursday accorded Final Operational Clearance, marking a major milestone by paving the way for operational exploitation by the Indian Air Force. Air Marshal Awadhesh Kumar Bharti, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, formally declared the Final Operational Clearance (FOC) of the Netra AEW&C system in a ceremony held at the Centre for Airborne Systems here. At the event here, the indigenous Netra (AEW&C) System and the FOC certificate were also unveiled. Speaking on the occasion, Air Marshal Awadhesh Kumar Bharti said, "It is indeed a proud moment to declare the AEW&C's Final Operational Clearance. This is not merely the culmination of an indigenous technology programme, but a celebration of the unique partnership between the Indian Air Force and the scientific community in fulfilling India's quest for Atmanirbharta." Noting that the journey of the AEW&C has been extraordinary, he also said that it came with challenges, as is the norm for any new system. "We had to do a lot of inno-

Digital arrest scams: CBI conducts searches in 16 states

NEW DELHI, June 25: The CBI has conducted searches at 80 locations in 16 states to dismantle a network that ensnared hundreds of people in digital arrest scams using a URL similar to that of the Supreme Court website, officials said Thursday. The agency deployed 60 specialised teams across 16 states stretching from Punjab and Gujarat in the west to Assam and Manipur in the northeast as part of 'Operation Chakra-VI' that dismantled the network allegedly linked to over 200 cases of cyber-enabled fraud. Digital arrest scam has emerged as one of the most pernicious forms of cyber-enabled extortion where victims are contacted by individuals impersonating police officers, central agencies investigators or judicial officials. Victims are threatened of being implicating in a criminal activity and coerced to make payments to avoid arrest or prosecution. At the centre of this scam is a website bearing a



URL (Uniform Resource Locator) "deceptively similar" to the official website of the Supreme Court of India, the CBI stated. "The fraudsters allegedly used this fraudulently registered domain to deceive victims under the guise of digital arrest. Based on a complaint received from the Registry of the Supreme Court of India, the CBI registered an FIR and commenced investigation into the matter," the spokesperson said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam Agriculture minister favours shift from paddy farming to high-value crops

With nearly 75 lakh people in Assam dependent on farming

GUWAHATI, June 25: Assam Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika on Thursday advocated a shift from traditional paddy cultivation toward high-value horticulture. Hazarika chaired a meeting organised by Assam Agricultural University (AAU) and the Department of Agriculture here on a roadmap for rural economic growth, according to an official release. The multi-stakeholder conclave brought together academicians, agriculture scientists, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), financial institutions and key allied departments like Fisheries, Irrigation, Veterinary, Animal Husbandry, Horticulture and Sericulture to forge a collaborative approach to modernise the state's farm sector. Addressing the gathering, the minister noted that while India ex-



ports billions of dollars in agricultural products like tea, meat, fish, fruits and vegetables, Assam's contribution remains minimal and must be urgently rectified. He highlighted the national economic drain caused by importing pulses and edible oils, emphasising

Prohibitory order issued for special Assam TET 2026 in Sonitpur

HT Correspondent TEZPUR, June 25: The District Magistrate of Sonitpur, Ananda Kumar Das, ACS, has promulgated an order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, in connection with the Special Assam Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) 2026, scheduled to be held on June 28. The order has been issued to ensure the free, fair and smooth conduct of the examination and to maintain security, discipline and confidentiality throughout the examination process. According to the order, the assembly or gathering of unauthorized persons, unauthorized entry into the examination centre, pho-

tography, videography, communication or any activity intended to facilitate unfair means or disrupt the examination process has been prohibited. The order also bars the use of loudspeakers or public address systems and any activity causing noise or disturbance in the vicinity of the examination centre. Further, any act causing obstruction, interference or compromise to the security and orderly conduct of the examination has been prohibited within a radius of 100 metres of the examination centre on the day of the examination. The order shall not, however, apply to candidates possessing valid admit cards, examination officials, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Kuki body apologises for killing of six Naga hostages

CHURACHANDPUR, June 25: Acknowledging and expressing regret over the killing of six Naga hostages, Kuki Zo Council (KZC) chairman Henliethang Thanglet on Thursday apologised for the incident and called for an impartial investigation into all acts of violence linked to the ongoing ethnic strife in Manipur. Addressing a press conference at Churachandpur district headquarters, Thanglet said, "I admit the Kuki-Zo people made a grave mistake in killing the six Naga civilians. It was done out of emotion. I strongly condemn it. I am very sorry and apologise on behalf of my people." KZC spokesperson Ginza Vual-zong also called for an impartial investigation into all incidents of violence, including the killing of the Naga (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Very close on trade deal with US; competitive tariff advantage important for India: Piyush Goyal

**LONDON, June 25:** Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said that the trade pact with the US is "very close", but it cannot come into force unless India secures a competitive tariff advantage over its competitor nations.

"The day that happens, the deal is on," he said here at the India Global Forum (IGF) UK-India Week event. Goyal is here on a three-day official visit to discuss issues related to the implementation of the India-UK free trade agreement. The minister held two-day talks with US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer in New Delhi this week on the first phase of the India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

However, a statement by the commerce ministry gave no indication that all differences were resolved ahead of the expiry of 10 per cent temporary tariff on July 24. A free trade agreement is fundamentally aimed at providing a compara-



tive advantage over competitor countries in terms of market access, he said. "And until the framework of getting that competitive advantage can be finalised, we can't enter into force a US deal. I don't think I can be more transparent than that...So that's broadly the discussions (be-

over its competitor countries, such as ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia), Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Under the framework, the US had announced an 18 per cent tariff on Indian goods. At that time, tariffs on India's competing countries ranged from 19 to 20 per cent. But now, all countries face the same 10 per cent additional levy. The minister added that the framework or contours of the agreement with the US was finalised and announced on February 6 this year and both the teams are working since then to finalise the blueprint.

Suggesting that the India-United States trade deal was 99 per cent complete, US Ambassador Sergio Gor, on June 3 in Mumbai, said that both sides were trying to resolve the remaining "1 per cent" sticking points and expected the long-awaited pact to be inked within the next several weeks. (PTI)

## Assamese language: The road ahead

(Contd from page 1)

and shifting social aspirations have further altered the linguistic landscape of Assam. Increasingly, sections of society view English as the language of opportunity and upward mobility, while Assamese is often confined to cultural and emotional spaces. This perception, whether justified or not, has created a disconnect between linguistic identity and practical utility. The real challenge before Assamese, therefore, is not merely survival but relevance. A language remains strong when it occupies a meaningful place in everyday life, education, administration, commerce, technology, and public discourse. Mere expressions of pride or symbolic celebrations cannot ensure its future. The recent recognition of Assamese as a Classical Language has undoubtedly enhanced its prestige and reaffirmed its historical significance, but recognition alone cannot guarantee growth. The road ahead demands a clear understanding of the contemporary realities shaping language use. Assamese must become a language that is not only respected for its literary and cultural achievements but also valued for its practical significance in modern society. If this balance between heritage and utility can be achieved, the language will continue to flourish. If not, it risks becoming increasingly marginalized despite its rich history and cultural importance. The debate surrounding the future of Assamese is therefore not simply a linguistic issue; it is a broader question about identity, continuity, and the direction in which Assamese society wishes to move in the coming decades.

Any meaningful discussion about the future of Assamese must begin with the role of family and education, because these remain the two most influential institutions in language transmission. The strength of a language depends largely on whether it is passed naturally from one generation to the next. In many households today, particularly among urban and educated sections, the use of Assamese has gradually declined. Parents often choose to communicate with their children in English or a mixture of languages, believing that early exposure to English will provide academic and professional advantages. While multilingualism is undoubtedly beneficial in an interconnected world, the weakening of the mother tongue at the household level creates long-term consequences that are often overlooked. A child's first language shapes cognitive development, emotional expression, and cultural understanding. When children lose fluency in their mother tongue, they become increasingly detached from the literature, folklore, traditions, and historical experiences that define their cultural identity. Schools are expected to compensate for this loss, but educational institutions alone cannot perform the function that families once fulfilled naturally. At the same time, the growing preference for English-medium education has placed Assamese-medium institutions under considerable pressure. The issue is not whether English should be learned; in the modern world, proficiency in English is essential. The real question is whether Assamese can be strengthened alongside English rather than being displaced by it. Educational reforms must therefore focus on improving the quality of Assamese-medium education while ensuring that students remain competitive in a global environment. High-quality textbooks, modern teaching methods, digital learning resources, and strong teacher training programs are necessary to restore confidence in Assamese-medium institutions. Higher education also deserves attention. Assamese cannot remain confined to literature and the humanities if it is to remain relevant in the future. The language must become a medium for academic research, scientific discussion, technological innovation, and intellectual discourse. Universities and research institutions should actively encourage scholarly work in Assamese and develop the necessary terminology and resources to support advanced learning. A language thrives when it becomes a vehicle for knowledge creation rather than merely a subject of study. The future of Assamese education depends not on resisting modernity but on integrating the language into the changing educational and professional landscape.

The challenges and opportunities presented by technology and public life constitute another crucial dimension of the road ahead for Assamese. Languages across the world are increasingly competing for visibility and relevance in digital spaces. Social media platforms, online education, digital entertainment, artificial intelligence, and mobile technology now shape the communication habits of younger generations more profoundly than traditional institutions ever did. In this environment, a language that lacks a strong digital presence risks becoming peripheral, regardless of its literary achievements or official status. Assamese therefore faces a critical task: it must establish itself firmly within the digital ecosystem. Encouragingly, significant progress has already been made through Unicode technology, digital publishing platforms, and social media content creation. However, much remains to be done. The production of high-quality digital content in Assamese must expand dramatically. Educational videos, podcasts, online courses, digital libraries, mobile applications, and multimedia storytelling platforms can help bring the language closer to younger audiences. At the same time, public institutions and commercial establishments must contribute to strengthening the practical use of Assamese. Despite being the official language of the state, its presence in administration, business communication, and public services often remains inconsistent. A language gains prestige when it functions effectively in domains that affect everyday life. Government offices, educational institutions, businesses, and media organizations should therefore increase the use of Assamese in ways that are meaningful rather than merely symbolic. The media, in particular, has a special responsibility. Newspapers, television channels, radio stations, and digital platforms shape public attitudes toward language. Their commitment to linguistic quality and creativity can significantly influence how Assamese is perceived by younger generations. Another important consideration is inclusivity. Assam is home to diverse linguistic and ethnic communities, and the promotion of Assamese must proceed in a manner that respects this diversity. Assamese should continue to function as a bridge language that facilitates communication and social cohesion while acknowledging and respecting the linguistic rights of all communities. A confident language does not grow through exclusion; it grows through openness, adaptability, and its ability to bring people together. The future of Assamese will depend not only on how effectively it preserves its traditions but also on how successfully it adapts to the realities of a rapidly changing world.

The recognition of Assamese as a Classical Language has provided a historic opportunity, but opportunities become meaningful only when they are translated into sustained action. The significance of this recognition extends beyond symbolic prestige. It acknowledges the antiquity of Assamese, the richness of its literary heritage, and its contribution to India's linguistic and cultural landscape. More importantly, it creates possibilities for research, preservation, academic development, and international visibility. Yet the road ahead requires a shift from celebration to strategy. The central challenge is ensuring that Assamese remains both culturally significant and practically useful. A language cannot depend solely on government support or institutional initiatives; its vitality ultimately rests on the choices made by ordinary people in their daily lives. Every conversation conducted in Assamese, every book read by a young reader, every piece of digital content created in the language, and every effort to teach it to the next generation contributes to its future. The responsibility belongs to families, educators, writers, journalists, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and cultural organizations alike. At a deeper level, the future of Assamese is inseparable from the future of Assamese identity itself. Languages do not disappear overnight; they gradually lose ground when speakers begin to believe that they are no longer necessary. Preventing such a decline requires confidence, not defensiveness; innovation, not nostalgia; and practical engagement, not symbolic rhetoric. Assamese possesses all the attributes required for a vibrant future—a rich literary tradition, a strong cultural foundation, institutional recognition, and a devoted community of speakers. What is needed now is a collective determination to ensure that these strengths are effectively harnessed. The road ahead is undoubtedly challenging, but it is also filled with possibilities. If Assamese society can successfully combine cultural pride with modern relevance, historical awareness with technological adaptation, and emotional attachment with practical usage, the language will continue to thrive as a living and dynamic force. The future of Assamese will not be determined by external circumstances alone; it will be shaped by the choices made today. That reality places both the responsibility and the opportunity firmly in the hands of the people who call Assamese their own.

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Afia Begum, W/O- Jaimal Abdin of Village- No.2 Chaulkhowa, P.O- Mangaldai, P.S- Mangaldai, Dist.- Darrang (Assam), do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the above noted address and citizen of India by birth. That my actual and correct name is Afia Begum. That my name has been recorded in my Aadhaar Card Vide Aadhaar No.6903 5282 6683 issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India as Rukia Begum in place of Afia Begum. That Afia Begum and Rukia Begum are the same and one person who is myself. That this affidavit is required to be produced before the Authority concerned as a piece of evidence.

Sd/-  
Afia Begum

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Nijam Ali, son of Abdul Berek of Village No. 1 Sialmari, P.O. Dalgao, P.S. Dalgao, District Darrang, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a citizen of India by birth and permanent resident of the aforesaid address. That, I am the father and natural guardian of my daughter, who's actual and the correct name is Rejina Khatun. That, due to clerical error, in my Daughter's Aadhaar Card bearing No. 8268 3981 0583, her name has been wrongly recorded as Rejina Parbin instead of her correct name Rejina Khatun. That Rejina Khatun and Rejina Parbin refer to one and the same person, i.e., my Daughter, and there is no difference in identity.

Sd/-  
Nijam Ali

### AFFIDAVIT

I, Ajiran Nesa, W/o Hasmat Ali of Village Aminpara, P.O. Aminpara, P.S. Rowta, District Udalguri, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that, I am a citizen of India by birth and a permanent resident of the aforesaid address. That, my actual and correct name is Ajiran Nesa. That, inadvertently and due to clerical error, in my Aadhaar Card bearing No 2601-7620-7310, my name has been wrongly recorded as Ajiran Nesa instead of Ajiran Nesa. That Ajiran Nesa and Ajiran Nesa refer to one and the same person

Sd/-  
Ajiran Nesa

## Shakti Pumps unveils clean energy solutions in Guwahati

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, June 25:** Shakti Pumps (India) Limited, a manufacturer of energy-efficient pumps and solar pumping solutions, organised its Product Launching Meet 2026 in Guwahati in collaboration with its authorised channel partner, Tirupati Pump House, to showcase its latest clean energy technologies and strengthen its presence in Northeast India.

The event, held at Vivanta, brought together dealers, channel partners, industry professionals and stakeholders from across the region.

Chairman of the Assam Small Industries Development Corporation (ASIDC), Kishore Upadhyay, addressed the programme as the chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, he highlighted the role of technology-driven solutions in promoting industrial growth, self-reliance and sustainable development in the region.

Among those present were Under Secretary of the Irrigation Department Gopal Chetry, Additional Chief Engineer of the Public Health Engineering Department Ghanashyam Kalita, AGS President Krishna Bhujel, Executive Engineer of the Boko Chaygaon Chamaria Division Akikul Aman, Assistant Engineer of the Public Health Engineering Department Abhinav Talukdar and Punjab National Bank Senior Manager Minhaz Ahmed. During the programme, the company showcased its latest range of energy-efficient pumping technologies, including solar pumping systems, stainless steel pumps and intelligent water management solutions aimed at supporting sustainable agriculture and efficient water use.

Speaking on the occasion, Managing Director of Shakti Pumps Ramesh Patidar said Northeast India is emerging as an important market for sustainable water and energy solutions.

Contd. from Page 1...

## Four missing persons

Khandu also announced ex gratia assistance to the family of the deceased and relief to the injured as per government norms. He said 14 stranded tourists were airlifted from Ziro in Lower Subansiri district to Naharlagun, while evacuation of another 11 tourists and one patient from Daporji in Upper Subansiri was completed.

Meanwhile, Governor K T Parnaik expressed grief over the death and prayed for the safe recovery of those still missing. He directed the district administration and other agencies to remain on high alert, identify vulnerable locations, closely monitor weather conditions and issue timely advisories. (PTI)

## Restrictions on commercial

can access PNG and can shift to PNG or are in the process of shifting to local PNG network, they shall be permanently transitioned to PNG, Mittal said. "OMCs shall ensure that this transition to PNG continues to happen in conjunction with CGD entities," he added. (PTI)

## Venezuela quakes claim 164

number of collapsed buildings. "Dozens of buildings have collapsed there ... and we are currently carrying out intensive rescue operations to save lives," Rodriguez said. Video shared online appeared to show dozens of people, some lying on the ground and others on hospital beds, being treated outside a hospital in La Guaira.

While Venezuela sits near multiple fault lines, its position straddling the South American and Caribbean plates makes strong earthquakes much less common than in other parts of Latin America.

Rodriguez appealed to businesses to make heavy construction equipment available for rescue operations, adding that search and rescue teams certified by the United Nations were on their way to Venezuela.

During the quakes, people ran from swaying buildings in Caracas, many visibly shocked when they turned back to see destroyed walls that left furniture visible from the street. Columns of dust rose in two typically busy neighborhoods in the capital. "It started off gently and then gradually grew, and in the end, we all had to leave our houses, go outside and gather together," Caracas resident Hector Ricci said.

The U.S. Geological Survey said the first earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.2, hit west of Moron on the Caribbean coast, about 170 kilometers (105 miles) west of Caracas. It had a depth of 22 kilometers (about 14 miles). Just a minute later, USGS reported a second 7.5 magnitude earthquake, with a depth of 10 kilometers (about 6 miles) and an epicenter 16 kilometers (10 miles) southwest of Moron. (AP)

## Another couple nabbed for

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on February 14, and has been a major tourist draw for its majestic view of the Brahmaputra. (PTI)

## Digital arrest scams: CBI

The operation culminated with the arrest of two accused individuals, B Naresh and Sanjib Saha, from Chennai and Kolkata respectively. They were part of the gang that cheated citizens through deception, intimidation and technological subterfuge, they said. The arrested suspects were allegedly involved in creating a financial scaffolding to cover money trail by setting up shell companies and opening and operating mule bank accounts. "These accounts were reportedly used for laundering approximately Rs two crore of suspected proceeds of crime," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The fraudsters allegedly exploited public trust by creating forged documents that closely resembled official court orders, warrants and notices on the URL mimicking the Supreme Court website. "Investigation has revealed that the perpetrators uploaded forged and fabricated documents, including fake orders resembling those issued by courts and various law enforcement agencies, to lend credibility to their fraudulent activities," the spokesperson said.

The agency leveraged advanced forensic tools and technical expertise, identifying critical elements of the criminal infrastructure operating both within India and abroad. The CBI said the inquiry has uncovered evidence suggesting that the criminal enterprise may have targeted foreign nationals in addition to Indian citizens.

During the searches, investigators seized mobile phones, digital devices, banking records and other incriminating material. (PTI)

## Prohibitory order issued for

Executive Magistrates, police personnel and other government officials engaged in examination-related duties. The district administration has informed that any violation of the order will attract penal action under Section 223 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, along with other relevant provisions of law.

The prohibitory order has come into force with immediate effect and will remain in force until the completion of both shifts of the Special Assam Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) 2026. The district administration has appealed to all citizens to cooperate by strictly complying with the order and extending all possible support for the peaceful, orderly and fair conduct of the examination.

## India's indigenous Netra

final operational clearance. And this was not mere act of optimism. This was an expression of confidence in the capabilities of our scientists, and in the immense potential of our indigenous industry," he added.

Later, speaking to reporters, K Rajalakshmi Menon, Director General (AERO) at DRDO said the indigenous system is equipped with a comprehensive suite: radar, electronic warfare systems, secure communication, self-protection and it provides excellent situational awareness.

Along with the airborne segment, the system also has ground elements. "This includes operator training stations and mission planning stations. So, it is a fully operational capability that we have provided to the Indian Air Force. This capability is already being used operationally. It is a very capable system," she added.

In a video message, Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit, Chief of Integrated Defence Staff (CIS), said that the national objective of achieving full operational capability for the Netra AEW&C system is particularly significant in the rapidly evolving geopolitical scenario.

Recalling the project's journey from the Cabinet Committee on Security's sanction in October 2004 to the FOC achieved today, he lauded the efforts of DRDO, the Indian Air Force and industry partners in delivering the indigenous airborne early warning and control system at its full operational potential. "DRDO's innovative research and development expertise, support from certification and quality assurance agencies, the efficiency and agility of Indian industry, and the operational insights of the services have emerged as a critical pillar in strengthening our national defence capabilities and achieving self-reliance in defence technologies," Dixit said. He also welcomed the planned expansion of the Netra programme to six more aircraft, expressing confidence that the upcoming projects would be equally successful. Asked about the six aircraft that will be developed by the DRDO under the programme, Menon added that, "the new system will incorporate all the lessons we have learned. It will have enhanced features. The current NETRA was developed during the 2004 era and beyond. For the new system, we are using today's technologies. It will be significantly better than what has already been delivered."

Addressing media later, the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff said, "Since it has been built indigenously, it is entirely ours. All the software, source codes, interface control documents (ICDs), and everything related to the system are with us. This allows us to keep our capabilities confidential. We can also modify and enhance the system according to our future requirements," he said. Bharti observed that this flexibility is not available with systems procured from abroad. "In such cases, we always have to go back to the original manufacturer if any capability enhancement is required. That is the biggest advantage of an indigenous programme, and that is what we are seeing with the AEW&C Netra," he added. (PTI)

## Assam Agriculture minister

researchers of AAU to utilise this collaborative platform to guide the department in selecting region-specific crops and developing climate-resilient seeds and saplings. He stated that this interface must serve as a dynamic bridge connecting scientific research directly to the fields, transforming Assam's agricultural landscape from basic subsistence to a highly profitable commercial enterprise, the release said. (PTI)

## Kuki body apologises for killing

hostages, 14 Kuki civilians and the burning of Kuki villages. Six Nagas were taken hostage from Leilon Vaiphei village in Kangpokpi district on May 13. Their bodies were recovered on June 10 from the vicinity of a Kuki-Zo village. Kuki organisations have claimed that 14 members of the community were killed and several houses were burnt after clashes broke out between the Kuki and Naga communities in February this year.

Vualzong also demanded "firm and decisive action against militant groups responsible for attacks on civilians, including the NSCN-IM and the Zeliangrong United Front (Kamson), and comprehensive investigations into locations suspected of sheltering or harbouring perpetrators".

He alleged that security operations were being conducted selectively in Kuki areas and demanded that law enforcement actions be carried out fairly, professionally and without bias against any community. Vualzong also called for reopening all blocked routes in Naga-dominated areas and ensuring unhindered access to health-care services, food supplies, medicines, fuel and other essential commodities for affected populations.

"Restore public confidence by ensuring accountability within the administrative and security apparatus and by protecting all vulnerable villages irrespective of ethnicity," he said. (PTI)

**BALANCE ELECTRICAL GENERAL WORKS**  
E-Tender Notice No. DY.CEE/CON/HQ/MLG/03/2026 Dated: 22-06-2026. Open tender through e-Tendering system is invited from experienced and reputed contractor(s)/firm(s) for the following works: **Tender No. EL-CON-MLG-01-2026-27-KYG. Name of work:** Balance Electrical General works in BG-2 section and HQ Mallaigon. **Tender value:** ₹2,26,97,843.35/- **Bid Security:** ₹4,54,000/- **Date & Time of submission of tender:** Upto 14.30 hrs. on 15-07-2026 & opening at: 15.30 hrs. on 15-07-2026. The complete information and tender document of above e-Tender will be available at [www.ireps.gov.in](http://www.ireps.gov.in)

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NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY (Construction Organisation)

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### NAME CHANGE

I, Dulal Hazarika do hereby declare that I have changed my name from Dulal Das to Dulal Hazarika by dint of an affidavit, executed before Executive Magistrate on 22/06/2026.

Now I will be known as Dulal Hazarika instead of Dulal Das.

Dulal Hazarika  
Vill - Dimoruguri (Santipur)  
P.O. - Jagi Bhakatgaon  
P.S. - Jagiroad  
Dist - Morigaon Assam  
PIN - 782412

### NAME CHANGE

I, Kiran Hazarika do hereby declare that I have changed my name from Kiran Das to Kiran Hazarika by dint of an affidavit, executed before Executive Magistrate on 22/06/2026.

Now I will be known as Kiran Hazarika instead of Kiran Das.

