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- **Evolution to Autonomy:** Grown from its early roots into the fully empowered Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council in 1995.
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DR. TULIRAM RONGHANG
HON'BLE CEM, KAAC



**RANGSINA SARPO AHONGJAI
TARALANGSO, DIPHU
23rd June, 2026**

FROM THE HILLS, TOWARDS GREATER HEIGHTS

Honouring the Past + Celebrating the Present + Inspiring the Future

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Industry hails Bengal budget's focus on reforms, infrastructure and ease of doing business

KOLKATA, June 22: Industry chambers and business leaders on Monday welcomed the BJP government's first full budget in West Bengal, backing its proposed reforms in land, infrastructure, logistics, technology and ease of doing business while expressing hope that the measures would help attract investments and spur industrial growth.

The budget presented by Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta proposed a review of the Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976, establishment of a deep-sea port at Dadanpatrabarh, a greenfield airport near Kalyani, logistics and industrial infrastructure projects, and initiatives in areas such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, defence manufacturing and renewable energy.

Calcutta Chamber of Commerce president Anant Saharia said the budget addressed several long-standing concerns of investors.

"The proposed Rs 5,000 crore industrial incentive package, along with the re-examination of the legacy ULCRA framework, directly addresses two long-pending concerns of investors—competitive support and productive land use," Saharia said.

"The Budget's focus on industrial incentives, infrastructure, land reform, renewable energy and business facilitation marks a decisive shift from incremental progress to structured industrial revival. This is the need-of-the-hour policy direction that can restore investor confidence, accelerate manufacturing, strengthen MSMEs and attract large-scale domestic and global capital," he added.

Merchants' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) president Priti A Sureka described the budget as a prescription for all-around development and said it sought to transform West Bengal into a business and investment-friendly state.

The chamber welcomed proposals for a logistics hub, clusters for traditional industries such as jute



and tea, an IT hub, a semiconductor unit at Durgapur and a startup policy.

MCCI also hailed the announcement that a new law would be enacted to eliminate the syndicate system.

"This will be a big boost for the business fraternity," the chamber said, adding that the government's commitment to address bottlenecks, including land acquisition issues for large projects, was a positive signal for industry.

The chamber further welcomed the proposal to list profitable state public sector undertakings and revive the Calcutta Stock Exchange.

Bharat Chamber of Commerce president Naresh Pachisia termed the proposed review of the Urban Land Ceiling Act a "long-awaited and path-breaking reform".

"West Bengal, being the only major state still implementing this archaic law, has been a major investment bottleneck, hampering large-scale institutional investments and urban development," Pachisia said.

"The proposed re-examination will unlock the potential of developable land, attract major investments, and fuel economic growth in urban areas," he added.

Pachisia also welcomed plans to accelerate digitisation of land records and improve transparency in land ownership.

On infrastructure, he said, "Key projects like the 1,000-acre greenfield airport at Kalyani, the proposed deep-sea port at Dadanpatrabarh, and the metro expansion surveys in Durgapur, Asansol, and Siliguri will significantly lower logistical friction and reshape the state's commercial landscape."

Pachisia also welcomed the government's emphasis on artificial intelligence, semiconductor manufacturing and global capability centres.

"The West Bengal Impact AI Mission is a welcome step towards harnessing AI for governance and economic growth, while the incentive package for AI-oriented data centres is expected to attract substantial investments. The proposed semiconductor unit at Durgapur signals a strong commitment to integrating Bengal into the global supply chain," he said.

Keventer Group chairman Mayank Jalan said the budget marked "a welcome shift towards growth, investment and job creation" and expressed optimism over the focus on agriculture, food processing and infrastructure.

"The government's infrastructure push also provides an opportunity to revive transformative projects such as Kulpi Port," he added.

Fusion CX chairman and man-

aging director Pankaj Dhanuka said the budget reflected a forward-looking approach despite the state's fiscal challenges.

"A government that walks in carrying Rs 8.15 lakh crore of inherited debt and still leads its first Budget with an AI Mission, a semiconductor unit in Durgapur, and a greenfield airport in Kalyani is making a firm bet on what Bengal can become," Dhanuka said.

"The re-examination of the Urban Land Ceiling Act is the other announcement that matters to the manufacturing sector, because it is exactly the kind of structural barrier that has made it harder than it should be to expand," he added.

"We are particularly encouraged by the government's commitment to leveraging infrastructure-led growth as a catalyst for attracting investments, generating employment opportunities, and enhancing the competitiveness of West Bengal as a preferred investment destination in eastern India," Singh said.

Former Indian Jute Mills Association chairman Sanjay Kajaria welcomed the government's plans for revival of traditional jute clusters in Howrah and Hooghly and implementation of the National Fibre Mission.

Kajaria noted that one of the objectives of the mission was "revitalising the Jute Industry through innovation and market diversification".

Kutchina Home Makers Pvt Ltd managing director Namit Bajoria said reforms relating to land aggregation and business practices could benefit the real estate sector.

"Any progress on rationalising the Urban Land Ceiling framework and enabling smoother land aggregation can open up significant opportunities for integrated developments, townships and commercial hubs," Bajoria said. (PTI)

Rahul Vatts elected COAI chairperson, Ravi Gandhi named vice-chairperson

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 22: The Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI), the apex industry body representing the country's digital communications sector, concluded its Annual General Body Meeting for the financial year 2025-26 and announced its new leadership team for 2026-27.

The meeting brought together member organisations to review developments in the telecommunications sector, discuss emerging priorities and chart a roadmap for strengthening India's digital communications ecosystem.

As part of the leadership transition, Rahul Vatts, Group Chief Regulatory Officer and Director, Corporate Affairs, Bharti Airtel Limited, was elected Chairperson of COAI for 2026-27. Dr. Ravi P. Gandhi, Chief Regulatory Officer of Reliance Jio Infocomm Ltd., was appointed Vice-Chairperson.

A telecom industry veteran with nearly three decades of experience,

Rahul Vatts has worked extensively in areas such as telecom and broadcasting licensing, spectrum management, economic regulation and regulatory litigation.

At Bharti Airtel, he leads government relations, policy and regulatory affairs across multiple business segments, including mobility, broadband, direct-to-home services, data centres and digital businesses. He also serves as Chair of the GSMA Spectrum Policy Working Group and is a member of several international policy forums.

Dr. Ravi P. Gandhi brings more than 30 years of experience in telecom regulation, public policy and network operations. Before joining Reliance Jio, he served as Chief Regulatory Officer at Bharti Airtel and held several key positions in the Department of Telecommunications as an officer of the Indian Telecom Services.

He holds a Ph.D. from IIT Delhi and a B.Tech degree from NIT Kurukshetra.

Core infrastructure sectors' output slows to 7-month low of 0.5 pc in May

NEW DELHI, June 22: Production growth of eight core infrastructure sectors slowed to a seven-month low of 0.5 per cent in May due to a fall in output of coal, crude oil and refinery products.

The core sectors' growth was 1.8 per cent in April 2026 and 1.2 per cent in May 2025.

According to the government data released on Monday, coal, crude oil, natural gas, refinery products and fertiliser output recorded negative growth. The growth rate in the production of steel and cement declined to 5 per cent and 8.4 per cent in May against 7.4 per cent and 9.7 per cent, respectively, in May 2025.

The only bright spot was electricity generation, which grew 8.7 per cent during the month under review, compared with a contraction of 4.7 per cent in May last year. During April-May 2026-27, the key sectors' expansion remained flat at 1.1 per cent.

The previous low growth rate was in October 2025, when these eight sectors' output recorded a negative growth of 0.1 per cent. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

US, Iran agree on roadmap

"major progress" to end the Lebanon War. He said the first "real test" would be the Lebanon deconfliction cell. A ceasefire brokered in Lebanon over the weekend appeared to remain in effect, with Israel easing some restrictions in areas near the border.

However, Israel and Hezbollah are not parties to the US-Iran understanding, Israel has said its forces will remain in southern Lebanon until security threats are eliminated, while Hezbollah said it will halt attacks only if Israel commits to withdrawing its troops. The joint statement said the mediating parties will continue to do their utmost to ensure that the negotiations continue to be conducted in a constructive atmosphere with the aim of reaching a final deal.

Meanwhile, US Vice President J D Vance told the press that "peace requires give and take". "This is a historic meeting. Never before have Iranian and American leadership met at such a high level outside of Islamabad," he said on Sunday.

"What today really represents is the beginning of a technical negotiation that's not going to solve every disagreement, but is going to allow us to sit together as teams, for the first time really in history, to figure out what matters most to the respective parties, to settle those issues, to solve those issues, and get to a better tomorrow," he said. "The reason why the political leadership of the respective countries is here is because we wanted to, first of all, set up the structure for these technical negotiations, and second of all, make sure that our teams have our full support and know they can always call on us to break through any barriers."

Vance, thanking the US president, said a great deal had "already been accomplished" and the team looked forward to seeing "how much more we can accomplish together".

"Can we change relations in the Middle East, or do we go back to doing things the old way?" he said. "Where Iran and the Gulf have had an unfriendly relationship, or Iran has been a driver of regional instability? We see a future where everyone can work together to promote peace and prosperity for everyone."

Pakistan and Qatar also thanked friendly countries for their support and contribution to the ongoing negotiations. On Monday, Prime Minister Sharif said that the first High-Level Committee Meeting under the framework of the MoU "concluded successfully" in Bürgenstock. "The discussions were held in a positive and constructive atmosphere and yielded encouraging progress, including agreement on a roadmap toward a final deal within 60 days, the establishment of a High-Level Committee to provide political oversight, and the commencement of further technical talks," he said in a statement on X.

"Pakistan will continue to play its honest and sincere role in advancing dialogue and diplomacy towards a peaceful and lasting resolution," he added.

The Bürgenstock meeting marked the first formal review of progress under the Islamabad MoU, signed last week following intensive diplomatic efforts by Pakistan and Qatar to facilitate dialogue between Washington and Tehran amid heightened regional tensions. The MoU was signed by US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, with Sharif signing as a guarantor. (PTI)

Arunachal police arrest prime

He added that the accused allegedly operated a fake WhatsApp account displaying the profile picture of the Chief Minister of Assam and shared photographs suggesting close proximity to prominent political personalities. "Police are also verifying the authenticity of an alleged voice call made from the account," the official added.

Believing these claims to be genuine, the complainant allegedly transferred a total of over Rs 34.33 crore over a period beginning in 2022.

Following technical and conventional intelligence inputs, the accused was apprehended in Guwahati and later produced before the JMFC court at Yupia here, which remanded him to 10 days of police custody for further interrogation. Dr Nega said scrutiny of bank transactions, KYC records, electronic communications, screenshots and suspected forged documents has so far corroborated significant portions of the complaint.

"The investigation has also indicated that the alleged proceeds of the crime were routed through accounts linked to associates, family members and business entities, whose roles are now under examination," the SP said.

The seized electronic devices have been sent for forensic examination, while verification of the purported government documents is underway, Dr Nega said, adding that investigators are also examining whether the alleged voice attributed to the Assam chief minister was generated using artificial intelligence or created through voice impersonation techniques. He said efforts are continuing to trace the complete money trail, identify all beneficiaries and co-conspirators, recover the proceeds of the crime and establish the full extent of the alleged conspiracy.

Appealing to the public to remain vigilant, Dr Nega advised citizens to verify all claims of government approvals or official patronage through concerned authorities and avoid relying solely on social media or digital communications. He also urged people to immediately report suspicious investment proposals or fraudulent activities to the nearest police station. (PTI)

'BJP to gain decisive support

as the principal opposition party after winning 77 seats, a sharp rise from its tally of three seats in 2016. The eastern India and the Northeastern regions are viewed as crucial pockets for the BJP's long-term electoral strategy as the party seeks to consolidate its support base ahead of the 2029 parliamentary elections.

Air India to launch direct

businesspersons, students and the large Assamese and Northeastern diaspora residing abroad. Over the past few years, the state government has prioritised the expansion of international air links as part of its broader vision of transforming Guwahati into the gateway to Southeast Asia. Improved connectivity is also expected to support trade, cultural exchanges and economic cooperation with countries in the region. Sarma described the upcoming flights as a "big fillip" to the government's efforts to establish Guwahati as a major aviation hub connecting Northeast India with Southeast Asia and the wider global economy.

Ambubachi Mela: Kamakhya

the devotees for the Ambubachi Mahayog atop the sacred Nilachal Hills. "Multiple government agencies are leaving no stone unturned to make the event a grand success. The state government is working across different avenues in coordination with 24 different departments to ensure smooth conduct of the Mela," she had added.

The minister had said that three huge camps are being set up to accommodate thousands of devotees attending the Ambubachi Mela.

There will be separate camps for police personnel and these camps will be functional round the clock. The administration has also set up medical camps with doctors and medicines, while there will also be sufficient ferries on the Brahmaputra that flows just below the Nilachal Hill.

During the Ambubachi Mela period, no VIP or VVIP movements will be allowed at the famed Kamakhya temple.

The Ambubachi Mela is held on the temple premises during this period and is one of the major tourist events in the state.

Besides the police personnel, volunteers, private security guards and others will also be engaged to ensure that the Mela is held without any problems. (PTI)

GM NFR inspects Kamakhya

providing prompt assistance to passengers. "He also guided concerned officials to remain alert at all times, closely monitor passenger movement, coordinate effectively with security agencies and civil authorities, and ensure smooth train operations throughout the festival period," it added.

To cater to the anticipated rush of pilgrims, NFR is operating several special unreserved train services connecting Kamakhya with important destinations across Assam and North Bengal. In addition, various regular passenger trains have been temporarily augmented to enhance carrying capacity and facilitate smooth travel for devotees during the mela period.

Shrivastava also directed concerned officials to focus on passenger safety, cleanliness and seamless service delivery, while ensuring that adequate information and guidance are available to devotees arriving at and departing from Kamakhya Railway Station.

According to NFR, extensive arrangements have been made to facilitate the movement of pilgrims during the Ambubachi Mela, and the railway remains committed to providing a safe, comfortable and hassle-free travel experience to passengers.

G Ramesh Kumar takes charge as NABARD Assam chief

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 22: G Ramesh Kumar on Monday assumed charge as Chief General Manager of the Assam Regional Office of the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD).

An experienced banking professional with more than three decades of service in the banking and financial sector, Ramesh Kumar brings extensive expertise in rural and development banking, project financing and institutional strengthening.

He holds a postgraduate degree in Agriculture (Agronomy) and is a Certified Associate of the Indian Institute of Bankers (CAIIB).

He has also completed a Post Graduate Certificate in Advanced Financial Management from XLRI and an Advanced Post Graduate Certificate in Artificial Intelligence, Machine Learning, Data Science, Blockchain and Fintech from the SP Jain Institute of Management and Research.

Prior to his posting in Assam, Ramesh Kumar headed NABARD's Business Operations vertical for over four years, where he played a key role in strengthening the functioning and growth of banks and financial institutions.

He has also served as Chief Financial Officer of NABSAMRUD-DHI Finance, a subsidiary of NABARD, and as Vice President of NABCONS, the consultancy arm of NABARD, where he handled several national and international consultancy assignments.

Over the course of his career, he has worked extensively in areas such as credit planning, innovative credit delivery models, climate-resilient natural resource management, rural infrastructure development and energy initiatives.

He has also been actively involved in promoting credit linkage for Joint Liability Groups (JLGs), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) and micro-credit federations.

GoBabyGo Cabs opens northeast headquarters, launches fourth GBGX EV showroom in Guwahati

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 22: GoBabyGo Cabs Private Limited, the company behind the GBG EV mobility platform and the GBGX multi-brand electric vehicle retail network, on Monday inaugurated its centralized office for Northeast India and its fourth GBGX showroom in Guwahati. The new facility, located at JS Tower, was inaugurated in the presence of the company's Founder and CEO Akash Ali, actor Barsha Rani Bishaya, singer and artist Deepina Deka, and social activist Jousrang Boro, Vice President of the Confederation of All India Small Tea Growers Association (CISTA).

The inauguration marks another step in the company's expansion plans aimed at strengthening access to electric mobility solutions across the Northeast. The company said the initiative is intended to benefit delivery partners, gig workers, small business owners, fleet operators and individual consumers seeking affordable and sustainable transportation

options. Speaking on the occasion, Akash Ali said the Northeast has significant potential to play an important role in India's growing electric mobility ecosystem. "Through vehicle access, battery-swapping infrastructure, skill development programmes and employment opportunities, we are creating systems that generate long-term value for communities while making sustainable transportation more accessible," he said.

Founded with the objective of promoting electric mobility beyond major metropolitan centres, GoBabyGo Cabs plans to establish more than 50 GBGX showrooms across the Northeast. The company currently operates over 66 hubs across 15 states and more than 30 cities through its GBG EV network.

The company has also developed manufacturing facilities in Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Guwahati, aimed at strengthening domestic production and improving regional supply chains.

Centre flags seed deficit in Jharkhand, Nagaland this kharif season; TN left with near-zero buffer

NEW DELHI, June 22: The Union Agriculture Ministry has flagged seed shortfalls in Jharkhand and Nagaland, and a near-zero contingency margin in Tamil Nadu, even as overall national availability of certified and quality seeds remains in surplus this kharif season.

Jharkhand faces the steepest deficit – availability standing at 3,09,421 quintals against a requirement of 3,91,629 quintals, leaving a gap of 82,208 quintals across crops.

The ministry, in an advisory issued to all states, has described it as "the only state with a significant deficit in all the crops."

"The state's National Seed Reserve allocation of 2,860 quintals is insufficient to bridge the gap," it said. Jharkhand has been asked to immediately review crop-wise availability and initiate inter-state seed movement in consultation with the Union Agriculture Ministry, neighbouring state seed corporations, and the National Seeds Corporation (NSC).

Nagaland has a more modest shortfall of 368 quintals – availability at 1,92,43 lakh quintals against a requirement of 1,72,98 lakh quintals – and has been directed to source the deficit from NSC, public sector undertakings, or neighbouring states.



Tamil Nadu presents a different but equally pressing concern. The southern state has a seed availability of 7,22,095 quintals against a requirement of 7,20,877 quintals, reflecting a marginal surplus of just 1,217 quintals.

"Tamil Nadu's near-zero buffer leaves no contingency margin – any delayed onset or crop switching will require additional procurement from national surplus states," the ministry's advisory noted.

At the national level, total availability at 192.43 lakh quintals comfortably exceeds the kharif requirement of 172.98 lakh quintals.

States with comfortable surpluses include Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya

Pradesh, Telangana, Haryana, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Gujarat, and Bihar.

Several states — Tripura (15,890 quintals), Arunachal Pradesh (21,167 quintals), Himachal Pradesh (21,150 quintals), Goa (3,840 quintals), Meghalaya (17,279 quintals), Sikkim (473.9 quintals), Kerala (21,253 quintals), and Puducherry (1,430 quintals) — have availability that just about meets requirements, leaving little room for error.

The ministry has set a National Seed Reserve (NSR) target of 1,74,325 quintals for the season. NSR comprises certified and foundation seeds of short and medium duration, covering drought-toler-

Progress made for creation of a mechanism for further technical talks: Mediators US, Iran agree on roadmap for final deal

ISLAMABAD/ZURICH, June 22: The US and Iran have agreed on a roadmap aimed at reaching a final agreement within 60 days after hours-long talks at the Swiss resort of Burgenstock, mediators Qatar and Pakistan said on Monday, describing the progress as "encouraging."

In a joint statement, the mediators said that the talks were conducted in a "positive and constructive" atmosphere.

"Encouraging progress has been made, including the creation of a mechanism for further technical talks," the joint statement said.

The high-level talks at the Lake Lucerne Summit in Switzerland, held on Sunday and Monday, took place under the framework of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed by the US and Iran on Thursday to advance negotiations on regional security and other contentious issues.

While the US team was led by Vice President JD Vance, the Iranian delegation was led by Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf.

Pakistan PM Shehbaz Sharif and Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani also participated in the dis-



cussions, facilitating the negotiations. In the joint statement issued after the conclusion of the Lake Lucerne Summit, the first high-level committee meeting since the signing of the MoU, the mediators said that representatives of Iran, the US, Pakistan, and Qatar reviewed progress made under the agreement.

Building on the MoU, the parties have agreed to the establishment of a High-Level Committee, which will provide political oversight on the mediation, it said.

The committee will receive regular reports from chief negotiators and supervise specialised working groups focused on nuclear, sanctions and dispute resolution mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of the MoU and oversee progress on issues covered under the framework.

"The High Level Committee has agreed upon a roadmap towards reaching a final deal within 60 days, laying the foundation for the immediate commencement of further technical talks," the joint state-

ment said. It added that a dedicated communication channel has been established between the parties for the period specified in the MoU to prevent incidents and miscommunication and to facilitate the safe passage of commercial vessels through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Strait of Hormuz, the narrow waterway connecting the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, is considered the world's most important oil transit chokepoints. It serves as a key route for crude oil exports from major Gulf producers, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE and Iran.

Recently, the Iran-US war and restrictions on shipping through the Strait disrupted oil flows, triggering concerns over global energy supplies and contributing to volatility in crude prices.

According to the joint statement, the parties also agreed on the creation of a deconfliction cell, between the parties, the Lebanese Republic and facilitated by the mediators, to ensure the adherence of the termination of military operations in Lebanon as per the MoU.

In a post on X, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said that Pakistani and Qatari mediators have delivered (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam to export 48 million semiconductor chips daily: CM

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, June 22: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that the state will export 48 million chips daily from Guwahati to markets across the globe.