Kiran Hazarika  
Vill - Dimoruguri (Santipur)  
P.O. - Jagi Bhakatgaon  
P.S. - Jagiroad  
Dist - Morigaon Assam  
PIN - 782411

### LOST

I, Meghalee Rangra, resident of Bongaigaon, Assam, hereby state that my HSLC Pass Certificate bearing Roll No. 0309 and Registration No. 02UV061200693410 has been lost/misplaced.

If anyone finds the said certificate, kindly contact me at 8011374069.

Meghalee Rangra  
Bongaigaon, Assam

### NAME CORRECTION

I Harekrishna Mahato S/O Sukhadev Mahato R/O Ganeshguri, kachariBasti,Dispur Guwahati -5 have corrected my name that my actual and correct name is Harekrishna Mahato but in some other documents it is written as Harekrishna Mahto, Hari Krishna Mahto and Harekrishna Mahoto that all are same person having single identity sworn through an affidavit before the first class Judicial Magistrate, Kamrup (M) Guwahati dated 06/06/2026.

### NAME CORRECTION

My actual name is Samsun Naher which is correctly appeared in my EPI card vide No. JBM 6837747 under Mankachar LAC . in my Aadhaar card No. 5440 5027 8275 and my pan card No. DQEPN 3211D unfortunately my name has been recorded as Samsun Nehar Bibi in my Bank passbook Account No.7149010045836 under Assam Gramin Bikash Bank kharuabandha Branch.

Yours faithfully  
Samsun Naher  
W.O.Saher Ali  
Vill. Telipara  
P.O. purandiara  
P.S. Mankachar

## Pijush Hazarika calls for crop diversification

### Agriculture Minister urges shift to high-value horticulture at AAU interface meeting on farm sector transformation

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 25:** Assam Agriculture, Irrigation and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika on Thursday called for a strategic shift from traditional paddy cultivation to high-value horticultural crops, urging scientists, policymakers and stakeholders to work together to transform the state's agricultural economy.

The Minister was addressing an Interface Meeting jointly organised by Assam Agricultural University (AAU) and the Department of Agriculture at the Assam Administrative Staff College.

The meeting brought together academicians, agricultural scientists, Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs), NABARD representatives and officials from allied departments, including Fisheries, Irrigation, Veterinary and Animal Husbandry, Horticulture and Sericulture.

Describing the event as a first-of-its-kind multi-stakeholder initiative, Hazarika stressed the need for closer collaboration between scientific institutions and govern-



ment agencies to modernise Assam's agriculture sector.

Addressing the gathering, the Minister observed that despite India's substantial agricultural exports, Assam's contribution remains limited and requires urgent attention.

He also highlighted the country's dependence on imported pulses and edible oils and called for enhanced production to achieve self-sufficiency in commodities

such as eggs, fish, poultry and pork.

With nearly 75 lakh people dependent on agriculture in the state, Hazarika emphasised the need to expand irrigation coverage, noting that only about 24 per cent of Assam's agricultural land is currently irrigated.

He advocated replacing low-profit traditional paddy cultivation with high-value horticultural crops, encouraging farmers to di-

versify into commercially viable produce such as areca nut, litchi and black pepper to significantly enhance rural incomes.

Calling upon Assam Agricultural University to play a proactive role, the Minister urged researchers and scientists to identify region-specific crops, develop climate-resilient seed varieties and provide scientific guidance to farmers through sustained collaboration with the Agriculture Department.

He said the interface should serve as a bridge between scientific research and practical farming, helping transform Assam's agriculture from subsistence-based cultivation into a profitable and market-oriented sector.

The inaugural session was attended by Agriculture Department Commissioner and Secretary Aruna Rajoria, Assam Agricultural University Vice-Chancellor Prof Dipjyoti Rajkhowa, Chief General Manager of NABARD Assam G Ramesh Kumar and other senior officials and experts from the agriculture sector.

## KAAC tables key bills, salary hike proposal in 254<sup>th</sup> council session

### CEM introduces financial and administrative measures as House pays tribute to former CEM Biren Singh Engti

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, June 25:** The 254th Session of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) was held at the KAAC Session Hall in Diphu on Thursday under the chairmanship of Council Chairman Raju Tisso, with members deliberating on a series of important financial and administrative matters.

During the session, Chief Executive Member (CEM) Tuliram Ronghang tabled several key Bills relating to the powers and functions of the Customary Law Court, the KAAC Employees' Pension and the council's taxation framework.

He also placed the latest reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) before the House.

Among the major proposals introduced during the session was a Bill seeking revision of salaries and allowances for the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, Chief Executive Member, Executive Members (EMs) and Members of the Autonomous Council (MACs).

The House also observed a



solemn obituary reference in memory of former Union Deputy Minister and former Chief Executive Member of the KAAC, late Biren Singh Engti. Members paid rich tributes to the veteran leader and acknowledged his contributions to the development of Karbi Anglong. Earlier in the day, former MLA Darsing Ronghang was sworn in as a nominated Member of the Autonomous Council.

The oath of office was administered by Karbi Anglong District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia in

the presence of CEM Tuliram Ronghang and other council dignitaries.

Newly appointed Executive Members Headings Rongphar and Kadam Terangpi also formally assumed charge of their respective offices before the commencement of the council session.

The proceedings focused on strengthening the council's administrative and financial framework while addressing legislative and governance matters concerning the autonomous council.

## Injured Slow Loris rescued in Karbi Anglong

**HT Correspondent**

**HOWRAGHAT, June 25:** An injured slow loris, locally known as Lajuki Bandar, was rescued from the Bakaliaghat area of Karbi Anglong district on Wednesday night following a coordinated effort by a local environmental activist, police and forest officials.

According to reports, local residents spotted the injured animal lying by the roadside near JS Academy, close to Bakaliaghat Police Station, and alerted environmental activist Chandni Saha.

Saha immediately rushed to the spot and rescued the animal with the assistance of personnel from Bakaliaghat Police Station before handing it over to the Forest Department for treatment and rehabilitation.

Forest officials provided the necessary medical care to the injured mammal and initiated arrangements to release it back into its natural habitat after ensuring its recovery.

The prompt response of the environmental activist, police and forest officials drew appreciation from local residents, who lauded their efforts in protecting the endangered species.

The slow loris is a rare nocturnal primate known for its slow movements and distinctive defensive mechanism.

It is among the few venomous mammals in the world, possessing a specialised gland near its arm that secretes a toxin.

When threatened, it mixes the secretion with its saliva, enabling it to deliver a venomous bite.

The species is native to the rainforests, dense woodlands and tea garden ecosystems of Northeast India, including Assam.

However, habitat destruction and illegal wildlife trade have significantly reduced its population, making it one of the region's vulnerable and protected mammals.

Forest officials reiterated the importance of public cooperation in wildlife conservation and urged people to immediately inform the authorities whenever injured or distressed wild animals are spotted.

The successful rescue once again highlighted the crucial role of timely public intervention and coordinated action in safeguarding the region's rich biodiversity.

## Assam orders probe into alleged DISE-SEBA code scam in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, June 25:** The Assam Government has ordered a formal inquiry into alleged irregularities in the allotment of DISE and SEBA codes to private schools in Nagaon district following reports of procedural violations and fraudulent approvals.

Education Minister Ranaj Pegu announced the decision on Thursday through social media, stating that the Department of School Education had initiated an investigation into the matter.

According to an official order issued by the department, the inquiry was ordered after media reports and inputs from various sources indicated large-scale irregularities in the Office of the Inspector of Schools, Nagaon. The allegations include the issuance of prior permission, DISE codes and SEBA codes to several private schools without the required documentation or approval from the competent authorities.

The department has entrusted Krishna Baruah, Secretary, Department of School Education, with conducting a detailed inquiry. He has been directed to submit a comprehensive report within seven days of

receiving the order. The announcement of the probe has reportedly triggered concern within the Office of the Inspector of Schools, which is alleged to have been at the centre of the irregularities.

According to reports, a section of officials and employees allegedly facilitated the issuance of DISE and SEBA codes to private educational institutions in violation of prescribed procedures.

Earlier this week, the Inspector of Schools, Nagaon, reportedly acknowledged during a press conference that at least eight private schools had obtained DISE and SEBA codes through fraudulent means.

He also stated that some institutions had been operating using forged documents.

The alleged scam has drawn sharp criticism from various organisations in Nagaon, which have demanded a thorough investigation and strict action against those found responsible. Several citizens and members of the academic community welcomed the government's decision, expressing hope that the inquiry would restore transparency and accountability in the school affiliation process.

Meanwhile, questions have also been raised regarding alleged activities at the Inspector of Schools' office after official working hours. Some local residents have alleged that a section of Grade III and Grade IV employees regularly assemble at the office during the evenings, prompting calls for further scrutiny.

The Madhya Assam Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union also demanded stringent action against educational institutions that allegedly secured DISE and SEBA codes through fraudulent means.

Addressing a press conference, the union's General Secretary Ratul Kumar Rajbongshi called for the immediate closure of such schools and urged the government to dismantle rackets allegedly commercialising the education sector.

The organisation also demanded that no new private school be permitted to operate within a two-kilometre radius of an existing government school. The inquiry report is awaited as the state government moves to examine the allegations and strengthen oversight of the school recognition and affiliation process.

## Leopard sighting triggers panic in Margherita

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, June 25:** Panic has gripped Margherita town in Tinsukia district following repeated sightings of a full-grown leopard in and around the premises of the abandoned A.R. & T. Company Limited Veneer Mill, prompting residents to urge the Forest Department to take immediate action.

According to local residents, the leopard was first spotted on June 20 inside the compound of the century-old veneer mill, which has remained closed for several years and is now overgrown with dense vegetation, providing a suitable habitat for wild animals. Residents claimed to have witnessed the leopard in the area, triggering fear among nearby inhabitants.

Fresh panic spread on Thursday morning when the leopard was reportedly seen drinking water from the Buridighing River near Ward No 6 of Margherita town.

The sighting caused concern among traders, shopkeepers and residents in the busy market area.

Following the repeated appearances of the big cat, local residents questioned the response of the Forest Department under the Digboi Forest Division and urged officials to take immediate measures to capture the animal and prevent any untoward incident.

## Kokrajhar transport officials inspect accident-prone spots

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, June 25:** The District Transport Office, Kokrajhar, on Thursday conducted an inspection of several accident-prone locations in and around Kokrajhar town as part of efforts to improve road safety and reduce traffic accidents.

District Transport Officer Dhwanendra Basumatary, accompanied by Motor Vehicle Inspector (MVI) Biju Gogoi, visited key accident-prone stretches to assess prevailing road safety conditions and identify areas requiring intervention.

During the inspection, the officials interacted with drivers of both private and commercial vehicles and discussed various road safety issues.

They also conducted awareness activities, urging motorists to adopt safe driving practices and strictly adhere to traffic regulations.

Emphasising the importance of responsible driving, the District Transport Officer and the Motor Vehicle Inspector appealed to road users to follow traffic rules, avoid reckless driving and contribute to reducing accidents in the district.

Officials said the District Transport Office is planning to launch a comprehensive road safety awareness campaign aimed at educating motorists, promoting responsible driving behaviour and enhancing public awareness of traffic regulations. The proposed initiative is expected to strengthen road safety measures, improve traffic management and help minimise accidents across Kokrajhar district.

## ATDC chairman seeks probe into alleged irregularities in Dibrugarh park renovation

**Rituparna Baruah urges Chief Minister to order independent inquiry into utilisation of ₹3 crore renovation funds**

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, June 25:** Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) Chairman and former MLA Rituparna Baruah has sought an independent inquiry into the renovation of Mahatma Gandhi Sishu Udyan, popularly known as Khanikar Park, in Dibrugarh, alleging possible misuse of public funds in the execution of the project.

In a letter addressed to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on June 18, Baruah requested an impartial investigation into the renovation works carried out under the Directorate of Housing and Urban Affairs (DOHUA).

The project was reportedly undertaken at an estimated cost of approximately ₹3 crore.

Khanikar Park is one of Dibrugarh's most prominent recreational spaces, frequented by children and families from the district and neighbouring areas.

While acknowledging the Chief Minister's initiative in undertaking the park's renovation, Baruah said several complaints had been received from members of the public regarding the quality of the work executed.

According to him, residents have questioned whether the existing infrastructure and facilities at the park are commen-

surate with the reported expenditure, raising concerns over the utilisation of government funds.

"Khanikar Park is a prominent landmark and a major recreational destination for the people of Dibrugarh. The public deserves transparency regarding the utilisation of funds allocated for its renovation," Baruah said.

Referring to the grievances received, he claimed that only limited work, including the installation of a few CCTV cameras and painting, was visible at the site despite the project costing nearly ₹3 crore.

He said the visible improvements appeared disproportionate to the reported expenditure and warranted an independent assessment to establish whether the funds had been utilised appropriately. Seeking accountability, Baruah urged the Chief Minister to order an impartial inquiry into the execution of the project so that the facts could be established and public confidence maintained.

The demand comes amid growing public concern over the condition of the renovated park, with several residents reportedly questioning the quality of infrastructure created under the project and calling for greater transparency in the utilisation of public funds.

## Section 163 BNSS imposed around Haflong TET centre

**HT Correspondent**

**HAFALONG, June 25:** The Dima Hasao district administration has imposed prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), 2023, around the designated examination centre for the Assam Special Teacher Eligibility Test (TET), 2026, scheduled to be held on June 28. The order was issued by District Magistrate Gayatri Devidas Hyalinge, IAS, to ensure the smooth, peaceful and fair conduct of the examination.

According to the official notification, the administration has apprehended the possibility of a breach of peace and law-and-order issues during the examination. To prevent any disruption, the entry of all persons, except candidates appearing for the examination and officials engaged in conducting and monitoring it, has been prohibited within a 100-metre radius of the examination centre. The restrictions will remain in force in and around PM

Shri Government Girls' Higher Secondary School, Haflong, the designated examination centre for Dima Hasao district.

The order, however, exempts police personnel, Army personnel and magistrates performing official duties. The District Magistrate stated that the prohibitory order had been issued under powers conferred by Section 163 of the BNSS and was passed ex parte considering the urgency of the situation. Any person aggrieved by the order may approach the competent authority seeking modification, alteration, waiver or rescission of the directive.

The prohibitory order will come into effect from 7 am on June 28 and remain in force until the completion of the entire examination process. The district administration has appealed to the public to cooperate with the authorities in maintaining a peaceful and secure environment to facilitate the smooth conduct of the Assam Special TET 2026.

## MP Ranjit Dutta reviews devp projects at Sonitpur DISHA meeting

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, June 25:** Member of Parliament from Sonitpur Lok Sabha constituency Ranjit Dutta on Thursday chaired the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) meeting at the Convention Centre, Batamari, and reviewed the progress of flagship government schemes being implemented across Sonitpur district. In his opening remarks, Dutta observed that it was the first DISHA meeting held after the formation of the new State Government and stressed the need for effective coordination among departments to ensure the timely implementation of development programmes.

The meeting was attended by Naduar MLA Padma Hazarika, Tezpur MLA Prithiraj Rava, Barchalla MLA Ritubaran Sharma, Sonitpur District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das, Sonitpur Zilla Parishad Chairperson Manisha Upadhyay, District Development Commissioner Sanjeev Kumar Sharma, Chief Executive Officer of Sonitpur Zilla Parishad Jayanta Kumar Bora, Additional District Commissioners, elected representatives, heads of departments and

other stakeholders.

The meeting began with a review of the Action Taken Report on decisions taken during the previous DISHA meeting, followed by detailed discussions on schemes implemented by the departments of Panchayat and Rural Development, Public Health Engineering, Health, Public Works, Education, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Affairs, Forest, Municipal Administration, Water Resources, NHIDCL, BSNL and APDCL, among others.

The MP directed all departments to expedite the implementation of pending projects and emphasised the need for timely completion of works sanctioned under the 15th Finance Commission. The committee also reviewed the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and the Awas+ 2024 Survey, including progress in identifying land for landless beneficiaries.

Discussions were also held on the implementation of Jal Jeevan Mission projects, monitoring the responsibilities of Jal Mitras, progress of Asom Mala road projects, Aahhaar seeding under municipal schemes, distribution of free bicycles to eligible students and the ra-

tionalisation of teachers and doctors across the district. In view of the ongoing monsoon season, special emphasis was laid on strengthening embankments and flood preparedness. The Water Resources Department was instructed to maintain adequate stocks of geobags, geotubes and other essential materials to enable prompt response during flood emergencies. The committee further reviewed the progress of rural electrification in Forest Rights Committee (FRC) villages and the availability of mobile network connectivity in remote areas.

During the meeting, the Chief Executive Officer of the Sonitpur Zilla Parishad also briefed members on various components of the Viksit Bharat - Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) [VB-G RAM-G]. Prior to the DISHA meeting, members attended the District Planning Committee (DPC) meeting, chaired by Sonitpur Zilla Parishad Chairperson Manisha Upadhyay, during which schemes proposed under the tied and untied grants of the 15th Finance Commission for all five Legislative Assembly constituencies of the district were considered and approved.

## NFR steps up passenger assistance during Ambubachi Mela

**Food distribution, Scout volunteers and special trains deployed**

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, June 25:** Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has intensified passenger assistance measures during the annual Ambubachi Mela by organising food distribution programmes, deploying volunteers and operating special train services to facilitate the movement of thousands of pilgrims visiting the Kamakhya Temple.

As part of the initiative, the Northeast Frontier Railway Women's Welfare Organization (NFRWVO), under the leadership of its President Shalini Shrivastava, organised a food distribution programme at Kamakhya Railway Station for devotees arriving from different parts of the country.

The initiative was aimed at providing refreshments and assistance to pilgrims during one of the region's largest religious congregations.



NFRWVO stated that the programme reflected its continued commitment to passenger welfare and humanitarian service.

To strengthen passenger assistance during the festival, members of the NF Railway Bharat Scouts and Guides have been deployed at

major railway stations across the Northeast Frontier Railway zone.

The volunteers are assisting passengers through crowd management, guidance and information support to ensure safer and smoother travel.

The Commercial Department of

Northeast Frontier Railway also organised a food distribution programme at Guwahati Railway Station for devotees travelling to Kamakhya Temple.

To manage the heavy rush of passengers, NFR is operating several special unreserved train services connecting Kamakhya with major destinations across Assam and North Bengal.

The railway has also temporarily augmented the carrying capacity of several regular passenger trains to accommodate the increased number of devotees during the Ambubachi Mela.

Northeast Frontier Railway said it remains committed to providing safe, convenient and passenger-friendly services through coordinated efforts involving various departments, welfare organisations and volunteers during the festival period.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*A lover without indiscretion is no lover at all.*  
- Thomas Hardy

## Dengue upsurge

A major outbreak of dengue fever is sweeping over South Asian countries this year; in India, the reduced rainfall during the current weak monsoon season has emerged as a negative factor. While the number of affected persons and dengue-related deaths are significantly higher in India in the region as a whole, because of its larger population, the situation in neighbouring countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh is not much better either. According to medical authorities, rising temperatures over longer periods during spring/summer months, rapid urbanisation, rising air pollution and unpredictable rain patterns have all contributed to the spread of dengue fever in recent years. There are alarming signs that the fever may no longer be treated as a seasonal phenomenon. This year, almost 7000 cases in India, a staggering number, were reported during the Jan-Feb period, breaking previous records! More cases were reported from South Indian states with Tamil Nadu registering 2873 cases, while Maharashtra followed with 786, according to recent reports. There were more cases in Kerala and Karnataka as well on a y-o-y basis. Official sources said the growing numbers of dengue-related cases challenged common perceptions still prevailing in parts of the country that the disease was seen at its most virulent form during the pre-monsoon and rainy seasons.

As for Bangladesh, foreign media reports claimed that in June over 5000 dengue attacks were reported. Countrywide, 714 cases were reported in May, which rose to 1703 by mid-June. Nine people have died so far. Hundreds of people were being admitted to hospitals daily. The medical outlook for Bangladesh in the short and medium terms was grim, as the peak of dengue was usually witnessed during the June/September period. The worst affected areas, apart from crowded parts like Dhaka etc, were Barishal and Chattogram, suggesting that conditions were alarming in both urban and rural areas. A further discouraging common feature for south Asian countries regarding the spread of dengue (and also measles, for Bangladesh) was the significant drop in the quantum of rainfall during the present monsoon this year. The one thing that kept the mosquito population down and reduced its breeding time was the repeated spells of heavy rainfall usually seen during the monsoon. But this year, a generally reduced rainfall has been predicted for the region as a whole because of the La Nina factor operating at present.

As things stand, hospital facilities have come under a major strain, as more and more patients get admitted. Not only medicines and supplies are running out, but the hospital staff themselves are feeling the strain, as there is little relief for them, creating avoidable tensions at workplace.

## Ambubachi: From religious belief to modern science

In the natural rhythm of the seasons, the arrival of the month of Asadha is far more than a mere environmental transition. It breathes a vibrant new life into the religious, social and cultural fabric of Assam. It is during this month that the celebrated Ambubachi Mela is hosted at the historic Kamakhya Dham. Known locally as Xanth or Aamati, this festival, centered around the sacred seat atop the Nilchal Hills, stands as one of the grandest celebrations within the pan-Indian Shakta tradition. Every year, Kamakhya Dham transforms into a magnificent confluence of millions of devotees, sages, ascetics and tantric practitioners from across the globe. Today, it has also emerged as a significant focal point for historians, sociologists and scientifically-minded researchers. Beyond its foundational folklore, the festival harbors profound scientific realities, cosmic cycles, a celebration of womanhood and ancient agrarian wisdom. Rooted in the fertility of the Earth and the cyclical rhythms of nature, this tradition reflects humanity's deep-seated kinship with the environment. In today's rationalist society, there is a pressing need for an objective analysis of Ambubachi's religious beliefs, its underlying scientific outlook and its cultural relevance.

The term 'Ambubachi' originates from two Sanskrit words—Ambu (water) and Vachi (expression). Literally, it signifies the swelling of waters or the nurturing moistening of the Earth caused by the seasonal rains. Two primary historical texts of the Assamese Shakta tradition—the Kalika Purana and the Yogini Tantra—depict Ambubachi as a sacred period marking the annual cosmic cycle and the menstruation of Mother Earth. According to astrological calculations, when the Sun passes through the fourth quarter of the Mrigashira nakshatra and enters the Ardra nakshatra in the month of Asadha, the Earth Mother is believed to undergo her annual menstrual cycle. Based on this traditional belief and scriptural ordinances, the doors of the Kamakhya Temple remain completely closed to the public for the first three days. On the fourth day, following ritualistic purification and special prayers, the temple gates are reopened for devotees.

Beyond the religious spectrum, this tradition is viewed in Indian philosophy as a pro-

found tribute to the creative power of womanhood. At the heart of Ambubachi lies a deep spiritual conviction. For generations, devotees and seekers have revered this festival as a unique manifestation of the universal feminine energy. In Indian Shakta philosophy, a woman is not perceived merely as a physical entity of flesh and blood, she is venerated as the primal cause of creation, the sustenance of life and the dynamic energy of the cosmos. The Devi Mahatmyam within the Markandeya Purana, an authoritative scripture of Shaktism, extols this omnipresent form of the Divine Mother:

"Ya Devi Sarvabhuteshu Shakti-rupena Samsthitā, Namastasyai Namastasyai Namastasyai Namamah."

Similarly, the Devi Bhagavata Purana designates the Goddess as the Mother of the Universe and the ultimate foundation of creation, preservation, and dissolution. Aligning with this expansive spiritual framework, the belief in Mother Earth's menstruation during Ambubachi is celebrated as a deeply sacred and creative festival of life.

The definitive significance of Kamakhya Dham is vividly illustrated in the 76th verse of the 62nd chapter of the Kalika Purana, a renowned 10th-century text, which states: "Satyastu patitam tatra vishirman yonimandalam, Shilavatamagachhaite Kamakhya tatra samsthitā. Samprishya tam shilam martyo hyamaratvamavapnuyat, Amartyo brahmasadanam tatstho mokshamavapnuyat." This proclaims that the sacred yonimandala of Goddess Sati, the beloved of Mahadeva, fell upon this mountain and transformed into stone over time. Within this stone form, Goddess Kamakhya resides eternally. If a mortal on earth gets the opportunity to touch this sacred stone even once, they transcend all worldly illusions to attain immortality. Furthermore, such a virtuous soul eventually ascends to the highest realm of Brahma and achieves ultimate salvation.

Correspondingly, the 19th verse of the 11th chapter of the Yogini Tantra, a pivotal 16th-century Tantric text, declares:

"Rinani trinypakartum yasya chittam prasidati, Na gachhit paraya bhaktiya Kamakhya yonisannidhim." This specifies that a person

whose heart is pure and who desires to liberate themselves from the three mandatory spiritual debts of life—Pitri Rina, Rishi Rina, and Deva Rina—must seek refuge at the Kamakhya Yoni Pitha with supreme devotion. This directive reinforces the paramount religious and spiritual gravity commanded by Kamakhya in 16th-century Tantric society. In Sanatan tradition, clearing these inherited debts is considered a fundamental duty. By positioning a devout pilgrimage to Kamakhya as a path toward redemption from these profound spiritual obligations, the text establishes Kamakhya as an unparalleled pilgrimage site.