Speaking at a media Summit in the national capital, Sarma highlighted the progress of the Tata Semiconductor Assembly and Test facility coming up in Jagiroad in the Morigaon district of the state, Sarma said the plant is expected to begin exports later this year.

"Assam is growing at the rate of 12-13 per cent continuously for the last seven to eight years. This is much higher than the national average," the Chief Minister said.

He further said that the state has been registering a sustained economic growth rate of 12-13 per cent over the last seven to eight years, significantly higher than the national average, and is poised to emerge as a major semiconductor manufacturing hub in the country.

The Chief Minister added that international buyers have already shown strong interest in the products to be manufactured at the facility.

Sarma also revealed that the state government has finalised agreements for two more large



semiconductor projects in Assam, which are expected to further strengthen the state's position in India's electronics and semiconductor ecosystem.

"We have closed deals for two more bigger semiconductor industries in Assam," he said, without disclosing further details.

On the energy front, Sarma said Assam is on track to become a power-surplus state within the next three to four years.

"We are working aggressively towards green energy and power generation. Assam will become a

power-surplus state in the next three to four years," he stated.

The Chief Minister also announced that Guwahati will host two high-level meetings in July, describing the decision as a reflection of Prime Minister Modi's commitment to the development of the Northeast.

"These meetings could have been held anywhere in the country, but they are taking place in Guwahati. This reflects the Prime Minister's intent to position the Northeast at the centre of India's growth story," Sarma avowed.

AIUDF chief takes oath as Assam MLA

GUWAHATI, June 22: AIUDF chief Badruddin Ajmal took oath as a member of the Assam assembly on Monday, a month after other newly elected legislators were sworn in, officials said.

Assembly speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass administered the oath to Ajmal, who was elected from the Binnakandi constituency in central Assam.

The ceremony was held in the meeting room of the speaker's office, with assembly secretary-in-charge Rajiv Bhattacharjya conducting the proceedings, according to a post on the assembly's social page.

Members of the newly elected assembly had taken oath on May 21, the first day of the session of the new government.

An AIUDF leader said Ajmal was away on Haj when the other MLAs had taken oath. "He had informed the assembly secretariat that we would not be present during the oath-taking ceremony. After returning from Haj, he once again wrote, seeking a date and time to take his oath. Accordingly, the leader said, Ajmal, a former three-time MP, has returned to state politics for a second time as an MLA. He was first elected to the assembly from the South Salmara seat in 2006.

The NDA, comprising the BJP, Asom Gana Parishad and Bodoland People's Front, won 102 seats in the 126-member House in the recent assembly polls. The BJP secured 82 seats, while the AGP and BPF won 10 each.

The Congress and Rajiv Dal, which were part of a six-party opposition alliance, won 19 and two seats, respectively. The AIUDF and Trinamool Congress contested separately and won two and one seats, respectively. (PTI)

Arunachal police arrest prime accused in ₹ 34.33 crore investment scam

ITANAGAR, June 22: Naharlagun Police have arrested the prime accused in a ₹ 34.33 crore alleged investment fraud case involving forged government documents, impersonation and false claims of high-level political and bureaucratic connections, police said on Monday.

The accused, identified as 41-year-old Rishiraj Borkotoky of Guwahati in Assam, was arrested on June 20, while police also seized five mobile phones and a luxury vehicle worth around ₹ 1.5 crore during the operation.

Naharlagun superintendent of police (SP) Dr Nyelam Nega said the case was registered at Banderdewa Police Station following a complaint lodged by Rajesh Agarwal.

A case under various sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, was registered on June 5 and entrusted to sub-inspector Koj Tada for investigation, the SP told a press conference on Monday.

The complaint alleged that the accused persuaded the investor to put money into a proposed extra neutral alcohol (ENA) manufacturing project in Assam. The SP said the accused projected himself as a financially influential businessman with strong connections in government and political circles.

"To gain the complainant's trust, he allegedly produced forged documents purportedly issued by the revenue department under the Union Finance ministry and the office of the Cabinet Secretary," Dr Nega said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ambubachi Mela: Kamakhya temple doors to shut at 9:08 pm for 'prabritti'

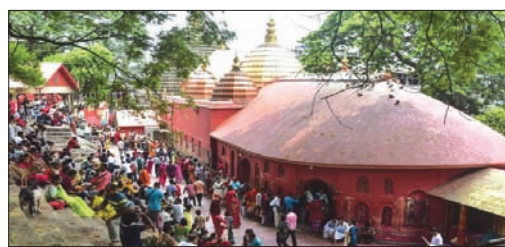
GUWAHATI, June 22: Famed Ambubachi Mela at Kamakhya temple here will begin from Monday night with the administration gearing up to welcome lakhs of devotees in the next four days.

The doors of the temple will be closed at 9:08 pm on 'prabritti', marking the belief that the annual menstrual cycle of Goddess Kamakhya will take place during this period.

"After the 'nibritti', the doors of the temple will be opened for the public on the morning of June 26 after sunrise," said Himadri Sarma, the 'Saru Doloi' of Kamakhya Devalaya.

When the ceremonial rituals associated with Kamakhya Puja and the holy bath of Goddess Bhagawati will be performed, the temple will be opened for the devotees, he added.

"The Mahajagya will be conducted continuously for three days and three nights on June 23, 24 and 25.



The main ceremony will take place on June 26," Sarma said. A senior official of the Kamrup Metropolitan district administration said that around eight lakh devotees are expected to visit the 'Shakti Peeth' during the Ambubachi Mela.

In 2024, a total of 7,46,066 devotees, including 20 from abroad, came for the Ambubachi Mela, while 7,72,019 people, including 42 foreign nationals, at-

ended the event last year.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, "On the sacred occasion of the holy Ambubachi Mahayoga of Mother Kamakhya enthroned on Neelachal, millions of obeisances at the feet of the Mother of the Universe." On the occasion of this festival, he extended a hearty welcome to the devotees from across the world who have arrived in Assam.

"May the grace-filled gaze of Mother Kamakhya fill everyone's life with happiness, peace, prosperity, and spiritual strength—this is my prayer. Jai Maa Kamakhya," the CM said.

He has called upon all stakeholders and devotees to join hands in ensuring the smooth, safe and orderly conduct of this grand spiritual gathering.

Addressing a press conference on June 17, Tourism Minister Ajanta Neog had said the government is fully prepared to welcome (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Air India to launch direct Guwahati-Dubai, Abu Dhabi flights from August 4: Himanta

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, June 22: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday announced that Air India will commence direct flights from Guwahati to Dubai and Abu Dhabi from August 4, describing the move as a major step towards strengthening Assam's international connectivity and positioning Guwahati as a key travel and transit hub in the region.

Taking to micro-blogging site X, Sarma said the launch of the two international routes comes just days after European Union member states lifted their travel advisory for Assam, opening new avenues for the state's engagement with the global community.

"Opening new avenues to connect Assam to the global community. Just days after EU member states lifted their travel advisory for Assam, I am happy to share that from 4th August, Air India will commence direct flights from Guwahati to Dubai and Abu

Dhabi," the Chief Minister wrote. According to Sarma, the introduction of the non-stop services will significantly enhance international access to Assam and the Northeast. With the addition of the two routes, Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati will be directly connected to four countries — the United Arab Emirates, Thailand, Singapore and Bhutan.

The Chief Minister said the state government is continuing efforts to further expand Guwahati's international air network.

He also revealed that his next objective is to facilitate direct flight services between Guwahati and Vietnam, adding, "Updates on the proposal would be shared in due course."

The announcement marks another milestone in Assam's strategy to improve global connectivity, boost tourism, attract investment and facilitate easier travel for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam to get drone postal service

GUWAHATI, June 22: Drone-powered postal services will soon be introduced in Assam, official sources said on Monday. It will help in connecting rural and remote areas with eco-friendly operations, they added.

"A new era of logistics is taking flight in Assam. Drone-powered postal services will connect remote regions faster than ever, reducing delivery times from hours to minutes," the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said in a post on X. "With real-time tracking and eco-friendly operations," it added.

The post further said that delivery time will shrink from two hours to seven minutes, connecting the rural parts of the state. The CMO, however, did not mention when the service will be launched or who will be operating it. (PTI)

Karbi singer Pokhila Lektheipi to receive Padma Shri

'It has been possible because of the love and support of the people'

HT Bureau
DIPHU, June 22: Noted Karbi singer Pokhila Lektheipi, fondly known as the 'Queen of Melody', will be conferred the Padma Shri, India's fourth-highest civilian award, in recognition of her outstanding contributions to art and the preservation of Karbi folk culture and traditions.

The Government of India had announced her selection for the prestigious honour in January this year. The award ceremony will be held at Rashtrapati Bhavan, New Delhi, from 5 pm on June 23, where President Droupadi Murmu will present the awards to the recipients.

Lektheipi has already reached New Delhi to attend the ceremony.

Speaking over the phone, the noted singer dedicated the honour to the people of Karbi Anglong and Assam. "The people of Karbi Anglong and Assam have supported



me and recognised my contributions towards preserving and popularising Karbi folk culture through songs. I dedicate this award to them. It is not my achievement alone; it has been possible because of the love and support of the people," she added.

During a musical career spanning more than five decades, Lektheipi has composed and sung over 300 songs and has worked tirelessly to preserve and promote Karbi folk music.

She had shared a close association with Assam's iconic singer

Zubeen Garg, performing on stage with him and recording several Karbi and Assamese duet songs. Popular duets by the two singers include Paipai Mo Nangklang from the album Jontro and Jijoi Penle Koansi Mir Jangthu Chepachoi and Chuli Kachetongcheng Lasa Along from the album Manai.

Among her memorable solo songs from the 1990s are Ne Ning Do Dam Asar Ahut, Sining Kelir Angden, Dam Po Ne Bangso Apirthe Pen, Malong Aphuchong Therepo Angrong and Chetong Nang Ove Ahithi An, among others.

Apart from her contributions as a singer, Lektheipi has remained actively involved in cultural activities through the Karbi Cultural Society and the Karbi Youth Festival.

She has previously been honoured with the Cultures of Resistance Award, the Assam Silpi Award and Artist Pension in 2023, and the Assam Gaurav Award in 2024.

GM NFR inspects Kamakhya station, reviews Ambubachi Mela arrangements



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 22: General Manager of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, on Sunday conducted a comprehensive inspection of Kamakhya Railway Station to assess

preparedness and passenger management arrangements for the Ambubachi Mela being held from June 22 to 25.

The annual religious event is expected to witness a significant influx of devotees from various parts

of the country, necessitating extensive operational and passenger facilitation measures by the Railways.

"During the inspection, Shrivastava assessed facilities and arrangements put in place for the convenience, safety and security of pilgrims, including crowd management measures, passenger amenities, cleanliness, drinking water facilities, medical assistance, help desks and security deployment," an official statement said.

He also interacted with railway officials and staff deployed at the station and reviewed operational readiness to handle the anticipated surge in passenger traffic during the mela period.

As per the statement, the General Manager emphasised the importance of maintaining constant vigilance, ensuring effective crowd control and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Miami Beach is where neon goes to die.- Lenny Bruce

Difficult phase ahead for IT cos

Indian technology companies are entering a more difficult phase as the market reaction to Accenture's weaker revenue outlook exposes deeper concerns about the sector's growth model.

The pressure comes at a time when the sector is already grappling with muted demand from banking, financial services, retail, telecom and manufacturing clients.

That shifts bargaining power towards customers and forces service providers to prove that they can deliver AI-led productivity rather than simply defend legacy revenue streams.

75 Years of Self-Governance

Karbi Anglong's journey from aspiration to progress

A defining chapter in the recent history of the KAAC has been the dynamic leadership of Dr Tuliram Ronghang, who has been leading the Council since October 24, 2013 with a clear vision of transforming Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong through peace, progress and inclusive development

Seventy-five years is not the end of a journey, but the beginning of a new chapter of progress.

- Dr. Tuliram Ronghang

On 23rd June 2026, the people of Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong proudly commemorate a historic milestone—the Platinum Jubilee of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), marking 75 years of a remarkable journey of self-governance, cultural preservation and developmental transformation.

The history of the Council is deeply rooted in the aspirations of the indigenous hill communities for safeguarding their distinct identity, traditions and rights. Established on 23rd June 1952 under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India as the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills District Council, it represented a significant step towards democratic decentralisation and empowerment of the tribal people of the region.

For seven and a half decades, the Council has remained the principal institution of self-governance for the hill people. It has not merely administered a region of difficult terrain and diverse communities; it has nurtured a shared identity, protected traditional customs, promoted in-

igenous languages and cultures, and acted as a bridge between the aspirations of the people and the larger developmental framework of the State and the Nation.

The journey of Karbi Anglong has witnessed numerous challenges. Its geographical remoteness, infrastructural limitations and socio-economic constraints demanded resilience and collective efforts. Yet, the people of the two hill districts, guided by visionary leaders and supported by dedicated administrators, have continued to move forward with determination.

Every road constructed across the hills, every school established in remote villages, every healthcare initiative, and every effort to preserve the rich cultural heritage of all communities reflects the spirit of this collective journey. A defining chapter in the recent history of the KAAC has been the dynamic leadership of Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, who has been leading the Council since October 24, 2013 with a clear vision of transforming Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong through peace, progress and inclusive development.



development of the hill districts has further accelerated the pace of transformation through enhanced cooperation between the State Government and the KAAC. A landmark moment in the contemporary history of Karbi Anglong was the signing of the historic tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) on 4th September 2021 between the Government of India, the Government of Assam and five Karbi armed groups. This significant agreement brought an end to decades of violence and unrest, paving the way for lasting peace, reconciliation and accelerated development in the region.

the rich cultural diversity of the region remains equally important.

As we celebrate this Platinum Jubilee, it is also a moment of gratitude and reflection. We remember with deep respect the pioneers, former leaders, social reformers, public representatives and ordinary citizens whose sacrifices, vision and relentless dedication laid the foundation of the Council and sustained its journey through generations.

The 75th Foundation Day is therefore not merely a celebration of the past; it is a call for renewed commitment towards the future. The coming years must focus on sustainable and inclusive development, ensuring that progress reaches every village and every household while preserving the unique cultural and ecological heritage of the hills.

The story of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council is a story of resilience, identity and hope. Seventy-five years ago, a people's aspiration took institutional shape. Today, it stands as a proud symbol of self-governance and the enduring spirit of the hill people.

As the Council enters its next chapter, the vision remains clear—to build a peaceful, prosperous and developed Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong where every community moves forward together. The Platinum Jubilee is not the conclusion of a glorious journey, but the dawn of a new era of greater possibilities, collective achievements and shared prosperity.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Zahid Ahmed Tapadar

chapter in the recent history of the KAAC has been the dynamic leadership of Dr. Tuliram Ronghang, who has been leading the Council since October 24, 2013 with a clear vision of transforming Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong through peace, progress and inclusive development.

For seven and a half decades, the Council has remained the principal institution of self-governance for the hill people. It has not merely administered a region of difficult terrain and diverse communities; it has nurtured a shared identity, protected traditional customs, promoted in-

development of the hill districts has further accelerated the pace of transformation through enhanced cooperation between the State Government and the KAAC. A landmark moment in the contemporary history of Karbi Anglong was the signing of the historic tripartite Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) on 4th September 2021 between the Government of India, the Government of Assam and five Karbi armed groups. This significant agreement brought an end to decades of violence and unrest, paving the way for lasting peace, reconciliation and accelerated development in the region.

The Northeast's place in India's green energy future

By: Siddharth Roy

As India accelerates its transition towards a low-carbon economy, the conversation on green energy has increasingly moved from aspiration to implementation.

For decades, the Northeast has occupied a paradoxical position in India's development narrative. Rich in natural resources but constrained by geographical isolation, environmentally significant yet economically underdeveloped, the region has often been viewed through the lens of challenges rather than opportunities.

The Northeast possesses several natural advantages that align closely with the requirements of a green economy. Its vast hydropower potential has long been recognised by policymakers. The region's fast-flowing rivers, abundant rainfall, and mountainous terrain make it one of the most promising hydropower zones in the country.

However, the future of green energy in the Northeast cannot be reduced solely to hydropower. The region's energy prospects are considerably more diverse. States such as Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya possess growing potential for solar energy, particularly through decentralised and community-based installations.

What makes the Northeast particularly important in India's green transition is not merely the availability of resources but the possibility of pursuing a different development model. Much of India's industrialisa-

tion has historically relied on energy-intensive growth patterns that have often generated environmental costs. The Northeast has the opportunity to avoid some of these pitfalls by integrating sustainability into development strategies from the outset.

The economic implications are considerable. Green energy investments can create employment opportunities across multiple sectors, including construction, manufacturing, maintenance, research, and technical services. As India seeks to develop a workforce capable of supporting its clean-energy ambitions, the Northeast's young population represents an important asset.

At the same time, the region's strategic location offers additional advantages. Situated at the crossroads of South Asia and Southeast Asia, the Northeast is increasingly central to India's Act East Policy. As regional energy cooperation gains momentum, the possibility of cross-border electricity trade and renewable energy partnerships becomes more relevant.

Yet the promise of green energy must be approached with caution. Development in the Northeast has often been accompanied by concerns regarding environmental sustainability, displacement, and local participation. Large hydropower projects, in particular, have generated debates about ecological impacts and community rights.

However, the future of green energy in the Northeast cannot be reduced solely to hydropower. The region's energy prospects are considerably more diverse. States such as Assam, Tripura, and Meghalaya possess growing potential for solar energy, particularly through decentralised and community-based installations.

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tion has historically relied on energy-intensive growth patterns that have often generated environmental costs. The Northeast has the opportunity to avoid some of these pitfalls by integrating sustainability into development strategies from the outset.

Equally important is the question of governance. The success of the green transition will depend not only on technology and investment but also on institutions. Transparent decision-making, meaningful consultation with local communities, and rigorous environmental assessments must become standard practice.

The Centre's increasing focus on the Northeast's development presents a timely opportunity. Investments in connectivity, infrastructure, and industrial capacity are already reshaping parts of the region. Integrating renewable energy into these broader development initiatives can create synergies that enhance economic resilience and environmental sustainability simultaneously.

India's green energy transition is often discussed in terms of targets, megawatts, and investment flows. While these metrics are important, they should not obscure a larger reality. The transition is ultimately about reimagining development itself. It is about creating economic opportunities while preserving ecological balance, enhancing energy security while promoting social inclusion, and pursuing growth without repeating the environmental mistakes of the past.

The Northeast is uniquely positioned to help India achieve these objectives. Its natural wealth, youthful population, strategic location, and ecological significance make it an indispensable part of the country's sustainable future. The challenge now is to ensure that policy vision is matched by thoughtful implementation. If that balance can be achieved, the Northeast will not merely participate in India's green energy future; it will help define it.

Why is casteism mixed in the water fight?

The demand for water is justified, but an officer should be judged by his actions, not his caste

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The ongoing protest over the water crisis in Chainat village, in the Hansi region of Haryana, raises an important social and administrative issue. In any civil society, the fact that people are forced to take to the streets for a basic necessity like drinking water is a matter of concern for the government.

The Constitution of India guarantees every citizen the right to live a life with dignity. The Supreme Court has also clarified on numerous occasions that the right to life includes access to clean drinking water. If people in a village are deprived of adequate water, it is not merely a local problem but a matter of civil rights and administrative responsibility.

The problem of water scarcity is not new in a country like India. Rising population, over-exploitation of groundwater, uneven distribution of rainfall, lack of conservation of water sources, and unplanned urbanization have exacerbated the water crisis in many areas. In an agricultural state like Haryana, this challenge becomes even greater, as water resources are under increasing pressure due to agriculture, domestic use, and industrial needs.

In a democracy, protest and agitation are legitimate rights of citizens. When the public feels that their problems are not being addressed, they submit memorandums, hold demonstrations, and draw the attention of the administration. This is a healthy process in a democratic system. But democracy is not just about rights; it is also about responsibilities. The right to protest is as important as maintaining social decorum and mutual respect.

Criticizing an official, public representative, or public figure is part of democracy. However, criticism should be based on their decisions, actions, and policies. When criticism focuses on a person's caste, clothing, language, or social background, it ceases to be a democratic debate but instead takes the form of prejudice and discrimination. This situation not only hurts the individual but also fosters division and distrust in society.



of the Constitution envisioned a society where a person would be judged not by their caste, religion, language, or birth, but by their abilities and actions. To this end, the Constitution guaranteed the right to equality and made special provisions to eliminate touchability and caste discrimination. Despite this, caste-based thinking and prejudice still persist in many parts of society.

It is important to understand that reaching any administrative position involves years of hard work and struggle. Officers selected for the Indian Administrative Service, State Administrative Service, or other high-ranking positions undergo a lengthy competitive process. They pass rigorous examinations, undergo training, and prepare themselves for public service.

Dignity is of paramount importance in public life. If a tendency to criticize individuals based on their birth status grows in society, it impacts the quality of democratic discourse. In such a situation, even capable and talented individuals may hesitate to enter public life. This could also undermine public trust in the administrative system and democratic institutions.

It is equally true that the administration must be sensitive to the public's feelings and concerns. Often, delays in resolving problems or a lack of communication contribute to public discontent. Therefore, the administration's responsibility should not be limited to issuing orders. It must communicate with the public, listen to their complaints, and make transparent efforts toward resolution.

In the case of Chainat, it's essential that the administration and villagers strengthen their dialogue, rather than confronting each other. Solving a water crisis cannot be achieved through mere blame game. It requires administrative will, technical planning, and community participation. Immediate relief can include the provision of water tankers, additional water supplies, and temporary solutions. However, long-term solutions require measures such as water resource conservation, rainwater harvesting, pipeline network expansion, increased

water storage capacity, and groundwater recharge.