It is believed that during this specific timeframe, the creative energy of the Divine Mother reaches its zenith. The scriptures prescribe rigorous codes of conduct to be observed during these days. Since the Earth Mother is undergoing her cycle, it is believed that she must not be harmed or disturbed in any manner. Consequently, agricultural activities such as tilling, digging, or sowing seeds are strictly forbidden. Additionally, daily formal worship and the touching of deities or idols are suspended. Instead of outward celebrations and rituals, the scriptures advocate inward spiritual reflection through mental chanting, congregational prayers and meditative Tantric practices. However, the essence of Ambubachi extends far beyond institutionalized religious beliefs, it shares a deep, symbiotic relationship with nature and our traditional agrarian philosophy. The month of Asadha represents the peak of the monsoon season, a time when the soil absorbs rainwater to prepare itself for yielding new life. Because our agrarian society visualizes the Earth as 'Mother Earth,' many researchers argue that Ambubachi is fundamentally a continuity of an ancient fertility cult tied to agricultural cycles. There is an eloquent symbolic parallel between a deity's menstrual cycle and the soil's capacity to regenerate and produce food crops. Viewed from this perspective, Ambubachi is an environment-centric celebration of nature's rejuvenation and fertility, where faith and ecology merge seamlessly.

When examined through the lens of modern science, the true significance of Ambubachi emerges as remarkably rational, progressive and reformative. Menstruation is a natural, biological, and healthy process inherent to the female anatomy. Modern medical science recognizes it as an indispensable component of human reproduction and well-being. Historically, however, due to deep-rooted social taboos and superstitions, menstruation has

often been shrouded in shame, stigma, or notions of impurity, subjecting women to arbitrary social restrictions. In stark contrast to such regressive attitudes, the tradition of Ambubachi has historically celebrated this very biological function as the ultimate symbol of purity, creativity and the continuity of life. The spiritual concept of the Goddess Herself undergoing a menstrual cycle carries a remarkably progressive message for modern society. At a time when global conversations are heavily focused on women's health, menstrual hygiene, and gender equality, the core philosophy of Ambubachi can serve as a powerful catalyst for social awareness, dismantling the lingering stigmas surrounding menstruation.

From a cultural standpoint, Ambubachi is an invaluable and distinctive heritage of Assam. It projects the state's identity, folk beliefs, tantric heritage and spiritual legacy onto the global stage. The influx of thousands of devotees, scholars and tourists from different parts of the world provides a monumental boost to the local economy and the tourism sector. Artisans, small traders, transport operators and the hospitality sector experience significant financial benefits during this period. As a result, Ambubachi has transitioned from being an isolated religious event into a massive socio-economic congregation.

In today's technology-driven era, faith and science are frequently viewed as conflicting paradigms. In reality, though their roles in human life differ, they act as complements to one another. Science analyzes the causes and mechanics of natural phenomena, while faith and spirituality provide an emotional, ethical and cultural language to the human psyche. Ambubachi achieves an exquisite synthesis of these two perspectives. While faith interprets it as the worship of Adashakti science helps us appreciate the biological and ecological realities underlying it and culture preserves it as an integral part of our national heritage.

In conclusion, Ambubachi stands as a sublime intersection of faith, science and culture. It teaches us to honour the creative energy of womanhood, understand the fertility of nature and decode the profound meanings embedded within our ancient traditions. In a rapidly changing world, the core message of Ambubachi is more relevant than ever. Therefore, looking at Ambubachi not merely as a rigid, conventional ritual, but embracing it as a living symbol of respect for women, ecological consciousness and cultural unity, constitutes its true and lasting fulfillment.



## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Lalit Nath

tional coherence matters even more.

India's own experience provides evidence of this reality. The implementation of the Goods and Services Tax significantly improved interstate movement by eliminating many checkpoints and reducing procedural hurdles. The gains did not come from building new roads but from reforming the institutional architecture governing commerce. Similarly, digitisation initiatives in customs and freight management have often yielded efficiency improvements disproportionate to their cost. These examples demonstrate that administrative reforms can generate returns comparable to, and sometimes greater than, infrastructure investments.

The challenge today is that logistics governance in India remains fragmented. Multiple ministries oversee different modes of transport. State governments pursue their own priorities. Urban authorities, port trusts, railway agencies and regulatory bodies frequently operate in silos. Coordination often depends on ad hoc arrangements rather than permanent institutional mechanisms. While initiatives such as PM Gati Shakti have sought to break these silos through integrated planning, the deeper task is to create enduring institutions that survive beyond specific projects and political cycles.

One area demanding urgent attention is centre-state coordination. Logistics is inherently territorial. Freight moves across states, ports serve hinterlands extending far beyond their immediate geography, and industrial corridors connect multiple jurisdictions. Yet regulatory practices, land-use policies and administrative procedures continue to vary significantly across states. Competitive federalism has its advantages, but excessive divergence creates uncertainty for businesses. India needs institutional platforms through which the Centre and states can regularly coordinate logistics policy, share best practices and resolve bottlenecks before they escalate into barriers to trade.

Urban logistics represents another neglected frontier. Much of India's logistics discussion focuses on long-distance freight movement, but the final stages of delivery increasingly determine economic efficiency. Rapid urbanisation, e-commerce growth and rising consumer expectations are placing enormous pressure on city logistics systems. Congested roads, inadequate warehousing spaces and poor integration between transport modes increase costs and emissions. Addressing these challenges requires metropolitan governance institutions capable of coordinating transport planning, land use and freight management. Infrastructure alone cannot solve problems rooted in fragmented urban administration.

Equally important is the need to strengthen data governance within the logistics ecosystem. Modern supply chains thrive on real-time information. Businesses require visibility into cargo movement, transit times and potential disruptions. Governments need reliable data to identify bottlenecks and design evidence-based interventions. India has made progress in digital infrastructure, but data systems often remain dispersed across agencies and platforms. Creating interoperable and transparent logistics data frameworks should be viewed as an institutional priority rather than a purely technological exercise.

There is also a tendency to underestimate the role of human capital. Efficient logistics requires skilled planners, supply-chain managers, warehouse operators and regulatory professionals. Institutional capacity is not merely about structures; it is about people capable of managing complexity. As India aspires to become a global manufacturing hub, investment in logistics education, training and professional development must accompany investment in physical assets.

The broader economic context makes these reforms urgent. Global supply chains are undergoing significant reconfiguration. Companies seeking resilience are diversifying production locations and exploring alternatives to traditional manufacturing centres. India has an opportunity to position itself as a major beneficiary of this shift. But attracting investment and integrating into global value chains require more than infrastructure announcements. Investors seek predictability, efficiency and institutional reliability. They assess how smoothly goods move across jurisdictions, how quickly disputes are resolved and how consistently regulations are implemented.

India's infrastructure push deserves recognition. Roads, railways, ports and logistics parks are laying the foundation for future growth. Yet foundations alone do not build a house. The next phase of logistics reform must focus on institutions that coordinate, regulate and optimise these assets. If India can complement its impressive infrastructure expansion with equally ambitious institutional reform, it can achieve a logistics transformation that lowers costs, boosts competitiveness and accelerates economic growth. The real test is no longer whether India can build infrastructure. It is whether it can build the institutions that make infrastructure work.

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## Chasing Dreams into Fire

The tragic fire in Lucknow that claimed fifteen precious lives, mostly young students full of dreams, and left several others severely injured, is not just another unfortunate accident written off in the daily news. It is a stark and painful reflection of the deep dualities defining modern India. On one hand, we see an ambitious nation driven by an exploding education economy and a rapidly growing services sector, where millions of young minds are desperate to climb the socio-economic ladder. On the other hand, we are forced to confront the dark reality of unplanned urban growth, crumbling safety standards, and a systemic failure of regulatory bodies that repeatedly turns a blind eye to imminent dangers. This heartbreak highlights a dangerous gap between our national aspirations and the basic infrastructure required to keep our people safe.

India currently possesses one of the youngest populations in the world, a demographic dividend that is often celebrated on global stages. This youth force is hungry for success, eager to acquire new skills, and determined to secure negotiable necessities. The tragic reality is that it often takes a catastrophic loss of life for society and the administration to briefly acknowledge these violations, only to fall back into a state of comfortable apathy once the media attention fades. The Lucknow incident belongs to a deeply disturbing and recurring pattern that has plagued the nation, particularly during the intense summer months. This past season alone witnessed a horrific succession of major fire accidents across various states, from crowded gaming zones and newborn care hospitals to bustling commercial markets. Every time such a disaster occurs, public outrage naturally focuses on immediate administrative negligence, pointing fingers at local inspectors and corrupt officials. While this anger is entirely justified, the official explanations that follow almost always wrap up the entire conversation with a lazy and convenient phrase, attributing the disaster to an electrical fire or a short circuit.

This specific description conceals far more than it reveals. By simply blaming an electrical short circuit, the authorities wash their hands of deeper structural accountability, treating the fire as an act of god or an unpredictable technical glitch. In truth, electrical fires do not happen in a vacuum. They are the direct result of identifiable, preventable human errors and systemic failures. As our reliance on heavy electronic appliances like air conditioners, large computer servers, and heavy-duty projectors grows, the total electrical load on buildings increases exponentially. Most of these older or poorly converted residential buildings are running on primitive wiring systems that were never designed to handle such massive currents. This leads to severe overloading of circuits.

Sophisticated modern electronic equipment creates complex electrical distortions known as harmonic currents. These harmonics can travel through the electrical system and generate localized hotspots

not for hundreds of students crowding into small rooms for hours. What makes this even more infuriating is that the local civic authorities had reportedly issued repeated notices and demolition warnings to the owners over the years. Yet, the building stood tall, escaping any real punitive action, and continued to operate as a commercial death trap. The First Information Report filed by the authorities after the tragedy confirmed that neither the property owners nor the business operators running the institutes had made even the most basic provisions for fire safety. There were no accessible emergency exits, no functional fire extinguishers, and no ventilation systems to let out toxic smoke.

This kind of blatant violation is not an isolated anomaly in Lucknow. It is a pervasive, nationwide norm. Across India, commercial complexes, coaching hubs, and even schools routinely flout building codes with complete impunity. Profit margins are prioritized over human lives, and safety measures are viewed as unnecessary administrative hurdles or wasteful expenses rather than non-negotiable necessities. The tragic reality is that it often takes a catastrophic loss of life for society and the administration to briefly acknowledge these violations, only to fall back into a state of comfortable apathy once the media attention fades. The Lucknow incident belongs to a deeply disturbing and recurring pattern that has plagued the nation, particularly during the intense summer months. This past season alone witnessed a horrific succession of major fire accidents across various states, from crowded gaming zones and newborn care hospitals to bustling commercial markets. Every time such a disaster occurs, public outrage naturally focuses on immediate administrative negligence, pointing fingers at local inspectors and corrupt officials. While this anger is entirely justified, the official explanations that follow almost always wrap up the entire conversation with a lazy and convenient phrase, attributing the disaster to an electrical fire or a short circuit.

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Sophisticated modern electronic equipment creates complex electrical distortions known as harmonic currents. These harmonics can travel through the electrical system and generate localized hotspots

deep within the walls, heating up the wiring silently until the insulation melts away and ignites surrounding flammable materials. When you combine this with the widespread use of cheap, standard wires that lack proper fire-retardant coatings, you create a ticking time bomb. Most commercial buildings in India also completely lack advanced safety mechanisms like arc-fault protection devices, which are designed to detect dangerous electrical sparking and shut down the power before a fire can even start. Preventing future tragedies requires us to develop a rigorous culture of scientific investigation. Right now, when a fire occurs, the site is rarely preserved for detailed forensic study. Local fire departments, which are often understaffed and poorly equipped, focus primarily on dousing the flames rather than analyzing the root cause. India suffers from a critical shortage of trained fire-forensics experts who possess the scientific capability to conduct comprehensive investigations, trace the exact point of ignition, and analyze how the smoke and fire traveled through the structure.

Without this precise expertise, the lessons we learn from each disaster remain superficial, preventing us from designing and implementing effective, data-driven systemic remedies. The scale of this challenge demands a comprehensive, unified national response that goes beyond local knee-jerk reactions. India has made its global ambitions crystal clear, striving to transform itself into a fully developed nation and an economic superpower in the near future. This grand vision of a developed India cannot be separated from the fundamental responsibility of ensuring the safety and security of its citizens in public spaces. Economic growth becomes meaningless if our children are sent to study in places where their lives are constantly at risk. When we look at developed countries, mandatory fire detection, automated sprinkler systems, and strictly enforced occupancy limits are standard, non-negotiable features of any building layout. In contrast, many prominent commercial and educational structures in Indian cities lack even a basic smoke alarm. To change this trajectory, the government needs to initiate a massive, nationwide assessment of building safety. Even a scientifically designed sample survey covering major educational and commercial hubs would yield invaluable data, exposing the most critical vulnerabilities and providing a clear roadmap for urgent regulatory reform.

Undertaking such a massive overhaul across a country as vast as India is undoubtedly a monumental and complex task that will require immense political will, financial investment, and bureaucratic coordination. The human and economic costs of maintaining the status quo are far greater than any investment we could make. Every young student we lose to such preventable disasters is an irreplaceable loss to their family and a tragic waste of national potential. We cannot allow our cities to expand into hazardous concrete jungles where safety is sacrificed at the altar of quick profits. True progress lies in building a nation where development and safety walk hand in hand, ensuring that the spaces built to nurture the future of India do not turn into their final resting places.

## India's logistics revolution needs institutions, not just infrastructure

By: Siddharth Roy

India today is in the midst of an infrastructure transformation unprecedented in its scale and ambition. Highways are expanding across the country, dedicated freight corridors are becoming operational, ports are being modernised, airports are multiplying, and multimodal connectivity projects under the PM Gati Shakti initiative promise to integrate disparate transport networks into a seamless whole. The government rightly views logistics as a critical pillar of economic growth, manufacturing competitiveness and export expansion. Yet amid the excitement surrounding concrete, steel and capital expenditure, an uncomfortable truth deserves greater attention: India's logistics revolution will succeed not because of infrastructure alone, but because of the institutions that govern it.

For decades, India's logistics costs have remained significantly higher than those of many competing economies. While estimates vary, the consensus is clear that inefficiencies in transportation, warehousing, regulatory compliance and supply-chain coordination impose substantial costs on businesses. The response has understandably been a massive push towards physical infrastructure. Better roads reduce travel time, freight corridors improve cargo movement, and modern ports enhance trade efficiency. These investments are indispensable. However, infrastructure can only create opportunities; institutions determine whether those opportunities are realised.

The tendency in public discourse is to treat logistics as a purely engineering challenge. It is not. Logistics is fundamentally an organisational challenge involving coordination among multiple agencies, levels of government and private stakeholders. A state-of-the-art highway loses much of its value if trucks spend hours waiting at checkpoints, navigating inconsistent regulations or dealing with cumbersome documentation. Similarly, a modern port cannot achieve optimal efficiency if customs procedures remain fragmented or if hinterland connectivity suffers from administrative bottlenecks. The productivity of infrastructure depends on the quality of institutions surrounding it.

The success stories that India often seeks to emulate offer a useful lesson. Countries that emerged as global manufacturing and trading hubs did not merely build ports and highways; they built institutions capable of ensuring predictability, coordination and efficiency. Their logistics systems are supported by integrated planning authorities, transparent regulatory frameworks, digital platforms for cargo management and mechanisms that align incentives across stakeholders. Physical assets matter, but institu-

# Achievement or concern: Fixed dose drug combinations



**AUTHOR**

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

**H**ealth is the most important asset of any nation. Modern medical science has made unprecedented progress in the treatment of diseases, and a significant aspect of this progress is the combined use of various drugs. Many diseases require more than one drug for treatment. Keeping this need in mind, fixed-dose drug combinations (FDCs) were developed. FDCs are medicines that combine two or more active pharmaceutical ingredients in a specific ratio and are presented as a single drug. These can be in the form of tablets, capsules, syrups, or injections.

FDCs have become an important part of the medical world today. They are widely used in the treatment of high blood pressure, diabetes, tuberculosis, HIV infection, heart disease, asthma, and various infections. The World Health Organization also considers the use of FDCs useful in certain conditions. While they have many benefits, their uncontrolled and irrational use has also raised serious concerns. There has been a long-standing debate, particularly in India, regarding the regulation and quality of FDCs.

The basic purpose of FDCs is to simplify treatment. When a patient needs to take different medications multiple times a day, they often miss doses or don't take them regularly. This impacts the success of treatment. If the same medications are available in a single pill, it becomes easier for the patient to take them. This is why FDCs are considered an effective tool to increase patient compliance.

The biggest advantage of FDCs is patient convenience. Containing multiple medications in a single tablet simplifies medication administration. This is particularly useful for older patients, children, and those on long-term treatment. Reducing the number of medications reduces the likelihood of patients discontinuing treatment. This advantage is particularly important in diseases like tuberculosis and HIV, where incomplete treatment can have serious consequences.

Another important benefit of FDCs is increased treatment effectiveness. In many diseases, combining different drugs produces better results. For



example, the treatment of tuberculosis requires the combined use of multiple drugs because single-drug treatment can lead to bacterial resistance. Similarly, multi-drug therapy is part of the standard treatment for HIV infection. In such cases, FDCs simplify and make treatment more effective.

Another benefit of FDCs is controlling drug resistance. Antibiotic resistance has become a global health crisis. If a patient skips one of the necessary medications, the potential for pathogens to develop resistance increases. FDCs help mitigate this problem by giving all necessary medications simultaneously. This prevents the patient from skipping a single medication, making treatment more effective.

FDCs are also often economically beneficial. The production, packaging, transportation, and distribution costs of combined drugs can be lower than those of individual drugs. This reduces the financial burden on healthcare systems. The use of FDCs in large government health programs can also simplify drug management and supply systems. FDCs are also useful for health administration. In national health programs, when medicines

must be provided to large numbers of patients, distributing a single combined drug is more convenient than distributing individual drugs. This reduces storage requirements and makes it easier to ensure drug availability.

Despite these advantages, FDCs also pose several serious challenges. The most significant problem is the lack of dosage flexibility. Each patient's needs are different. Often, a physician may want to increase or decrease the dosage of a particular drug, but this is impossible with FDCs because all the components are in fixed proportions. As a result, the patient must either change the entire drug or take a dosage that does not meet their needs.

Another major drawback of FDCs is that they make it difficult to identify side effects. If a patient experiences an allergic reaction or other adverse effect after taking a combined medication, it can be difficult to identify which component caused the problem. This can complicate treatment and compromise patient safety.

Another significant problem is unnecessary medication use. Sometimes, patients don't need all the medications included in an FDC, yet they

are still required to take the entire combination. This increases the risk of side effects and exposes patients to unnecessary additional medications. A fundamental principle of medical science is to give patients only the medication they need, but irrational FDCs can go against this principle.

The biggest concern regarding FDCs in India has been irrational combinations. For a long time, many drugs were available on the market for combinations that had no clear scientific basis. In some cases, the components of the drugs reduced rather than enhanced each other's effects, while some combinations posed unnecessary risks to patients. This situation exposed the weaknesses of the drug regulatory system.

Irrational combinations of antibiotics have been a particular concern. Their improper use promotes resistance in bacteria. When antibiotics become ineffective, even common infections become difficult to treat. The World Health Organization has identified antibiotic resistance as one of the greatest threats to human health. Therefore, special caution is necessary in the use of antibiotic FDCs.

Challenges related to FDCs include the com-

plexity of the regulatory system. Before any new FDC can be marketed, adequate scientific testing of its safety, efficacy, and quality must be conducted. Weak testing and evaluation processes can lead to unsafe or ineffective drugs reaching the market. In India, the central government has periodically banned several irrational FDCs, highlighting the severity of this problem.

India is one of the world's largest drug producers, and the use of FDCs is widespread. Thousands of FDCs are available in the Indian pharmaceutical market. Many of these are scientifically justified and extremely beneficial to patients, while some combinations appear to have been developed solely for commercial gain. This is why experts have long stressed the need for a rational drug policy.

A rational FDC is one in which each ingredient has a clear role, all ingredients complement each other, their safety and effectiveness are scientifically proven, and their combined use is more beneficial than using them individually. A combination that does not meet these standards is not considered rational.

Looking ahead, India needs to adopt a balanced approach to FDCs. While recognizing the genuine benefits of these drugs, preventing their misuse and irrational use is crucial. This requires making the drug approval process more transparent and scientific. Physicians should be trained in rational drug use, and patients should be made aware that they should not use combination drugs without medical advice.

Pharmacovigilance, or drug side-effect monitoring, also needs to be strengthened. This will ensure that any FDC-related adverse effects are identified in a timely manner and necessary regulatory action can be taken. Effective national strategies must also be adopted to promote the judicious use of antibiotics.

Ultimately, it can be said that fixed-dose drug combinations are an important and useful tool of modern medical science. Their use, under appropriate circumstances, plays a crucial role in increasing patient compliance, simplifying treatment, reducing drug resistance, and improving the efficiency of healthcare services. However, their benefits can only be ensured if they are used based on scientific evidence, rational medical principles, and a robust regulatory system. Irrational FDCs not only pose risks to patients but can also pose serious challenges to public health. Therefore, it is essential that the development, acceptance, and use of FDCs in India be governed by the principles of scientificity, transparency, and patient welfare, so that this important achievement of medical science can become a means of real welfare for society. (Dr. Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

# Supreme Court's draft AI regulations impose big tasks on district courts

By: Harsh Gour

**T**he Supreme Court of India's Draft Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence in Courts, 2026 ("Draft Regulations") are based on five principles: human primacy, transparency, accountability, data protection, and judicial independence. These principles visibly translate through the Draft Regulations in the general principles which deal with governing AI systems, permissible and prohibited use of AI, institutional architecture, oversight architecture, procurement, data protection, training programmes, and grievance redressal.

The Draft Regulations use a careful vocabulary with their framers clearly alive to what can go wrong when AI enters adjudication. But what they do less well, and what this piece argues, is reckon with what it will actually take for an Indian judiciary of uneven technical capacity, spanning the Supreme Court down to tribunals and statutory commissions, to deliver on what they propose.

Every provision under the Draft Regulations creates certain obligatory functions, assuming the required capacity to discharge them. It is largely silent on where that capacity will originate from. For instance, Regulation 38 of the Draft Regulations requires periodic in-house technical, legal, and ethical AI audits. This sounds like a thoughtful security position, but it also presumes that AI secretariats will possess the expertise to audit AI systems unaided.

District courts in several states are still building reliable case management software. At this backdrop, the proposal of initiating in-house AI auditing is not simply a small requirement. It does not say about where the capacity of in-house AI auditing will come from; all that it says is that AI auditing is a must.

The Draft Regulations envision an oversight structure comprising an Apex Body, AI Committees, AI Secretariats, and a Centre of Research and Excellence on Artificial Intelligence. This tiered structure, in compact form, has the power to approve, audit, direct remedial measures, and suspend a non-compliant system.

By the Draft Regulations, the Apex Body at the Supreme Court shall set the minimum mandatory standards for AI use across all courts in India. Under Regulation 57, the Supreme Court AI committee has the task of periodically re-

viewing these Draft Regulations, folding self-review into the body whose decisions are most consequential.

AI governance errors are frequently invisible until someone with technical literacy looks for them. The Draft Regulations have left open, rather than answered, who monitors the gap in the oversight structure when there's an error.

There is nothing in the Draft Regulations that requires an external audit of the Apex Body's own judgment calls. There is no independent technical Ombudsperson outside the proposed institutional hierarchy. In some sense, courts have been self-reviewing and with jurisdiction under Articles 32 and 226 of the Constitution, remain available in principle, and so the absence of an external audit is not necessarily fatal.

The Draft Regulations require regular and structured training for judges, advocates, and court staff, on the technical, legal and ethical dimensions of AI, at a minimum, addressing the functioning, capabilities and limitations of AI systems: the identification and mitigation of AI bias, hallucinations and technical errors; the legal and ethical framework governing AI in judicial context, including the rights of litigants and the obligations of judicial officers under these regulations; data protection principles, cybersecurity awareness and the handling of sensitive judicial data; and the correct procedure for reporting AI incidents, raising concerns and utilizing grievance literacy mechanisms.

This seems to be a credible curriculum, but not without a stronger guarantee of competence. UNESCO's 2024 Global Judges' Initiative: survey on the use of AI systems by judicial operators found that only nine per cent of operators who had used AI tools had received any related training, even as forty-four per cent were already using such tools. This is a gap between exposure and literacy that a static curriculum cannot close.