The role of rural communities is also crucial. Water conservation is not solely the government's responsibility. Society must also play an active role in judicious water use, rainwater harvesting, and the conservation of local water sources. If communities and the administration work together, permanent solutions to problems like water scarcity are possible.

Education and social awareness also play a crucial role in this regard. Schools, colleges, social organizations, and the media must foster a mindset that promotes equality, respect, and constitutional values. Laws alone are not enough to eliminate caste prejudices; the development of social consciousness is also essential. Unless there is a mental transformation within society, the constitutional ideals of equality will not be fully realized.

If casteist or derogatory remarks are made on a public platform, they must be addressed within constitutional and legal frameworks. In a democracy, the rule of law is paramount. Any discriminatory or derogatory behavior is unacceptable. It must also be ensured that such incidents are not used to divert attention from the underlying problem. The water crisis is real and must be addressed on a priority basis.

Today, the need is to reconnect the Chainat movement to its original purpose. The movement's goal should be to ensure water availability, not to foster an atmosphere of hatred against any individual or community. The villagers' demands are legitimate, and they deserve justice. At the same time, upholding social decorum and constitutional values is equally important.

Ultimately, the Chainat incident offers us an important message. In a democracy, the protection of rights and social respect go hand in hand. Citizens have every right to raise their voices to address their problems, but this voice should pave the way for dialogue and resolution, not division and hostility. Water is every citizen's right, and respect is the foundation of every person's dignity. Only if we can protect both these values will we be able to build a society that is just, sensitive, and truly democratic.

Solving the water problem is the responsibility of the administration, but addressing casteism is the responsibility of society as a whole. This is the biggest lesson from the Chainat incident. (Dr Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

Negotiated peace, contested acceptance: Understanding the Kuki MoS in Assam

By: Dr Lamkholal Doungle

The Memorandum of Settlement (MoS) signed on March 15, 2026 between the Government of Assam and the Kuki Suspension of Operations (SoO) groups marks an important development in Assam's peace process. Signed with the Kuki Revolutionary Army (KRA), United Kuki Gam Defence Army (UKDA), Kuki Liberation Army (KLA), and the Hmar group HPC (D), the agreement seeks to end years of insurgency in Assam.

For the Government, the MoS represents another attempt to resolve ethnic militancy through dialogue. For the Kuki community, however, it carries deeper political significance rooted in identity and representation.

Yet, even before implementation began, the agreement faced opposition from several organisations in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. The controversy demonstrates that in Assam's ethnically diverse hill areas, political settlements are often interpreted through concerns over autonomy, representation, and demographic balance.

The political aspirations of the Kukis in Assam, particularly in Karbi Anglong, are neither recent nor incidental. The demand for a Kuki Tribes Autonomous Regional Council (KTARC) emerged in the early 1990s from concerns over representation, neglect, and development.

The movement gained organised expression in 1992 with the formation of the Kuki National Assembly (KNA), which spearheaded the demand for a separate Regional Council within Karbi Anglong under the Sixth Schedule. Although overshadowed by the larger Autonomous State movement led by the Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC), official assessments during the 1990s acknowledged Kuki grievances, including uneven development, lack of decentralisation, and limited participation of Kuki villages in decision-making within the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC). Reports also recognised the distinct identity and customary practices of the Kukis, while noting that their demand for a Regional Council was reasonable and justifiable.

Even today, the Kukis continue to have no meaningful representation within the KAAC, whether through elected or nominated positions. This absence has deepened feelings of exclusion and strengthened demands for an institutional mechanism to safeguard their interests and ensure equitable participation.

The issue entered a new phase in 2000 when a faction of the ASDC agreed in principle to support a separate autonomous arrangement for the Kukis. However, the development also triggered opposition from certain Karbi militant groups, contributing to heightened ethnic tensions. The Kuki-Karbi clashes of 2003-2004 proved to be a major setback. The violence weakened the Kuki movement and deepened mistrust between communities. Although the demand for KTARC lost visibility after the conflict, it remained one of the core aspirations later pursued by the Kuki



SoO groups during negotiations with the Government.

The Kuki demand for a Regional Council derives constitutional legitimacy from the Sixth Schedule, which provides for autonomous regions and Regional Councils for distinct Scheduled Tribes within an autonomous district. Kuki leaders have consistently argued that if greater autonomy is legitimate for larger hill communities, the aspirations of smaller tribal minorities also deserve recognition.

The demand also draws inspiration from the former Pawi-Lakher Regional Council established in 1953 under the Sixth Schedule, which later evolved into the Lai, Mara, and Chakma Autonomous Councils in Mizoram. The Kukis therefore maintain that their demand is neither unprecedented nor outside the constitutional framework envisaged for tribal areas in North-east India.

The present MoS emerged after years of armed conflict and negotiation. The Kuki militant groups entered into a Suspension of Operations agreement with the Government in 2012, followed by talks involving the Centre, the Assam Government, and the Kuki SoO groups.

The significance of the 2026 MoS lies not only in what was granted, but also in what was relinquished. The Kuki groups eventually agreed to give up their long-standing demand for a KTRC in exchange for a Kuki Welfare and Development Council (KWDC). For many within the Kuki community, this represented a major compromise. While the Welfare and Development

Council was welcomed as a step toward socio-economic upliftment, many viewed it as falling short of the original political demand. Nevertheless, acceptance of the agreement reflected the willingness of the Kuki leadership to prioritise peace and democratic engagement.

Soon after the signing of the MoS, objections emerged from several organisations in Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao. Concerns centred around representation in the KAAC and the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC), as well as apprehensions that the proposed Development Councils might weaken the Sixth Schedule framework.

The concept of Development Councils for minority communities was not entirely new. Similar recommendations had appeared earlier in D.P. Goala's recommendations concerning Dima Hasao, aimed at ensuring inclusive development for non-majority communities.

The Government later clarified that the proposed changes would not affect the territorial jurisdiction, demographic balance, or political majority of the Karbi and Dimasas communities. It also stated that the Kuki and Hmar Welfare and Development Councils were intended primarily as socio-economic and cultural bodies working with the existing Autonomous Councils.

Despite these assurances, opposition continued in some quarters. This underlines a larger challenge confronting peace settlement in ethnically diverse regions: even accommodative measures are often interpreted through the lens of ethnic competition and political insecurity.

At the same time, the controversy should not obscure another important reality: relations among communities at the ground level did not entirely collapse into hostility. This suggests that the debate surrounding the MoS reflects deeper political anxieties embedded within the structure of autonomy and representation in the hill districts. The Kukis and Hmars have long been integral to the region's socio-political fabric. Their aspirations, like those of other communities, deserve recognition.

The Kuki MoS therefore represents both an achievement and a test. It is an achievement because it seeks to bring closure to a long-standing conflict through dialogue and compromise. It is also a test because its success will ultimately depend on how it is perceived, implemented, and accepted across communities.

In a diverse democracy like India, the aspirations of even the smallest communities deserve accommodation. Sustainable peace in multi-ethnic societies must also be built upon dignity, mutual respect, and the assurance that no community's voice remains permanently unheard.

Ultimately, the future of this MoS will depend not merely on the provisions contained in the agreement, but on the willingness of all stakeholders to move beyond suspicion toward trust and coexistence. The Kuki MoS should therefore be viewed not merely as a settlement for one community, but as part of a broader democratic effort to balance competing aspirations within Assam and India.

Versailles MoU is a win for Iran and a big relief for US President Trump

By: Ashok Nilakantan Ayers

The war that began on February 28, when American and Israeli strikes targeted Iran's nuclear infrastructure, formally ended on Wednesday with the signing of the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding — not in a Geneva ballroom with cameras rolling, but quietly and electronically, then sealed in person by President Donald Trump at the Palace of Versailles during a G7 dinner hosted by Emmanuel Macron.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed separately in Tehran, posting an image of the document on social media and calling it "a historic document and a message from a powerful Iran." The choreography of the signing — remote, hurried, devoid of the grand ceremonial reset that had been planned for Switzerland — turned out to be a fitting metaphor for the deal itself: a transaction struck under pressure, with both sides racing to claim the upper hand in the story they tell their own publics.

The formal Geneva signing ceremony, once billed as the moment the war officially ends, has effectively been overtaken by events. Pakistan's Shehbaz Sharif, who mediated the talks alongside Qatar, postponed his own trip once it became clear the Islamabad MOU had already been electronically signed and entered into force. What remains on the Geneva calendar now is technical-level negotiation — the unglamorous business of converting fourteen points of political intent into the far more complicated final agreement that both governments insist must come within sixty days, "extendable with mutual consent."

Stripped of the spin, the Islamabad MOU is a short, deliberately vague instrument — roughly 800 words against the hundreds of pages that made up the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

It declares an immediate and permanent end to hostilities "on all fronts, including Lebanon," commits both sides to mutual non-interference, and sets the sixty-day clock for a substantive final deal. The operational core is maritime and military: the United

States begins dismantling its naval blockade immediately and to complete the withdrawal of forces from Iran's vicinity within thirty days of the final agreement, while Iran commits to clearing mines and technical obstacles so commercial shipping can resume through the Strait of Hormuz — free of charge for sixty days, after which Tehran will negotiate a permanent administration of the strait with Oman and other Gulf states. On the economic side, Washington commits to working with regional partners on a reconstruction plan worth "at least \$300 billion" for Iran, and to eventually terminating UN, IAEA and unilateral American sanctions on an "agreed schedule" tied to the final deal.

Iran, for its part, reaffirms — in line with its existing Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations — that it will not build nuclear weapons, and agrees to a "minimum methodology" of down-blending its near-weapons-grade uranium stockpile under IAEA supervision, details to be hammered out later. Notably, and pointedly, Iran's missile program is excluded from the agreement altogether; Tehran's foreign ministry has said bluntly that its missiles are "only for firing, not for negotiation."

The instinct to compare this to the Obama-era JCPOA is understandable but misleading. That agreement was a single-issue document — enrichment levels, centrifuge counts, inspection protocols — built almost entirely around the nuclear file. The Islamabad MOU is a wartime ceasefire wrapped around a maritime-security bargain, with the nuclear question deferred to a future negotiation rather than resolved now. It resembles less a non-proliferation treaty than an armistice with an economic rider attached.

For Trump, the framework lets him close out a war he started without the political cost of an open-ended occupation or a stalemate. He can point to a reopened Hormuz, falling oil prices — Brent crude has slid from a wartime peak above \$114 a barrel to the high \$70s — and an Iranian commitment, however contingent, against nuclear weapons.

He has also moved to kill the narrative that this is a giveaway,

publicly denying that Washington is "investing 10 cents" in any \$300 billion fund and insisting the money will come from outside investment Iran can attract only by complying with the deal. And he has kept a coercive backdrop in reserve, telling reporters bluntly that the United States would "go right back to dropping bombs" if Iran reneges.

That combination — disengagement without humiliation, deterrence without occupation — is precisely the kind of offshore-balancing outcome American presidents have favoured in the Middle East for two decades. Trump gets to claim he ended a war, reopened a fifth of the world's oil flow, and avoided what could have become a Vietnam-style entanglement.

But the more interesting story is what Iran extracted. Tehran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, was unsparring in calling the deal "a record of America's failure," arguing Iran negotiated "from a position of strength" because Washington had failed to achieve its stated war aims.

The regime survived intact — Pezeshkian signed his copy with a portrait of the Supreme Leader's slain predecessor and his successor hanging behind him, a deliberate signal that nothing fundamental has changed inside Iran. Sanctions are scheduled for phased termination.

Oil exports can resume immediately via Treasury waivers. A reconstruction fund north of \$300 billion is now part of the written record, regardless of how Washington tries to characterize its funding source. And critically, Iran's missile arsenal — the capability Israel and hawks in Washington most wanted constrained — was kept off the table entirely.

This is why the reaction inside Trump's own political base, and from the opposition, has been so sour. Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer called it "one of the biggest American disasters," accusing Trump of having "capitulated to the Iranians."

Senator Elizabeth Warren put it more pointedly: "I understand how the Iranians win in this MOU, but I sure don't see how this helps one single American family." Even hardliners inside Iran are unhappy, for the opposite reason — factions tied to the Paydari Front have called the deal a surrender of Iran's strategic leverage over Hormuz, proof that grievance is being generated on both ends of the negotiating table simultaneously, which is often the surest sign a deal is actually a workable compromise rather than a rout.

Read closely, the agreement is a mutual exit dressed up as two separate victories. Washington gains the thing it values most after a war whose objectives kept shifting — de-escalation, cheaper oil, and a path out of a Middle Eastern commitment that risked metastasizing into something far costlier.

Those gains are real but largely defensive: relief rather than conquest. Iran's gains are more immediate and tangible — sanctions relief, oil revenue, a regime that visibly endured a war aimed partly at unseating it, and a missile program walled off from scrutiny. If frozen assets are released and the reconstruction financing materializes, Tehran's economic position over the next year could improve markedly.

The sixty-day clock is the real test. Down-blending enriched uranium, defining sanctions of schedules, and converting "at least \$300 billion" from a sentence into a financing mechanism are the kind of granular, trust-dependent negotiations that the JCPOA took nearly two years to complete. If they stall, the Islamabad MOU will be remembered as a temporary cessation of hostilities. If they hold, it will be remembered as proof that Iran, battered but unbroke, outnegotiated a superpower that wanted out of the Middle East more than Iran wanted out of the deal. (IPA Service)

The Forever Bottle

By: Satyabrata Borah

The plastic water bottle is barely over fifty years old, but it is already on track to become one of the most permanent things humans have ever made. Every single plastic bottle produced since the early nineteen seventies is still here on this planet in some form, existing somewhere in a cycle of breakdown that outlasts human memory. The clear container that people use for a few minutes and throw away carries a lifespan that stretches across centuries, changing the very nature of the environment.

The story of modern plastic packaging traces back to a patent granted to an engineer named Nathaniel Wyeth in nineteen seventy three. He developed a container made from polyethylene terephthalate, a material praised for being light, unbreakable, and incredibly cheap to mass produce. Within a single decade, this new material replaced glass across the global beverage industry. It transformed the way companies shipped goods and how people consumed drinks. By the year twenty twenty four, factories were manufacturing an estimated four hundred and eighty billion of these bottles annually, which equals close to one million containers every single minute.

The exact chemical stability that made this material so successful is the same reason why its remains are now showing up in places where humans have never lived.

When people talk about plastic waste, a timeline of four hundred and fifty years is frequently mentioned as the time required for a single bottle to decompose. This widely shared number comes from research used to compare how long different types of ocean litter last. Because this material has only existed for a few decades, no one has ever actually watched a bottle complete this journey. The timeframe is an estimate based on how fast the material breaks down under specific laboratory conditions. A plastic bottle does not decay the way an apple core or a piece of paper does. It stays in the environment for generations, and even when it disappears from view, the material has not actually vanished. It has only transformed.

Natural materials like wood, cotton, and leaves are easily broken down by bacteria and fungi. These organisms have spent millions of years evolving enzymes that can digest organic structures. Synthetic polymers are entirely different from anything that existed in nature before the twentieth century, meaning no microorganism has evolved a way to break their bonds efficiently. Instead of decomposing naturally, a discarded bottle relies on weather and sunlight. Over decades, the sun, heat, and physical friction make the plastic brittle. It cracks and breaks into smaller and smaller pieces. These fragments turn into microplastics, which are pieces smaller than five millimetres, and eventually into nanoplastics that cannot be seen by the naked eye. The plastic remains on the earth, broken into billions of microscopic particles that keep the exact same chemical identity as the original object.

The distance these tiny fragments can travel became clear during a study by researchers who examined snow samples collected from ice floes between Greenland and Svalbard. They also looked at snow from the Swiss Alps and parts of Germany. Microplastic particles appeared in nearly every single sample they tested. This included ice from the high Arctic, thousands of kilometres away from any major city or industrial center. The scientists determined that the particles had been lifted into the atmosphere by wind currents and carried across vast distances before falling back to earth with the snow. The process mimics how pollen travels across continents, showing that plastic can ride the wind to the most isolated places on earth.

Another group of researchers looked at a monitoring station located in the French Pyrenees, high up in the mountains and far away from any urban development. Over a five month period, the station recorded hundreds of microplastic particles falling on every square metre of land every day. Most of these fragments looked like the remnants of single use packaging. Wind pattern models showed that these particles had drifted through the air for at least ninety five kilometres before settling on the mountain. This research proved that plastic fallout is not something that stays confined to crowded cities or polluted coastlines. It climbs mountains and fills the air above quiet forests.

This pattern of movement goes deep into the earth as well. Scientists studied small, shrimp like creatures collected from six of the deepest ocean trenches around the Pacific Rim, including the Mariana Trench, which drops down nearly eleven thousand metres into the dark. The study found microplastic fragments inside the digestive tracts of seventy two percent of all the creatures examined. In the Mariana Trench specifically, every single creature tested had plastic inside its body. The fibers identified included nylon and polyethylene, the exact materials used to make everyday grocery bags and beverage containers. These materials are now sitting at the bottom of the sea, inside creatures that live in total darkness under crushing water pressure.

To understand how these tiny fragments managed to saturate the entire planet, it helps to look at the sheer volume of production. A major historical study estimated that humans had manufactured around eight billion tonnes of pure plastic since the middle of the twentieth century. By the year twenty fifteen, over six billion tonnes of that total had already been discarded as waste. Out of all that garbage, only nine percent had been recycled, and twelve percent had been burned. The remaining seventy nine percent was left to sit in landfills or remain scattered across the natural landscape.

This collective research reveals a reality that is difficult to ignore. The very first bottles made in the late nineteen seventies have only completed a tiny fraction of their long journey toward breakdown. Most of the plastic that has ever been manufactured is still with us today, floating in rivers, resting in ocean sediment, and blowing through winter snow. The plastic bottle was created to be a temporary convenience, a disposable tool for modern life. It ended up being a permanent monument to human manufacturing, waiting out a timeline that makes the history of human civilization look brief.



Keir Starmer resigns as UK PM, sets out timetable for new leader

LONDON, June 22: Keir Starmer on Monday announced his resignation as British Prime Minister and the Leader of the Labour Party, setting out a timetable for his successor to be elected in the coming weeks and be in place by September.

The 63-year-old said he will remain in post until a new leader and PM is elected by the governing party and pledged his "full and unequivocal support" to the next incumbent to "ensure an orderly handover of power".

Andy Burnham, who returns to the House of Commons on Monday after winning a crucial by-election last week, is seen as the frontrunner in the race to replace Starmer at 10 Downing Street. "I will put myself forward as part of this process," he said in a social media post.

"The question my party is asking now is whether I am best placed to lead us into the next general election," said an emotional Starmer, in his address from the steps of Downing Street.

"I have heard the answer of my parliamentary party to that question and I accept that answer with good grace. Every decision I have taken has been about putting the country I love first. That is why I will resign as leader of the Labour Party," he said.

Starmer said he had spoken to King Charles III on Monday morning to inform him of the decision.

He will now ask the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the Labour Party to set out the timetable for selecting his successor, with nominations opening on July 9 and the process to be completed by the summer recess of Parliament, scheduled for July 17.

The NEC will set out the process to elect a new leader, though there is growing speculation that the overwhelming backing already notched up by Burnham could see him elected unopposed and in post at Downing Street by mid-July.

"In the case of a contest, this will en-



sure a new leader is in place before Parliament returns in September. I will remain in post as Prime Minister until the contest is complete, and I will do everything I can to ensure an orderly handover of power," said Starmer.

"I will also give my successor my full and unequivocal support, knowing that they will inherit a Britain that is far stronger and fairer than the one I inherited two years ago, better prepared for the challenges ahead, and better able to ensure the Labour Party secures a second term in office," he said.

Starmer led the Labour Party to a landslide victory in a general election in July 2024 and after an initial phase of popularity, saw his ratings as PM plummet in recent months over some controversial decisions.

"When I leave the biggest job in the country, I shall spend more time on the most important job, being the best husband I can to my fantastic wife, Vic, who has been a rock by my side through good times and bad, and being the best dad I can to my beautiful children, who are my pride and my joy," said Starmer, choking back tears.

He began his address by setting out

what he saw as the Labour government's achievements in the past two years after taking over from the Conservative Party with a strong mandate for change.

"Look at what we have achieved in just two years, an economy that is stronger, growing faster than our peers, wages rising faster than inflation in every single month since we came to power, investment secured, infrastructure being built... change promised by a Labor government, change fought for by a Labor government, change delivered by a Labor government," he stated.

On his own achievements, Starmer pointed out that he inherited a party that was "politically, financially, and morally bankrupt" six years ago and went on to prove his doubters wrong by winning an emphatic majority of 174 in the last general election.

Potential leadership challengers, also expected to include former health secretary Wes Streeting, would need support

from at least 20 per cent of the party's MPs. They must also have the backing of either 5 per cent of the constituency Labour parties, or at least three affiliated Labour Party organisations or trade unions.

Starmer's resignation means the UK is now on the hunt for its seventh prime minister in 10 years, following rapid leadership changes during the previous Tory government.

The biggest damage to Starmer's premiership was the appointment of former Labour Party grandee Peter Mandelson as US ambassador despite his known links with convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein.

Mandelson's eventual sacking, coupled with some unpopular domestic decisions on welfare reforms and U-turns around taxes and social benefits, made his position untenable with most of his Cabinet advising him to step aside for a change in leadership direction. (PTT)

US notifies sale of support services for India's Apache helicopters, M777A2 howitzers



WASHINGTON, June 22: The US has formally notified the proposed sale of sustainment support services and related equipment for India's Apache helicopters and M777A2 Ultra-Light Howitzers at an estimated cost of USD 482.2 million.