Draft Regulations require the AI Secretariat to design training programmes and review them at least once in every two years. But what it does not specify is the duration, recurrence, assessment, or what follows when an officer demonstrably fails to internalise and apply the material, say, through a flawed verification practice, or a simple unfamiliarity with what a hallucinated citation looks like before it reaches a judgment.

Real AI literacy can only be built through scenario-based exercise and repetition, and not simply by an onboarding set of modules.

Following Regulation 50, maintaining a repository of best practices on AI incidents is a sound instinct and a practice towards institutional memory. But it is only as useful as the obligation to consult it, and the Draft Regulations do not make consultation mandatory for deployment decisions.

In one case, an instance of a single hallucinated citation is a correctable error. That hopefully can be caught by the verification duty, as under Regulation 8(3). In a difficult category of events, another case being: suppose a hallucination pattern runs quietly through a legal research tool which is deployed across the district courts of a state, that will result in a systematic failure masquerading as unconnected individual failures.

Primarily, the Draft Regulations' incident architecture is built around the individual case basis. Regulation 39 requires AI incidents to be logged in a database at each AI secretariat, then should be communicated with across the AI Secretariats of the other High Courts and to the Apex Body, so that corrective measures may be adopted across jurisdictions.

There's no doubt that this is useful, but the Draft Regulations do not attempt to mandate a static analytical function where someone can be responsible for the job to scan the database for clustering, to ask whether how fifteen unrelated complaints, say, a transcription tool powered by AI across five district courts in a quarter, are in fact one incident wearing fifteen case numbers. This process, in turn, will make the AI incident database an archive rather than an early warning system without that layer.

This is perhaps the most consequential structural choice of the Draft Regulations that it has taken. Notably, such an approach is not unique to India. A similar default posture can be observed in nearly every court AI framework written so far. The accountability mechanisms under the Draft Regulations are almost entirely procedural: approval before deployment, usage documentation, followed by an audit. None of these steps independently tests whether an AI system performs safely with the court's language diversity and data.

A court which satisfies every requirement under the Draft Regulations, for instance, fills an impact assessment, logs the system, con-

ducts an annual audit, trains the staff, and can still deploy an AI system that causes real harm. Therefore, the focus should not be on "did the institution follow its own rules", which is a procedural compliance question; instead, it should be "is the AI system safe to deploy and safe to use?"

England and Wales's AI Guidance for Judicial Office Holders gestures at this distinction by treating personal responsibility (not the process) as the operative safeguard. On similar lines, Regulation 8 of the Draft Regulations vests accountability in an officer rather than on the AI tool in use. However, under Regulation 8 itself, the proviso allows officers to dispense with verification for recorded reasons. Further, allowance for administrative tools certified as reliable on a class basis without prior verification. Now, both of these create exactly the kind of shortcut that circumvents scrutiny and compliance — where such scrutiny matters the most.

As Regulation 52 states, an aggrieved party has the right to apply to the court where the AI system was used, and the court shall "pass appropriate orders as it may deem fit". Further, in respect to any harm caused by the use of AI in court processes, a person may seek other legal remedies as available under any law in force (Regulation 53).

Some quick operational questions. What happens to an aggrieved party in a district court with no legal representation? Within 24 hours of a serious incident, who is actually notified — is it only the AI secretariat? Or does the aggrieved party learn anything before the matter resurfaces later? Who will investigate these matters, and further, with what independence from the body that approved the AI system in the very first place?

The proportionality of the grievance redressal architecture does not appear to mitigate the risks the Draft Regulations themselves identify. It is harder to assess, as timelines for investigation, an interim relief, and a guaranteed channel through which an unrepresented person would learn of a logged AI incident are all left unspecified.

Compared against the prominent comparative practices, India's Draft Regulations are unusually comprehensive on paper, and unusually quiet within the ecosystem that would make such paper rules operative.

The iterative, incident-driven culture can be found in England



and Wales. The first published AI guidance was released in December 2023, replaced in April 2025, and refreshed again on October 31, 2025, an approach built around revision rather than a single frozen statement of principle. Cases like *Ayinde v London Borough of Haringey* [2025] EWHC 1383 (Admin) are a visible warning case. In *Ayinde*, the Divisional Court of the High Court of Justice was confronted with false authorities and inaccurate legal material linked to the use of generative AI. The response did not stop with the bench; the Bar Council in England and Wales updated its generative AI guidance on November 26, 2025. The Civil Justice Council set up a working group in January 2025 to consider whether rules are needed for the use of AI by legal representatives in preparing court documents. It treats personal responsibility as the load-bearing safeguard. It warns that material entered into a public AI tool should be treated as published to the world, a confidentiality risk that the Indian Draft Regulations address only obliquely.

In this context, the United States federal judiciary illustrates a different stage of institutional AI governance. There is no single binding nationwide AI rule. There is an evolving mix of Administrative Office interim guidance, Federal Judicial Center materials, and local standing or general orders issued by individual courts. In early 2025, the Administrative Office established an advisory AI Task Force and said its interim guidance was intended to permit experimentation while preserving the integrity and independence of the federal courts. Subsequently, the 2025 Strategic Plan called for an AI governance framework. Senate Judiciary Committee pressure intensified after

Chairman Chuck Grassley disclosed that staff in two federal judges' chambers had used generative AI to draft inaccurate orders that the judges approved. The US has long governed AI in courts through incremental guidance, local practice, and oversight. India's Supreme Court, on the other hand, has chosen to intervene with a comprehensive governance architecture of its own.

One of the most operationally developed models can be found in Singapore. Its Registrar's Circular No. 1 of 2024, which applies from October 1, 2024 across the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts. The Circular did not prohibit the use of generative AI. But at the same time, it places full responsibility on the court user and requires independent verification of the output. Pre-emptive disclosure is generally not required unless the court asks for it. Justice Aidan XU stated in a July 2025 speech that the Singapore judiciary is exploring and testing AI products, trying judgment-drafting use cases carefully, and subjecting them to safeguards, supervision, and even red-teaming — that public-facing compliance guide sits alongside an internal culture of experimentation — is exactly the kind of ecosystem the Indian Draft Regulations gesture toward through CoRE-AI, but yet to kick off alive and function.

The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) is the closest institutional comparator. It began with the 2018 European Ethical Charter, then the Operational Assessment Tool and AI Advisory Board, and more recently, Guidelines on the Use of Generative AI for Courts. CEPEJ has moved beyond prescribing principles to constructing mechanisms through which the principles

envisioned in the ethical charter can be assessed, operationalised, and periodically revisited. This offers a useful blueprint for the direction that Indian Draft Regulations will require in the future.

Written proactively, the Indian Draft Regulations have the advantage of foresight, but are yet to be tested in practice and when errors necessitate institutional measures.

The arguments raised here are not intended to take a position against the Draft Regulations or the Supreme Court of India's decision to develop an AI governance framework for the use of AI in Indian courts — that is an appreciative, timely, and necessary step.

The anchoring general principles, on which the Draft Regulations are based, are correct. The questions raised in this piece, however, remain to be proven.

The objective of creating any regulations is to have conditions under which an institution can function and succeed. Regulations, per se, do not supply the competence, the funding, or the culture of taking compliance and scrutiny seriously rather than performing it. That work falls on the table of the Apex Body at the Supreme Court, the AI secretariats under the High Courts, and every officer who will have to decide, case by case, whether to trust what a device screen displays.

The stakeholder and public comment process, which closed on June 20, 2026, was the first test of whether the institution understands the difference between writing a good rule and building the capacity to live by it. The real test of these Draft Regulations, however, will be whether the institutions expected to implement them acquire the technical capacity, professional culture, and willingness to enforce them. (IPA Service)

# Zelensky says Russia is shifting air defences to Moscow

**KYIV, June 25:** Russia is moving a significant part of its air defences to protect a handful of prime targets, including Moscow, as Ukraine's long-range drones continue to hammer sites deep inside the country, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky says.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in a meeting.

In new overnight strikes, meanwhile, Zelensky said Thursday that Kyiv's forces hit two more Russian oil refineries in Ufa, 1,500 kilometres from the front line, and an oil depot in the Krasnodar region, 300 kilometres from Ukraine.

Ukraine has in recent months stepped up its aerial campaign against Russian military installations and energy facilities. Its success has caused fuel shortages and disrupted army supply lines, stalling Moscow's full-scale invasion of its neighbour after more than four years of fighting and rattling Russian officials.

Zelensky said in his daily address late Wednesday that Russia is moving more air defences to the capital as well as to Valdai, a town some 500 kilometres northwest of Moscow where Russian President Vladimir Putin has a residence, and to protect the Kerch Bridge, a vital supply route connecting the Crimean Peninsula with the Russian mainland.

"In the Moscow region alone, they have amassed hundreds of launchers" for air defence missiles, Zelensky said. "Nearly 90 launchers have been redeployed to Valdai from other regions of Russia."

It was not possible to independently verify Zelensky's claims, which portrayed the Russian leadership as caring more about protecting itself than other cities and towns in the vast country. Russian officials made no

immediate comment. Ukrainian drones have recently hit Moscow and St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city and Putin's hometown. Ukraine is also trying to cut off Crimea, the Black Sea peninsula that Russia invaded and illegally annexed in 2014.

The changes, Zelensky suggested, would leave other parts of Russia vulnerable to Ukraine's increasingly sophisticated long-range drones, which can now fly more than 1,500 kilometres.

"There are many difficulties (for Russia), all because Putin refuses to end his war and to hear our proposals for a meeting, genuine negotiations, and a dignified peace," Zelensky said.

Zelensky has accepted an unconditional ceasefire demanded by US President Donald Trump but Putin has refused, and a year of US-led peace efforts made no significant headway.

**Trump praises Zelensky**

Western officials and analysts say Ukraine's prospects have improved after more than four years of a gruelling war of attrition as its domestic development and production of cutting-edge drones pin down the bigger Russian army.

Trump, who previously has been critical

of Zelensky, said Wednesday that the Ukrainian leader is "courageous" and "doing pretty well" in the war.

Zelensky said he won pledges of sustained foreign support when he attended a recent summit of G7 leaders, including Trump, and that promised aid will help further help Ukraine's intensified campaign.

"Our operation, including the one concerning Crimea, has been carefully planned, and the way it is unfolding clearly demonstrates that if Ukraine receives exactly what we discussed with our partners at the G7 — and that depends on our partners' decisions — we will quickly create conditions in which Russia will be forced to choose peace," he said.

"We very much hope for a positive response from our partners," Zelensky added. "They know exactly what we are talking about."

**Ukraine is wary of its neighbour Belarus**

Belarus, whose manufacturing plants have played a key role in supporting Moscow's war effort, appears to have turned off signal repeaters on its soil that Kyiv says were used to help guide Russian drone attacks on Ukraine. Moscow launched its 2022 invasion of Ukraine from Belarus.

Zelensky demanded last week that Belarus, which borders Ukraine to the north and also shares a frontier with Russia, remove the relay equipment that enabled Moscow's drones to strike western Ukraine. He threatened to take action against the relay stations, presumably with a military strike that could bring the countries into direct conflict.

Ukrainian intelligence has determined that the repeaters are now off, Zelensky said in a message sent to journalists.

Ukrainian military officials on Wednesday ordered a mandatory evacuation for the approximately 1,000 people still in the Chernihiv region bordering Russia and Belarus starting July 1.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is walking a fine line in the war.

"Lukashenko continues to stall and deflect the Kremlin's intensified attempts to drag Belarus into the war in Ukraine while maintaining relatively neutral rhetoric towards Ukraine," the institute said.

Ukrainian Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of the armed forces, said last week that Ukraine is strengthening defenses on its northern border, including creating new army drone units there.

**Russia targets Ukraine's civilian gas stations**

Russia launched a ballistic missile and 90 long-range drones at Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian air force said.

One drone struck a gas station Thursday in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region, injuring four people, said regional administration head Oleh Hryhorov, adding that Russian forces have attacked the region's gas stations 13 times in June alone.

A Russian overnight strike in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia injured one woman and damaged a gas station, according to regional head Ivan Fedorov.

Russia's Defence Ministry said that air defences downed 269 Ukrainian drones from late Wednesday until early Thursday.

Several Russian airports temporarily restricted flights overnight during drone attacks. (AP)

# FTA with UK most comprehensive agreement so far: Piyush Goyal

**LONDON, June 25:** The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the UK is the most comprehensive agreement that India has entered into so far, and "sky is the limit" in terms of the economic benefits that will flow from it, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said here on Thursday.

The minister arrived in the UK on a three-day visit to review the preparedness of both countries to implement the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which will enter into force on July 15.

Addressing the India Global Forum (IGF) UK-India Week at the start of his tour, the minister exhorted businesses in both countries to "seize the moment" and set ambitious targets to boost the estimated 48-billion-pound annual bilateral trading partnership on the back of CETA.

"The UK free trade agreement will be the first most comprehensive agreement that India has entered into so far," said Goyal. "It's a partnership between two complementary economies, two growing economies. We understand each other; our mindsets have a lot of similarities. If our businesses leverage the benefits of the CETA, the sky is the limit," he said.

The minister dubbed as "very modest" some official UK government estimates that project the tariff cuts under the agreement, injecting an estimated 25 billion pounds annual boost to the trading relationship over the next few years.

"That is very modest... I would think our businesses should be ambitious on both sides. I would be seer all the people in this room and take this message to all those who are not in this room to seize the moment," he said.

Goyal hailed the level of continuity provided at the UK ministerial level, despite political instability that witnessed changes in governments from the Conservatives to Labour over the course of the FTA negotiations.

"Ministers may have changed, but I must compliment the UK for continuity in decisions and continuity in following through on what

was already negotiated," he said. The minister will hold a high-level bilateral meeting with his UK counterpart, Secretary of State for Business and Trade Peter Kyle, with a focus on aligning regulatory roadmaps, streamlining cross-border customs coordination and finalising administrative mechanisms to facilitate the smooth implementation of CETA.

"The deal that we have just got across the line with India, just look at the barriers that are removed. It's not just tariff barriers, it is also non-tariff barriers, the sharing of data, the use of technology in order to smooth the way for trade having legal underpinnings for IP (intellectual property)," Kylesaid while addressing the IGF UK-India a week earlier.

"These are the sorts of things that aren't just going to make trade more profitable, it's going to make trade swifter... wouldn't it be incredible if that first trillion-dollar company is a partnership between a British and Indian company? I don't see why these sorts of things aren't possible in the age that we are living in," he said.

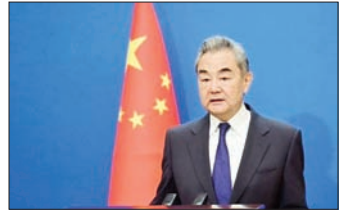
Describing Goyal as one of the most "effective, insightful, knowledgeable, and experienced ministers", Kyle said the duo had clinched an FTA that benefits both countries not just in a "transactional way" but also contributes towards their "resilience".

Asked about the last-minute hurdle that delayed CETA implementation by some weeks over the UK's new steel tariffs coming in next month, the minister said: "When it comes to issues like steel... each country will have things which are politically, economically, or in terms of resilience challenging domestically."

"It's not always easy, there are sticking points, and there are times where you have to use the relationship you have in order to have frank conversations and explain... the challenges you have."

"It is never a job done. The thing that's always exercised me... is that this (CETA) now needs to be fully utilised by businesses," the minister added. (PTI)

# China pledges 'unwavering support' for Pak's Iran-US mediation efforts



**ISLAMABAD, June 25:** Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has congratulated Pakistan's leadership and pledged "unwavering support" for its mediation efforts between the US and Iran, according to a statement issued by the foreign office in Islamabad.

It said, a telephonic conversation took place on Wednesday between Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar and his Chinese counterpart.

The discussions focused on the Iran-US peace process, particularly the first round of high-level talks in Switzerland mediated by Pakistan and Qatar, with Wang praising Pakistan's untiring efforts for peace and stability, the statement said.

"He reaffirmed China's unwavering support for Pakistan's mediation efforts, underlining the importance of peaceful settlement of disputes as enshrined in the UN Charter," it said.

Dar shared that the talks led to the establishment of a high-level committee to oversee the mediation process under a memorandum of understanding that was signed by the US and Iran last week, according to the statement.

Three working groups have been set up to focus on the nuclear issue, sanctions and monitoring, aiming to facilitate a final deal between the US and Iran within 60 days.

The two leaders reaffirmed the resolve of Pakistan and China to work closely for a negotiated settlement between the US and Iran, to bring a permanent end to hostilities and promote lasting peace, shared development and common prosperity, it said. (PTI)

# Pak's PTI party demands transfer to hospital, end of 'solitary confinement'

**LAHORE, June 25:** The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf on Thursday called for the transfer of former prime minister and party founder Imran Khan to a hospital and put his "solitary confinement" to an immediate end.

The 73-year-old cricketer-turned politician has been in Rawalpindi's Adiala Jail since August 2023 in connection with multiple cases, including corruption, leaking state secrets and an unlawful marriage - allegations that he has denied.

"We demand restoration of former PM Imran Khan's right to hold weekly meetings with family members, lawyers and political associates," Khan's party said in a statement issued on Thursday.

The party demanded that Khan should be allowed to maintain regular telephonic contact with his sons, and have access to books, newspapers and other reading material.

The last time the government allowed Khan to meet one of his sisters in jail was on December 5, 2025.

After that interaction, Khan's sister, Naureen Khan Niazi, told the media that the political leader had called Army chief Asim Munir a "mentally unstable man", due to which Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif imposed a ban on his meetings.

The political party's list of demands includes his immediate transfer to Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad for a comprehensive medical examination and treatment under the supervision of specialist doctors.

It further said these are not special concessions but fundamental legal and human rights that should be guaranteed without further delay.

In conversation with PTI, Shaukat Basra, a

senior leader in Khan's party, said that the organisation is planning mass mobilisation against the inhuman treatment of the former prime minister in jail.

"This regime shows no regard for human rights and the rights of a prisoner. The rulers should remember that they will not remain in power forever and one day they will be held accountable by the people of Pakistan," he said, demanding justice for Khan.

He also called for an end to his solitary confinement and his urgent transfer to Shifa International Hospital for proper medical care.

Khan suffers from an eye problem. He was diagnosed with retinal vein occlusion in late January.

Earlier this month, Khan was taken to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in Islamabad for eye treatment. (PTI)

# India's envoy to Bangladesh assumes office; announces travel visa resumption

**DHAKA, June 25:** India's new High Commissioner to Dhaka Dinesh Trivedi on Thursday announced the resumption of travel visas for Bangladesh nationals as he assumed office, a day after New Delhi conferred him the status of a Union minister.

The 76-year-old Bharatiya Janata Party leader on Thursday presented his credentials to President Mohammed Shahabuddin, marking the start of his diplomatic assignment. He was named as the envoy to Bangladesh on April 27, becoming the first politician to serve in this position.

"The new Indian High Commissioner has presented his credentials to the honourable president, beginning his diplomatic assignment in Dhaka," a Bangabhaban presidential palace spokesman said.

The spokesman said a contingent of the President Guard Regiment offered him a guard of honour before Trivedi presented his diplomatic papers.

Shortly after the ceremony, Trivedi made his first public appearance at the Indian Visa Centre in the capital, where he announced the resumption of travel visas for Bangladeshi nationals.

The travel visas were halted nearly two years ago amid an escalated security situation and deteriorating ties with New Delhi during the Muhammad Yunus-led interim regime. "I am very happy to be able to announce the launch of general travel visas again. Visa applications can be submitted starting June 28," he said.

Trivedi said visas would be issued from all five centres — Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chattogram, Sylhet, and Khulna — and the process would be expanded further in the future.

The envoy said urgent medical visas would continue



Dinesh Trivedi, India's new High Commissioner to Bangladesh, is seen with officials at the Indian Visa Centre in Dhaka.

to be provided for humanitarian reasons. Travel visas for Bangladeshi nationals typically permit access to India for tourism, medical treatments, government and business assignments and transiting to third countries.

India on Wednesday granted Trivedi the status of a Union minister for ceremonial functions via an official memorandum issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Trivedi succeeded career diplomat Pranay Kumar Verma. He arrived in Bangladesh through its western Benapole-Petrapole land border on June 12.

Verma's four-year tenure, which ended last month, witnessed the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government in a student-led uprising in August 2024 and a subsequent downturn in India-Bangladesh relations under the interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus. Elections were held in the country earlier this year, but Hasina's Awami League was barred from contesting. On February 17, Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader Tarique Rahman took the oath as prime minister. (PTI)

# Indian national identified as director of Singapore companies that abandoned workers

**SINGAPORE, June 25:** The High Commission of India on Wednesday evening said it is in touch with workers of three Singapore companies that did not pay them for months, as well as with the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) and Ministry of Manpower (MOM), who are providing assistance to the affected.

Over 400 workers from India and Bangladesh have been abandoned without wages and accommodations by three companies, namely SK Industries, KPA Engineering and VVR Plant Engineering.

One director, who was common for the three firms, has been identified as an Indian national named Ramu Palani Velu, according to a report published by The Straits Times.

According to the daily, checks on the corporate intelligence platform Sayari show that Ramu is a director of seven companies here. The firms are listed as providing air-con, plumbing and building services.

Ramu, a permanent resident of Singapore, is said to have left the country.

NTUC Secretary-General Ng Chee Meng, representatives from the Migrant Workers' Centre and

Minister of State for Manpower Dinesh Vasu Dash met the abandoned workers on Wednesday and assured them of help by providing cash, supermarket shopping vouchers, accommodations and jobs.

The workers are getting SGD200 in cash and supermarket shopping vouchers while alternate accommodations are being arranged and job placements are being matched.

The unpaid migrant workers reported to MOM on Monday, saying their employers at KPA Engineering, a company that provides air-con maintenance services, and its related firm SK Industries, were not contactable. Singapore labour chief Ng said the Tripartite Alliance for Dispute Management and tripartite partners are working to contact the employers involved in the case.

Ramu took over VVR Plant Engineering, formerly called VMD Integrated, in 2025. The company was previously owned by Indian nationals Ravi Victor and Ravi Vijayarani, and their Singaporean son, Ravi Martin Abraham.

Martin, 23, said the family sold the company to Ramu.

The company was valued for having access to work permits for the specialised process sector --

such permits allow for process construction and maintenance works at locations such as Jurong Island, Singapore's largest processing industry zone.

Martin said, "It is not easy to obtain the permit for new companies, so we thought he bought our family business for that reason."

Ramu started his first business, KPA Engineering, in 2014. It was last recorded as having SGD1 million in capital.

Sundaramoorthy Komathy, also an Indian national, served as a company director with Ramu between 2016 and 2018. After he left, Krishnamurthy Sundaramoorthy became a director in 2020. He remains an active director, according to The Straits Times report.

Sam (not his real name), who was hired by KPA Engineering, said the workers knew Ramu as the big boss but the day-to-day operations were handled by an Indian national named Moorthy. "We have been trying to contact Moorthy, but he has not responded," Sam said.

In 2019, Ramu incorporated Comfort Air Engineering, formerly called Velmurugan Trading, with a registered capital of SGD100,000. He is the sole director. (PTI)

# Powerful 7.2 magnitude earthquake strikes off northern Japan

**TOKYO, June 25:** A powerful earthquake struck off the northern coast of Japan during rush hour on Thursday morning, but the country's meteorological agency said there was no danger of a tsunami and no serious injuries were reported. The tremor shook dozens of towns across northeastern Japan and was even mildly felt in the capital, Tokyo. It hit in an area where strong earthquakes have repeatedly been reported in recent months, including one that triggered a week-long mega-quake caution advisory in December.

In the town of Hashikami, a school principal recounted how her car shook sideways when the quake struck as she was driving to work. Children already gathered at the school were safe, she said, though some were crying in fear.

The quake — off the eastern coast of the Iwate prefecture — had a magnitude of 7.2, upgraded from an initial reading of 6.9, the Japan Meteorological Agency said. Its depth was about 50 kilometres (30 miles), the agency said. The U.S. Geological Survey also reported the quake, giving its magnitude as 6.9.

Eight people were injured in the northern prefectures of Aomori and

Iwate, the Fire and Disaster Management Agency said. Japanese media had no report of life-threatening injuries, and the injuries that were reported were mainly from falling or being hit by falling objects.

In Tokyo, Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi told reporters that her government's emergency team is "putting people's lives first," while assessing information and preparing for relief operations, if needed. She urged residents in the affected regions to use caution against possible aftershocks. Tomoko Nagane, the primary school principal in Hashikami, in Aomori prefecture, told NHK that classes were cancelled for the day and that all children returned home safely.

Footage on Japan's NHK public television showed several towns, including Sendai and Morioka, where the broadcaster's reporters said they felt the shaking for a couple of minutes but had not seen any damage. Videos showed people commuting as usual.

The East Japan Railway Co., which operates trains in northeastern regions, said some bullet trains and local lines were temporarily suspended for safety checks. (AP)

# King Charles III is expected to reveal his personal tax bill in a bid to boost transparency

**LONDON, June 25:** King Charles III is expected to become the first British monarch to reveal his personal tax bill on Thursday as he responds to demands for greater transparency in royal finances after months of embarrassing headlines about his disgraced younger brother, the former Prince Andrew.

The information will be released during Buckingham Palace's annual briefing on the sovereign grant, the mechanism through which taxpayers fund the monarchy, British media reported over the weekend. Last year, the palace published a 159-page report on how it spent the 86.3 million pounds (USD 113.7 million) it received from the Treasury, including funds for a major renovation of the palace.

While Charles released the details of the tax he paid on his personal income when he was Prince of Wales, this will be the first time he has done so since ascending the throne following the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in 2022. Prince William, the current Prince of Wales, is expected to follow his father's example during a separate briefing.



King Charles III is expected to reveal his personal tax bill on Thursday.

The moves come as lawmakers and the public demand greater transparency about the inner workings of the monarchy following revelations about the affairs of the former Prince Andrew, who was stripped of his titles in 2025.

Now known as Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, the king's younger brother is under investigation for misconduct in public office related to his friendship with the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. Mountbat-

ten-Windsor has been forced to move out of a sprawling royal estate, for which he paid no rent.

**The king seeks greater transparency**

The king made a personal decision to reveal his tax payments as part of a drive to "encourage wider understanding and accountability," the BBC reported last Saturday, citing palace sources.

Even before the Mountbatten-Windsor scandal blew up, Charles

had pledged to slim down the monarchy and cut costs as he sought to ensure the 1,000-year-old institution's survival in the face of growing questions about the role of a hereditary sovereign in a modern democracy.

The king has a personal fortune valued at 680 million pounds (USD 896 million), which puts him at No. 230 on the Sunday Times' annual list of Britain's richest people.

While the monarch is not required to pay income tax, Charles voluntarily pays tax on his private income. His mother began paying taxes in 1993 after public outrage at the cost of restoring Windsor Castle following a devastating fire the previous year. The arrangement was formalised under a memorandum of understanding between the government and the crown, which guarantees Charles the same right to privacy as any other taxpayer.

**The king has several sources of income**

The king is expected to release information about the taxes he pays only on his private income, most of which comes from two privately owned estates, Balmoral in Scotland

and Sandringham on the east coast of England, as well as savings and investments.

Balmoral comprises more than 50,000 acres (20,000 hectares) and the king's summer home, Balmoral Castle. Much of the grounds are open to the public, with the estate offering guided tours, afternoon tea and golf. Sandringham is the king's 20,000-acre (8,000-hectare) country retreat on the east coast of England. The house and gardens are open to the public, with much of the land farmed either by the estate itself or tenants.

The king doesn't pay taxes on the sovereign grant or other income that is used to fund his official duties.

Prince William's primary source of private income is the Duchy of Cornwall, a portfolio of land and investments held in trust by the Prince of Wales during his lifetime. The duchy owns about 130,000 acres (52,000 hectares) of land and reported a profit of 22.9 million pounds (USD 30.2 million) last year. The duchy is overseen by a board of directors and major decisions must be approved by the Treasury. (AP)

# Meghalaya: ED attaches ₹ 40 lakh property in development funds laundering case

**SHILLONG, June 25:** The Enforcement Directorate has provisionally attached an immovable property of ex-Garo Tribal Council member Ismail R Marak, valued at ₹ 40 lakh, in connection with the misappropriation of funds for development projects in Meghalaya's Garo Hills region, officials said on Thursday.

The action was taken under the provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002.

"The attached property is in the name of Ismail R Marak, a former Member of the District Council representing the Asanang constituency," the federal probe agency said in a statement.

According to the ED, the investigation was initiated based on a charge sheet filed in West Garo Hills, arising from a complaint registered by the Meghalaya Lokayukta.

The probe agency alleged that out of nearly ₹ 28.66 crore allo-



cated to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), ₹ 1 crore was sanctioned for 49 development projects

in the Asanang constituency.

However, 60 per cent of the project value was allegedly released in advance to two contrac-

tors against work orders purportedly obtained using forged signatures, despite the projects never being executed.

The ED claimed that the funds were subsequently siphoned off and that its probe traced proceeds of crime amounting to ₹ 52.60 lakh.

Of this, ₹ 19.60 lakh was allegedly received in cash by Marak, while ₹ 33 lakh was transferred through banking channels to his wife, Pratibha Marak, via accounts linked to the contractors, it said.

The agency said the attached property represents the value of the proceeds of crime traced during the investigation and does not exceed that amount.

The ED further said that bank account balances aggregating Rs 16.38 lakh had earlier been frozen under Section 17(1A) of the PMLA, with the freezing subsequently confirmed by the adjudicating authority. (PTI)

# Congress demands resignation of Union Education Minister over exam paper leaks

**AIZAWL, June 25:** Mizoram Congress on Thursday demanded the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over repeated examination paper leak scandals, alleging the BJP-led Central government has failed to safeguard the integrity of the country's education system.

Mizoram Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) senior vice president Lalnunmawia Chuauango alleged that during the 12 years of BJP rule, several incidents detrimental to the public have occurred in the country.

He alleged that the repeated leakage of question papers in various examinations under the BJP government has severely affected millions of students and job-seeking youth across the country.

Chuauango alleged that at least 23 national-level examinations have been marred by paper leak controversies since the BJP came to power, raising serious concerns about the credibility of India's examination system.

According to him, this year,



over 22 lakh students appeared for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) on May 3, competing for around 1.29 lakh medical seats across the country.

However, allegations of question paper leaks led to the examination being reconducted on June 21, causing widespread anxiety among candidates, he said.

"During the BJP's 12 years in power, there have been as many as 23 instances of question paper leaks in national-level examinations. These incidents are deeply alarming and have severely undermined the future prospects of the country's youth," Chuauango told a news conference here.

The Congress leader also expressed concerns surrounding the National Testing Agency (NTA), established in 2018 to conduct major national examinations including NEET, JEE, CUET, UGC-NET and others.

He also blamed the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 as lacking sincerity.

The Congress leader also alleged that unemployment among educated youth has risen alarmingly because the BJP failed to genuinely improve the country's education system.

Calling for accountability, the Congress leader said India needs an education system that prioritises students and protects the aspirations of future generations. (PTI)

# Tripura govt to bar doctors of GBP Hospital & AGMC from private medical practice: CM



**AGARTALA, June 25:** Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Thursday said the state government has decided to bar faculty members and medical officers of GBP Hospital and AGMC from private practice to strengthen healthcare services at the state's main hospital.

The council of ministers, in its last meeting held on Monday, has decided to bar faculty

members and medical officers of GBP Hospital and AGMC in exchange for a 20 per cent hike in their basic pay as a non-practising allowance.

Addressing a government programme at Lalsinghura in Sepahijala district, he said it has been noted that faculty members and medical officers who are employed at GBP Hospital and AGMC have an emotional attachment with private hospitals or clinics.

"We have consulted with doctors, and also, there was a suggestion from AIIMS, New Delhi, to bar faculty members and medical officers of GBP Hospital and AGMC from private practice to further strengthen the healthcare services at the state's main hospital. It will be implemented only at the premier hospital," he said.

The state government has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with AIIMS, New Delhi, to improve services at the GBP Hospital and AGMC.

Saha said the 7th CPC recom-

mended curbing private practice of government medical college doctors and provide 20 per cent hike in their basic salaries as non-practising allowance.

The chief minister said the government is contemplating to provide quarter facility to the faculty and medical officers of the premier medical institution.

Claiming that the state recorded an 80 per cent reduction in medical referral cases, he said the telemedicine service linking AIIMS, New Delhi, has been introduced so that patients could get better treatment facilities at GBP hospital.

The chief minister said steps have been initiated to introduce more superspecialty departments at the hospital cum medical college.

"At present, the state has 550 MBBS seats and 113 PG seats in three medical colleges. A total of 83 more PG seats will be opened at GBP Hospital and AGMC. We are planning to open liver and heart transplant facilities at the hospital," he said. (PTI)

# Never experiment with drugs, it's a destructive force that ruins lives and families: Mizoram CM



**AIZAWL, June 25:** Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Thursday urged young people to stay away from drugs and warned that experimentation with narcotics could quickly lead to addiction, broken families and premature death.

Addressing a programme organised to mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking here, the chief minister also called on citizens to report drug traffickers to law enforcement agencies, alleging that drug syndicates were exploiting the Mizo community's culture of trust to recruit unsuspecting people as drug couriers.

"Drugs may be within your reach, but have the courage to refuse them. Do not even experiment with them," Lalduhoma told the gathering, which included a large number of students.

Describing drugs as a destructive force that ruins lives and families, Lalduhoma said many users begin out of curiosity but soon become trapped by addiction.

"Many individuals begin using drugs believing they will not become addicted, only to find themselves

trapped by addiction. Drugs destroy families and often lead people to an untimely death," he said.

The CM stressed that the fight against drugs must extend beyond users to those who profit from the illegal trade.

Referring to a recent case involving a Mizo woman allegedly caught carrying heroin in her luggage while returning from Bangkok, Lalduhoma said traffickers frequently exploit innocent individuals to transport drugs.

He said the Mizo community's culture of trust and willingness to help others is often misused by criminal networks, which convince unsuspecting people to carry narcotics disguised as personal or family belongings.

"Many innocent people have been arrested and imprisoned after being deceived into transporting drugs for others," he said.

The CM also appealed to the public to remain vigilant and cooperate with authorities in tackling the drug menace.

"Drug traffickers are taking lives. They destroy families and damage society. If we know or suspect anyone involved in drug trafficking, we must report them to the authorities. Let them face the punishment they deserve," he said.

Lalduhoma claimed that drug abuse in the state has considerably declined over the last few years due to coordinated efforts by the state government, churches, civil society organisations, and community leaders.

He also said collective efforts have helped many to recover from addiction and reintegrate them into society.

The event was attended by Social Welfare Minister Lalrinpui, Sports Minister Lalnginglova Hmar and senior officials, including chief secretary Khilli Ram Meena. (PTI)

# Democracy thrives only when power respects Constitution: Khandu



**ITANAGAR, June 25:** Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday said democracy can survive only when those in power respect the Constitution.

Khandu described June 25, 1975, the day on which the Emergency was imposed, as one of the darkest chapters in India's democratic history.

"Fundamental rights were suspended, the press was censored, opposition leaders were jailed, and dissent was silenced under the Emergency," he said in a social media post.

Calling upon people to remember the courage of those who stood firm in defence of democracy and constitutional values, the chief minister said the observance serves as a reminder of the importance of safeguarding the Constitution and democratic institutions.

"As we observe #Samvidhan-HatyaDiwas, let us remember the sacrifices of those who stood firm in defence of democracy and constitutional values," he said.

Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein also paid tribute to those who resisted the Emergency, saying a constitution is strongest when it protects the voice of every citizen.

The Emergency, imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975, remained in force for 21 months until March 1977. (PTI)

# Militant arrested in Manipur's Imphal West

**IMPHAL, June 25:** A militant was arrested in Imphal West district of Manipur, police said on Thursday. Manipur Naga People Front (MNPF) member Siro Wungta was arrested from the Khuman Lampak area of the district, they said.

Wungta, 24, is a resident of Tarong village in the Kamjong district, they added. In a separate operation, arms and ammunition were recovered from Kotlen in Kangpokpi district, police said.

Among those recovered were a 5.56 mm rifle, eight single-barrel rifles, four improvised mortars, five lathods, 236 live rounds of ammunition of different calibres, and two magazines, they said. (PTI)

# Arunachal gov, wife fill SIR enumeration forms

**ITANAGAR, June 25:** Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik and his wife Anagha on Thursday filled their SIR enumeration forms at the Lok Bhavan here.

The exercise was conducted by Papum Pare district election officer Lobsang Tsering and electoral registration officer Dani Rikang of 13-Itanagar (ST) Assembly Constituency, following guidelines from the Election Commission, an official communique said.

Underscoring the civic responsibility of every eligible citizen, the governor emphasised that accurate electoral records are foundational to democratic governance.

"Public participation is essential for the success of this revision exercise. Electoral rolls are not merely administrative records but the very basis of free, fair, and transparent elections," Parnaik said.

The governor appealed to the people of the state to actively engage in the month-long SIR exercise, which commenced across Arunachal Pradesh on June 15 and is scheduled to conclude on July 14. (PTI)

# Mistakes made by Congress during Emergency resulted in its declining public support: Manipur CM

**IMPHAL, June 25:** Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Thursday alleged that the "mistakes" made by the Congress during the days of the Emergency resulted in the party's declining public support.

Speaking at an event to mark the 'Samvidhan Hatya Diwas' at the BJP state office here, Singh said that democracy cannot survive if people are denied the right to express their opinions freely.

"During the Emergency, many individuals who opposed the Congress were jailed... The mistakes made by

the Congress during that time are now well understood by the people, resulting in the party's declining public support," the CM said.

The Emergency, imposed by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on June 25, 1975, remained in force for 21 months until March 1977.

Referring to the current situation in Manipur, the chief minister said, "The state is gradually returning to normalcy, with positive developments taking place across all districts."

He also said that in Jiribam, meetings have been held with

members of the Hmar, Meitei, Kuki and Rongmei communities to stress on peace and reconciliation, and efforts are underway to facilitate the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the district.

Singh said that a "major new project" is expected to be launched in Jiribam soon.

Later in a post on X, the CM said: "Joined the observance of #SamvidhanHatyaDiwas at Thambal Shanglein, Nityaipat Chuthek, commemorating June 25, 1975 - the day the National Emergency was imposed." (PTI)

# Tribal council rejects Blinkit's trading license permission in Meghalaya

**SHILLONG, June 25:** Blinkit's bid to establish operations in Meghalaya has hit a major roadblock after the tribal council denied the quick-commerce giant the mandatory trading licence required to conduct business, and it also cited concerns that its operating model could adversely affect the livelihoods of more than 4,000 local grocery stores in the state capital. Defending the decision, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council chief executive member Winston Tony Lyngdoh told PTI, "The executive committee would not issue a trading licence to any platform whose business model threatens indigenous traders and small businesses."

He said Blinkit had reportedly obtained a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Dorbar Shmong and Rangbah Shmong of Nongrim Hills, but its application had not yet reached his office for consideration.

"More than 4,000 grocery shops under the council's jurisdiction stand to be affected by app-based delivery platforms offering deep discounts and doorstep services," Lyngdoh said, adding that the council had earlier refused licences to similar ventures, including Instamart, to safeguard local retailers. (PTI)

# NE NSS festival 2026 inaugurated in Itanagar

**HT Correspondent**

**ITANAGAR, June 25:** The five-day North East NSS Festival 2026, being organised from 24th to 28th June 2026 by the Ministry of Youth Affairs & Sports, Government of India, in collaboration with the NSS Regional Directorate, Guwahati, Arunodaya University, Itanagar, and the State NSS Cell, Directorate of Higher & Technical Education (DHTE), Arunachal Pradesh, commenced on Thursday with a grand inaugural ceremony at Arunodaya University, Jollang, Itanagar.

The prestigious festival has brought together 320 NSS Volunteers and Programme Officers representing all the eight North-Eastern States, providing a vibrant platform for youth interaction, cultural exchange, leadership development and national integration.

The inaugural function was graced by Pasang Dorjee Sona, Minister for Education, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, as the Chief Guest. Officially inaugurating the festival, the Minister emphasised the importance of effective time management, cultural assimilation, and fostering a spirit of brotherhood among the youth. He urged the NSS volunteers to respect and appreciate the diverse cultures and traditions of North-East India and contribute meaningfully towards nation-building.

A colourful cultural parade showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the North-Eastern region was presented by participants from all the states on the theme song of the National Service Scheme (NSS), captivating the audience and reflecting the unity in diversity of the region.



Addressing the gathering, NV Sangvikar, Vice-Chancellor, Arunodaya University, highlighted the pivotal role of youth in contemporary society and reiterated the University's commitment to providing quality education and holistic development opportunities to learners.

Jangjijong, In-charge Regional Director, NSS Regional Directorate, Guwahati, motivated the volunteers to actively participate in nation-building initiatives and encouraged them to contribute towards the vision of Viksit Bharat through community service and social engagement.

Speaking on the occasion, AK Mishra, State NSS Officer (NSS), Directorate of Higher & Technical Education, elaborated on the objectives of organizing the North East NSS Festival

and highlighted its significance in promoting leadership, volunteerism, social responsibility, and regional harmony among the youth.

The programme concluded with a formal vote of thanks delivered by KK Jha, Deputy Registrar, Arunodaya University, who expressed gratitude to the dignitaries, participants, organizers and all stakeholders for their support and contribution towards the successful inauguration of the festival.

The festival will continue over the next four days with a series of activities, including cultural exchanges, youth interactions, competitions, leadership sessions, site seeing and community-oriented programmes aimed at strengthening the values of service, unity, and national integration among NSS volunteers of the North-East region.

# GST officials conduct inspection drive in Kohima shops

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMPAPUR, June 25:** GST field officials conducted inspection, search and seizure operations across commercial establishments in Kohima.

The inspections were carried out under Section 67 of the Nagaland Goods and Services Tax (NGST) Act, 2017, from June 23 to strengthen tax compliance and ensure transparency in business transactions.

During the inspections, officials examined whether registered businesses were issuing proper tax invoices to customers as mandated under Section 31 of the NGST Act, 2017. Shop owners were asked to produce sales records, purchase invoices, stock registers, and other relevant documents for verification.

The inspection team also scrutinized the accuracy of GST returns filed by the establishments. Particular attention was given to the reconciliation of sales and purchase figures reported in GST returns with the actual business records maintained by the traders.

Physical stock verification was also carried out to ascertain whether the stock available at business premises and godowns matched the quantities reflected in the books of accounts and GST records. Discrepancies detected were documented for further examination and necessary action under the provisions of the GST law.

During the inspections, field officials seized documents related to sales transactions, including cash memos and bills, for further scrutiny and assessment.

Shop owners and traders were asked to maintain proper records as mandated under Section 35 of the NGST Act, 2017, issue genuine tax invoices for every transaction, and file GST returns accurately and within the prescribed timelines to avoid penalties and legal consequences. The officials said further inspections will be carried out in different parts of Kohima in the coming weeks as part of the department's ongoing enforcement and awareness initiatives.

## CM Adityanath accuses Congress of 'strangling democracy' during Emergency

LUCKNOW, June 25: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday accused the Congress of "strangling democracy" during the Emergency and said its imposition was not merely an assault on India's democracy, but a direct attack on the dreams of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar.

The CM also announced a series of welfare measures for 'Loktantra Senanis' (democracy fighters), including state honours at funerals, enhanced healthcare benefits and free bus travel facilities.

Addressing a function in Lucknow organised on the 51st anniversary of the Emergency, observed as 'Samvidhan Hatya Diwas', Adityanath said the country is remembering "that dark chapter" in its democratic history.

"Today, the entire country is remembering that dark chapter of June 25, 1975, when, for its vested political ambitions, the Congress strangled democracy in this coun-



try," he said.

The chief minister alleged that then prime minister Indira Gandhi imposed the Emergency to remain in power and avoid the consequences of a court order.

"To atone for her political sin, she attempted to snatch away the rights of Dalits, deprived sections, backward classes, women and every adult voter of this country -- rights that Babasaheb Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar had ensured for every citizen without discrimination. This sin of the Congress was not merely an assault on India's democracy; it was a direct attack on the dreams of Babasaheb Bhim-

rao Ambedkar," he said.

Adityanath said voices raised in support of democracy were suppressed during the Emergency.

Questioning the necessity of imposing the Emergency, he said, "When we arrive at the conclusion, only one conclusion emerges -- the Congress committed this sin only to retain power. To conceal this sin, it tried to suppress the voices of the youth, political workers and various social and cultural organisations."

The chief minister alleged that democratic institutions were weakened during the period.

Taking a swipe at the Samajwadi Party, he said, "Whenever the Samajwadi Party attempted to forge an alliance with the Congress, late Mulayam Singh Yadav opposed it. He used to say that anything could happen, but there should be no alliance with the Congress. But what are his successors doing today? They are ready to sink Mulayam Singh's legacy by boarding the Congress' sinking ship." (PTI)

## Emergency dark period which saw Indian democracy brutally crushed: Modi



NEW DELHI, June 25: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said Emergency was a direct assault on the Constitution as the period witnessed the suspension of civil liberties, curbs on freedom of expression, and an assault on institutions that are the bedrock of Indian democracy.

Paying homage to all those who steadfastly defended democratic values during one of the "darkest chapters in India's history", Modi said Emergency also revealed the extraordinary courage of countless citizens who refused to remain silent and upheld the ideals enshrined in the Constitution.

"The Emergency was a direct assault on our Constitution. It witnessed the suspension of civil liberties, curbs on freedom of expression, arrests of political leaders, journalists, social workers and an assault on institutions that

are the bedrock of our democracy," he said in a post on X referring to the proclamation of Emergency on this day in 1975.

The prime minister said for people, the Constitution is an embodiment of the aspirations, rights and duties of 140 crore Indians.

"We reaffirm our collective commitment to safeguarding constitutional values. Guided by the spirit of our Constitution, we will build an India that remains ever committed to justice, liberty, equality and fraternity," he said.

Between June 25, 1975 and March 21, 1977, India was placed under a state of Emergency under Article 352 of the Constitution.

Since 2025, the Narendra Modi government is observing the day as 'Samvidhan Hatya Diwas'.

A gazette notification in this effect had noted that Emergency was declared on June 25, 1975, following which there was "gross abuse of power by the government of the day and people of India were subjected to excesses and atrocities".

In another post on X, the prime minister said the 'Samvidhan Hatya Diwas' also reminds every one of that "dark period" when "Indian democracy was brutally crushed".

"It inspires us to always remain committed to protecting democracy, the Constitution, and citizens' rights. My respectful salutations to all the luminaries who opposed the

Emergency," he said in the post in Hindi. The formal declaration of Emergency marked a turning point in Indian constitutional history. The executive acquired overriding powers, and state authority was brought under central control.

Following the proclamation, constitutional safeguards were systematically suspended. The Emergency saw strict control over the press and public information through institutional mechanisms and administrative orders.

Parliament passed a series of constitutional amendments during the Emergency that weakened judicial review and institutional checks. One of the most controversial aspects of the Emergency was the forced sterilisation campaign.

The Emergency came to a formal end in March 1977, following a political shift triggered by general elections. (PTI)

### K'taka, AP, T'gana CMs resolve to find solution to water sharing issues

KOPPAL (KARNATAKA),

June 25: The Chief Ministers of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana on Thursday discussed resolving the water sharing issue between their states amicably, and decided to find a permanent solution to the water crisis with the involvement of Union Minister for Jal Shakti C R Patil.

Consensus was reached among the three Chief Ministers - D K Shivakumar, N Chandrababu Naidu and A Revanth Reddy respectively, as they met with Patil during the inauguration of the newly installed 33 spillway gates of Tungbhadra Dam here.

"There was a time when Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu were constantly in conflict over water-sharing issues. Discussions were not progressing, and no one was coming together on a common platform. But today is a good day. The chief ministers of all three states are here on one platform. They have committed that they will not quarrel," Patil said addressing a public meeting here after the inauguration. (PTI)

## Cong leaders carry out 'anti-democratic activities' under pretence: Nadda

PATNA, June 25: Union Minister J P Nadda on Thursday accused senior Congress leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, of engaging in "anti-democratic activities" while claiming to uphold constitutional values.

Addressing a programme organised to mark 'Samvidhan Hatya Diwas' at Gyan Bhawan here, attended by hundreds of participants of the 1975 JP movement, Nadda alleged that the Congress had a history of undermining democratic institutions.

"Today, Congress lectures us on democracy. Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi carry copies of the Constitution with them, but before doing so, Rahul Gandhi should apologise to the nation for the actions of his grandmother that left the Constitution in a shambles," Nadda said. He claimed that during the Emergency imposed by former prime minister Indira Gandhi, fundamental rights and personal liberty were curtailed, and courts were stripped of the authority to review restrictions imposed by the government.

"Democracy has often been treated as a tool of political convenience by the Congress and the INDIA bloc. Their political thinking has always been anti-democratic," he alleged.

Nadda also accused the Congress of misusing constitutional provisions for political purposes.