The Defence Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), which administers the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) programme of the US, issued the arms sales notification in the Federal Register on June 17.

On May 18, the Department of State informed the US Congress about the possible sales of services for Apache Helicopters and M777A2 ultra-light howitzers to India.

India inducted the M777A2 Ultra-Light Howitzers, procured from the US under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) route, to bolster its artillery capabilities, particularly in mountainous terrain.

The Indian Army also operates AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, regarded as among the world's most advanced combat helicopters, for precision strike and battlefield support missions.

As per the notification, India has requested long-term sustainment support for its M777A2 Ultra-Light Howitzers.

"The following non-major defence equipment items will be included: ancillary items; spares; repair and return; training; technical assistance; field service representative; depot capability; and other related elements of logistics and programme support. The estimated total cost is USD 230 million," the notification said.

In a separate notification, the Department of Defence said India has sought AH-64E Apache sustainment support services, US government and contractor engineering, technical and logistics support services, technical data and publications, personnel training, and other related logistics and programme support.

The estimated cost of the Apache support package is USD 198.2 million.

The principal contractors for the Apache support services deal will be Boeing Company and Lockheed Martin, while BAE Systems, located in Cumbria, UK, will be the principal contractor for the M777 howitzer support programme.

The Department of Defence said the proposed sale of assistance for helicopters and howitzers will support the foreign policy and national security objectives of the US by helping to strengthen the US-Indian strategic relationship.

It will also help improve the security of a major defence partner, which continues to be an important force for political stability, peace, and economic progress in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia regions.

The proposed sales will improve India's capability to meet current and future threats, strengthen its homeland defence, and deter regional threats. India will have no difficulty absorbing these articles and services into its armed forces, the Department of Defence said.

The proposed sales would not alter the basic military balance in the region and would have no adverse impact on US defence readiness, it said. (PTT)

Andy Burnham will run to succeed Starmer

LONDON, June 22: Former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham has confirmed he will run to succeed Keir Starmer as Labour leader and British prime minister.

He posted on social media that he will "put myself forward as part of this process."

Former Health Secretary Wes Streeting, considered another leading contender, said he will back Burnham.

That makes it more likely that Burnham will be selected without a leadership contest.

In a post on X, Burnham thanked Starmer for his service and leadership.

He said Starmer's decision to step down "marks the beginning of a transition and it is important that this process is conducted in an orderly and responsible way. I will put myself forward as part of this process."

"The country expects stability, seriousness and a continued focus on the issues that matter most and that is what it will get."

He added: "People want to see progress on economic growth, cost of living, public services, housing and opportunities for the next generation. Political change should never distract from the responsibility to improve people's lives." (AP)

Pak PM Sharif praises Iranian delegation's 'cool-headedness, dignity' during talks in Switzerland

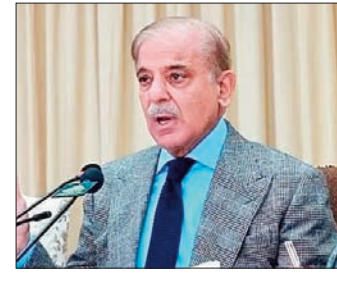
ZURICH, June 22: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday praised the Iranian delegation's "cool-headedness, dignity and attempts at de-escalation" while speaking to the press in the Swiss mountain resort of Burgenstock.

The quadrilateral talks between the US, Iranian, Qatari and Pakistani delegations – being termed the Lake Lucerne Summit – are focused on implementing key provisions of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed last week by US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, with Sharif signing as a guarantor.

"I think they genuinely mean to promote peace in the region," Sharif said of the Iranian leadership, adding, "So does President Trump."

Sharif further said he had "no second thoughts" about Trump being a "man of peace." "He has demonstrated that during the war between Pakistan and India," he said.

The US president has repeatedly claimed he stopped the conflict between India and Pakistan, since May 10 last year, when he announced on social media that the two countries agreed to a "full and



immediate" ceasefire after a "long night" of talks mediated by Washington.

Sharif was optimistic about the "renewed friendship" with the US, and hoped it would grow into a relationship of close coordination and cooperation between the two countries.

While the US and Iran are the two main sides in the negotiations, Pakistan and Qatar are mediators. As the talks began, Trump in a post on Truth Social had threatened Iran over unrest in Lebanon, one of the key issues in the negotiations.

"Iran must immediately stop their highly paid PROXIES in Lebanon from causing trouble. If they don't, we'll hit Iran very hard again, just like we did last week, only harder!!!" he said.

The US president, in an interview with Fox News, issued

threats over the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, claiming that he maintains "a variety of options" at his disposal.

Meanwhile, US Vice President JD Vance told the press that "peace requires give and take".

"This is a historic meet. Never before have Iranian and American leadership met at such a high level outside of Islamabad," he said.

"What today really represents is the beginning of a technical negotiation that's not going to solve every disagreement, but is going to allow us to sit together as teams, for the first time really in history, to figure out what matters most to the respective parties, to settle those issues, to solve those issues, and get to a better tomorrow," he said.

"The reason why the political leadership of the respective countries is here is because we wanted to, first of all, set up the structure for these technical negotiations, and second of all, make sure that our teams have our full support and know they can always call on us to break through any barriers."

Vance, thanking the US president, said a great deal had "already been accomplished" and the team looked forward to seeing "how much more we can accomplish together." (PTT)

Explosion as Qatar restarts gas export terminal hurts 54, leaves 18 missing

DUBAI, June 22: An explosion tore through Qatar's key natural gas export terminal Sunday night as workers tried to resume operations there after Iran bombed it during the war, causing a fire that hurt at least 54 people as another 18 were still missing hours later.

The blast at the Ras Laffan industrial area could cause further chaos in global energy markets, particularly as Qatar remains one of the world's top natural gas producers. Qatar shut down its production after Iran's chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz meant it couldn't get shipments out to its clients.

With Iran loosening its grip on the strait as negotiations continue over a permanent end to the war, Qatar began work to try to restart its export terminal. On Sunday night, that work sparked an explosion and fire at the Barzan gas supply facility, the state-run firm QatarEnergy said.

The scale of the damage remains unknown after the blast, with officials initially saying only a few people had been hurt. But hours later, Qatar's Interior Ministry offered the far-greater casualty figures.

The Barzan plant had a capacity of almost 1.4 billion standard cubic feet of sales gas per day, which Qatar used primarily for local electricity generation and to power its crucial water desalination plants in the desert reaches of the Arabian Peninsula.

Qatar owns nearly all of the plant, with a small share also held by ExxonMobil. The oil company did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

In March, an Iranian missile hit Ras Laffan, sparking a fire that caused "extensive" damage before it was extinguished, authorities said. Qatar had already halted production there because of Iranian attacks.

Qatar shares its massive offshore natural gas field in the Persian Gulf with Iran. That natural gas production has made Qatar wealthy.

It has used that money to raise its profile worldwide through hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, creating the Al Jazeera news network and funding its work as an international mediator, including the talks in Switzerland between Iran and the United States. (AP)

Britain's economic woes fuel discontent with Brexit decade after historic vote to leave EU

LONDON, June 22: Simon Boyd's firm makes prefabricated steel structures on the south coast of England and ships them to customers as far away as Ghana and Barbados. Mike Hawes represents Britain's carmakers as the head of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders.

The business leaders were on different sides of the debate when Britain voted to leave the European Union in 2016. But 10 years later they are both frustrated by Brexit.

A decade ago, backers promised that Brexit would be the key to a bright new future where, freed from the edicts of EU bureaucrats, Britain would regain control of its laws and its borders and the economy would boom. But the reality failed to live up to the hype as Britain struggled to adjust to life without unfettered access to the 27-

nation free trade bloc and its market of 450 million people.

Economic growth is anemic, taxes are high, public services are creaking and successive governments have been unable to stem the flow of migrants who wash up on the English Channel coast in inflatable boats. As a result, it's not exactly a happy anniversary.

"No, it's not delivered everything that was said it would deliver on the tin, but it is delivering," Boyd told The Associated Press. "It's very sluggish. You only need to look at the statistics to see that."

Boyd, the managing director of REIDSteel, which employs about 130 people at a plant in Christchurch, England, still stands behind his decision to support Brexit, but blames lackluster results on politicians who weren't committed to delivering.

Britain has also experienced unexpected challenges over the past 10 years, from the COVID-19 pandemic to the wars in Ukraine and the Middle East, Boyd said.

Economists see fundamental issues

The Brexit vote quickly increased costs for businesses as they prepared for an uncertain future during years of negotiation over the UK's new relationship with the EU. Then, when Britain finally left the bloc on Jan. 31, 2020, new rules governing trade in goods and services made it more expensive and time-consuming to do business with European partners.

Creon Butler, who leads the global economy and finance program at Chatham House, a London-based think tank, said there were long-term consequences to leaving the European single market.

"Whatever was promised, whatever one hoped for, (you have) to accept that it has been a major loss of wealth and prosperity for us through the choice we made to leave," he said.

"That's a decision the British public have made, and they're entitled to make it, but it does make us poorer," he added.

By most measures, the British economy today is weaker than it would have been without Brexit, according to a recent report published by the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The report, compiled by researchers in Britain, Germany and the US, compares the performance of the UK economy to 33 other countries, including its European neighbours, the US, Canada and Japan. (AP)

As Vance meets top Iranian officials in Switzerland, Trump threatens Tehran from afar

OBBURGEN (SWITZERLAND), June 22: US Vice President JD Vance said Sunday there was an opportunity to "turn over a new leaf" with Iran as the sides held talks aimed at building out the interim deal to end the war in Iran reached by the two sides last week. But even as Vance called on Tehran to build on the moment, President Donald Trump threatened to restart strikes on Iran for its support of Hezbollah militants in Lebanon or if it moved to close the strategic Strait of Hormuz.

"Iran must immediately stop their highly paid PROXIES in Lebanon from causing trouble," Trump said on social media, one of multiple provocative warnings to Iran on Sunday. "If they don't, we'll hit Iran very hard again, just like we did last week, only harder!!!"

Vance and US negotiators met with Iran's parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi at a Swiss mountainside resort near Lake Lucerne.

Mediators from Pakistan and Qatar were also present for the direct engagement that, according to Iranian state media, lasted about 80 minutes. The US and Iranian negotiating teams also held separate private talks with Pakistani and Qatari officials.

The US is looking to get Iran locked into negotiations over its nuclear program amid concerns it may be used for military purposes, which Iran denies. Vance also is pushing Tehran to commit to keeping open the Strait of Hormuz, the critical waterway through which about a fifth of world traded oil passes.

But Trump's comments from afar—he

spent much of the weekend at the presidential retreat at Camp David, Maryland—appeared to threaten to derail the negotiations.

"They would do better to be careful about their statements," Qalibaf posted on X. "Our armed forces are prepared to respond to them in a different manner. They may keep talking, it is we who act."

Iranian state media said the talks had entered a "difficult phase" and recessed after the "publication of an insulting message by the US President." The Iranian delegation then met with Qatari mediators and left the negotiating site, state media said.

Despite the heated social media exchanges, an official with knowledge of the talks later told the AP the Iranian delegation remained engaged in the talks and has not indicated to mediators any intention to leave. The official requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the talks.

Iran first wants to focus on Israeli strikes in Lebanon

The interim agreement was signed last week, and top American and Iranian negotiators are in a 60-day sprint to reach an agreement on the technical details that hold massive implications for the world economy and global security.

The on-again, off-again conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants continues to threaten to derail the effort for the US to win concessions from Tehran on its nuclear program and keep the strait open.

"The question before us now is how much more can we accomplish together? Can we turn over a new leaf?" Vance said



as the talks, dubbed the "Lake Lucerne Summit," got underway.

"Can we change relations in the Middle East permanently, or do we go back to doing things the old way, which is not our preference, but is certainly very much something that can happen."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Es-mail Baghaei told the country's state news agency that their team's negotiations looked to focus on the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Only days after signing the agreement, it was stress-tested after fighting escalated in Lebanon between Israel and the Iranian-backed militant group Hezbollah — and by the subsequent announcement by Iran's military that it had again closed the vital waterway. Still, a renewed ceasefire in Lebanon, brokered on Saturday, appeared to be holding.

The agreement signed by Trump and Iranian President Pezeshkian immediately allows Tehran to sell its oil freely and paves the way for Iran to tap into billions of dollars in assets that are currently frozen. It also calls for Iran to dilute its stockpile of highly enriched uranium, believed to be

buried under nuclear sites that were targeted in US strikes last summer.

Pezeshkian, however, has insisted on Iran maintaining its right to enrich uranium.

He repeated that stance on Sunday. "What is certain is that we will never back down from the right to enrich uranium, and the other side is also forced to accept it," Pezeshkian said, according to Iran's state media.

Trump, in a telephone interview Sunday with Fox News, warned that the Iranian president should watch what he says and threatened to take over the rest of the country, in comments relayed by a Fox correspondent.

A delayed meeting is now back on

Iran had cautiously approached the talks given its previous experience with US negotiations on the nuclear issue, which twice in the past year were interrupted by massive military strikes against the country. "The implementation of any document is more important than its signing," Baghaei said Sunday.

Vance had originally been slated to be on the ground at the Burgenstock resort near Lucerne on Friday, but his departure from the United States was delayed after fighting escalated in Lebanon and Iranian officials cancelled plans to attend the talks.

US Central Command disputed Iran's claim that it had once again shuttered the strait and said US forces continued to monitor the situation to ensure traffic continues to flow through the waterway. Vance has said that millions of barrels of oil have moved through the strait in recent days.

Senior Assam officials review child healthcare services across Barak Valley

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, June 22: In a major initiative aimed at strengthening child healthcare services in the Barak Valley, a high-level team led by Dr P Ashok Babu, IAS, Commissioner and Secretary to the Government of Assam, Health and Family Welfare Department, and Dr Lakshmanan S, IAS, Mission Director of the National Health Mission (NHM), Assam, conducted an extensive review of healthcare facilities and child health programmes across the region.

The review covered the districts of Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi, with a focus on assessing the status of child healthcare services, identifying operational challenges and exploring measures to improve healthcare outcomes for children.

During the visit, the senior officials inspected Silchar Medical College and Hospital as well as district hospitals in the three districts.

They reviewed the availability of paediatric healthcare services, medical infrastructure, equipment and human resources, and inter-



acted with doctors, healthcare providers and hospital authorities to understand service delivery challenges and operational requirements.

The delegation also held a series of review meetings with district administrations and health officials to evaluate the implementation of child and maternal health programmes under the National Health Mission.

Discussions centred on strengthening referral systems, improving access to quality healthcare, reducing infant mortality and ensuring

effective delivery of essential health interventions across all levels of the healthcare system.

District Commissioners of the three districts participated in the review process.

Ayush Garg, IAS, District Commissioner of Cachar; Pradeep Kumar Dwivedi, IAS, District Commissioner of Sribhumi and Abhishek Jain, IAS, District Commissioner of Hailakandi shared district-specific experiences, achievements and challenges related to healthcare service delivery and programme implementation.

As part of the exercise, the officials also undertook field visits to villages across the Barak Valley to gather first-hand feedback from communities.

They interacted with parents, beneficiaries, frontline health workers and local residents to assess issues related to child healthcare services, immunisation coverage, nutritional support and access to medical facilities.

Officials said the information gathered during these interactions would help shape future policy decisions and targeted interventions aimed at strengthening child health services and improving health outcomes in the region.

Senior medical officers, district health officials and healthcare personnel from all three districts attended the review meetings and apprised the visiting delegation of ongoing initiatives, achievements and areas requiring additional support and resources.

The visit reaffirmed the State Government's commitment to enhancing healthcare infrastructure and ensuring equitable access to quality child healthcare services across Assam.

Dialysis patients protest against withdrawal of cashless treatment at private hospitals

Demonstrators fear government hospitals lack capacity to handle increased patient load after policy change



HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 22: Hundreds of dialysis patients, their family members and local residents staged a road blockade near Assam Medical College and Hospital (AMCH) on Monday, protesting the State Government's decision to discontinue cashless dialysis services at private empanelled hospitals from July 1.

The protest followed a government notification excluding chronic haemodialysis, acute haemodialysis, permanent tunnelled catheter placement and peritoneal dialysis from coverage under the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) and the Ayushman Asom-Mukhya Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AA-MMJAY) at private healthcare facilities.

Protesters expressed concern that the move would place a significant burden on government hospitals, particularly AMCH, which serves as the primary tertiary healthcare institution for Upper Assam and neighbouring areas.

According to demonstrators, government healthcare facilities currently lack adequate infrastructure to accommodate the large number of patients who presently receive dialysis treatment at private hospitals under the cashless schemes.

They pointed out that AMCH presently operates only a limited number of dialysis machines and warned that a sudden influx of patients could severely affect treatment accessibility.

Many patients and family members voiced fears that the decision would have serious consequences for economically weaker sections who depend on regular dialysis for survival.

"Many poor chronic kidney disease patients will suffer because of this decision," said one of the protesters participating in the demonstration.

Another protester, whose daughter undergoes dialysis three times a week, appealed to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to reconsider the policy.

"My daughter cannot survive without dialysis. I request the Chief Minister not to withdraw the support that helps patients continue their treatment," he said.

The protesters demanded that the government either continue dialysis coverage at private empanelled hospitals or significantly strengthen dialysis infrastructure in government institutions before implementing the new policy.

The demonstration led to temporary disruption of traffic in the area before authorities intervened. No untoward incident was reported during the protest.

As of Monday evening, there was no official response from the government regarding the demands raised by the protesters.

Yoga Day observed in Mailoo

HT Correspondent

MAILOO, June 22: The International Day of Yoga was observed with enthusiasm at Prayash Senior Secondary School, Mailoo, in West Karbi Anglong district recently.

The programme was organised by Mera Yuva Bharat (MY Bharat) Kendra, Diphu, under the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India, in collaboration with the Subaltern Development Club.

The programme commenced with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp and floral tributes to Swami Vivekananda.

Guests attending the event were welcomed and felicitated with traditional garlands.

Addressing the gathering, Sangita Chauhan, Vice Principal of Prayash Senior Secondary School, highlighted the importance of yoga in maintaining physical fitness and mental well-being.

Jeetendra Harijan, Vice Principal of Kapili College, spoke on the origin and evolution of yoga and underscored the significance of International Day of Yoga in promoting a healthy lifestyle.

Bharat Sahu, Saririk Pramukh of RSS Jamunamukh, elaborated on the benefits of regular yoga practice, stating that yoga plays a vital role in fostering discipline, physical health and mental balance.

A yoga session featuring jogging, various asanas and pranayama exercises was conducted under the guidance of Bharat Sahu.

More than 80 youths from different villages actively participated in the programme and performed the yoga exercises with enthusiasm.

The event was attended by Dulal Rajbhar, Principal of Prayash Senior Secondary School; Raja Chauhan, Principal of GCC Senior Secondary School; lecturer Shima Sharma; and former National Service Volunteer Dhanraj Harijan, among others. Organisers said the programme aimed to encourage young people to adopt yoga as a part of their daily routine and promote a healthy and balanced lifestyle among the community.

Padma Shri Pokhila Lektheipi gets new home

KAAC CEM inaugurates 'Runmeso', pledges support for veteran Karbi folk singer's Padma Shri journey

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 22: Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and Rongkhang MLA Tuliram Rongkhang recently inaugurated and formally handed over a newly constructed house to noted Karbi folk singer and Padma Shri awardee Pokhila Lektheipi at her native village.

Named "Runmeso," meaning a pleasant and modest home, the house was built through contributions from well-wishers after the veteran artist's difficult living conditions came to light.

Inaugurating the house, Rongkhang described Lektheipi as a priceless cultural asset of Karbi Anglong and lauded her immense contribution to preserving and promoting Karbi folk music.

"A talent like Pokhila Lektheipi is rare and cannot be replaced. Despite her invaluable contribution to Karbi culture and music, she did

not have a proper house. Therefore, with the support of well-wishers, we decided to construct a home for her," he said.

The CEM also announced that all expenses related to Lektheipi's visit to New Delhi to receive the Padma Shri award would be borne by the KAAC.

"She is representing Karbi Anglong and Assam on the national stage. We pray for her good health and a successful journey," he added.

Expressing gratitude, Lektheipi recalled the hardships she had endured over the years, including living in a house that leaked during the monsoon season.

"There were times when rainwater entered my house during heavy rains. But patience and perseverance have finally borne fruit. This house does not belong to me alone; it belongs to the people. I thank the CEM for understanding my struggles and extending support. I ded-

icate this house to the people," she said.

The initiative to construct the house gained momentum after media reports highlighted the poor condition of the singer's residence.

Following the publication of those reports, representatives of the KAAC visited her home, conducted an assessment and initiated plans for the construction of a new dwelling.

Pokhila Lektheipi is widely regarded as one of the most prominent voices in Karbi folk music and has played a significant role in preserving the language and cultural traditions of the community through her songs.

The inauguration ceremony was attended by MP Amarsing Tisso, MLA Niso Terangpi, KAAC Executive Member Madhuram Lekthe, Karbi Cultural Society president Humsing Bey and several local residents and well-wishers.

SC body seeks action against two employees over alleged fake caste certificates

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 22: The Scheduled Caste Sangrami Yuva Parishad, Assam, has lodged a formal complaint with the Nagaon District Commissioner alleging that two government employees secured their jobs by using fake Scheduled Caste (SC) certificates and demanding immediate action against them.