"Jawaharlal Nehru imposed President's rule eight times. Indira Gandhi did so around 50 times, dismissing elected governments. By contrast, during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 12 years in office, apart from Jammu and Kashmir and for a limited period in Manipur, President's rule has not been widely used," he added. He alleged that the activities of the INDI al-

liance are driven by the "pursuit of power" and not by the "vision of strengthening the nation".

Nadda said it is important to recall the "atrocities" committed by the Congress during Emergency so that the Indian democracy, which decisively defeated those who sought to crush it, remains strong forever and never faces such threats again.

"A few days ago, Congress leader Ashok Gehlot remarked that if Indira Gandhi were alive today, she would have banned the BJP. This shows their mindset hasn't changed. Had they had their way, they would have banned RSS and other patriotic organisations," the minister said. He urged people to keep Congress out of power in the country forever so that the "dark days like those under Emergency never come back."

Nadda said more than 1.31 lakh people were imprisoned without judicial scrutiny during the Emergency, claiming that even the British did not commit such levels of atrocities.

"The Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA), originally enacted by the British, was never used on such a scale during the freedom movement as it was during the Emergency," he said. The minister alleged that more than one crore people were forcibly sterilised under Indira Gandhi's rule, of which nearly 80 lakh sterilisations occurred during 1975 and 1976.

"Imagine the situation during the Emergency. Whenever doctors arrived in villages, young men would flee. This was a massive assault on human dignity. In Delhi, approximately 1.5 lakh houses were demolished, rendering around 7 lakh people homeless. More than 300 journalists were jailed. Newspapers appeared with blank spaces because of censorship," Nadda claimed. (PTI)

## SIT an eyewash, formed to protect the powerful: Arvind Kejriwal



LUCKNOW, June 25: Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Thursday dismissed the SIT probing the Ram Temple donation scam as an eyewash and not legally valid.

Kejriwal, who landed at Lucknow airport on his way to Ayodhya, alleged that the SIT, or Special Investigation Team, was intended to protect influential people rather than uncover the truth.

The former Delhi chief minister was received by hundreds of party workers at the airport.

Addressing reporters at the airport, Kejriwal lamented the alleged theft of valuables and cash received in donations by the grand temple.

"Diamonds and precious stones

that devotees offered to God have been stolen, Rs 200 crore in cash has been stolen, and even 200 kilograms of silver have been stolen," he said.

"I am deeply distressed. There are crores and crores of people like me who are deeply distressed. That is why I am going to Ayodhya. Tomorrow I will visit the Ram Temple and offer prayers to Lord Ram, and I will also visit Hanuman-garhi," the former Delhi chief minister said.

The AAP leader also questioned the SIT and the absence of an FIR despite evidence of theft.

"In this case, donations worth billions of rupees have allegedly been stolen, some money has even been recovered, yet no FIR has

been registered.

"An SIT cannot be formed without an FIR. The CrPC states that an SIT can be constituted only after an FIR is registered. Under which law has this SIT been formed?" he said.

"This SIT has no power to conduct an investigation. This SIT is merely a fraud, an attempt to throw dust in people's eyes. Its only purpose is to protect influential people and cover up the entire matter," the AAP leader alleged.

Earlier in the day, AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh appeared before the SIT probing the alleged Ram Temple donation scam and related cases and submitted documents which he claimed contained evidence of corruption. The Uttar Pradesh government had constituted the SIT on June 13, following a request from the temple trust over allegations of malfeasance.

On Tuesday, the team submitted its preliminary inquiry report to the Uttar Pradesh government.

The report was submitted by Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant to Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Sanjay Prasad, who is an ex officio member of the trust. (PTI)

## BJP targets Rahul after he expresses 'regret' before MP HC in defamation case

NEW DELHI, June 25: The BJP on Thursday attacked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi after he expressed "regret" before the Madhya Pradesh High Court in a defamation case related to Union minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's son, alleging that he has repeatedly made baseless allegations and later apologised when faced with legal action.

The BJP's attack came after Gandhi, the leader of opposition (LoP) in Lok Sabha, filed an application before the Madhya Pradesh High Court expressing "regret" over his allegedly defamatory statement about Chouhan's son Kartikeya Singh.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla alleged that Gandhi is a "serial liar" and has made a habit of making allegations without evidence.

"Rahul Gandhi is a serial liar. He thinks LoP means 'leader of propaganda', not 'leader of opposition'. Making allegations and then fleeing after a hit-and-run is his habit," Poonawalla said in a video statement.

Referring to the defamation case, Poonawalla claimed Gandhi had admitted he made a wrong allegation against Singh.

"He levelled allegations against Shivraj Singh Chouhan's son, Kartikeya Singh. But when the matter reached the high court, he apologised and expressed regret, admitting that he had wrongly made allegations linking him to the Panama Papers," he alleged.

The BJP spokesperson claimed Gandhi has followed a similar pattern in other cases as well.

"He made baseless remarks about (Vinayak Damodar) Savarkar and later had to apologise in court. He made baseless allegations against the RSS and again had to apologise in court," Poonawalla said.

He also alleged Gandhi has spread "falsehoods" about the Rafale deal and India's armed forces.

"He lied about Rafale and the Supreme Court fact-checked his claims. He spread falsehoods about India's armed forces, after which the Supreme Court reprimanded him," he claimed. (PTI)

## Raut seeks action against rebel MP Sanjay Patil over 'threats'

MUMBAI, June 25: Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on Thursday wrote a letter to Mumbai Police Commissioner Devn Bharti, seeking action against MP Sanjay Dina Patil, who recently joined the ruling Shiv Sena, over his alleged comment about "throwing bombs" at protesters.

Amid a war of words between Raut and Patil, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Thursday said the police would take appropriate action against anyone issuing threats.

Responding to the spat between the two leaders, Fadnavis said no one should be intimidated by threats and asserted that the state would not tolerate any such acts.

In the letter to the police commissioner, Raut said Patil's alleged remarks amounted to terrorism and criminal intent. He claimed that six MPs, who recently switched over from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena (UBT) to Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena, have become a subject of public outrage across the country.

There is immense anger among

the people of Maharashtra against this split, and people are staging protests at various places because they feel that voters have been grossly "betrayed". Protesting and holding elected representatives accountable are constitutional rights of citizens, the Rajya Sabha member said. However, the "rebel" MP from Mumbai North East, Sanjay Patil, has threatened the protesters with death, he claimed.

Raut alleged that Patil said if anyone protests against him, he will "throw bombs" at them, enter their homes and "kill them".

The Sena (UBT) leader said an MP threatening to use bombs is deeply alarming. If these bombs have been manufactured or stored at his residence, an immediate search of his premises should be conducted. Assistance from the Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) should be sought for this purpose. If these bombs were obtained from any terrorist organisation or criminal network, then this becomes a grave issue of national security, he said.

Notably, after joining the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena on Monday,

Sanjay Patil told media persons that when his father Dina Patil (former Congress MLA) was attacked, they had killed five people, without providing details of the purported incident.

He was apparently responding to Raut's call of "Operation Tudva" (bash up) after six of the nine Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha MPs switched over to the rival Sena.

The acrimonious exchange had turned nasty later when Raut used epithets against Patil.

Raut claimed that Patil also stated not to mess with him and before protesting against him, people should take out a life insurance policy, adding that he will send them "either to the crematorium or to the hospital". While issuing this threat, Patil spoke about "killing" five people, he alleged in his letter to the police. He said an investigation should be conducted into who these five people were, and when and why Sanjay Patil allegedly killed them. Since he has himself made this admission, a murder case should be immediately registered against him, he said. (PTI)

## Systemic assault on civil society: Cong's Venugopal writes to PM on amendments to FCRA rules

NEW DELHI, June 25: Congress general secretary K C Venugopal wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday, saying the amended rules under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) are a "systemic assault" on India's civil society and must immediately be withdrawn.

In his letter to Modi, Venugopal called for initiating a constructive dialogue with stakeholders to foster an environment of cooperation rather than coercion.

The government has amended the rules for receiving foreign funds, requiring NGOs to choose from a pre-defined list of purposes and their areas of operation, allowing a range of faith-based activities, while explicitly excluding proselytisation from several categories eligible for registration under the FCRA.

In a gazette notification issued on Monday, the home ministry also said any association having foreign nationals, other than those of Indian origin, as its key functionaries will "ordinarily not be

considered" for the grant of registration or prior permission to receive foreign funds under the Act.

In his letter to Modi, Venugopal said, "I am writing to you to register my vehement opposition and concern regarding the recently notified Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2026, by the Ministry of Home Affairs. These rules are an overt and systemic assault on India's civil society, designed not to regulate, but to strangle the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that form the backbone of our grassroots developmental and social welfare frameworks."

The latest amendments reflect a disturbing intent to micromanage, harass and financially cripple the voluntary sector, he claimed.

"Forcing NGOs to select their activities from a rigid, government-mandated list and restricting their operational geography destroys the very flexibility that allows these organisations to respond to on-ground realities and emergencies," Venugopal argued. (PTI)

## CPI(M), BJP councillors clash outside Thiruvananthapuram Mayor's office



THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 25: Tension prevailed at the Thiruvananthapuram Corporation on Thursday after the CPI(M) and BJP councillors were involved in a minor scuffle outside the Mayor's office during protests over a series of recent political developments.

The CPI(M) has been demanding the resignation of BJP councillor R Sugathan, who was recently arrested in an assault case and booked under the Kerala Anti-Social Activities (Prevention) Act (KAAPA).

The protest also came a day after the Kerala High Court invalidated the oath taken by several BJP coun-

cillors in the Corporation after they invoked names other than "God" or used expressions beyond the prescribed form of oath or solemn affirmation.

The CPI(M) has also alleged that the fresh oath taken by the BJP councillors following the HC order was not in accordance with the prescribed procedure.

Left councillors staged a protest outside the chamber of Mayor V V Rajesh on Thursday.

However, when Rajesh, accompanied by BJP councillors, attempted to enter his office, CPI(M) councillors allegedly blocked his entry, triggering a brief scuffle between members of the two sides, police said.

Several councillors from CPI(M) and BJP, including Mayor Rajesh, sustained injuries in the clash and some of them were shifted to the hospital, police added.

Police personnel soon reached the spot and intervened, enabling the Mayor to enter his chamber.

Speaking to reporters before being shifted to the hospital, Rajesh held the CPI(M) councillor responsible for the violence.

"There were councillors and members of the public with me. If they block the Mayor's office and prevent people from entering, how will public work be carried out?" asked Rajesh. (PTI)

## QR codes now mandatory on vaccines, antimicrobials, cancer drugs

NEW DELHI, June 25: The government has expanded the ambit of the QR code-based track-and-trace mechanism to cover all antimicrobials, vaccines, anti-cancer medicines, and narcotic and psychotropic drugs, a move aimed at strengthening safeguards against counterfeit and substandard medicines.

The Union Health Ministry has notified amendments to the Drugs Rules, 1945, bringing these categories of medicines under Schedule H2, which mandates the use of bar codes or Quick Response (QR) codes for product identification and verification.

Under the amended provisions, manufacturers will be required to print or affix a barcode or QR code on the primary packaging label of the drug formulation, or on the sec-

ondary packaging where space constraints exist, the ministry said.

The code will enable authentication and verification of medicines through software applications across the supply chain.

According to the ministry, the QR code will contain key product information such as a unique product identification code, generic and brand names, manufacturer's name and address, batch number, manufacturing and expiry dates, manufacturing licence number, and details of excipients, wherever applicable.

The ministry said the requirement was previously applicable only to the top 300 pharmaceutical brands in the country.

With the latest amendment, its coverage has been significantly expanded to include all vaccines, an-



ti-microbials, anti-cancer drugs, and narcotic and psychotropic medicines regulated under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, 1985.

The enhanced traceability framework is expected to strengthen safeguards against counterfeit and substandard medicines by enabling authentication and verification of products at var-

ious stages of the supply chain, it said.

The ministry noted the measure would also support efforts to curb the distribution of spurious medicines and contribute to India's fight against antimicrobial resistance (AMR) by facilitating better identification and monitoring of counterfeit and substandard antimicrobial products.

To provide adequate time for implementation, the government has prescribed phased timelines for compliance.

The organisations relating to vaccines, anti-cancer medicines, and narcotic and psychotropic drugs will come into force from July 1 this year while those relating to antimicrobials will become effective from July 1, 2028, the notification said. (PTI)

# NCERT introduces section on emergency in Class 9 textbook

**NEW DELHI, June 25:** The NCERT has included in the class 9 social science textbook a section on Emergency, which it described as "one of the major challenges to democracy in India" with Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan hailing the move saying future generations should know about the "dark deeds".

While the topic was made part of class 12 school curriculum during UPA rule in 2007, this is the first time it has been included in class 9 textbooks.

"One of the major challenges to democracy in India was recorded when an Emergency was imposed in 1975-77. In the early 1970s, public dissatisfaction with the government led by Indira Gandhi was growing. Rising unemployment, inflation, and allegations of mis-

governance led to widespread protests," said the paragraph in the newly developed Social Science textbook "Understanding Society: India and Beyond".

"In June 1975, a National Emergency was imposed by the government on the grounds of internal disturbance. During this period, a majority of fundamental rights were suspended, the press was censored, and numerous political leaders and activists were arrested. Democratic institutions came under severe strain, and citizens' freedom was restricted," the section says. The Emergency was imposed 51 years ago on June 25, 1975, following a period of political unrest and a court verdict that declared Gandhi's election null and void.

Speaking to reporters, Pradhan said, "NCERT has done the right thing. Future

generations should know and understand the dark deeds of the Emergency so that such a situation does not arise again. That is why NCERT brought it to the forefront. NCERT did a good job."

The BJP also backed the decision saying the "dark chapter" in India's constitutional history must be remembered to ensure it is never repeated. The ruling party attacked the Congress over the imposition of Emergency and alleged that it is opposing the National Council of Educational Research and Training's (NCERT) decision to introduce the section.

According to BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla, June 25, 1975, marked the darkest chapter of India's democratic and constitutional journey and alleged that the Congress had attacked every constitutional institution during the period.

"The Emergency was imposed out of lust for power by Indira Gandhi and the Congress. Every constitutional body was attacked. Parliament, the legislature, the judiciary and the media were censored and suppressed.

"We saw how even the likes of Kishore Kumar had their voice suppressed and their songs removed from All India Radio. These were the kind of atrocities that were committed," he said in a video statement. He said fundamental rights were suspended, judicial review taken away and constitutional safeguards dismantled. The NCERT's decision to include a chapter on the Emergency will help students learn about this period so that such events are never repeated, he said.

Attacking the Congress, he alleged that the party continues to have an "Emer-

gency mindset" and questioned why it is opposing the inclusion of the chapter.

Poonawalla said leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Lalu Prasad Yadav had fought against the Emergency and alleged that it is ironic that many parties associated with them are now aligned with the Congress. Teaching of emergency in school curriculum has been a subject of debate in previous years.

While there were complaints before that school textbooks are yet to reflect the full excesses of the Emergency, several passages about the dark period got pruned as late as 2023 under the BJP as part of a curriculum rationalisation exercise following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The deleted content included paras on controversies surrounding the decision to

impose the Emergency, and the abuse of power and malpractices committed by the Indira Gandhi government.

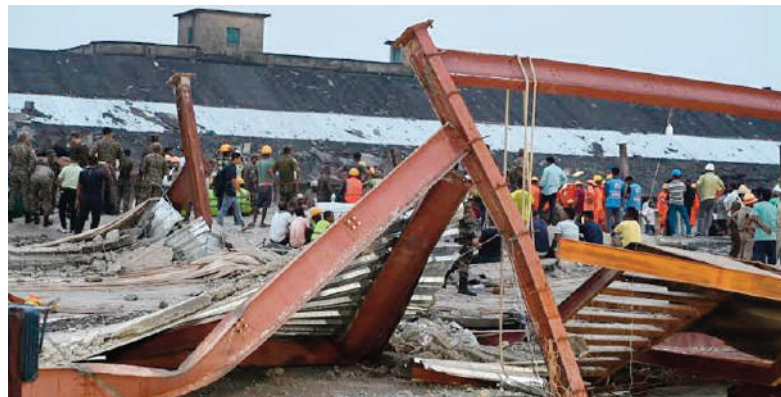
In 2018, the then-HRD Minister Prakash Javadekar had alleged that the textbooks did not reflect the "whole story" of the Emergency in school curricula for students to understand the reality of the time.

"In our textbooks, there are some chapters and columns on the Emergency that will be reviewed and this black chapter and assault on democracy of the country will figure some more in the books..."

"We will include the whole story of Emergency in the curriculum. Children should know the reality of that time. That is why the Emergency period is considered to be the second freedom struggle," he had said. (PTI)

## KOLKATA WAREHOUSE COLLAPSE

# Toll rises to 11, rescue operations on even after 24 hours



**KOLKATA, June 25:** The toll in the Taratala warehouse collapse in south Kolkata rose to 11 on Thursday as rescue teams, aided by the Army's advanced ground-penetrating radar (GPR) system, continued intensive search operations through the rubble for over 24 hours after the incident, officials said.

Five more people were rescued from the debris in the morning, taking the total number of victims pulled out from

under the rubble to 30, according to sources involved in the operation.

According to official sources, 10 people died either at the site of the incident or shortly thereafter, while another injured person succumbed to injuries during treatment on Thursday, taking the toll to 11.

The deceased have been identified as Krishna Chowdhury (30) of North 24 Parganas, Rohit Choudhari (40) of

Nadia, Rahul Choudhury (17) of Purba Bardhaman, Chandrama Choudhury (60) of Krishnanagar, Pappu Rajak (40) of Shyamnagar, Azgar Hossain (55) of Khidirpur in Kolkata, Sahil Sardar (17) of Basanti, Ghi Kumar (17) of Munger in Bihar, Hasan Imam (44) of Metiabruz, Nabin Singh of Asansol and Ganesh Kalindi (45), who died while undergoing treatment at SSKM Hospital. Nineteen injured are currently undergoing treatment in the state-run hospital, officials said.

Meanwhile, heavy rain stalled the rescue operations for nearly an hour, even as personnel from police, fire services, NDRF and the Army remained deployed at the site.

The warehouse was being built on a leasehold plot owned by the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in the city.

Rescue efforts continued through the night under the supervision of senior state government and civic officials, including Health Secretary Narayan Swarup Nigam, Kolkata Police Commissioner Ajay Nanda and Kolkata Mu-

nicipal Corporation (KMC) Commissioner Smita Pandey.

A senior state government official said all available resources had been mobilised to trace those who may still be trapped beneath the debris.

"The rescue operation is being carried out on a war footing. Advanced equipment, including the Army's ground-penetrating radar, cameras and other specialised devices, is being used to locate possible survivors. Our priority remains saving lives and ensuring immediate medical assistance to the injured," the official said.

The Army's GPR system is being used to detect signs of life beneath the collapsed structure. The equipment can detect movement and pulse signals beneath layers of debris, helping rescuers focus their excavation efforts on specific locations. Teams have also deployed cameras beneath the rubble to check for trapped persons, while mobile phone tower data is being used to trace the location of individuals whose phones remain active under the debris.

Five persons have been arrested in connection with the incident, including warehouse owner Shambhunath Behera, structural engineer Kamal Samanta, Gulzar Hussain, supervisor of Ayan Traders, labour supplier Dibakar Bhandari and Abdul Hamid.

Kolkata Police has registered a suo motu case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder and other relevant charges against the accused.

"We have initiated a criminal investigation into the collapse. At least five persons have been arrested so far, and further inquiries are underway to identify others who may have been responsible. We are examining all aspects, including structural safety compliance and operational procedures at the warehouse," a senior police officer said.

Behera Brothers was the lessee of the collapsed warehouse on Transport Depot Road in Taratala. Investigators are probing the circumstances leading to the collapse and whether any violations of safety norms contributed to the tragedy. (PTI)

## Govt operationalises Air Suvidha amid Ebola outbreak in Africa

**NEW DELHI, June 25:** An upgraded version of the air passenger health self-declaration portal Air Suvidha has been launched to enhance public health surveillance amid the Ebola outbreak in certain parts of Africa.

The civil aviation ministry and the Delhi airport operator DIAL on Thursday launched Air Suvidha 2.0.

Developed in collaboration with the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) under the health ministry, the portal enables international arriving passengers to submit a mandatory online health self-declaration.

The declaration will cover 21-day travel history, exposure history and related symptoms, if any, prior to immigration clearance, an official release on Thursday.

Air Suvidha Self Declaration Form (SDF) can be completed 24 hours in advance by passengers before they arrive in India.

All international travellers coming to India have to submit their self-declarations in advance.

The civil aviation ministry in the release said the portal enables real-time data sharing with the airport health officer, Bureau of Immigration, IDSP, and state surveillance officers.

Also, the portal will enable swift identification and referral of at-risk travellers while keeping the arrival experience seamless and contactless, with no physical forms to fill on landing, it added.

Air Suvidha portal was earlier operationalised during the coronavirus pandemic. (PTI)

## Centre ready to fund infrastructure projects in Goa's minority dominated areas: Rijiju

**MARGAO, June 25:** Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday assured central support for infrastructure, including school buildings and medical facilities, skill development and entrepreneurship initiatives in areas of Goa with significant minority populations.

He also said that the coastal state had not fully utilised the funds available under central schemes for minority communities.

Interacting with beneficiaries of the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation (NMDFC) schemes in South Goa, Rijiju said that he would discuss with Chief Minister Pramod Sawant to ensure that communities benefit from schemes implemented by the Ministry of Minority Affairs. The minister said the Centre's flagship 'Pradhan Mantri Jan Vikas Karyakram (PMJVK)' provides gap funding for infrastructure projects in areas where minority communities constitute more than 25 per cent of the population.

Rijiju said his ministry was committed to ensuring that all six notified minority communities -- Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains and Parsis -- received adequate support and access to government welfare programmes.

"In the last few years, I have observed that Goa has not utilised much of the available funds. I will be speaking to the CM to ensure

that wherever the minority population is more than 25 per cent, we can fund schemes for schools, school buildings, medical facilities, sports stadiums, libraries, skill training centres and other requirements," he said.

He also highlighted the Minority Affairs ministry's skill development initiatives, including the "TA Vikas" programme, and said efforts would be made to ensure minority communities in Goa derive greater benefits from entrepreneurship and training schemes.

Describing Goa as a unique state with high levels of development and connectivity, Rijiju said it has significant economic potential through tourism, fisheries and small-scale industries. Referring to the NMDFC's concessional loan schemes, the minister urged officials to explore ways to make them more attractive, particularly for youth and women entrepreneurs.

"In some states, educated unemployed youth have become self-reliant and even created jobs for others through these schemes. Goa, being an advanced and aware society, should also take advantage of the schemes through the Minorities Finance Development Corporation," he said.

He also referred to minority scholarship schemes, saying they had been temporarily suspended following allegations of irregularities and misuse of funds by certain institutions. (PTI)

**KOLKATA, June 25:** A day after a warehouse collapse in Kolkata snuffed out 10 lives, and with several still feared trapped, West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari attacked the previous TMC administration, alleging the structure had received official nod despite serious design flaws.

Addressing the Assembly on Thursday, Adhikari said the sanctioned building plan carried the signature of former Kolkata mayor and senior TMC leader Firdhad Hakim.

"This is the result of the sins you committed. By allowing such structures in exchange for money, you have turned the city of joy and greater Kolkata into a city of death," he said, escalating his attack on the erstwhile ruling party.

Promising strict action against everyone found responsible for the tragedy, Adhikari said, "No one will be spared."

The chief minister informed the House that nine people died and 20 others were injured in the collapse. However, hospital sources later confirmed that two injured workers succumbed on Thursday morning, taking the death toll to 11. A state government official said eight of the deceased have been identified so far.

Announcing relief measures, Ad-

hikari said the families of each deceased worker would receive Rs 10 lakh in compensation, while those injured would be given Rs one lakh.

Of the injured, one is in critical condition, and four are in serious condition, he added.

The chief minister said five people have been arrested so far in connection with the incident.

They are Gulzar Hossain, a supervisor of contractor Asgar; iron structure fabricator Kamal Samanta; land lessee Sambhunath Behera; labour supplier-trimex contractor Dibakar Bhandari; and Abdul Hamid, who allegedly brokered the sanctioned plan with the Kolkata Municipal Corporation (KMC).

Efforts are underway to trace contractor Asgar, Adhikari told the Assembly. According to the chief minister, preliminary findings indicate that the warehouse was approved despite structural deficiencies and a faulty design.

He said the building plan was sanctioned on January 17, 2026, when the TMC was in power.

"Those found guilty in the incident will face criminal prosecution and have their properties attached to extract compensation," Adhikari said. "There will be zero tolerance."

## Gujarat police bust pan-India APK fraud racket; three held

**AHMEDABAD, June 25:** Gujarat police have busted a Jharkhand-based cyber fraud network allegedly involved in spreading malicious APK files across the country to gain unauthorised access to victims' mobile phones and siphon money from their bank accounts, officials said on Thursday.