In its complaint, the organisation alleged that Malabika Bora of Teliaigaon, currently serving as a Senior Assistant in the Office of the District Commissioner, Nagaon, and Chandan Borkakoty of Kalita Chuk, Panigaon, employed as a Junior Engineer in the Irrigation Department's Tezpur Division, obtained government employment by submitting fraudulent SC certificates. The Parishad claimed that both are permanent government employees occupying posts reserved for Scheduled Caste candidates.

It further alleged that Malabika Bora is also seeking promotion while continuing to avail benefits meant for members of the Scheduled Caste community.

According to the organisation, the alleged misuse of reserved-category certificates has deprived genuine Scheduled Caste candidates of employment opportunities and other benefits intended for them.

The Parishad stated that the Nagaon District Committee of the Assam Scheduled Caste Parishad had also communicated that the two individuals do not belong to the Scheduled Caste community.

On Sunday, Parishad president Sanjiv Das and secretary Bitopan Pathak met the District Commissioner and submitted a written complaint seeking cancellation of the alleged fake SC certificates.

The organisation also demanded registration of criminal cases and appropriate legal action if the allegations are found to be true.

The matter has sparked concern among various social organisations and community groups, which have expressed apprehension over allegations of ineligible persons obtaining reserved-category government jobs through fraudulent means.

Kopili river water level rises as Khandong Dam opens all spillway gates

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, June 22: The water level of the Kopili River has risen significantly following the opening of all seven spillway gates of the Khandong Dam at the Kopili Hydro Power Station in Umrangso, prompting authorities to issue a precautionary alert for downstream areas.

According to officials, three spillway gates were initially opened last week to regulate the inflow of water resulting from continuous heavy rainfall in the catchment areas.

However, as water levels in the reservoir continued to increase, the dam authorities were compelled to open the remaining four gates to manage the growing volume and prevent overtopping.

At present, all seven spillway gates remain open, allowing water to be discharged into the Kopili River and causing a steady rise in the river's water level downstream.

Officials informed that the gates are currently maintained at an opening height of 0.50 metres.

The opening was recently reduced from one metre to 0.50 metres across all gates as

part of efforts to regulate the outflow.

The present discharge volume has been reported at approximately 187 cubic metres per second (cumecs).

The increasing discharge has placed downstream areas on alert, particularly low-lying villages situated along the riverbanks. Authorities have cautioned that continued heavy rainfall in Dima Hasao district and neighbouring areas of Meghalaya could further increase inflows into the reservoir, potentially leading to a sharper rise in river levels and the risk of flash floods.

Local administration officials have advised residents living near the river, especially in Kheroni and adjoining areas, to remain vigilant and closely monitor official advisories. Livestock owners have also been urged to move animals away from vulnerable riverbank locations as a precautionary measure.

Authorities have appealed to the public to avoid venturing near the river and to cooperate with safety instructions issued by the administration until the situation normalises.

Teacher escapes axe attack by armed intruders

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, June 22: Tension gripped Serfanguri village under Gossaigaon Police Station in Kokrajhar district after an assistant teacher allegedly came under attack from a group of armed intruders late on Sunday night.

The victim, Mir Matiur Rahman, an assistant teacher at Serfanguri ME School under the Gossaigaon Block Elementary Education Office, narrowly escaped injury when three to four unidentified persons allegedly entered his residence armed with an axe and a dagger.

According to available information, the incident occurred around 12:45 am.

The intruders reportedly cut through the rear fence of the house and entered the room where Rahman was resting.

After dinner, the teacher had retired for the night and was inside his room when one of the as-

sailants allegedly attempted to attack him with an axe.

Rahman reportedly resisted the attack and managed to overpower the intruder.

During the struggle, another miscreant entered the room, but the teacher confronted him as well.

Unable to carry out their plan, the attackers fled the scene.

Rahman later noticed another individual standing outside the house, who also escaped along with the others.

Rahman's wife and daughter were present in the house at the time of the incident.

The sudden attack left the family shaken, while the miscreants fled before local residents could intervene.

The attackers, however, allegedly left behind an axe and a dagger while escaping, which have since been recovered from the scene.

Speaking to reporters, Rahman

said he suspected that the intruders had entered the house with the intention of committing robbery or dacoity.

Following information about the incident, Sub-Inspector Pranati Kalita of Gossaigaon Police Station reached the spot and initiated an investigation.

Police have launched a probe to identify and apprehend those involved in the attack.

Meanwhile, a delegation of the All Assam Minority Students' Union (AAMSU), led by organisational secretary Mazharul Islam and West Kokrajhar district secretary Safiqul Islam, visited the victim's residence.

The organisation condemned the incident and demanded the immediate arrest of those responsible, along with stringent legal action against the perpetrators.

Police said investigations are underway and further details are awaited.

Gold chains worth ₹12 lakh snatched outside Dibrugarh DC Office

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 22: In a daring daylight robbery, unidentified motorcycle-borne miscreants allegedly snatched gold chains worth nearly ₹12 lakh from a man at the entrance of the District Commissioner's Office in Dibrugarh on Monday.

The incident occurred in one of the district's most sensitive government zones, triggering concerns over security arrangements at the DC Office complex.

The victim has been identified as Hrishikesh Goswami, a resident of Madarkhat in Lahowal.

According to reports, Goswami had arrived at the District Commissioner's Office in an auto-rickshaw for personal work. As he was climbing the staircase leading to the office premises, two miscreants riding a motorcycle allegedly targeted him.

The accused, who were reportedly wearing full-face helmets and masks to conceal their identities, snatched two gold chains weighing around 18 tolas from his neck before speeding away from the scene.

The entire operation was carried out within seconds, leaving little time for bystanders or security personnel to react. The stolen jewellery is estimated to be worth approximately ₹12 lakh.

The incident has raised serious questions regarding security at the entrance of the District Commissioner's Office, where there is regular public movement and deployment of security personnel.

Dr Nilima Bhagabati to represent India at global education leadership conference in Wales

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 22: Prof Nilima Bhagabati, former Head of the Department of Education at Gauhati University and Executive Representative of the Commonwealth Council of Educational Administration, Management and Leadership (CCEAM)-Asia affiliate, has been invited to represent CCEAM-India at a global conference on educational leadership to be held in Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom, from July 3 to 5.

The international conference on "Future and Perspectives of Educational Leadership", being organised in collaboration with the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration and Management (CCEAM) and the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS), will bring together leading educationists, administrators, policymakers, practitioners and researchers from across Commonwealth countries and beyond.

Prof Bhagabati will present an empirical paper titled "Youths as Architects of Viksit Bharat @ 2047 - From Demographic Dividend to Demo-



graphic Leadership", focusing on the Government of India's long-term vision of transforming the country into a developed nation by 2047.

Her presentation is expected to highlight India's evolving educational landscape and the role of youth leadership in nation-building.

The conference will deliberate on strategies for empowering young people through visionary educational leadership and creating opportunities for them to contribute meaningfully to so-

cial and national transformation.

Prof Bhagabati's invitation to the prestigious global meet comes in recognition of her distinguished academic and leadership contributions spanning more than four decades in higher education. Her participation will provide an opportunity to showcase India's educational reforms and initiatives aimed at nurturing future-ready youth leaders.

A prominent educationist, Prof Bhagabati currently serves as Upadhyaksha of Akhil Bharatiya Shikshan Mandal.

She has also contributed significantly to the formulation of educational policies as a National Focus Member associated with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and as Chairperson of the NEP-2020 Guidance and Counselling Committee for School Education.

Widely known for her work in youth development, educational outreach and mental health counselling, Prof Bhagabati has mentored and guided students and educators across the country. Her selection for the global forum has been described as a matter of pride for Assam and the nation.

NTPC Bongaigaon develops educational infrastructure under CSR initiative

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 22: NTPC Bongaigaon has inaugurated a major educational infrastructure development project at Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya (VKV), Balijan, under its Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programme, reinforcing its commitment to quality education and community development.

The project, implemented at a cost of ₹1.80 crore, includes the construction of science laboratories, a library and five classrooms aimed at enhancing educational facilities and creating better learning opportunities for students in the region.

The newly developed facilities were inaugurated by Nabam Vivek, MLA of the 14th Govind Constituency in Arunachal Pradesh, in the presence of Takar Rava, Additional Deputy Commissioner of Balijan, officials of NTPC Bongaigaon, and Sujatha Nayak, Secretary of VKV Balijan.

Teachers, students, parents,



community members and representatives of NTPC also attended the programme.

The project is expected to strengthen the school's academic infrastructure and improve access to modern educational resources.

The science laboratories have been established to provide practical learning opportunities and encourage scientific inquiry among

students, while the upgraded library is expected to promote reading habits, research and intellectual development.

The additional classrooms will help accommodate the growing academic needs of the institution.

Speaking on the occasion, representatives of NTPC and the school highlighted the importance of investing in educational infrastruc-

ture to foster social progress and empower future generations.

They noted that quality educational facilities play a crucial role in shaping young minds and creating opportunities for long-term development.

Officials reiterated NTPC Bongaigaon's commitment to supporting initiatives that generate sustainable social impact and contribute to community welfare.

Representatives of Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya expressed gratitude for the support and stated that the enhanced infrastructure would significantly improve the teaching-learning environment and benefit students for years to come.

NTPC Bongaigaon has been actively implementing CSR initiatives across various sectors, including education, healthcare, skill development, environmental sustainability and community welfare, with the objective of promoting inclusive growth and socio-economic development in the region.

WB budget: BJP govt balances welfare, fiscal discipline

Announces 1 lakh recruitments, DA hike

KOLKATA, June 22: The BJP government in Bengal sought to blend welfare continuity with political and administrative reset in its maiden budget presented on Monday, as it pledged filling one lakh government vacancies, increasing dearness allowance by 20 percentage points while stressing the need for fiscal discipline.

Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta presented a ₹ 4.38 lakh crore budget for 2026-27 the first full-fledged financial statement of the BJP government that assumed office in May after ending the 15-year rule of the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC.

The TMC government had presented a ₹ 4.06 lakh crore vote-on-account budget in February.

Dasgupta sought to project the BJP government's budget as a roadmap for a "modern, progressive and developed Bengal" while repeatedly contrasting the new administration's approach with that of the previous regime.

Amid loud desk-thumping by treasury bench members, Dasgupta announced that dearness allowance



for state government employees and pensioners would be increased by 20 percentage points from October 1, taking the total DA to 38 per cent. With this, the gap between the DA received by state government employees and their central government counterparts has narrowed to 22 percentage points. State where employees had for long agitated over the issue under the previous regime.

Before presenting the budget, Dasgupta and Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari participated in a brief prayer ceremony in the as-

sembly premises.

The budget sought to reassure beneficiaries that welfare programmes would continue despite the change in government, even as the BJP moved to put its own stamp on several flagship schemes.

₹ 36,000 crore was earmarked for the Annapurna Yojana, the BJP government's replacement project for the TMC-era Lakshmi Bhandar scheme. Under the programme, women between 25 and 60 years of age will receive direct financial assistance in their bank accounts.

The Women and Child Develop-

ment and Social Welfare Department saw the highest allocation of ₹ 52,308 crore. The Panchayats and Rural Development Department received ₹ 51,836.55 crore, while School Education got ₹ 44,948.21 crore.

Projecting employment generation as a central pillar of governance, Dasgupta announced that one lakh vacancies in government departments would be filled in phases, including 20,000 posts in the police department and 50,000 teaching and non-teaching jobs in schools. Thirty-three per cent of the jobs would be reserved for women, while 10 per cent quota would be provided to Agniveers wherever applicable. The government also decided to continue the five-year relaxation in the upper age limit for recruitment for another two years.

A new assistance scheme, 'Bharosa', was unveiled, under which eligible unemployed graduates from families earning less than ₹ 1 lakh annually would receive ₹ 3,000 a month, while other eligible unemployed persons would get ₹ 2,000 each. (PTI)

Parl panel visit not meant to assess Kashmir situation: Tharoor

JAMMU, June 22: Senior Congress leader Shashi Tharoor's remarks about "encouraging progress towards normalcy" in Jammu and Kashmir, made after a meeting with LG Manoj Sinha, have not gone down well with his party here. Tharoor is the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs which is visiting Jammu and Kashmir.

"We discussed the situation in the state and the encouraging progress towards normalcy. When I arrived, he was chatting with the President of the Kashmiri Writers' Association and the Women's Organisation — a positive outreach that I welcomed. Many challenges remain and much remains to be done, but I left the meeting feeling more positive than I have felt for a while," Tharoor posted on Sunday while sharing a photograph with the Lieutenant Governor in Srinagar.

Chief spokesperson of the J-K Pradesh Congress Committee Ravinder Sharma took exception to the post by Tharoor, suggesting he should have met the people of Kashmir.

"People of Kashmir too were expecting you to meet them to gain a better understanding of the ground realities."

"At least you could have spared some time to meet your own party workers who have been fighting for the restoration of statehood, which was taken away seven years ago," Sharma posted on X.

Amid the controversy, Tharoor on Monday said the panel is in Jammu and Kashmir not to evaluate conditions in the Valley and its focus is limited to matters related to foreign affairs, including India-Pakistan and Sino-Indian relations, and passport services. Heading a 10-member Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, Tharoor arrived in Jammu on Sunday evening.

The panel met senior police officials on Monday morning before reviewing the functioning of passport



offices and Passport Seva Kendras in the region. Defending his statement, Tharoor said he had so far only met the Lieutenant Governor and had not interacted with a wider cross-section of people in the Valley. "I have not had a chance to see other things and listen to other people's voices. So I just want to make it very clear, this is not a visit about checking the conditions in Kashmir Valley," Tharoor told reporters on the sidelines of the panel's visit to the passport office here.

The Congress leader said the committee is in the Union Territory to study three specific issues — India-Pakistan relations, Sino-Indian relations, and the functioning of passport offices and Passport Seva Kendras.

"We're not here to look at domestic matters; it's not our business. We are the External Affairs Committee. That's it all. That's what I have to say," he said.

The parliamentary committee, which also includes MPs Asaduddin Owaisi, Arun Govil, Arvind Ganpat Sawant, Vijay Baghel, K Laxman, B S Mubarak, Vikas Kumar and B S Rawat, is scheduled to visit army headquarters for a briefing and the Jammu border before leaving for Kashmir on Tuesday. They are also scheduled to visit Ladakh as part of the study tour. (PTI)

BJP chief Nabin meets agricultural economist SS Johl in Ludhiana



LUDHIANA, June 22: BJP president Nitin Nabin on Monday met noted agricultural economist and Padma Bhushan awardee Sardara Singh Johl at his residence here and discussed issues concerning the agriculture sector, including crop diversification.

Nabin was on a three-day visit to Punjab. Monday is the last day of his tour to the poll-bound state.

In a post on X, Nabin said during his Punjab visit, he met renowned agricultural economist Johl at his residence.

"Dr Sardara Singh Johl Ji is one of the country's leading agricultural economists. As Vice-Chancellor of Punjab Agricultural University and Chairman of the Commission for Agricultural Costs

and Prices (CACP), he played a pivotal role in shaping the country's agriculture policy through crop diversification and agricultural reforms," he noted.

Nabin said he held extensive discussion with Johl on Punjab's agricultural system, issues related to farmers, crop diversification, and the overall development of the agricultural sector.

The BJP president was accompanied by Punjab BJP president Kewal Singh Dhillon and state general secretary Anil Sarin.

Nabin called it part of BJP's 'Sampark Abhiyan' to engage Punjab's intellectual voices. He presented Dr Johl a booklet on 12-years of BJP-led Centre's schemes.

After the meeting, Johl cautioned that debt is mounting and over-reliance on subsidies is eroding the state's economic base.

He urged all parties to drop the "freebie culture" free power, ration and instead focus on industry, jobs and self-reliance. Nabin began his Punjab visit from Amritsar on June 20. He also visited Jalandhar and Ludhiana. (PTI)

Neeraj Dangi takes oath after being re-elected to RS

NEW DELHI, June 22: Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan on Monday administered oath to Congress member Neeraj Dangi, who has been re-elected to the Upper House from Rajasthan.

Dangi took the oath in Hindi. This is his second term as a member of the Rajya Sabha. Dangi was elected for the first time as a member of the Rajya Sabha from Rajasthan in June 2020.

"Vice President and Chairman, Rajya Sabha, Shri C P Radhakrishnan administered the oath to Shri Neeraj Dangi, Member of the Rajya Sabha, re-elected from Rajasthan, at Parliament House today," the Vice President said on X while sharing pictures of the oath-taking.

Rajya Sabha deputy chairperson Hariwansh, leader of the house and Union Health minister Jagat Prakash Nadda, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Minority Affairs Kiren Rijiju, Congress member Jairam Ramesh and Rajya Sabha Secretary General P C Mody and other senior officers of the secretariat were also present on the occasion. (PTI)

BJP MLA backs Oppn MPs joining NDA

MUMBAI, June 22: BJP MLA Ashish Deshmukh on Monday said Opposition MPs were welcome to join the NDA for a stronger Centre, but questioned the need to induct Opposition MLAs into Maharashtra's ruling Mahayuti, noting the alliance already holds a two-thirds majority in the assembly.

Bringing in additional MLAs could undermine those already part of the ruling alliance, Deshmukh claimed. His remarks come amid a rebellion by six of the nine Shiv Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha members, with two of them confirming their switch to the ruling Shiv Sena led by Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. Deshmukh said the Opposition Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members switching sides will strengthen the Union government.

"I welcome their move as we need a stronger Centre to pass several important bills. But do we really need MLAs from the Opposition in Maharashtra?" asked Deshmukh, who represents the Savner assembly constituency in Nagpur district.

The Mahayuti, comprising the BJP, Shinde's Shiv Sena and Sunetra Pawar-led NCP, already has 237 MLAs in the 288-member



state assembly, he pointed out.

The Maharashtra government already has more than a two-thirds majority. "Irrespective of the eagerness of Opposition MLAs to join Mahayuti, we need to decide whether we really want any more MLAs, as the existing lot is enough and capable," he said.

Deshmukh said the induction of more MLAs could lead to injustice towards existing legislators in the ruling alliance. "It is my request to all leaders of Mahayuti that they rethink this strategy of bringing Opposition MLAs into the ruling alliance," he said. Deputy CM Shinde recently hinted at more Opposition leaders joining his party.

Addressing the Shiv Sena's foundation day rally on Friday, Shinde said, "This is just a trailer;

the movie is still not over. Two of the six Lok Sabha members of Shiv Sena (UBT) have already stated that they are joining Shiv Sena led by Shinde. The remaining four have maintained silence."

Deshmukh, who hails from a prominent political family in the Vidarbha region, won the 2024 assembly election from Savner on a BJP ticket after defeating the Congress candidate.

His father, Ranjit Deshmukh, served as Maharashtra Congress president, while his uncle, Anil Deshmukh of the NCP (SP), was Maharashtra's home minister during the Maha Vikas Aghadi government. Ashish Deshmukh joined the BJP before the 2014 assembly elections and defeated his uncle Anil Deshmukh from the Katol seat in Nagpur district.

He returned to the Congress and contested against then Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis in the 2019 assembly polls, but was expelled from the party over his statements against Rahul Gandhi.

He subsequently rejoined the BJP, which fielded him from Savner, a Congress stronghold since 2004, in the 2024 assembly elections. (PTI)

Prez Murmu and VP condole loss of lives in Lucknow fire

NEW DELHI, June 22: President Droupadi Murmu and Vice President C P Radhakrishnan on Monday condoled the loss of lives in a fire at a building in Uttar Pradesh's Lucknow.

Fifteen people, including students, were killed and seven others injured after a massive fire gutted a three-storey commercial building housing an animation centre in Usha Mehta Marg in Lucknow's Aliganj area on Monday afternoon. President Murmu said she was extremely sad to know about the loss of lives in a horrific fire accident in Lucknow and expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families.

In a post on X in Hindi, Murmu said, "The news of the deaths of numerous people in the horrific fire accident that occurred in Lucknow is extremely sad. I express my heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. I pray for the swift recovery of the injured."

Expressing grief over the incident, VP Radhakrishnan, in a social media post, said, "The loss of lives in a fire accident in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh is deeply painful." (PTI)

Adityanath slams SP, Congress, BSP over governance

FIROZABAD (UP), June 22: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Monday slammed the SP, Congress and BSP, saying their governments "failed" to provide development and law and order.

The BJP government, however, has made the state free from mafias and disorder, he claimed.

Addressing a programme in Firozabad where he inaugurated and laid foundation stones of 81 development projects worth over Rs 658 crore, Adityanath said the previous governments promoted division and criminal elements, while the present government was working on development and welfare schemes.

"The agenda of the Samajwadi Party was never development. Its agenda was to divide society, weaken social harmony, encourage hooliganism, stop work for the poor, create hurdles in development projects and turn festivals into disturbances," he alleged.

"Remember what the situation was before 2017. Today, the double-engine BJP government is running schemes like one district, one medical college, one district, one product and one district, one cuisine, while the Samajwadi Party had 'one district, one mafia'. Every district had an identified mafia who created an atmosphere of fear, grabbed houses and land of



the poor through their associates, carried out extortion and occupied government land," he alleged. The chief minister further said, "Today I am happy to say that our state is now free from mafias, free from criminals and free from disturbances. The curfew and riots that used to happen earlier are no longer there. Today in Uttar Pradesh, everything is peaceful and festivals are being celebrated."

Targeting the opposition parties further, he said, "These people from the Congress, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party were used to living in darkness because their activities were carried out effectively in the dark. That is why they never wanted electricity to come. They used to keep the poor deprived."

Unlike his past speeches wherein he slammed

SP and Congress only, Adityanath, hit out at the BSP also this time. Adityanath said under the BJP government, around 15 crore poor people were getting free ration, 10 crore people had received health insurance cover under Ayushman Bharat, 65 lakh poor families had been provided houses, two crore people had received free LPG connections and nearly 1.5 crore families had got free electricity connections.

He said the ₹ 658 crore projects announced for Firozabad were part of the development initiatives being undertaken under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"Development comes when people take the right decision and press the right button on the EVM. When BJP MLAs reach Lucknow carrying the lotus symbol, development comes in return," he said.

The chief minister praised Firozabad's glass industry, saying local artisans had transformed the sector through innovation and technology.

"Earlier, during festivals like Holi, Diwali and Dussehra, products made in China used to dominate the markets. But Firozabad's artisans adopted new technology, understood market demand and started producing accordingly. Today, people proudly say that these beautiful glass items are made by the artisans of Firozabad," he said. (PTI)

War of words over health sector in Kerala Assembly, LDF stages walkout

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 22: The Kerala Assembly on Monday witnessed a heated exchange between the ruling UDF and the opposition LDF over the functioning of the health department amid concerns over the spread of communicable diseases, with the latter staging a walkout after its demand for an adjournment motion was rejected.

The adjournment motion notice was moved by CPI(M) MLA and former minister P A Mohammed Riyas, who alleged that the state's acclaimed "Kerala model" in the health sector was showing signs of deterioration under the Congress-led government.

"Thirty-five days may not be enough to assess a government fully, but it is sufficient to understand the direction in which the administration is moving," Riyas said while initiating the discussion.

Taking a dig at Health Minister K Muraliedharan over remarks he had made in the past against then Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, Riyas said the opposition did not believe communicable diseases emerged because a particular party or front was in power.

"That is not our view, though it may have been the present health minister's view in the past," he said.

Riyas said diseases such as Nipah, West Nile fever, amoebic meningoencephalitis, monkey fever and so on had been reported in the state and accused the gov-



ernment of not maintaining coordination with the Health Department to tackle the situation.

Referring to the minister's observation that Ebola had not been reported in Kerala, Riyas remarked that he feared health department officials might soon announce its presence in the state as well.

Riyas also criticised the government over the ongoing transfer and posting exercise in the health department, alleging that it was adversely affecting the functioning of the sector. The opposition member alleged that four districts were functioning without District Medical Officers and said Kozhikode, where the Nipah case was reported, was facing a severe shortage of senior health officials. (PTI)

Telangana CM meets Rajnath Singh

NEW DELHI, June 22: Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Monday called on Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and sought large-scale civilian and commercial facilities — including cargo operations, Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul services, and hangar infrastructure — at the proposed joint-use airport in Adilabad district.

The Adilabad airport is being developed jointly by the Union Ministries of Defence and Civil Aviation and is expected to become operational by late 2027. During the meeting, Reddy drew the defence minister's attention to the growing interest of global airlines in establishing hangar facilities in the region, partly driven by recent developments in Central Asia, and appraised him that Adilabad was well-suited for such operations given its strategic location.

The chief minister also urged Singh to fast-track approval for a key project under the Defence Research and Development Organisation and the Defence Research and Development Laboratory, for which a site near Devarakadra in Mahabubnagar district has been identified, the state government said in a release. Assuring the Union minister of the state government's full cooperation, Reddy said Telangana would extend support on priority matters — particularly land acquisition and utility shifting — for the Adilabad airport project.

"The state government would extend all possible support, recognising the project's significance to national integrity and defence," he said. The chief minister also expressed his gratitude to the defence minister for the transfer of Defence Ministry lands for the Gandhi Sarovar project. (PTI)

Aravalli Biodiversity Park helps Delhi retain 3 million litres of rainwater, reduce flooding: Study

NEW DELHI, June 22: As Delhi braces for the upcoming monsoon, a recent study found that the Aravalli Biodiversity Park helps retain nearly three million litres of rainwater annually, reducing surface runoff that can contribute to waterlogging and urban flooding.

According to the study, the 692-acre restored forest is doing more than providing a patch of green amid the urban sprawl.

It said urban forests with roughly 2.02 lakh trees help prevent nearly three million litres of surface runoff annually, replenishing groundwater reserves and helping slow the movement of rainwater across the ground, allowing more water to infiltrate the soil instead of rapidly flowing over paved surfaces.

The researchers added that the Aravalli Biodiversity Park is located in an important groundwater aquifer recharge zone and plays a key role in replenishing underground water reserves.

The study, titled "Structure, ecosystem services and economic evaluation of native tree diversity: a case study of the restored



Aravalli Biodiversity Park, Delhi, India", was conducted by researchers from the Centre for Environmental Management of Degraded Ecosystems (CEMDE), Biodiversity Parks Programme, Department of Finance and Business Economics and Satyawati College, all affiliated with the University of Delhi.

"Delhi has a dry-winter humid subtropical

climate bordering on a hot semi-arid climate and receives an average annual rainfall of 774.4 mm, most of it during the monsoon months between July and September," the study said.

Besides regulating water, the park also plays a significant role in improving air quality. The study estimated that its trees remove around 126.89 tonnes of air pollutants

every year, generating environmental benefits valued at nearly ₹ 1.89 crore.

Researchers said the trees help remove particulate matter and other harmful pollutants from the atmosphere. The study noted that structurally diverse urban forests are particularly effective in trapping airborne pollutants and improving environmental quality.

The biodiversity park was also found to function as a growing carbon sink. Researchers estimated that its trees currently store around 8,360 tonnes of carbon, valued at nearly ₹ 11.34 crore, while absorbing another 1,236 tonnes of carbon every year as they continue to grow.

The study explained that carbon storage refers to the amount of carbon locked in tree biomass at a given time, while carbon sequestration refers to the annual accumulation of carbon by growing trees. For economic valuation, carbon estimates were converted into carbon dioxide equivalents using a standard molecular conversion factor. (PTI)

Arunachal Rights panel urges roads, flood protection measures in refugee areas



ITANAGAR, June 22: The Arunachal Pradesh State Human Rights Commission (APSHRC) has recommended urgent improvement of road connectivity and implementation of flood-control measures in Chakma and Hajong refugee settlement areas of Changlang district.

The state rights panel, in a letter to Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday, stated that such interventions are necessary to ensure that the communities remain within their designated settlement zones while safeguarding the demographic interests of the state's indigenous tribes.

APSHRC Acting Chairperson Bamang Tago in the letter, highlighted the findings of a field visit to Chakma and Hajong settlements in Diyun and Bordumsa circles of the district on June 12 and 13.

The Commission identified poor road infrastructure and recurring floods caused by the Dihing River as the two major challenges requiring immediate government attention.

It observed that despite the growing economic importance of the region, road connectivity in the settlement areas remains inadequate.

The Commission said that the nearly 33-km stretch between Namsai and Diyun takes more than an hour to cover due to poor road conditions, affecting trade, movement and overall development in the area.

According to the state rights panel, improved roads would not only boost economic activities in Changlang and Namsai districts but also strengthen strategic and security preparedness, considering the presence of the headquarters of the 2nd Arunachal Pradesh India Reserve Battalion at Diyun. Better connectivity would facilitate quicker movement of security personnel during emergencies and law-and-order situations, the letter said.

The Commission also pointed to the region's thriving area nut economy, noting claims that Diyun Circle alone accounts for an annual trade of around ₹ 50 crore. It said enhanced infrastructure could further expand economic opportuni-

ties for all communities living in the area.

Expressing concern over recurring floods, the APSHRC said annual inundation and erosion caused by the Dihing River continue to damage agricultural land and crops in Chakma and Hajong settlement areas.

The Commission observed that such displacement has historically created pressure for expansion beyond existing settlement zones.

It maintained that effective flood-control measures in Changlang and Namsai districts, particularly in Chakma and Hajong settlements, would help ensure that the refugee communities continue to reside within their notified areas.

Preventing displacement due to floods, it added, would also address the long-standing concerns of indigenous communities regarding the spread of Chakma and Hajong populations into other parts of the state.

Among its recommendations, the Commission urged the state government to expedite ongoing road projects connecting Namsai-Diyun and Diyun-Miao, ensure comprehensive PMGSY coverage in settlement areas of Diyun and Bordumsa circles, and consider including these routes under the proposed East-West Industrial Corridor for double-lane road development.

The APSHRC further recommended that flood-control works be undertaken in the settlement areas with support, if required, from the North Eastern Council and the Centre to ensure that affected populations can continue living within their designated settlement zones.

The recommendations came at a time when issues relating to demographic protection, indigenous rights and settlement regulation continued to be a matter of debate in Arunachal Pradesh.

The Commission said a balanced approach is needed to address humanitarian concerns and developmental needs while protecting the demographic and cultural interests of the indigenous communities of the state. (PTI)

Sikkim CM Tamang submits SIR enumeration form

GANGTOK, June 22: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Monday submitted his enumeration form under the ongoing SIR exercise in his native Soreng district. Tamang submitted the form in the presence of Block Level Supervisor Jas Bahadur Tamang and Booth Level Officers Semi Hang Limboo and Deepson Tamang, he said in a social media post.

"Today, I successfully submitted my SIR form in the presence of Jas Bahadur Tamang, Block Level Supervisor, and Semi Hang Limboo and Mr Deepson Tamang, Booth Level Officers of Soreng district," he said.

The chief minister urged all eligible citizens to complete and submit their forms within the stipulated timeline to facilitate the completion of the SIR exercise in the state.

"Participating in this process helps ensure that our records remain accurate and strengthens our democratic system," Tamang added. (PTI)

Monasteries preserve faith, culture, identity of Monpa society: Pema Khandu

ITANAGAR, June 22: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Monday said Buddhist gompas (monasteries) are much more than places of worship, describing them as the spiritual, cultural and social heart of the Monpa community that help preserve faith, traditions, values and identity across generations.

Khandu made the remarks after attending the consecration ceremony of the newly established Tiwkar Gonpa at Yusum village in Tawang district.

Sharing the information in a social media post, the chief minister said the sacred event marked an important milestone for the local community and reflected its deep-rooted spiritual heritage.

"Gonpa is far more than a place of worship. It is the spiritual, cultural and social heart of Monpa society, preserving our faith, traditions, values and identity across generations," Khandu said in a post on X.

The chief minister attended the consecration ceremony in the presence of Tawang MLA Namey Tsering, Zilla Parishad chairperson Leki Gombu and



other dignitaries.

He described the celebration at the picturesque Yusum village as a deeply meaningful occasion for the people of the region.

The Tiwkar Gonpa has been established as a full-time monastery and will serve multiple roles in the lives of the local people, the chief minister said

in another post.

"The Gonpa is a full-time monastery, serving daily as a spiritual sanctuary, a centre for education, and a cultural anchor for the entire community," he said.

Expressing appreciation to all those involved in the construction and consecration of the monastery, Khandu

'Present govt performing better than predecessors'

ZPM dismisses internal rift rumours

AIZAWL, June 22: Zoram People's Movement leader and Adviser to the Chief Minister, TBC Lalvenchhunga, on Monday rejected opposition's allegations of internal division within the ruling party, asserting that the ZPM government continues to perform better than previous administrations despite differences of opinion among party members.

Addressing a function at the party office here, Lalvenchhunga said that differing views were natural in any democratic organisation but rejected claims that the party was facing internal disunity.

"Divergent opinions do exist, which is entirely normal, but allegations claiming an internal rift within the ZPM party are completely false. Even if we are not the absolute ideal, we are still performing better than the previous governments," he said.

Lalvenchhunga, a legislator from Aizawl West-I constituency, who is also a member of the party's Political Affairs Committee



(PAC), urged party workers to place the interests of Mizoram and its people above personal ambitions.

Emphasising unity within the party, he said there was no distinction between senior and junior members in the ZPM.

"ZPM was built collectively by all of us. When our chief minister (Lalduhoma) and ministers look good, we all look good. The reputation of the CM and ministers reflects positively on the entire party," he said.

Lalvenchhunga also called upon party leaders and workers to uphold integrity and ensure that those in positions of authority do not engage in wrongdoing.

"Let us never pressure anyone to do what is wrong. We must be willing to stand up and say, 'I will not accept that.' We should have the courage to guide the people along the right path," he said.

Referring to recent political discussions and speculation, Lalvenchhunga said that differences between party leaders such as Chief Minister Lalduhoma and Home Minister K Sapdanga had once again become subjects of public debate.

However, he maintained that there was no division within the party and acknowledged that some PAC (ZPM high command) deliberations had been leaked and distorted, giv-

ing rise to rumours and unnecessary speculation.

"There are individuals who twist reports and wouldn't mind seeing us disintegrate. But we will not break apart; instead, we will continue to reform and improve," the ZPM leader said.

Recently, the leader of the opposition Lalchhandama Ralte had alleged that the ZPM was facing a serious internal rift, which could shake the party's organisational set-up, a charge denied by Lalduhoma.

Amid the allegation, the Mizoram government recently reshuffled a ministerial portfolio, giving the key charge of Personnel and Administrative Reforms to Lalduhoma, relieving Sapdanga of the charge.

In March last year, Sapdanga, who now holds only Home, and Urban and Poverty Alleviation portfolios, had also been relieved of the Disaster Management and Rehabilitation charge.

Lalduhoma was sworn in as the chief minister of Mizoram on December 8, 2023. (PTI)

Coordination, monitoring committee reviews development works in Dirang

HT Correspondent

DIRANG, June 22: A Coordination-cum-Sub-Divisional Level Monitoring Committee meeting was held at Dirang on Monday under the chairmanship of Phurpa Tsering, Advisor to the Minister of PWD, Highways and Science & Technology, to review developmental activities and address issues affecting public service delivery in the subdivision.

The meeting was attended by Deputy Commissioner of West Kameng Dr Dilip Kumar, Superintendent of Police, Additional Deputy Commissioners, administrative officers, Heads of Departments (HoDs), Zilla Parishad Members, PRI representatives and other stakeholders.

Welcoming the participants, ADC Dirang highlighted the importance of the meeting in assessing the progress of ongoing developmental works and identifying challenges faced by various departments.

During the session, Heads of

Departments made detailed presentations outlining the status of projects, achievements, challenges and future plans of their respective departments.

Various issues concerning development works and service delivery were deliberated upon, including transportation difficulties faced by departmental staff, installation of smart meters, pipeline connectivity, manpower shortages and other infrastructure-related concerns.

Departments also sought necessary interventions to ensure the smooth implementation of government schemes and developmental programmes in the subdivision.

Addressing the gathering, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Dilip Kumar stressed the need for stronger inter-departmental coordination to ensure timely execution and quality implementation of projects.

He said effective collaboration among departments was essential for accelerating developmental activities and achieving overall

progress in the district.

He also directed departments to ensure that beneficiaries selected under various government schemes are genuine and deserving.

In his address, Phurpa Tsering called upon all departments to actively involve Panchayat leaders and PRI members in the planning and implementation of developmental programmes.

He emphasised that beneficiary selection should be carried out transparently and in consultation with elected local representatives to strengthen accountability and public confidence.

Taking note of transportation difficulties faced by administrative officers and contingency staff due to the distance between offices, the Advisor assured that efforts would be made to facilitate the provision of a bus for the convenience of government employees.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks proposed by the Assistant Commissioner, Dirang.

Nagaland Guv calls for future-ready education to achieve 'Viksit Bharat' 2047



DIMAPUR, June 22: Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav on Monday asserted that India's education system must prepare young people with knowledge, skills, values and creativity to meet future challenges, while asserting that education remains the most powerful instrument of transformation in the country's journey towards achieving the Viksit Bharat 2047.

Addressing the Byatikram Education Conclave 9.0 in Dimapur, attended by educationists, academicians, principals, teachers and students, the governor said the education sector must focus on producing lifelong learners, innovators and responsible citizens capable of adapting to rapid technological changes.

Highlighting the significance of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Yadav said the policy offers a comprehensive roadmap for educational advance-

ment through multidisciplinary learning, critical thinking, innovation and skill development.

He observed that with Artificial Intelligence and emerging technologies reshaping societies and economies, students must be equipped with the ability to continuously learn and innovate.

The governor stressed that education should go beyond preparing students for employment and instead empower them to become creators of opportunities, entrepreneurs and contributors to the nation's development.

He also highlighted the strategic importance of the Northeast, stating that the region's cultural diversity, rich heritage, indigenous knowledge systems and youthful talent provide a strong foundation for future growth.

By integrating these strengths with quality education, research and innovation, he said, the Northeast has the potential to emerge as a vibrant hub of knowledge, entrepreneurship and economic development.

Yadav urged educational institutions, teachers and students to embrace innovation while preserving the region's unique cultural identity, emphasising that a future-ready education system would be key to building an inclusive, progressive and self-reliant India. (PTI)

Sambit Patra exhorts Tripura BJP to hold key organisational meetings every month

AGARTALA, June 22: BJP's Northeast coordinator Sambit Patra has exhorted the party's state leadership to hold all key organisational meetings every month to further strengthen the organisation, a party leader said on Monday. The directive came during a core committee meeting held at the party headquarters here, which was attended by Patra, Chief Minister Manik Saha, state BJP president Abhishek Debroy and other senior leaders.

Talking to reporters, Debroy said the core committee emphasised the need to hold meetings of the core committee, district units and mandals every month.

"The core committee also decided to constitute the state and district-level party committees at the earliest," he said.

The state and district committees could not be reconstituted for over a year due to a stalemate over the election of the state BJP president. Debroy, an MLA from Matabari Assembly constituency, was appointed state BJP president on May 28. He said there was no discussion on the electoral understanding with Tripra Motha ahead of the village committee elections. Earlier in the day, Patra met the chief minister at his official residence and discussed organisational issues related to the state, which is set to go to polls for the village committees under the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) in September.

"BJP's Northeast Coordinator Sambit Patra, along with party state president Abhishek Debroy, had a fruitful discussion on organisational issues. We exchanged views on how to further enhance the organisational strength and make it more people-centric," Saha wrote in a Facebook post. (PTI)

Thunderstorms, heavy rain to lash several Arunachal districts from today

ITANAGAR, June 22: Thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and heavy rain are likely to affect several parts of Arunachal Pradesh on Tuesday, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its forecast of the state.

According to the district-wise weather warning issued by the Meteorological Centre here, thunderstorms with lightning and heavy rain are very likely at isolated places in West Kameng, East Kameng, Papum Pare, West Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit and Namsai districts on Tuesday.

Thunderstorms with lightning are also expected at isolated places in several other districts, including East Siang, Upper Siang, Lower Siang, Dibang Valley, Anjaw, Changlang, Tirap and Longding.

On Wednesday, the weather is expected to remain unsettled in many parts of the state.

Heavy rain accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning is likely at isolated places in West Kameng, Papum Pare, West Siang, Lower Dibang Valley and Upper Siang districts, while thunderstorm activity is expected in several other districts during the day.

The forecast for Thursday indicates thunderstorms with lightning at isolated places across much of Arunachal Pradesh, with heavy rain likely in parts of Tirap, Longding, Changlang, East Siang, West Kameng and Papum Pare districts.

However, no warning has been issued for districts such as Tawang, Shi-Yomi, Kamle, Lower Subansiri and Upper Subansiri.

On Friday, thunderstorms and lightning are expected to continue over many districts, with heavy rain likely at isolated places in West Kameng, Papum Pare, Lohit, Namsai, Changlang, Tirap and Longding districts.

A similar weather pattern is likely on Saturday, when thunderstorms accompanied by heavy rain may occur at isolated places in West Kameng, Papum Pare, Lower Siang, Lohit, Namsai, Changlang, Tirap and Longding districts, while thunderstorms with lightning are expected in several other districts.

For Monday (June 22), the IMD has issued an alert for thunderstorms with lightning and heavy rainfall at isolated places in Papum Pare, Lower Subansiri, West Siang, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley and Namsai districts.

Thunderstorms with lightning are also likely at isolated places in many other districts, while no warning has been issued for Tawang and Shi-Yomi. (PTI)

NO.MMDB-184(6th FC)/BTAD/2024-25/3724 Date 06/06/2026

TENDER EXTENSION NOTICE

In continuation of the Short Notice Inviting Tender vide No. MMDB-184/6th FC/BTAD/2024-25 dated 08/05/2026 for the work "Construction of Crematorium at Koraghat Samsan Ghat under Jalabila VCDC", it is hereby informed to all concerned tenderers/contractors present at the tender venue that, due to unavoidable circumstances, the scheduled receipt and opening of tender on 06/06/2026 could not be conducted.

Accordingly, the tender process has been rescheduled. The receipt and opening of tender shall now be held on 29/06/2026 in the Office of the Block Development Officer, Mahanaya Development Block.

All tenderers/contractors are requested to take note of the revised schedule and remain present accordingly.

No other terms and conditions of the NIT shall remain unchanged.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Mahanaya Dev. Block, Bagribari

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/618



Ananya Panday urges audiences to support all kinds of films in theatres

Talking about her last release, the actor said that every film charts its own course and destiny, irrespective of box office expectations.

"I feel every film has a journey and fate. We got a lot of love for our performances, and the music (in 'Chand Mera Dil'). The film was well-received. I think films are forever and people will keep watching films," Panday said.

Panday, 27, was speaking on the sidelines of Amazon India's Beautyverse, a flagship beauty discovery experience. Held last week here, it featured a host of celebrities including Panday, Shilpa Shetty, Sonakshi Sinha, Karisma Kapoor,

"I feel every film has a journey and fate. We got a lot of love for our performances, and the music (in 'Chand Mera Dil'). The film was well-received. I think films are forever and people will keep watching films," Panday said

Jacqueline Fernandez, Mira Kapoor, Urfi Javed, and Maheep Kapoor, among others.