The key accused, Purmanand alias Mukesh Tiwari, created malicious APK files and a Telegram bot selling fraudulent apps disguised as banks, utilities, and government services, the Ahmedabad Cyber Crime Branch said, adding Tiwari and two more persons have also been arrested. A significant finding of the probe was the gang's self-propagating distribution model. After a victim

installed an APK file, the malware automatically forwarded itself to all WhatsApp and Telegram groups associated with the victim.

If another user downloaded the file, it spread further in a chain reaction, enabling the malicious applications to reach lakhs of mobile phones within days, the police said. The Cyber Crime Branch has so far linked the network to multiple fraud complaints and FIRs involving losses of nearly ₹ 54 lakh.

It arrested Tiwari from a moving train on the way from Kolkata to Mizoram, following an investigation into multiple cyber fraud complaints registered through the national cybercrime helpline-1930. The two other arrested accused are

Vikas Das, who allegedly supplied the APK files to around 400 cyber fraudsters, and Sitaran Mandal, who allegedly arranged credit and debit cards used in the fraud operations. All three accused are residents of Jharkhand, the police said. The arrests were made in connection with a case wherein a city resident, Naresh Sabnani, lost ₹ 6.68 lakh after fraudsters posing as officials of Sabarmati Gas Limited induced him to download a malicious application named 'Sabarmati Gas Bill Update.apk'.

According to the police, Sabnani received a WhatsApp message claiming his gas connection would be disconnected if his bill details were not updated. (PTI)

## Online child sexual exploitation cases rising: HC

**NAGPUR, June 25:** Online child sexual exploitation cases are rising and have emerged as one of the most serious forms of cybercrime, the Bombay High Court has said, refusing relief to a man whose Instagram account was permanently suspended for sending nude content to a minor.

Online social media platforms have a responsibility to ensure that their services are not misused for facilitating or promoting child exploitation, considering the grave nature of such offences and the devastating consequences they have on children, said a bench of Justices Anil Kilar and Raj Wakode in its order of June 19. A copy of which was made available on Thursday.

"Online child sexual exploitation is in-

creasing day by day. Online child sexual exploitation has emerged as one of the most serious forms of cyber-enabled crime, causing irreversible physical, psychological and emotional harm to children," the HC said.

The court agreed with the action taken by Meta-owned Instagram against the petitioner.

"Meta's zero-tolerance policy cannot be faulted as being arbitrary or disproportionate. Rather, it constitutes a necessary and proportionate response to one of the most heinous forms of online abuse, reflecting the paramount importance of protecting children in the digital environment," HC said.

It added that strict adherence to such policies is therefore not only justified but

also essential to ensure the safety of children and to prevent the misuse of social media platforms for criminal purposes.

Dismissing the man's petition, the court said it was of the opinion that no illegality had been committed by Meta in suspending his Instagram account permanently.

The petitioner's advocate Priti Badwaik Pendke argued that he was not given an opportunity to correct his mistake and a harsh action of permanent suspension of his account was taken.

The man had moved HC after his Instagram account was permanently suspended by Meta on account of multiple violations of community standards, including child sexual exploitation, abuse and nudity. (PTI)

# Ebola scare: Govt launches portal to strengthen surveillance

**NEW DELHI, June 25:** The Civil Aviation Ministry and Delhi International Airport Limited on Thursday launched an upgraded and contactless passenger health self-declaration portal to strengthen public health surveillance at points of entry in response to the Ebola disease outbreak in parts of Africa.

Developed in collaboration with the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), Union health ministry, the AIR SUVIDHA 2.0 portal enables international arriving passengers to submit a mandatory online health self-declaration covering 21-day travel history, exposure history and re-



lated symptoms, if any, prior to immigration clearance.

The portal enables real-time data sharing

with the Airport Health Officer, Bureau of Immigration, IDSP and State Surveillance Officers, enables swift identification and referral of at-risk travellers while keeping the arrival experience seamless and contactless, with no physical forms to fill on landing, the Health ministry said in a statement.

The Airsuvidha Self Declaration Form (SDF) can be completed 24 hours in advance before arrival to India.

"Passengers are requested to fill the forms before boarding of the flight, during web check-in for swift clearance on arrival and only required to show the downloaded SDF

at the International Travel Health Desk or Immigration counter," the statement said.

The launch of the portal follows the WHO's declaration of the Ebola/Bundibugyo Virus Disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda as a public health emergency of international concern on May 17 under the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005.

The current outbreak has been confirmed as Bundibugyo Virus Disease (BVD), and countries bordering Congo and Uganda, including South Sudan, have been assessed as high-risk for transmission. (PTI)

## First step to equality is providing equal access to law: CJJ

**NEW DELHI, June 25:** Chief Justice of India Surya Kant has said the first step to equality is providing equal access to the law and emphasised that it should not merely be a procedural nicety.

Speaking at the XIV St Petersburg International Legal Forum in Russia on Wednesday, the CJJ said equal access to law must fructify in the conferment of actual rights rather than hollow statutory declarations.

"We must ask ourselves what it actually takes for equality before the law to become real? My answer, which I draw from my experience presiding over the world's largest and most complex judicial systems, is that the first step to equality is providing equal access to the law.

"Such access cannot merely be a procedural nicety and must fructify in the conferment of actual rights rather than hollow statutory declarations," the CJJ said.

He said the birthplace of equality was not necessarily the Magna Carta in 1215.

"Rather, my own personal belief is that its roots are traceable to Kautilya's Arthashastra, which belongs to the Indian subcontinent and propounded the theory of equality in the fourth century," he said. (PTI)

# Vishal Bhardwaj, Sreekar Prasad and Deepa Bhatia among 529 new invites for Academy membership

Director-composer Vishal Bhardwaj, film editors Deepa Bhatia and A Sreekar Prasad as well as costume designer Eka Lakhani and casting director Dilip Shankar are among the 529 artists invited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences to become its members.

Bhardwaj, who started his cinema journey as a music composer before branching out as a successful filmmaker, has been invited as a composer to join the organisation. The filmmaker has always composed music for his films, be it "Maqbool", "Omkaara", "Kaminey", "Haider". He has also given music to Gulzar's "Maachis" and most recently composed for Manish Malhotra's production "Gustaakh Ishq".

"I'm deeply honoured and excited to be invited to become a member of the Academy. It is a privilege to be part of the most prestigious platform for global cinema, and I look forward to participating in the Academy Awards voting process," Bhardwaj said in a statement.

Bhatia is a renowned film editor and has worked on films such as "Tare Zameen Par", "My Name is Khan", "Rock On", "Kai Po Che", and "Raees".

"Honoured to be invited by the Academy, alongside people I so respect @vishalrbhardwaj," Bhatia posted on Instagram.

Prasad is also a prolific editor who has worked across industries in India and has edited "Kaminey" and "Talvar", "Pazhassi Raja" and "Kattradhu Thamizh".

Lakhani has worked as a costume designer on Mani Ratnam's "Ponniyin Selvan", "Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani", "Leo" and "Dunki" and many others.

"Honoured. Humbled. Grateful. Deeply honoured by the invitation to join the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. It's a privilege to be part of a community of artists whose work I have admired, learned from and been inspired by for years. Here's to the magic of storytelling," Lakhani said, tagging fellow Indian invitees in her post.

Dilip Shankar, who selected the cast for Mira Nair's "Monsoon Wedding" and Pan Nalin's "The Last Show", is part of the newly introduced Oscar branch for casting directors.

In a statement, Academy CEO Bill Kramer and Academy President Lynette Howell Taylor said, they are delighted to invite this remarkable group of film artists and professionals from around the world to join the Academy.

"Through their commitment to filmmaking, this year's exceptionally talented class has made significant contributions to our global movie industry," they said.

In its release, the Academy said the membership process for its 19 branches and one membership classification is conducted by sponsorship, not application. Additionally, Academy Award nominees are automatically considered for membership in the year in which they are nominated and do not require sponsors.

Membership selection is based on professional qualifications, with an ongoing commitment to representation, inclusion and equity remaining a priority. Of the 2026 invited class, 42 per cent are women, 56 per cent belong to underrepresented communities, and 53 per cent are from 60 countries and territories outside the United States. (PTI)



## Money laundering case: Actor Jacqueline Fernandez withdraws plea from SC

The Supreme Court on Thursday permitted Bollywood actor Jacqueline Fernandez to withdraw her plea challenging a Delhi court order to frame charges against her in a Rs 200 crore money laundering case.

"Counsel for the petitioner (Fernandez) has sought permission to withdraw this special leave petition with liberty to avail appropriate remedy in accordance with law," a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Joymalya Bagchi said.

The top court permitted the withdrawal of petition with the liberty as sought by the petitioner.

A Delhi court on May 30 ordered framing of charges against the actor, alleged conman Suresh Chandrashekar and 15 others in the case. The actor had moved the top court against the order.

The trial court also directed that charges be framed against Chandrashekar and 20 others for various offences, including under the stringent MCOCA provisions, in another case registered by the city police's special cell.

On June 3, setting the stage for trial, a Delhi court formally framed charges in the money laundering case.

On June 11, apex court judge Justice



Prashant Kumar Mishra recused himself from hearing the actor's plea. Fernandez, who was summoned by

the Enforcement Directorate (ED) several times in connection with the probe, was named an accused for the first time in a supplementary charge sheet filed by the agency.

The ED alleged in a second supplementary complaint that Fernandez was in constant touch with Chandrashekar and received valuable gifts from him through his associate Pinky Irani.

According to the prosecution, Chandrashekar was running an organised criminal network from inside jail and impersonating senior government officials, including those from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Law and Justice.

It claimed that the accused induced complainant Aditi Singh and her family members to part with huge sums of money by using spoofed calls, encrypted applications and fabricated identities.

The ED alleged that Chandrashekar generated proceeds of crime amounting to more than Rs 200 crore through extortion, cheating, impersonation and criminal intimidation, and thereafter concealed, possessed, transferred, layered and projected the same as untainted property with the help of his associates. (PTI)

## Ajay Devgn to headline action entertainer 'Chauhaan'

Actor Ajay Devgn is set to headline "Chauhaan", an action entertainer which will be released in theatres on October 1, 2027, the makers announced on Thursday.

The project was announced on the birth anniversary of Devgn's father Veeru Devgan, who was one of Hindi cinema's most celebrated stunt choreographers.

Presented by Jio Studios and Colour Yellow Productions, the film will be directed by Neeraj Yadav, known for his work as a writer on movies such as "An Action Hero" and "Tere Ishk Mein".

The makers also released an announcement video, offering a glimpse into the film's gritty action-packed world.

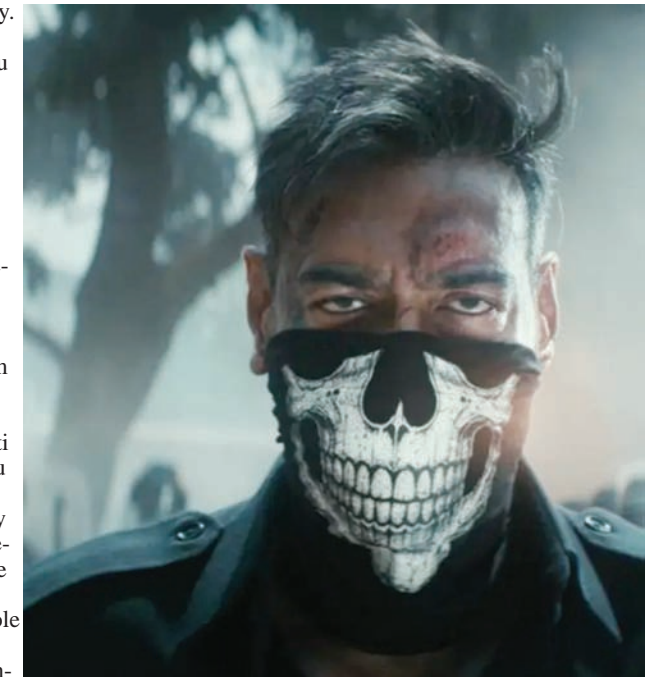
Set against a volatile backdrop in Jammu and Kashmir's Pulwama, the film will see Devgn step into the role of an army officer.

"Chauhaan" is being produced by Jyoti Deshpande, Aanand L Rai and Himanshu Sharma.

Devgn will next be seen in the comedy franchise film "Dhamaal 4", slated for release on July 3. It will be followed by the third instalment of the "Drishyam" franchise, in which he reprises his popular role as Vijay Salgaonkar.

He also has "Ranger", an action-adven-

ture co-starring Sanjay Dutt and Tamannaah Bhatia, in the pipeline. (PTI)



## 'I was simply fatigued': Alka Yagnik on viral wheelchair video from Padma awards ceremony

Playback singer Alka Yagnik on Thursday said she had requested for a wheelchair at the Padma ceremony because she was fatigued after a long and memorable day.

A new video from the ceremony, where she received the Padma Bhushan honour from President Droupadi Murmu, showed her sitting on a wheelchair. The video went viral on social media and sparked concern among her well-wishers. Yagnik was also seen going to dias with the help of an assistant.



The singer, who has been away from the spotlight for the last two years as she recovers from a hearing loss in 2024, has now asked fans not to worry while thanking them for their "love, concern and countless good wishes".

"I have seen the concern surrounding a video from the ceremony and would like to assure everyone that I am well and progressing positively in my recovery. After a long and memorable day at

the Padma facilitation, I was simply fatigued and requested a wheelchair while leaving. "Please do not worry. I am feeling much better and remain deeply grateful for the prayers and support that continue to strengthen me," the 60-year-old wrote on Instagram.

On Wednesday, Yagnik had released a statement in which she talked about her recent health struggles.

The singer suffered sensorineural nerve hearing loss caused by a viral attack two years ago. It is a hearing disorder that happens when there is damage to tiny hair cells within the inner ear or the auditory nerve that transmits sound signals to the brain.

"For the last two years, I have stayed away from the spotlight, from public appearances, and from sharing much of my journey. Many of you knew I am going through difficult health and through it all, your love, prayers, messages, and unwavering support have stayed with me every step of the way.

"Today, as I stepped out to receive one of highest civilian honours in the country - the distinguished Padma Bhushan, I did so with a heart full of gratitude," she wrote.

Yagnik, one of Bollywood's most successful singers, said she is deeply humbled by the honour.

"While my name may be on it, it belongs just as much to every listener who welcomed my voice into their lives, carried my songs through generations, and stood by me through both the highs and the challenges. (PTI)

## Ali Fazal, Pankaj Tripathi and Divyenndu return in teaser of 'Mirzapur: The Movie'



Actor-politician Ravi Kishan is the latest addition to the ensemble and seemingly steps into the role of the villain. He makes a striking impression with several gun-blazing moments in the teaser

The makers of "Mirzapur: The Movie" on Thursday unveiled the teaser of the much-awaited

film, offering a glimpse into the theatrical expansion of the popular crime drama series led by Ali Fazal and Pankaj Tripathi.

The film marks the first big-screen outing for the "Mirzapur" universe, which debuted as a streaming series in 2018 and went on to become one of India's most successful OTT franchises.

The over two-minute long teaser brings back the lawless world of Mirzapur, where the battle for power continues amid a barrage of bullets, betrayals and bloody rivalries.

The movie is set in 2018, hinting at an untold chapter from the first season of the show.

The teaser then offers first glimpses into fan-favourite characters -- Guddu Pandit (Fazal), Kaleen Bhaiya (Tripathi) and Munna Tripathi (Divyenndu).

Actor Jitendra Kumar also features in the teaser and he is playing Bablu Pandit, Guddu's brother who was killed towards the end of the first season.

Actor-politician Ravi Kishan is the latest addition to the en-

semble and seemingly steps into the role of the villain. He makes a striking impression with several gun-blazing moments in the teaser.

Packed with stylised action, explosive shootouts and high-octane chase sequences, the teaser suggests the film has been mounted on a big scale. While retaining the gritty atmosphere of Purvanchal, the visuals also expand the narrative to Rajasthan, featuring sweeping desert landscapes and elaborate action set pieces.

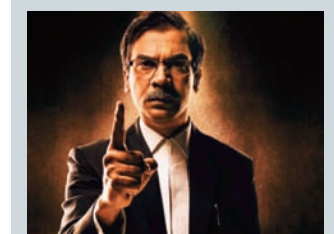
Returning cast members also includes Abhishek Banerjee, Rasika Dugal, Sheeba Chaudha, Rajesh Tailang, Pramod Pathak, Shriya Pilgaonkar, Harshita Shekhar Gaur, Shweta Tripathi and Sonal S Chauhan.

"Mirzapur: The Movie" is directed by Gurmmeet Singh from a script by Puneet Kishna.

The film is produced by Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akhtar under the Excel Entertainment banner, with Kassim Jagmagia and Vishal Ramchandani serving as co-producers.

Presented by Amazon MGM Studios and Excel Entertainment, "Mirzapur: The Movie" is slated to release in theatres on September 4 in Hindi and Telugu. (PTI)

## Rajkumar Rao transforms into public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam in 'Prahaar' first look



Production banner Maddock Films on Thursday unveiled the first look of "Prahaar", an upcoming biographical drama featuring Rajkumar Rao as the renowned public prosecutor Ujjwal Nikam.

Avinash Arun, the director of "Three of Us" and "Paatal Lok", has helmed the project, which will release in theatres on August 7.

"Why did it take so long to hang Kasab? Rajkumar Rao as Ujjwal Nikam unfolds the truth in 'PRAHAAR'. In cinema 7th August, 2026," Maddock Films posted on Instagram. Nikam, best known for leading the prosecutions in the 1993 Mumbai bombings and the 26/11 terror attacks.

According to the recently released teaser, which is currently playing in theatres along with "Cocktail 2", the story primarily revolves around Nikam's prosecution of Ajmal Kasab, the lone surviving terrorist captured after the 2008 attacks.

"Prahaar" will also feature Wamiqa Gabbi, Sikander Bhatia and Jaideep Ahlawat in pivotal roles. The movie is produced by Dinesh Vijan of Maddock Films. (PTI)

# England storms into Women's T20 World Cup semifinals at sweltering Lord's

**LONDON, June 25:** Host England was first into the Women's Twenty20 World Cup semifinals with a group match to spare after beating the West Indies by 38 runs at sweltering Lord's on Wednesday.

Both former one-time champions came to the matchup unbeaten, and Danni Wyatt-Hodge batted England out of reach with 65 off 42 balls. Wyatt-Hodge is the tournament's leading run-scorer with 193, averaging 65.

The West Indies can still advance if it beats winless Ireland in its last group match on Saturday.

On the hottest June day on record in Britain the evening game started at 35 degrees C and an air temperature of 41 C, and England made an impressive 186-7, the highest women's T20 total at Lord's and the second highest by a men's or

women's side.

No team has chased down 187 at a World Cup and West Indies was limited to 148-5. The required run rate was at 10 after only two overs and after 69-4 in the 11th over the team appeared to have no interest in attacking the target despite a sloppy fielding effort by England.

Wyatt-Hodge, who launched the tournament two weeks ago with a century against Sri Lanka, smacked a 32-ball fifty. She should have been run out on 58 and caught on 59 and was finally run out on 65 by partner Heather Knight. She hit eight boundaries.

"I'm happy it was my night tonight," Wyatt-Hodge said. "That was the hottest I've played in here in England. Felt like Dubai a couple of years ago (2024 T20 World Cup). But I enjoyed it, we came out

all guns blazing."

Knight, dropped on 14, added 43 from 26 before she was run out, too.

West Indies captain Hayley Matthews was furious to be given out on review on 14 in the fourth over. There was a spike on UltraEdge despite a clear gap between bat and ball, and Matthews, who argued with the umpire because she didn't believe she touched the ball, said afterward she respected the umpire's decision.

Deandra Dottin was caught in the deep on 19 and Shemaine Campbelle was bowled on 20 and the West Indies appeared to go into a shell. A late unbeaten 51 off 30 came from Chinelle Henry when the result was already certain.

Henry was dropped on 10, 28 and 45 among six dropped catches by England, its most in a T20 match in two years. (AP)



## The International Tennis Federation is now World Tennis

**LONDON, June 25:** The International Tennis Federation is changing its name to World Tennis.

The organization oversees the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup team competitions, as well as tennis at the Olympics and Paralympics.

"Today is an opportunity to redefine our role at the heart of world tennis and pledge our commitment to ensuring a strong, sustainable future for this brilliant sport," World Tennis president David Haggerty said Thursday. "World Tennis reflects who we are, our global footprint and unique mandate."

Other international sport federations have made similar name changes in recent years, such as World Athletics, World Aquatics, World Gymnastics and World Rugby.

The name switch was ratified last October by member national tennis associations voting at the governing body's annual general meeting.

London-based World Tennis works together with the ATP and WTA Tours and the four Grand Slam tournaments — the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and the U.S. Open — to organize the professional side of the sport.

"A lot of people think of the ITF as seven governing bodies when in fact they're not seven governing bodies. They actually have different purposes, which all add together to equal a big pie of a sport," World Tennis chief executive Ross Hutchins said, adding that the renaming reflects the organization's "global nature."

Wimbledon, where Serena Williams will play singles after nearly four years away, starts on Monday. (AP)

## 18-year-old national record breaker Anushka wants javelin-like status for hammer throw

**BHUBANESWAR, June 25:** A national record holder at just 18, Uttar Pradesh athlete Anushka Yadav has a simple wish -- to make hammer throw match the popularity of javelin which has a massive fan following in the country due to the exploits of two-time Olympic medalist Neeraj Chopra.

Anushka smashed the women's hammer throw national record with an effort of 67.02m on an eventful opening day of the National Inter-State Championships here on Wednesday. She bettered the nine-year-old previous national record of 65.25m set in 2017 by Sarita Singh.

"Not many people know hammer throw in India, but everybody knows javelin throw. I want people to know hammer throw just like javelin throw," Anushka, who hails from a farming family at Baleni village in Baghpur district of Uttar Pradesh, said after her feat.

"I am looking for a gold in the upcoming Asian Games and hoping to cross the 70m mark in the near future," she said when asked about her target this year.

Anushka made an improvement of more than four metres from her previous personal best of 62.89m, which she came up with on way to winning gold in the National Games last year.

She has a chance of winning a medal at the Asian Games in Japan in September-October. She breached the Asian Games qualifying mark of 61.72m set by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI).

At the 2022 Asian Games in China, the bronze winner had a mark of 64.14m, while the silver and gold medalist had produced 69.44m and 71.53m respectively.

Anushka is, however, placed 11th in the list of Asian hammer throwers this season, with Jie Zhao of China leading with 78.22m.

Hammer throw has largely been an unknown event as India has not won too many medals in the international arena.

At the 1951 Asian Games in New Delhi, Somanth Chopra and Kishen Singh won a silver and bronze respectively. Praveen Kumar Sobti clinched a hammer throw bronze at the 1966 Asian Games and a silver at the Commonwealth Games in the same year. Nirmal Singh Grewal bagged a silver in 1974 Asian Games.

Manju Bala is the lone Indian medalist among women in the Asian Games. She won a bronze in the 2014 edition.



Anushka is currently the youngest national record holder in athletics. But, athletes like legendary sprinter PT Usha have achieved national records at a younger age. Usha was 16 when she first set the national records in 100m and 200m.

**Knee ligament tear could have derailed Anushka's season**

Anushka suffered a knee ligament tear while operating a tractor at her family farm in her village.

"I was working at our village farm with my father and brother. My father asked me to help him till the field with the tractor and I got injured. The incident happened in March," she said.

"Luckily, my recovery did not take too long. But I started my season a little late because of the injury," said the youngster who trains under her father Sushil Yadav.

Anushka was initially interested in 100m but her father told her to shift to hammer throw when she was studying at a local school. Sushil, also a former hammer thrower, was also her formative coach.

"My father was a hammer thrower himself...he married young and quit the sport. He made me play hammer. I have three personal coaches -- my father, Chirag Yadav and Gagan Yadav.

"I used to do 100m. But after 6-7 months, my father asked me to quit running and pursue hammer," said Anushka who has two older sisters and two younger brothers.

She said her father gave her a hammer for the first time when she was 12 years old.

Some other top hammer throwers like Tanya Chaudhary also train with her, and Anushka said she got inspired by the senior athletes.

Tanya finished second on Tuesday with a throw of 61.70m.

"Tanya Chaudhary is there. She is senior to me. Everyone in our group is good. We get inspiration from our seniors. There are boys too, juniors and seniors." (PTI)

## Christian Pulisic feels 'great,' hopes to play for US in final World Cup group game vs Turkey

**IRVINE (US), June 25:** Christian Pulisic says he feels "great" now after missing one World Cup match with a calf injury, and he hopes to play for the U.S. in its final group match against Turkey on Thursday night.