On a query about the constant scrutiny women face, both on and off screen, the actor said it is an issue that cannot be changed overnight.

"It has been going on for years and years and it is not something that if I say something, things will make a difference and change. But I can do what is in my capacity, like when is the time and place to dress up, we are here (at Beautyverse) so I'm dressing up and being glamorous," Panday said.

"But if I'm off beauty or not shooting something or meant to dress up, I'll be most myself as possible. I'll post pictures about it and I'll show everyone that, I did not wake up like this. So, that the best I can do," the actor said. (PTI)

FTII PUNE STUDENTS, ALUMNI GET MIFF'S MOST COVETED HONOURS

The Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), Pune, registered a remarkable presence at the 19th Mumbai International Film Festival (MIFF) 2026, as its students and alumni secured several of the festival's most coveted honours. The awards were announced at the closing ceremony of MIFF 2026 held in Mumbai on Sunday in presence of Maharashtra Governor Jishnu Dev Varma, filmmakers, industry leaders and distinguished guests.

The FTII filmmakers secured four of the six honours presented under the national competition at MIFF 2026, a statement issued by the FTII said.

The FTII students and alumni were also recognised through the IDPA best student film award, the Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari award for best debut director, the best short film award on 'Viksit Bharat / 150 Years of Vande Mataram / Bharat@2047', and a project grant at the 2nd WAVES Doc Bazaar. The FTII-produced short fiction film "Small Clouds", directed by Shubham Sumit, won the Silver Conch for best Indian short fiction film along with a cash prize of Rs 3 lakh.

The award was received by FTII vice chancellor Dhiraj Singh and the filmmaker at the closing ceremony. The film further strengthened its winning run with student Ranadhir Biswas receiving the best cinematographer award under the national competition category for his work on "Small Clouds".

The IDPA award for best student film was conferred upon Milan Kumar for his film The Old Bull Knows, or Once Knew.

At the 2nd WAVES Doc Bazaar, held alongside MIFF 2026, FTII student filmmaker

Madhurima Maiti received a grant of Rs one lakh for her documentary project "The Girl Beneath".

"The Sun" was among three projects selected for grant support under the 'Recommends' section. Expressing happiness on the impressive haul at MIFF, Singh said, "MIFF is one of the most respected platform in the documentary and short film space and doing well in this space of authenticity is a matter of pride. It bears testimony to FTII's commitment to deep craft and art and openness to new avenues".

The Silver Conch for best Indian documentary film was awarded to "Waaai", directed by alumni Sainath S. Uskaikar. The Best Sound Design Award under the National Competition category went to Bigyna Dahal, alumna of FTII's Sound Recording and Sound Design Department, for the film "Kovarty". The Dadasaheb Phalke Chitranagari Award for best debut director was presented to

Pooja Tolani, alumna of FTII's Screenwriting course, for her film "Raaza". The Best Short Film Award on "Viksit Bharat / 150 Years of Vande Mataram / Bharat@2047" was awarded to "The Last Shelter". The award was received by Rajesh Bhatia, an FTII alumna, along with Bharat Arora. (PTI)



ANSHULA KAPOOR'S WEDDING FESTIVITIES KICK OFF WITH JANHVI, KHUSHI, ARJUN KAPOOR BY HER SIDE



On Sunday, the Kapoor family came together to celebrate the beginning of Anshula Kapoor's wedding festivities with fiancé Rohan Thakkar. Anshula and Rohan's wedding festivities commenced on a spiritual note with a traditional Mata Ki Chowki attended by close family and friends. The ceremony saw members of the Kapoor family, including Arjun Kapoor, Janhvi Kapoor, Khushi Kapoor, Shanaya Kapoor, Maheep Kapoor, Sanjay Kapoor, Sunita Kapoor, and more family members coming together to seek blessings ahead of Anshula's wedding to Rohan Thakkar. Dressed in festive ethnic attire, the

family participated in devotional prayers and bhajans, and were also seen dancing together.

The pictures were shared by Shanaya, featuring her father, actor Sanjay Kapoor, her mother Maheep, and her younger brother Jahaan. Anshula's siblings, Arjun Kapoor, Janhvi Kapoor and Khushi Kapoor were also seen all by her side at this pre-wedding celebration.

Inside Anshula Kapoor's pre-wedding event

For the pre-wedding celebrations, Anshula Kapoor looked radiant in a heavily embroidered beige-and-gold lehenga, which

she paired with a vibrant Phulkari dupatta that added a pop of colour to her festive ensemble.

Joining her at the ceremony were sisters Janhvi Kapoor and Khushi Kapoor, both dressed in elegant traditional outfits. Janhvi turned heads in a pink silk saree teamed with an intricately embroidered red blouse, accessorised with traditional gold jewellery and glamorous makeup. Khushi, meanwhile, opted for a blush-pink short kurti paired with a matching gharara set.

Who is Anshula Kapoor?

Anshula Kapoor is the daughter of film producer Boney Kapoor and his first wife,

Mona Shourie Kapoor. She is the younger sister of actor Arjun Kapoor.

She is also the half-sister of actors Janhvi Kapoor and Khushi Kapoor, who are Boney Kapoor's daughters with his late wife, Sridevi. Over the years, the Kapoor siblings have developed a close bond and are often seen supporting each other during family celebrations and special occasions. Known for her candid social media presence and advocacy for body positivity and mental well-being, Anshula has earned admiration for carving out her own path despite being part of Boney and Anil Kapoor's Khandaan. (Agencies)

Netflix announces 'India's Got Latent' season two, new Samay Raina comedy special

Streaming platform Netflix on Friday announced a new creative collaboration with comedian and content creator Samay Raina that includes the second season of his popular talent show "India's Got Latent" and an all-new stand-up comedy special.

"India's Got Latent" season two will premiere on Saturday and will be simulcast on Netflix and YouTube in a first-of-its-kind release strategy. New episodes will be released every two weeks, Netflix said in a statement.

The announcement comes after days of speculation online following cryptic social media posts by Netflix and Raina.

In a promo for season two, Raina said everything would remain "same to same", with the only difference being that Netflix viewers would not see advertisements or a comment section.

The latest season arrives over a year after the show was embroiled in controversy following comments made during one of its episodes.

A remark by YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia in February 2025 sparked widespread backlash and resulted in multiple FIRs against the comedians and participants featured in that episode of "India's Got Latent".

According to the streamer, Raina's upcoming comedy special, currently in development, will be exclusive to Netflix and feature his trademark observational humour, storytelling and candid take on everyday life.

Further details about the special are expected to be announced later.

Raina has emerged as one of India's most popular comedy voices in recent years, building a large fan base through stand-up performances, digital content and live shows.

The comedian first gained prominence after winning the second season of the stand-up competition show "Comicstaan" in 2019 and he has since expanded his presence across digital entertainment through comedy specials, podcasts, gaming streams and reality-format content. (PTI)



Emma D'Arcy says Rhaenyra is more confident in 'House of the Dragon' season three

Emma D'Arcy, the lead star of HBO's fantasy series "House of the Dragon", says the character of Rhaenyra Targaryen undergoes a journey of evolution in the upcoming third season, where she has a newfound conviction to rule the Westeros but there are also dangerous consequences in store for her.

D'Arcy, who plays the claimant to the Iron Throne in the "Game of Thrones" prequel, said Rhaenyra has spent much of the first two seasons grappling with doubts about her legitimacy and her late father King Viserys' intentions for her.

"My learning has that one has to be very strong in one's conviction. There's a nice journey that we see Rhaenyra go on over the course of the three seasons, where in the sort of first two, she is kind of wrapped by doubt.

"She has a lot of self-doubt about her inheritance, about her claim, about her father's intentions for her. And I think some of that has dropped away, for better or for worse, by season three. But, and I suppose there is a sort of self-actualisation part to that as well as something a little more sinister," D'Arcy told PTI in a virtual group interview.

"House of the Dragon", based on parts of "Fire & Blood" novel by celebrated author George R R Martin, is set nearly 200 years before the events of "Game of Thrones", the blockbuster series which ran for eight seasons on HBO from 2011 to 2019. The prequel show chronicles the rise and fall of House Targaryen and centres on a bitter succession struggle known as the Dance of the Dragons, a devastating civil war that pits rival factions of the ruling family against each other in a battle for the Iron Throne.

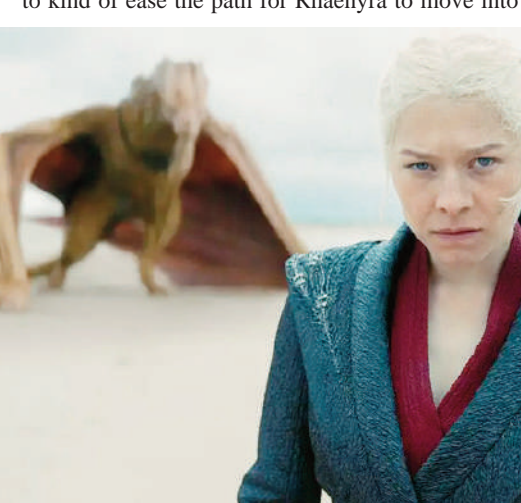
D'Arcy, who identifies as non-binary and uses the pronouns they/them, plays Rhaenyra, who was anointed heir to the Iron Throne by her father, King Viserys I Targaryen, only to find her succession contested following his death, setting off the bloody Tar-

garyen civil war.

It also stars Matt Smith as Rhaenyra's husband Prince Daemon and Olivia Cooke as her friend-turned-foe Alicent Hightower.

The eight-episode-long season three, which will premiere in India on JioHotstar on June 22, will see Rhaenyra in a position of real political and personal confidence for the first time, D'Arcy said.

"She commands a load of dragons. She's got a strong naval presence. She has a powerful land army, thanks to Daemon. And she has just received this kind of crazy, quite extraordinary offer from Alicent to kind of ease the path for Rhaenyra to move into



King's Landing without further bloodshed.

"So for the first time, there is a real momentum in her campaign. And that's sort of paired with a kind of growing religiosity that for the first time, her success feels fated," the British actor said.

D'Arcy said Rhaenyra's increasing ambition in the third season stems from the grief and trauma she has endured over the course of the story.

"Based on everything that we've built over two seasons, grief is a sort of mechanism that becomes

of mechanism behind ambition. It feels very honest to me.

"The conversations that Ryan (Condal, show creator) and I had early were about sort of seeing what happens when this relatively sympathetic character kind of steps into the arena of ambition and sort of really starts to play the game," they said.

Despite the show's elaborate battles, fire-breathing dragons and political intrigue, D'Arcy said they view "House of the Dragon" primarily as a family drama, with the adaptation focusing on the emotional lives and relationships of its characters rather than simply recreating historical events from Martin's source material.

"There's lots of things at play here. One is the lovely tension about creating an adaptation like this is that the source material is a perfect history. And here we're telling a story kind of through a family drama. I consider my job to be head of department for Rhaenyra," they added.

Asked about their working relationship with Smith, the star of popular shows such as "Doctor Who" and "The Crown" as well as films such as "Terminator Genisys", "Last Night in Soho" and "Morbidity", D'Arcy said it has only gotten better.

"I just love working with him so much. And there isn't like a day where I'm going into work, where I'm going to shoot a scene with Matt that I don't feel excited about. And that's his great gift... I feel delighted because I suffered a bit of a drought in season two. And so I had my thirst quenched in season three," they added.

Season three of "House of the Dragon" also stars Steve Toussaint, Rhys Ifans, Fabien Frankel, Ewan Mitchell, Tom Glynn-Carney, Harry Collett, Bethany Antonia, Phoebe Campbell, James Norton, Tom Bennett, Freddie Fox, Clinton Liberty, Gayle Rankin, Abubakar Salim and Tom Cullen. (PTI)

India look to carry momentum forward against arch-foes Pakistan in London leg of Pro League

LONDON, June 22: A thrilling win against Olympic champions Netherlands boosting its confidence, the Indian men's hockey team would look to carry forward the momentum when it takes on arch-rivals Pakistan in the opening match of the London leg of the FIH Pro League here on Tuesday.

It will also be the first time that India and Pakistan will lock horns against each other since the Asian Champions Trophy clash in Hulubair, China, in 2024 which India won 2-1, thanks to captain Harmanpreet Singh's brace.

The head-to-head record between the two sides over the last 10 years is hugely in favour of India, who remain undefeated across 17 matches, with 15 wins and two draws.

The Indians won two matches out of four in Rotterdam. They beat hosts and world no.2 the Netherlands 3-2 on Sunday in the concluding match of the Rotterdam leg. India's other victory (3-1) came against reigning world champions and world no.5 Germany.

In the other two matches, India lost 2-3 against the Netherlands and 1-2 against Germany, all close results.

The Dutch leg turned out to be a valuable experience for the Indians, who are using this tournament to fine tune their grey areas ahead of this year's two big ticket events -- the FIH World Cup and the Asian Games, which is also an Olympic qualifier.



India are currently placed eighth in the nine-team Pro League standings, ahead of their next rival Pakistan, who are yet to log a point in the tournament. India will next take England on Thursday and then face Pakistan again on Friday in their second leg match.

With two wins and as many losses, the Indians have produced a much-improved show in the European leg so far as against the home leg of the tournament where they failed to secure a single win across four matches.

During the home leg, India conceded a massive 19 goals while scoring only five from four

matches. Considering that, India's chief coach Craig Fulton would be a lot more satisfied with the performances of his wards in the European leg, where they gave higher-ranked opponents a tough contest.

But going into Tuesday's match, the Indians will have to control their emotions as any Indo-Pak contest is a high-voltage one with plenty of pride at stake, considering the ongoing political tensions between the two nations.

For coach Fulton, all these outings are a platform to test his resources and bench strength to build a well-oiled squad for the World

Cup and the Asian Games. Fulton is visibly satisfied with India's performance in the Rotterdam leg of the Pro League.

"We had some very promising performances in the Netherlands leg. We worked very hard in the build-up and so it's good to see the consistency coming through," he said.

But he warned his players to remain vigilant and disciplined against Pakistan.

"For us, it's important that we treat the fixture against Pakistan like any other game and focus on our processes. If we really do that well, then the result takes care of

itself."

But conceding late goals continue to be a problem area for India as, despite leading 3-1 against the Netherlands, they conceded a 59th minute goal to take the match closer.

India's strength has been penalty corner conversions with the likes of Harmanpreet, Jugraj Singh and Rajinder Singh at their disposal, but Fulton would be expecting more field strikes from his forwardline, consisting of senior players like Mandeep Singh and Dilpreet Singh, among others.

The midfield has been well marshalled by India's most-capped player Manpreet Singh, vice-captain Hardik Singh and Vivek Sagar Prasad but it is the backline which needs to pull up its socks.

Pakistan, on the other hand, have endured a miserable Pro League season, losing all their 11 matches against Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain, and is now staring at the prospect of relegation from the competition's top tier.

Already reeling from a dismal campaign, uncertainty looms large over the availability of Pakistan regular captain Ahammad Shakeel Butt and possibly head coach Manzoor-ul-Hasan for the final leg of the tournament in England due to visa issues.

According to reports, Shakeel, a key figure in Pakistan's defence, was denied a visa because he had previously overstayed in England while playing club hockey. (PTI)

Uruguay struggles in first 2 matches as Suarez watches from the stands



MIAMI GARDENS (USA), June 22: Uruguay is off to a start many did not expect. After draws against Saudi Arabia and Cape Verde, and with a match against Spain still to come, the two-time World Cup winner is at risk of missing the knockout stage.

Among the many fans watching was someone the team looked to for goals for more than 15 years: Luis Suárez.

The matches were played in Miami Stadium, near where Suárez serves as striker for Inter Miami. The 39-year-old watched from above as Uruguay struggled despite being heavily favored.

Suárez ended his international career in 2024 as the all-time leading scorer for the national team with 69 goals in 143 appearances. He was ultimately left off coach Marcelo Bielsa's squad after months of speculation.

After the match, Bielsa spoke about the team's inability to capitalize on some of its advantages.

"I think that the problem or greatest issue is that we started the second half with the ball and with the victory," Bielsa said through a translator after Sunday's game. "And it was at that moment that we didn't close it. We didn't make any danger."

Bielsa claimed his team "lacked a finishing touch" in Sunday night's draw. Something that could have given Uruguay a much-needed victory.

Suárez and Bielsa clashed after the 2024 Copa América when Suárez criticized Bielsa for the negative environment he had created under his leadership. Now, Bielsa and the Uruguay team will face further pressure to secure a win with an attack that has yet to dispel concerns.

All eyes will be on Uruguay on Friday as they travel to Guadalajara Stadium for a match against Spain.

"Our expectations with Uruguay now is that we never know," Uruguay fan Alfonso Aguel said. "We need to play every match, go match by match, and see what actually happens." (AP)

In April, Luis Suárez announced he was willing to come out of re-

tirement to play for Uruguay in the World Cup. The announcement fueled speculation that Uruguay's star could make one final appearance on soccer's biggest stage. Bielsa instead placed his faith in Uruguay's next attacking generation, also excluding veteran striker Edinson Cavani from his roster.

"I feel like he's a little older, so for players like Darwin (Núñez), I think it just gives him a little bit more of a chance to shine," Uruguay fan Ian Lancaster said.

In its first World Cup match without Suárez since 2010, Uruguay narrowly avoided an upset against Saudi Arabia with the team's only goal coming late from midfielder Maxi Araújo. Núñez and Federico Viñas led the front line but were largely ineffective.

Bielsa chose a different lineup Sunday night, starting only Viñas to lead the attack. Midfielder Agustín Canobbio was added to the starting lineup against Cape Verde and made a difference, scoring Uruguay's second goal.

It was Canobbio's narrow miss in the second half, however, that could have given Uruguay a much-needed victory.

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"Our expectations with Uruguay now is that we never know," Uruguay fan Alfonso Aguel said. "We need to play every match, go match by match, and see what actually happens." (AP)

Three Indians finish in Top-5 of Dutch Ladies Open



EEMNES (THE NETHERLANDS), June 22: Indian women golfers enjoyed one of their strongest weeks on the Ladies European Tour as Diksha Dagar, Avani Prashanth and Pranavi Urs finished inside the top-five at the Dutch Ladies Open here.

Diksha and Avani shared the third place at eight-under 208 at the par 72 course, while Pranavi finished tied fifth at seven-under. It marked Diksha's fourth top-10 finish of the season, Avani's second consecutive top-five result and Pranavi's first top-five finish of the year. Avani came agonisingly close to forcing her way into the playoff.

She stood at nine-under through 17 holes after Aunchisa Utama had set the clubhouse target.

However, a bogey on the closing hole dropped her back to eight-under, leaving her just one stroke short of the winning total. Aunchisa Utama was joined by Norway's Dortehe Forbrigg at nine-under.

Diksha, after a birdie on the 17th, reached eight-under and could have joined the play-off with a birdie but managed only a par and tied for third with Avani. Despite the disappointment, the 19-year-old Avani produced one of the best rounds of the day with a five-under 67 featuring six birdies. (PTI)

Pritam bags junior world title in 10m air rifle

India add women's pistol team bronze

SUHL (GERMANY), June 22: Teenager Pritam Kendre struck gold in the men's 10m air rifle competition as India's impressive run at the ISSF Junior World Championship showed no signs of slowing down here.

India also bagged a bronze in the women's 25m pistol team event, taking their medal tally to 11, including five gold.

Competing in only his second international tournament, the 16-year-old shot 251.3 in the eight-man final to finish ahead of Neutral athlete Timofei Aleinikov and Norway's Jens Oestli, giving India another gold at the prestigious junior event, here on Sunday. The Pune-based shooter had recently completed his Class 10 Board exams.

"I am extremely happy with this victory. My only focus throughout the competition was on my technique and giving my best in every shot," said Pritam.

"Winning a world championship gold has given me immense confidence. I want to continue improving in the 10m air rifle event and win many more medals for India in the years ahead."

He also credited Gagan Narang's Gun For Glory Shooting Academy for his rapid rise.

Pritam and compatriot Piyush Sharma were the only two Indians to make the final after shooting 628.2 and 629.0 respectively in qualification, where they finished third and fifth respectively.

Pritam was lying sixth after the second series, while Piyush had



surged into the lead, but the former steadily worked his way up as the eliminations progressed.

Piyush stayed in medal contention for a long time but fell short by the narrowest of margins, missing the top-three by just 0.1 point after the fourth elimination round and finishing fourth.

Pritam then held firm in the closing stages to seal the title ahead of Aleinikov.

His winning effort included 15 shots of 10.5 or above, with two 10.9s and two 10.8s under pressure.

However, India failed to figure in the men's team standings as third member Abhinav Shaw was disqualified after his equipment failed the ISSF compliance.

Later in the day, India picked up a bronze in the women's 25m pis-

tol team event through Anjali Bhagwat, Parisha Gupta and Nithila Christopher, who combined for 1713 (43x). Teams of Neutral athletes claimed the gold and silver medals.

Anjali was also the only Indian to reach the women's 25m pistol individual final, qualifying seventh with 577-11x. Manvi Jain narrowly missed out after ending ninth in qualification.

In the final, Anjali exited in sixth place after losing a shoot-off to Ukraine's Karina Zaichenko in the second round of eliminations.

More than 800 shooters from 70 federations are competing in the fifth edition of the Junior World Championships, with India fielding an 84-member contingent.

The tournament runs until June 26. (PTI)

Wyndham Clark avoids record collapse

SOUTHAMPTON, June 22: Wyndham Clark couldn't remember being in a darker place. He was publicly reviled for a moment of petulance when he smashed a locker at Oakmont after missing the cut in the U.S. Open last year. His game, his reputation, he felt it all was slipping away. Sunday at Shinnecock Hills wasn't much better. The New York crowd behind Scottie Scheffler in his bid for a career Grand Slam turned on Clark, cheering his misses and wishing for the worst.

That's what made this U.S. Open title so much sweeter. On the edge of the greatest collapse in U.S. Open history, Clark held his nerve against a charge by Sam Burns and a Shinnecock Hills crowd that never gave him much love until he showed his mettle with his second U.S. Open title in four years. (AP)

ICC's 'Return to Play Post-Pregnancy' guidelines: Care Managers to oversee 16-week plan

DUBAI, June 22: To ensure a safe and sustainable return to cricket for women players post-pregnancy, the ICC on Monday announced guidelines to cover their early recovery after birth, structured training, and conditioning during a 16-week window before the comeback. The "Return to Play Post-Pregnancy Guidelines" for female cricketers, outline a six 'R's' framework: Ready, Review, Restore, Recondition, Return and Refine.

"The approach covers early recovery after birth, medical and wellbeing reviews, gradual return to structured training, cricket-specific conditioning, return to play and ongoing monitoring once a player is back in the cricket environment," the ICC stated in a press release.

The document speaks about having a dedicated 'Case Manager' for the players returning to competi-

tion. The Case Officer should be either a doctor or a physiotherapist.

The early review would include focus on psychological support in the players' adjustment to life as a mother, followed by graded reintroduction of strength-based training. After eight weeks of these assessments, the player will return to training in collaboration with a doctor and physio.

A thorough monitoring of any symptoms including musculoskeletal and pelvic floor issues is done before the player is given the go ahead to return to action.

"No player should have to choose between motherhood and representing her country at the highest level. The ICC's Return to Play Post-Pregnancy Guidelines are an important step in creating a more supportive and informed environment across the game," ICC Chairman Jay Shah said. (PTI)

Iran's challenges at World Cup swirl outside draw with Belgium

INGLEWOOD (CALIFORNIA), June 22: Iran took another step toward advancing in the World Cup on Sunday, but once again the off-the-field play dominated the conversation.

At the match's conclusion, at least one attendee wearing a pre-revolutionary flag shirt was detained for trying to run onto the pitch. And afterward, though demonstrations were quieter than Monday's, an Associated Press reporter observed a fan who got into a scuffle with protesters being loaded into an ambulance.

But before the match had even kicked off, US Homeland Security Markwayne Mullin said Sunday that the Iranians had "tried to get somebody in yesterday" who had direct ties to Iran's Revolutionary Guard. In a statement, the soccer federation vociferously pushed back.

"The claim that an official representative of the Iranian Football Federation attempted to board a flight to enter the United States yesterday and was prevented from doing so is an outright and undeniable lie," the statement said.

Mullin told Fox News that most teams travel with around 120 people, but the US had accepted 53 in Iran's case. He said the rest of the people Iran had tried to secure visas for had "direct ties to the IRGC and aren't their normal travelling group".

The federation called Mullin's claims "completely unsupported by any evidence or documentation, but also represent a clear attempt to cover up discriminatory behaviour and unreasonable restrictions".

That statement echoed Iran's complaints throughout the tournament that politics have infringed on soccer, even as US Vice President JD Vance said there was an opportunity to "turn over a new leaf" with talks beginning in Switzerland on the interim deal to end the war.

Iran's players and coach have complained about shuttling to and from Mexico instead of Tucson, Arizona, and the barring of some officials and staff, and the federation has said it would pursue a complaint against FIFA.

Iranian national team player Alireza Jahanbakhsh said after the match that he doesn't want to keep focusing on the challenging situation, and that players are now focused on recovery and preparing to travel to Seattle for the next game, against Egypt. (AP)

Focus on singles and competing regularly in Grand Slams: Amritraj advises Indian tennis players

CHENNAI, June 22: Tennis legend Vijay Amritraj has urged India's aspiring players to prioritise singles over doubles, saying the ultimate goal should be to break into the world's top 50, compete regularly in Grand Slams and win ATP titles rather than merely participate on the tour.

The former world No. 16 said young players must aspire to emulate the achievements of great singles champions such as Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Serena Williams, stressing that success in tennis is ultimately measured by rankings, titles and performances at the sport's biggest events.

"You're not starting the game of tennis to be the greatest doubles player or the greatest mixed doubles player. You're starting the game of tennis to be the next Federer or the next Nadal or the next Serena Williams."

"That's why you start the game of tennis if you want to be at that level, to be competitive at the world-class level. So, I think that itself should be the focus regarding where you want to get to in your sport," Amritraj told PTI on Mon-



day. Amritraj, who reached the Wimbledon quarter-finals and US Open semi-finals, said Indian tennis needs players consistently featuring in all four Grand Slams, adding that breaking into the top 100 and then progressing towards the top 50 should be the benchmark for evaluating a player's career.

When asked why the likes of Leander Paes and Sania Mirza opted to switch from singles to doubles at the peak of their careers, the

pointed out that it was necessary for any tennis player to get into the top 100 in ATP rankings and do well in Grand Slams.

"When your career is looked at over the years, you look at the number of titles you won, the number of times you played the Grand Slams, how far you've gotten in the Grand Slams, and if you were fortunate enough to win one. That's what made Djokovic, Nadal, and Federer so great. Sixty-six majors between the three of them," Amritraj observed.

"We have to get into the Grand Slams first. Absolutely. I go to Wimbledon every year and we need to have someone consistently playing in all the four Grand Slams. And that would be the yardstick. No question."

Djokovic can win his record extending 25th Grand Slam

Talking about the legendary Novak Djokovic, Amritraj said the 39-year-old Serb can win a record extending 25th major at the Wimbledon beginning later this month.

"It's incredible that he still has that desire to win that extra Grand Slam. So I think on grass, he has a

chance. No question about it. Alcaraz is missing. But you really have to watch the other guys. Lots of other guys are coming along very quickly."

"So I think, yes, Sinner is a frontrunner. No question. But Djokovic is right behind. His passion is there. His desire is there. His work ethic is incredible."

Comparing the three greats of the modern era, Amritraj added: "Federer plays tennis like it's ballet. He's so graceful on a court. So we all enjoy watching Federer play."

"Nadal, on the other hand, plays well behind the baseline. He chases down everything. There is no give up on any point. He has a never-say-die spirit. And Djokovic, on the other hand, we call him Spider-Man for a reason, because he stretches into the corner."

"And I've never seen anyone hit an offensive shot so well from a defensive position. So each of them bring some incredible talent and shots to the game," said Amritraj, who was recently conferred with the Padma Bhushan, India's third highest civilian honour. (PTI)

World Cup stunner: Cape Verde gets 1st goal of tourney, holds Uruguay to 2-2 draw

MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA), June 22: Cape Verde's magical start to its first World Cup isn't over. It might just be getting started.

The tiny island nation that stunned tournament favourite Spain last week did it again against Uruguay – a two-time World Cup champion – on Sunday, coming from behind for a 2-2 draw.

Kevin Pina scored on a free kick for Cape Verde's first-ever goal in the World Cup, and Helio Varela scored the equaliser for what has become one of the most surprising teams of the expanded 48-team tournament – a club now with a legitimate chance of getting into the knockout stage.

"This is something we owe to other smaller national teams – teams that struggled to qualify for a world tournament," Cape Verde coach Pedro Leitao Brito said through an interpreter, adding that his entire squad believes it can continue its historic play and reach the knockout stage.

Cape Verde, which has two points in Group H along with Uruguay, face Saudi Arabia in its final group match.

"We're also here to show that a country may be small, may struggle financially," he added, "But if they are resilient, if they can endure struggle, they can also stand shoulder to shoulder with other major teams and with players who are on another level."



The group of islands off Africa's West coast have about 4,000 square metres of landmass and approximately a half million inhabitants, making Cape Verde the third-smallest nation by population to qualify for the World Cup.

Even as a large number of fans at Miami Stadium chanted for Uruguay throughout Sunday's match, Cape Verdean players seemed undaunted.

"Once you're on the pitch, a lot of things become equal," Leitao Brito said.

Cape Verdean fans who watched their squad pull off one of the stunners of the tournament last week by holding Spain to a

scoreless draw continued their celebrations when Pina split Uruguay's wall and blasted a strike past diving goalie Fernando Muslera for a 1-0 lead in the 21st.

Maxi Araujo and Agustin Canobbio scored late first-half goals to put Uruguay ahead. But Varela, minutes after coming into the game in the second half, took advantage of a bad pass by Mathias Olivera and caught Muslera way off his line for a tying empty-net goal and his first international score.

"I had dreamed of this," Varela said in a quote distributed by FIFA.

"But I never imagined it would

happen this way. Scoring my first goal for the national team on my World Cup debut is incredible. I have no words."

Varela celebrated by hopping into his teammates' arms and flexing atop their shoulders as Muslera and other Uruguay players dropped their heads in disappointment.

"The result, I think, was quite deserved," Uruguay coach Marcelo Bielsa said afterward through an interpreter.

Uruguay failed to capitalise on numerous late chances to take the lead and settled for its second draw after a 1-1 finish against Saudi Arabia in its opener.

La Celeste face Spain in their

group stage finale, needing a positive result to have a chance at advancing.

"The organisational mistakes that were made – that a squad makes – always fall upon the driver," Bielsa added.

"What I mean by that is the head coach. ... There is no magical recipe whatsoever to fix them. It goes without saying we paid a very high cost for those mistakes."

It was another special moment for Cape Verde's Vozinha, who became one of the tournament's breakout stars after shutting down Spain. The 40-year-old goalie had his mother in the stands for Sunday's match; she was unable to attend Cape Verde's opening draw against Spain because she couldn't obtain a visa.

It was also the first World Cup match with two starting goalies aged 40-plus. Muslera, who made his 18th World Cup appearance, turned 40 on June 16.

Vozinha waved at the crowd after the final whistle as his teammates ran to a section of Cape Verdean fans, who cheered and danced on their way out of the stadium as if they were celebrating a victory.

"You show up, you believe, and we work very hard as a team," said Cape Verde defender Stipira.

"I think all the world can see us play, we play very good, and we also have quality in the team. So now it's on to the next game, and to try to reach the next one." (AP)

Salah scores and Egypt downs New Zealand 3-1 for a first World Cup victory



VANCOUVER, June 22: Egypt's players danced on the field while their red-clad fans celebrated in the stands. The Pharaohs finally got their first World Cup win.

Mohamed Salah scored the go-ahead goal and Egypt went on to defeat New Zealand 3-1 on Sunday night.

He celebrated his 68th international goal by pumping his fist before he was mobbed by his teammates in the 67th minute. When he was subbed off in the 85th he was treated to a standing ovation by the sellout crowd at BC Place Vancouver.

When it was over, coach Hosam Hassan and an assistant grabbed an Egyptian flag and ran around the field waving it aloft. The fans cheered and sang long after the final whistle.

"I always give my best to the national team," Salah said. "Today I think is a very special day, with our first win in the World Cup."

Egypt moved to the top of the standings in Group G with the win, but was not yet assured of a spot in the knockout round. The Pharaohs will play a deciding game against Iran on Friday in Seattle, needing at least a draw to advance.

Egypt is making its fourth World Cup appearance after missing the field in Qatar four years ago. Salah scored a pair of goals in the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Finn Surman put New Zealand in front in the 15th minute with a flying header off a corner kick delivered by Instagram sensation Tim Payne. It was the third international goal for the 6-foot-3 defender who plays for the Portland Timbers in MLS.

Omar Marmoush dropped a free kick off to Salah in the 35th minute but it went just wide and bent into the side netting and Egypt went into the half down 1-0.

"In between the first and the second half, we said it's a no-go, we are not going to leave this pitch un-

less we claim the victory for ourselves, unless we make everyone proud and happy," Hassan said. "I told them, I told the players, I am not willing to withdraw, I am not willing to go two steps back."

Egypt turned up the pressure coming out of the half and Mostafa Zico broke through with the equalizer, finding space between Surman and Payne for a header that goalkeeper Max Crocombe got a hand on but couldn't stop in the 58th minute. Zico celebrated by gesturing for the fans in the crowd to cheer.

Salah took a back-heel pass from Zico for his goal, which puts him just one away from tying his coach for the national team's all-time scoring lead. Trezeguet's diving header wrapped up scoring for Egypt in the 82nd.

Egypt's Hamdy Fathy was subbed off late in the first half after an apparent injury away from the ball. He was replaced by Ramy Rabia.

In the opener against Belgium, Emam Ashour scored the early goal for Egypt but then Romelu Lukaku subbed into the match and caused chaos in the box, resulting in an own goal for a 1-1 draw.

New Zealand twice took the lead against Iran in their group opener, only to cede it for a 2-2 draw in the end. Elijah Just scored both goals for the All Whites.

New Zealand returns to Vancouver on Friday to face Belgium. The All Whites are still looking for their first World Cup win. But they have not been eliminated yet.

"You just have to believe and be positive," said veteran Chris Wood. "We're still one win away. We can still go in, beat Belgium and go through. I'm not going to lie, it's going to be very tough."

Iran and Belgium played to a scoreless draw earlier in the day in Inglewood, California, giving both teams two straight draws at the tournament. (AP)

Shahbaz steers Rarh Tigers to maiden Bengal T20 League title

KOLKATA, June 22: Shrachhi Rarh Tigers outclassed Sobisco Smashers Malda by nine runs via DLS Method to clinch their maiden Bengal T20 League title.

Skipper Shahbaz Ahmed led from the front with a brilliant unbeaten 88 off 46 balls, an innings studded with seven fours and six sixes, to guide his side to a memorable victory in a rain-interrupted match here on Sunday.

Put into bat after the match was reduced to 15 overs per side, Rarh Tigers recovered brilliantly from 10/3 to post a challenging 165/4.

Shahbaz anchored the innings with a captain's knock and was ably supported by Gaurav Singh Chauhan, who smashed 55 off 30 balls.

Chasing a revised target of 107 in 9 overs, Malda fought hard but fell short, scoring 97/5 in the allotted overs.

Abhimanyu Easwaran top-scored with a fine 38 off 22 balls.

For Rarh Tigers, Sukhmeet Singh bagged two wickets, while Raju Halder and Rohit Kumar claimed one wicket each. (PTI)

Iran plays 10-man Belgium to 0-0 draw at World Cup

INGLEWOOD (CALIFORNIA), June 22: Alireza Beiranvand made seven saves while Iran and Belgium played to a 0-0 draw at the World Cup on Sunday, with Team Melli unable to break through after the Red Devils went down to 10 men in the second half.

Belgium defender Nathan Ngoy received a straight red card in the 66th minute when he miskicked a ball backward and then fouled Mehdi Taremi to prevent the Iran star from getting a clean break-away scoring chance.

Iran couldn't capitalise, and Belgium actually generated better scoring chances down the stretch – but both teams left with their second straight draw in group play.

Neither team will feel good about the result at SoFi Stadium.

During a tumultuous World Cup trip affected by travel restrictions and visa denials from the US, Iran will regret missing a golden opportunity to beat a European powerhouse sitting 10th in FIFA's world rankings while playing before a loud, supportive crowd.

Iran returned to the Los Angeles area for its second straight match in front of a crowd packed with fans from the diaspora both supporting Team Melli and decrying



the Iranian government with boos of the anthem and hundreds of Lion and Sun flags displayed.

Iran's World Cup cycle has been chaotic ever since the US began a war on February 28. The Iranians moved their training base from Arizona to Mexico, and the team is operating under travel restrictions requiring them to leave Los Angeles only hours after both matches,

infuriating coach Amir Ghalenoei.

Meanwhile, star-studded Belgium has yet to score in two matches at the World Cup, getting on the scoreboard only through an own goal in its opening draw with Egypt.

Belgium is unbeaten in its last 15 competitive matches, but it has not scored on 53 consecutive shots at the World Cup dating back to its

Serena Williams to play singles at Wimbledon in stunning comeback at 44

LONDON, June 22: It's been talked about ever since Serena Williams announced nearly three weeks ago that she was returning to professional tennis after almost four years away from the sport.

Still, seeing the single-sentence announcement from The All England Club that the 23-time Grand Slam champion will play singles at Wimbledon was stunning nonetheless.

"Serena Williams (USA) receives the final ladies' singles wild card," read the key line in Sunday's announcement, which was issued eight days before the grass-court Grand Slam begins.

At 44, Williams will actually play both singles and doubles at Wimbledon after already accepting a wild card for the doubles competition with older sister Venus.

"This is not a drill," Wimbledon said on its social media accounts Sunday.

Commented the WTA Tour, "Name a more iconic return... we'll wait."

Wimbledon held open the eighth and final women's singles wild card spot until Williams made up her mind. As recently as earlier this week after losing a doubles match in Berlin, she appeared to be waffling over the decision.

"Oh my gosh, there are some left?" she replied when she was told there was still a wild card spot open.

Wild cards are special invita-



tions handed out by tournament organisers, which allow former champions and others access to the main draw without the necessary entry qualifications. But then she mused about her readiness for it.

"Do you think I'm ready for singles?" she asked a reporter and then turned to doubles partner Karolina Muchova to ask what she thought.

"I think I would be interested in it," the Czech player responded.

"That's the question of the hour, right?" Williams said. "I don't know, I don't know. I wonder why there's – I don't know."

Well, now that Williams has made up her mind, the big remaining question is how she can physically handle singles play after so long.

Serena's most-recent singles match was a loss to Ajla Tomljanovic in the third round of the 2022 US Open. At the time, she said she didn't want to use the word "retiring" and instead declared that she was "evolving" away from tennis.

Her second daughter was born in 2023.

"Just finished a mean game of duck duck goose," Williams said on X after the wild card announcement.

Of Williams' 23 Grand Slam titles in singles, seven have come at Wimbledon: in 2002, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2016. She's also won 14 Grand Slams in doubles, all with Venus, and six of them at Wimbledon.

Serena also swept the singles and doubles (with Venus) titles at

the 2012 London Olympics, when the tennis competition was held on the hallowed grass of the All England Club.

At her last Wimbledon appearance in 2022, Serena was beaten in the opening round by 115th-ranked Harmony Tan in her first match since having to stop less than a set into her opening contest at the All England Club because of an injury the year before.

Serena won a doubles match with partner Victoria Mboko at Queen's Club last week but the pair had to withdraw after Mboko injured her knee in a singles match.

In another doubles match at the Berlin Open on Tuesday, Serena and Muchova were beaten by Giuliana Olmos and Erin Routliffe.

As of Sunday, Serena had not entered the singles draws of any grass-court tournament before Wimbledon.

She will learn who her first-round opponent is on Friday when the singles draws for Wimbledon are held.

While she's No. 593 in the doubles rankings courtesy of her victory last week, Serena has no singles ranking after being away for so long.

Iga Swiatek is the defending Wimbledon champion, while Aryna Sabalenka is ranked No. 1.

Because Serena has no ranking, she could potentially face Swiatek, Sabalenka or any other top-ranked player in the opening rounds. (AP)

Gukesh vulnerable to time trouble, must improve speed, technique ahead of title defence: Sasikiran



CHENNAI, June 22: World champion D Gukesh's penchant for creating complex positions often leaves him vulnerable to time trouble, according to Grandmaster Krishnan Sasikiran, who believes the Indian must improve his technique, speed and defensive accuracy ahead of his title defence against Uzbekistan's Javokhir Sindarov.

Gukesh is set to put his crown on the line against Sindarov, the winner of the 2026 Candidates Tournament, in the World Championship match provisionally scheduled from November 23 to December 17.

"Sometimes Gukesh takes too much risk by his unconventional play creating chaos and imbalance ... in a sense, he wants to let things go out of control, it does not matter if the position is completely in chaos," Sasikiran told PTI.

"He is a champion of that kind of a game but he often gets into time trou-

ble. So, one thing I'd advise him to concentrate on is speeding up his calculation, he definitely needs to speed up, because you don't want to consistently find yourself in a scenario where your opponent is driving you into time trouble.

"To avoid time trouble, you have to get your house in order. Preparation will continue right up until you enter the match. There will be a lot to memorize, that's undeniable, because some things simply cannot be played at that level without memory; memorizing things is necessary."

Gukesh has experienced a mixed run of form following his historic world title. He has struggled in classical events like the Grand Swiss, World Cup last year and the recently-concluded Norway Chess.

Sasikiran, who served as a second to five-time winner Viswanathan Anand during his World Championship matches

against Magnus Carlsen in 2013 and 2014, believes Gukesh must identify and exploit the pressure points in his opponent's game.

"My advice to him will be: the World Championship requires proper preparation. Cover a lot of areas and then make positions that are a little uncomfortable for your opponent," said the Chennai-based Grandmaster.

"From what I have seen from Sindarov, all this candidate stuff, he is also making some complications, he had prepared very deeply for the Candidates tournament. I mean very high level of chess, so this world championship match is going to be very tough."

Sasikiran described Sindarov as a player who depends on memory and speed.

"Sindarov, I have seen, plays a solid set of openings and relies more on memory, specifically, speed; he plays very fast and relies more on his memory. He is having a slight bit of trouble when his opponent has a slightly better endgame," the 45-year-old Indian said.

By contrast, Sasikiran said Gukesh's technique in technical positions needed improvement.

"While Gukesh is known to let down a little bit in technical positions, technique is one area that definitely needs improvement. His technique has to be at a very high level, if he is to get an advantage from the opening, he needs to convert with very high accuracy. (PTI)