Pulisic played a dynamic first half in the Americans' historic 4-1 victory over Paraguay to open their home World Cup nearly two weeks ago, but the AC Milan midfielder came off at halftime after an injury from training stiffened up.

Pulisic said he nearly played in the U.S.' 2-0 victory over Australia last Friday but was held out to get closer to full fitness for the games ahead. He has returned to practice with his teammates this week after working out on his own last week before the trip to Seattle.

"I'm hoping to play a part in (the match against Turkey), for sure," Pulisic said before the U.S. training session Wednesday at Great Park. "I'll discuss that with my coaches and the medical staff. Obviously not a good chance I'll probably go and play 90 (minutes) right away after you come back and miss a game, but we'll see."



U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino didn't reveal his plan Wednesday for Pulisic in the match against Turkey, which is meaningless for both teams. The Americans are locked into first place in their group, while Turkey has been eliminated from knockout-round contention.

"Pulisic is talking with the medical (staff)," Pochettino said in an afternoon news conference at SoFi Stadium. "We have to decide if it's

possible to play from the beginning, or maybe play from the bench and play the second half."

Pochettino did indicate that his players who have already received yellow cards — Folarin Balogun, Chris Richards, Antonee Robinson and Tyler Adams — are unlikely to play, at least as starters.

"For the guys that have yellow cards, it's not necessary to take another yellow card and not be avail-

able for the next stage," Pochettino said. "It's a normal, easy answer not to play with them from the beginning."

Pulisic hopes the plan includes at least some playing time for him as the U.S. ramps up for its Round-of-32 match in Santa Clara, California, on July 1. While Pulisic's calf injury robbed him of one chance on the World Cup stage, he felt certain he wouldn't be out for long.

"I never feared anything worse," Pulisic said. "I was pushing, and I was really close to trying to be available for the last game, for sure. I did feel a little something (against Paraguay), but I definitely was able to push through in the first half and just get me through. But yeah, it wasn't quite ready, but it wasn't anything where I feared anything worse than what it was."

With no stakes for the U.S. against Turkey, Pochettino seems likely to provide some rest to key players in his starting lineup while giving a few of his reserves possibly their only opportunity to hit the field. That sounds great to Richards, who thinks some time off wouldn't be a hindrance. (AP)

## Skiers Arif Khan, Stanzin Lundup to be first Indian recipients of IOC's USD 10k grant for Olympians



**NEW DELHI, June 25:** Skiers Arif Mohammad Khan and Stanzin Lundup will be the first Indian beneficiaries of the International Olympic Committee's USD 10,000 grant for Olympians as they had represented the country at this year's Milano-Cortina Winter Games, which would be the starting point for the programme's rollout.

The grant marks a major shift from over a century old IOC principle of not handing out financial benefits to athletes due to the concept of amateurism enshrined in the Olympic movement.

It is a part of IOC's "Fit for the Future" strategic framework to find "new and complementary ways" to provide support to athletes, who qualify for the Games and steer clear of any doping offences.

IOC President Kirsty Coventry has refused to call it prize money, insisting that it is a support mechanism. The payouts will begin by the end of this year after examining applications through a soon-to-be-launched mechanism.

The 36-year-old Arif had produced India's best-ever finish in men's slalom by ending 39th in Milano-Cortina. It was 10 notches higher than India's previous best result in the event, set by Kishore Ratna Rai at the 1988 Games in Calgary.

"This grant is a recognition of what an athlete goes

through while preparing for the Olympics. It will give them motivation and yes USD 10,000 (₹ 9.43 lakh) is a decent sum which an athlete can use to his benefit," the two-time South Asian Winter Games gold-medallist told PTI over a phone call.

"In fact, it is not even about the money, it is about the care. IOC is showing athletes that it cares for their journey, which is very heartening.

"This is a grant for the hard work of an Olympic cycle. They are recognising the effort that goes into making an Olympian. It is a huge moment for athletes," added the skier from Jammu and Kashmir's Gulmarg.

The 28-year-old Lundup's debut Winter Games experience was, however, not particularly memorable. He finished 104th in the men's 10km freestyle cross-country skiing event.

This was after a higher-ranked Manjeet Kumar had dragged his selection by IOA to the Delhi High Court, which ruled that the process was indeed "manifestly arbitrary and unfair".

However, after the IOA expressed its inability to make any change to the team composition as the deadline to submit names was long over, the Sports Ministry, taking note of the technical issues involved, eventually approved Lundup's participation.

The Army man from Ladakh ended up being the country's flag-bearer in the Games closing ceremony after Arif got the honour in the opening ceremony.

Chair of the IOC Athletes' Commission, basketball great Pau Gasol said an application process for athletes is being worked out.

"This grant will be available to every Olympian. Not just medal winners. Not just athletes from certain countries. Every Olympian. Because, while every athlete's journey is different, every Olympian has made sacrifices to reach the Olympic stage," Gasol said while announcing the fund which has been capped at USD 140 million per Olympics.

"This is not prize money. This is about recognising the journey and the commitment it takes to become an Olympian," he had further stated echoing Coventry. (PTI)

## Australia may get Litchfield boost ahead of blockbuster India clash



**LONDON, June 25:** Australia could receive a timely boost ahead of Sunday's T20 World Cup clash against India with star batter Phoebe Litchfield set to return from injury, and it could hand the six-time champions a significant edge in the high-stakes encounter.

Litchfield suffered a calf injury during the match against South Africa in Manchester earlier in the tournament and missed the last three games, though the Aussies remained unbeaten.

Coach Shelley Nitschke indicated that Litchfield might return for Australia's final group-stage clash at Lord's against Harmanpreet Kaur's side.

"I think Pheebies (Litchfield) is tracking really well and hopefully will be available for the India game," Nitschke was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au. Litchfield's return could force Australia into a selection rejig, admitted Nitschke.

"And then, that's going to be a really tough call -- Pheebies is likely to come back into that No. 3 position, so then we've got some decisions to make on what the set-up looks like and how to structure up. But obviously someone has come out for her," she said.

Nitschke, however, said Litchfield is returning at the right time, with the left-hander poised to slot back into her preferred No 3 position.

Litchfield's comeback could trigger a reshuffle in the lineup, with veteran all-rounder Ellyse Perry likely to move down to No 4 despite her outstanding all-round display against Pakistan, where she blasted 71 runs and claimed two wickets. The batter's inclusion would also mean Australia must leave out one player from the playing XI.

Young pacer Lucy Hamilton appears the frontrunner to make way, while Nitschke revealed that experienced all-rounder Grace Harris is also in contention for a recall, with her familiarity with Lord's from her stint in The Hundred potentially working in her favour.

"She (Harris) has played at Lord's quite a bit with the London Spirit, so she certainly throws her hat into the ring as well," Nitschke said. "She's been really unlucky so we've certainly got some options."

A win over India would ensure Australia finish atop their group and head into the semifinals with a perfect record, while even a defeat may not be enough to derail their campaign, as the six-time champions are well-placed to secure a spot in the knockout stages. (PTI)

## I would get angry and cry, wondering why I was out of the team: Deepika



**NEW DELHI, June 25:** Star drag-flicker Deepika Sehrawat says the toughest challenge of her career was not scoring goals but coping with

months away from hockey after a serious hamstring injury, a period that left her frustrated, emotional and questioning when she would return to the field.

Now, after playing a pivotal role in India's title-winning FIH Nations Cup campaign in New Zealand, the 22-year-old feels she has rediscovered both her confidence and rhythm at a crucial time, with the World Cup and Asian Games on the horizon.

Deepika, who missed last year's Asia Cup after suffering a Grade III hamstring tear, made an impressive return by finishing as the joint highest scorer at the Nations Cup with six goals, alongside American Ashley Sessa.

"Nations Cup was my first tournament after rehab and regaining full fitness. It had been a long time since I had played at this level, so I was a little nervous in the beginning. But it turned out to be a good tournament and this performance has given me a lot of confidence after returning from injury," Deepika told PTI Bhasha in an interview.

The prolific forward admitted that the months spent on the sidelines tested her mentally as much

as physically.

"The time away from hockey was very difficult. I would get angry and cry, wondering why I was out of the team. While the team was touring Argentina and Australia, I was still in rehab. It was only at the Nations Cup that I truly felt I had returned," said Deepika, Hockey India's best emerging player for 2025.

**Credit for comeback goes to support staff**

At a time when doubts crept in about her comeback, Deepika said the support and faith shown by head coach Sjoerd Marjine, strength and conditioning coach Wayne Lombard and the support staff played a crucial role in restoring her confidence.

"Last year, the injury was so serious that I wasn't sure when I would return. The credit for my comeback goes to coach Sjoerd, Wayne, trainer Ciara and Rodet, who worked tirelessly on my rehabilitation," she said.

"Their support gave me confidence throughout the recovery process. Coach Sjoerd has built this team in a short period. It wasn't easy, but he has worked very hard and the players have fully

backed him. The coaching staff deserves a lot of credit."

Deepika also highlighted the impact of a specialised drag-flick camp conducted by Dutch great Taeke Taekema, one of the finest exponents of the skill.

"The drag-flick camp with him was a great experience. We not only worked on drag flicks but also analysed videos of opposition teams, studying the movements of first rushers and goalkeepers. That helped me understand where to place my shots."

**Playing without fear was key**

She said the biggest lesson was to trust her instincts and play without fear.

"I was told not to put too much pressure on myself and to trust my skills. Even if we were trailing, I was encouraged to take drag flicks with confidence. That approach helped me a lot."

Despite finishing among the tournament's leading scorers, Deepika insisted the achievement was the result of a collective effort.

"As a striker and drag-flicker, it is my responsibility to score goals. But without the team's sup-

port it wouldn't have been possible because I can only showcase my skills when the team earns penalty corners. The team backed me completely."

India's Nations Cup triumph also secured promotion back to the FIH Pro League after relegation last season, something Deepika believes will be invaluable for the team's development.

"It was very important for us to win this tournament because playing in the Pro League gives us the opportunity to compete regularly against the top teams."

"That helps us understand where we stand and what we need to improve. We went there with the intention of winning and the feeling of lifting the trophy is very special."

With the World Cup and Asian Games fast approaching, Deepika said India is determined to carry forward the momentum generated by the Nations Cup success.

"We have returned to the Pro League through the Nations Cup, so expectations are naturally high. We are ready to live up to those expectations and deliver strong performances in the World Cup and Asian Games." (PTI)

## Mexico beats Czech Republic 3-0 to win all 3 World Cup group-stage matches for 1<sup>st</sup> time



**MEXICO CITY, June 25:** Mateo Chávez and Julián Quiñones scored in a six-minute span early in the second half, and Mexico beat the Czech Republic 3-0 on Wednesday night to win all three of its World Cup group-stage matches for the first time.

The 22-year-old Chávez, in his first World Cup, opened the scoring in the 55th minute and Quiñones scored his second goal of the tournament in the 61st. Alvaro Fidalgo added a goal in second-half stoppage time.

Mexico's previous best group-stage performance was two wins and one draw, done in 1986 and 2002 and both featuring Javier Aguirre, the first as a midfielder and the second as El Tri's coach. Aguirre is back as coach this year, his

third stint leading the team.

Already the winner of Group A, Mexico will play again at Estadio Azteca on Tuesday in a round-of-32 match against an opponent to be determined.

Mexico is undefeated at nine World Cup matches at the massive stadium, which was packed with 80,824 fans on Wednesday. El Tri has only two losses at Azteca, most recently in World Cup qualifying against Honduras on Sept. 6, 2013.

The match included nods to Mexico's past and future. Gilberto Mora, at age 17, became the youngest Mexico player to start in a World Cup. And 40-year-old goalkeeper Guillermo "Memo" Ochoa entered in the 77th minute,

joining Argentina's Lionel Messi and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo as the only players to appear in six World Cups.

Mexico's triumph was marred, however, by the return of a homophobic chant by fans that has previously led to fines and other sanctions against its soccer federation. The chant, a one-word slur that literally means male prostitute in Spanish, was heard near the end of the first half when Czech goalkeeper Matej Kovar took a goal kick.

The Czech Republic was eliminated, finishing with one point in three games.

Mexico is unbeaten in 11 games dating to a friendly loss against Panama last November. And Aguirre has made the most of his roster, using 25 of 26 players in the tournament. Chávez was one of five starters Wednesday who did not start last Thursday's 1-0 win over South Korea.

**Ochoa makes history in his likely farewell** Ochoa, who wears No. 13, played the last 13 minutes, plus stoppage time, in what's likely to be his final appearance for Mexico. He turns 41 on July 13 and has said he plans to retire from international competition after the World Cup.

He was a substitute in the 2006 and 2010 tournaments and started for Mexico in 2014, 2018 and 2022.

Raúl Rangel is the starter this year, stepping in for the injured Luis Ángel Malagón, who helped Mexico win the CONCACAF Nations League and Gold Cup last year. Malagón's injury opened the door for Ochoa's return.

Ochoa became the oldest Mexican to play in the World Cup. The previous record holder was Cuauhtémoc Blanco, who was 37 when he played in South Africa in 2014. (AP)

## South Africa reaches World Cup knockout round for 1<sup>st</sup> time with 1-0 win over South Korea



**GUADALUPE (MEXICO), June 25:** South Africa advanced to the knockout phase of the World Cup for the first time with a 1-0 victory over South Korea on Wednesday night. Thapelo Maseko scored in the 63rd minute off a precise cross from Tshepang Moremi and South Africa finished in second place in Group A behind Mexico, which won all three of its group-stage games.

South Africa will take on Canada, the second-place finisher in Group B, in a knockout game Sunday at Inglewood, California.

Maseko had five total shots in the match and leads South Africa with eight shots in the tournament.

When Maseko was asked what he would tell his younger self about his accomplishment, the Mamelodi Sundowns forward said: "The one thing I would say is keep dreaming."

South Africa had opened its World Cup with a 2-0 loss to Mexico before using a late goal to earn a 1-1 draw with Czech Republic. It entered its final group-stage needing to defeat South Korea in order to advance. Bafana Bafana had failed to advance from the group stage in 1998, 2002 and as host in 2010.

South Africa head coach Hugo Broos described the faith he had in his team despite the difficult start to the tournament. "The mentality in this group is amazing," Broos said. "Everybody is working for everybody. We are not afraid of other teams."

Sphethelo Sithole, who received a red card in the

opening game against Mexico, also earned a start and helped South Africa keep a clean sheet.

"In the first two, three days, it wasn't easy," Sithole said. "I needed to pick myself up. I'm very proud of myself because I did."

Maseko, who plays for South African club Mamelodi Sundowns, missed two big chances early in the match before scoring the winner.

The 22-year-old received the ball from a cross on the right side of the box — cut inside — and struck the ball low with his left foot through a defender's legs and into the bottom corner.

South Africa's bench players ran across the sideline to celebrate with Maseko for his first World Cup goal.

When the final whistle was blown, the bench stormed the field and the players embraced each other.

"(The final whistle) for me was a rush of emotions not only because we won the game, but also because it will probably be one of the last games of my career," the 74-year-old Broos said. "When you can end a career in this way, I think every coach dreams of it."

South Korea head coach Hong Myung-bo raised some eyebrows when he decided not to start Son Heung-min, and instead bring him in as a substitute. He said that he preferred to bring Son onto the field when the South African defenders were lower on energy.

"If I knew the result beforehand, I probably would have made some different choices," Hong said. "On the world stage like this, the responsibility is ultimately down to the head coach."

South Korea opened this World Cup with a 2-1 come-from-behind win over Czech Republic and lost to Mexico 1-0 in its second game. The Taeguk Warriors could still advance in the tournament, pending the results of other games this week.

South Korea became the first Asian team to reach the knockout round in 2002, when it finished fourth overall. The Taeguk Warriors also advanced out of the group stage in 2010 and 2022, both times reaching the round of 16. (AP)

## Manzambi gets a WC start and makes the most of it against Canada



**VANCOUVER (CANADA), June 25:** Johan Manzanambi started a World Cup match for Switzerland for the first time, and he started the second half of that match by putting his team ahead by two goals.

The 20-year-old winger, who came off the bench in Switzerland's opening two matches of this year's tournament, set up Ruben Vargas with a cross for the opening goal in a 2-1 victory over Canada only seconds after the second half started. He then added his own goal 11 minutes later by slipping a shot past Canada goalkeeper Maxime Crépeau.

"We need players like this that are creative up front," Switzerland defender Manuel Akanji said. "He sees things that maybe others don't see or are not capable of doing, and we really need that."

With the victory on Wednesday,

Switzerland won Group B and will stay in Vancouver for the round of 32 against one of the eight best third-place finishers.

The goals on Wednesday weren't Manzanambi's first of this year's World Cup. He scored twice in the 4-1 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina as a substitute.

In the 74th minute against Bosnia, Manzanambi volleyed in a ball from near the penalty spot to finally give his team the lead. He scored a second goal on a one-touch finish in the 90th.

That impressive performance must have made an impact on coach Murat Yakin, who gave Manzanambi his first World Cup start against Canada in a match with major implications.

"Johan has been in amazing form, he is in top shape. I can use him in different positions," Yakin said. "In the No. 10 position he feels extremely comfortable because he has so many liberties and he sees the gaps. He's very strong on the finishes. It helps him personally, the way he works, and he's a very humble, very modest person."

Although still young, Manzanambi has been making a mark on the game.

In his second match for Switzerland last June, Manzanambi scored a goal and had an assist in a 4-0 victory over the United States. (AP)

## Switzerland wraps up first place in Group B at World Cup with 2-1 victory over Canada

**VANCOUVER, June 25:** Switzerland put a damper on Canada's World Cup party in Vancouver.

The Swiss got goals from Rubén Vargas and Johan Manzanambi to beat Canada 2-1 on Wednesday and win Group B. Now Switzerland will get a week of rest before returning to the same city to face one of the eight best third-place finishers on July 2.

"I think that we deserve to be where we are right now," Switzerland coach Murat Yakin said. "In three days from now, we will know the opponent of the next match, and now we have the possibility to watch this tournament, and to watch the matches, and we will take what we get."

Canada dropped to second place in the group and will play in the knockout round for the first time in team history. But the Canadians had been hoping for a win or a draw on Wednesday so they would play their round of 32 match on home soil.

Instead, Canada will travel Inglewood, California, for its next game on Sunday against the second-place finisher in Group A.

"We wanted to be here in Vancouver, but we still have a massive opportunity ahead of us to find a



way to still electrify the nation, even though it'll be from Los Angeles," Canada coach Jesse Marsch said.

After Manzanambi came off the bench and scored two goals in Switzerland's 4-1 victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina on Thursday, he earned a spot in the starting lineup against Canada.

The 20-year-old midfielder became the youngest player to score two goals off the bench in the World Cup and is among the breakout young stars at the tournament.

Canada pulled a goal back in the 76th. Promise David scored with a volley on his first touch of the game about a minute after he came on as a substitute. But despite a flurry of chances, the Canadians couldn't find the second goal to keep them at home.

Switzerland captain Granit Xhaka had a chance in the scoreless first half but his free kick in the 37th minute and sailed over the net as he let out a yell.

Ali Ahmed had one of Canada's best attempts of the first half in the 42nd minute, but his shot to the near post was smothered by Switzerland goalkeeper Gregor Kobel.

On Thursday, Canada won its first World Cup match, 6-0 over Qatar, and put itself in position to advance. But the historic victory was bittersweet because Ismaël Koné was stretched off with a broken left leg. Koné was at Wednesday's game on crutches.

The Swiss opened the World Cup with a lackluster 1-1 draw against Qatar before they routed Bosnia with a flurry of late goals. Considered the favorite in Group B, Switzerland has played at the last five World Cups and advanced to the round of 16 in the past three. (AP)

## Bosnia-Herzegovina boosts chances of advancing at World Cup with 3-1 win over Qatar

**SEATTLE, June 25:** Ermin Mahmic stripped his jersey off, darted toward the corner of the pitch in front of Bosnia-Herzegovina's fans and pumped his right fist.

The 21-year-old Mahmic prompted thousands of the team's supporters at Lumen Field to celebrate Wednesday following his 80th-minute goal against Qatar in a 3-1 victory that boosted Bosnia-Herzegovina's chances of advancing at the World Cup.

Mahmic, who had come on just past the hour mark, received a yellow

card for removing his top.

It was worth it.

"We knew that the bookings are erased after the group stage," coach Sergej Barbarez said in Bosnian. "I also heard that he shed a tear. I think it was quite emotional for him."

With the victory, the third-place finishing Bosnia is more than likely to advance to the Round of 32 in the expanded field. The eight best third-place finishers across the 12 groups advance. Bosnia has played in only one other World Cup -- 2014 in Brazil -- and didn't get out of the

group stage.

"We all wanted to write history, and make history," Barbarez said. "But, this was never initially, honestly, our plan. We still have to see whether we are going to progress to the next stage."

Bosnia-Herzegovina's fate will be determined by how the rest of the group-stage matches play out. But, the party was on Wednesday after just 29 minutes when Kerim Alajbegovic became the eighth-youngest scorer in World Cup history. (AP)

## Neymar makes first appearance in World Cup as second-half sub for Brazil against Scotland

**MIAMI GARDENS, June 25:** Neymar has finally played in this World Cup, and Brazil has a superstar back in time for the knockout rounds. Neymar checked in during the 76th minute against Scotland on Wednesday, with the team leading 3-0 and well on its way to clinching a spot in the knockout stage that starts next week. Brazil won by that score. His appearance wasn't a surprise: Brazil said earlier this week that he would be available, clearing the way for the forward to make his debut after missing the first two matches because of a right calf injury.

It was his first appearance for Brazil since 2023.

"I'm very happy to be wearing the national team jersey again after three years," he told Brazilian media, following an emotional embrace with his family before he left the field. "I feel fine physically. Obviously, it was tough being

sidelined for all those days." He did not start, and it seemed like that was the plan Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti had all along when he raised the possibility earlier this week that Neymar could play as a substitute. And when Neymar got off the bench to start doing some warmup sprints and stretches along the sideline during the second half, fans in that area absolutely roared. The cheers got louder when he checked in, as well as when he made his first touch.

"A very important moment for all of us," Vinicius Júnior, who scored two goals for Brazil, said in Portuguese. "Our idol is back, a guy who always fought hard and did everything to be here, returning after a spell out with injury. I hope he can keep evolving and keep improving, helping us throughout the competition. That's what matters most." (AP)

## As eyes are on the men at the World Cup, the Women's World Cup countdown has begun

**WASHINGTON, June 25:** While most of the soccer world is focused on the men at the World Cup, the countdown has begun for the 2027 Women's World Cup in Brazil.

The women's tournament is set to start June 24, 2027, hosted by a South American country for the first time. Brazil hosted the men's World Cup in 1950 and 2014.

"I think that the host country, it sleeps and breathes football. So, I think just the energy you're going to see from the public, the general public, and obviously the teams touching down in Brazil, I mean, it's such a unique, special country," FIFA chief football officer Jill Ellis said at an event Wednesday in Miami.

"I think the same energy you're going to feel right now when you bring the world together, and you have an incredible product in women's football, I mean, the level of quality the players is so extraordinary that I think, honestly, it will

be an epic showcase of football and fandom."

In addition to Miami, a countdown event was also held in Rio de Janeiro. Even in Vancouver, British Columbia, at Wednesday's World Cup match between Switzerland and co-host Canada, video signage flashed with ads for the upcoming women's tournament.

All eight cities that will host women's matches next year also hosted men's games in 2014: Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Belo Horizonte, Brasilia, Fortaleza, Porto Alegre, Recife and Salvador. Qualification for the tournament has already begun. Brazil, which has an automatic spot as host, has never won the women's tournament and it remains to be seen whether Marta, the six-time FIFA world player of the year, will be on the national team. The 40-year-old Marta has never won a major international tournament.

Thirteen other teams have also quali-



fied, including Australia, Philippines, Japan, North Korea, China, South Korea, Argentina, Colombia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Spain and Denmark.

revenues. The Women's World Cup in Brazil will be the last with 32 teams. In 2031 the event will include 48 teams, like the men's tournament.

The 2031 World Cup is expected to be hosted by the United States, Mexico, Costa Rica and Jamaica. The formal decision will likely be announced in November.

"I think when we went to 32 there was some noise, are we're ready, are there going to be blowouts? We saw an incredibly competitive landscape. We saw debutantes making the knockout rounds. I think the global game is accelerating so fast that countries are closing the gap a lot faster," Ellis said. "Our job is to make sure teams come in there as prepared and ready as they can, so we have the most competitive World Cup. So I think the growth of the game is accelerating rapidly, and I think by 2031 we certainly will have a very competitive World Cup." (AP)