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- 'India lone voice of silence': Sonia slams govt for not calling out Israel's 'Gaza genocide'
- Bihar: Ex-JD(U) president RCP Singh meets Nitish Kumar, fuels rapprochement chatter
- Manipur Naga body seeks PM's intervention, judicial probe into alleged killing of six civilians
- Kuki-Zo group says its chief's remarks not meant to suggest community responsible for Naga killings

DA case: ED attaches properties worth ₹ 53.28 cr of former Assam IGP Prasanta Kumar Dutta

4 hotels in Guwahati, 2 flats in Mumbai seized

GUWAHATI, June 27: The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has ordered that immovable properties worth over ₹ 53 crore of a retired IPS officer be attached in connection with a disproportionate assets (DA) case.

Prasanta Kumar Dutta, a former IPS officer who was promoted from Assam Police Service, is facing charges of amassing disproportionate assets valued at approximately ₹ 79.01 crore, an official statement said on Saturday.

"The Guwahati zonal office of ED has issued the Provisional Attachment Order under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA), provisionally attaching immovable properties valued in the aggregate at ₹ 53.28 crore (approx.) in the case relating to Dutta, who superannuated from the rank of Deputy Inspector Gen-



eral of Police, and his family members and group companies," the statement said.

The ED investigation was initiated on the basis of an FIR registered by the Vigilance and

Anti-Corruption Branch police station of Assam Police under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988.

As per the FIR, Dutta, during his service period from 1992 to 2019, amassed assets grossly disproportion-

ate to his known sources of income, the statement said.

As against the disclosed income of the officer and his wife of about ₹ 7.23 crore and disclosed expenditure of about ₹ 9.04 crore, undisclosed assets of about ₹ 77.21 crore were found, the net disproportionate assets being reasonably ascertained at approximately Rs 79.01 crore on the basis of the material on record, the statement said.

It further said investigations under the PMLA revealed that the Proceeds of Crime so generated were laundered and projected as untainted property through three closely-held companies -- Mahamaya Estates Pvt Ltd, Ishan Commercial Pvt Ltd and Murari Commodities Pvt Ltd -- whose registered offices were found to be non-existent. The investigation established (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Small tea growers to get govt benefits with Farmer IDs: CM

GUWAHATI, June 27: Small tea growers in Assam will now be able to register on the Farmers' Registry Portal and access a range of government benefits through a single platform, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced.

The growers will be issued Farmer IDs, enabling them to avail fertilisers, government scheme benefits, institutional credit on better terms and other agricultural services, he said.

While the tea sector will continue to remain under the Industry Department, the move will allow small tea growers to access the benefits provided by the Agriculture Department.

"Today marks a historic day for the lakhs of small tea growers in Assam. Tea and plantation class land holdings are now included in the Farmers' Registry Portal," Sarma said in a social media post on Friday night.

Describing the initiative as a "game-changer," he said the Farmer



ID system would ensure timely and need-based availability of fertilisers, provide access to government schemes through a single platform, facilitate easier institutional credit and reduce the role of middlemen in exploiting tea growers.

"It is a major leap for the tea community, who can now enjoy all government benefits through a single platform," he said.

Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika said the decision would provide much-needed support to Assam's small tea growers, who now contribute nearly half of the state's tea production.

"For generations, Assam's small tea growers have strengthened the identity of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Zubeen's death case probe appears to be moving in right direction: Garima

GUWAHATI, June 27: The investigation and court proceedings into singer Zubeen Garg's death case appear to be moving in the right direction and the family is hopeful of a "positive result", Garima Saikia Garg, wife of the deceased musician, said here on Saturday.

She expressed hope that the new generation will continue to take forward Garg's creations and ideology, adding that the trust to be formed in his name will also work in the same direction.

"The process is ongoing. As of now, that is a matter before the court, so I cannot say whether it is proceeding in the right direction or not. However, it appears to be moving appropriately," Saikia Garg told PTI Videos, on the progress in the investigation into her husband's death.

The singer-composer drowned under mysterious circumstances while swimming off Lazarus Island on September 19, a day before he was slated to perform at the North East India Festival in Singapore.

A Special Investigation Team of Assam Police's CID probed the death and filed its charge sheet before a local court here in December, naming seven accused. Four of them are facing murder charges.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in the state Assembly in November that Garg's death was a case of "plain and simple murder".

However, the Singapore Police, which has carried out a separate probe, has concluded that there is no evidence of foul play. Authorities in Assam have maintained that the Singapore probe will not impact the case in the northeastern state in any manner. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sunil Gavaskar calls on Assam CM; proposes Tokyo Marathon-like event



GUWAHATI, June 27: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Saturday said that cricket legend Sunil Gavaskar has proposed that the northeast state organise an international marathon on the lines of a similar event in Tokyo.

Sarma said the government will examine the proposal.

"Shri Sunil Gavaskar ji met me & proposed to organise an International Marathon in Guwahati on lines of the Tokyo Marathon '25," Sarma said in a post on X.

"We will be glad to host it & will definitely examine it," he added.

Sarma also shared his memories of watching the cricketer in action.

"Like many of my generation, I also shared with him my childhood memories of those SUNNY knocks," the CM added.

The Chief Minister's Office, also in a post on the social media site, added that discussion between the duo also focused on strengthening Assam's cricketing ecosystem. (PTI)

Flood toll rises to two in Arunachal; IMD warns of more heavy rain

ITANAGAR, June 27: The toll in the heavy rain-triggered flash floods in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district rose to two on Saturday after the body of another woman was retrieved from under the debris in the NEEPCO Colony, an official said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) also warned of heavy to extremely heavy rainfall across several parts of the state from Sunday.

The deceased has been identified as 30-year-old Ballari Marak alias Olyn Synkly of Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district, Keyi Panyor District Disaster Management Officer (DDMO) Beru Dulam said.

Marak was among five persons who went missing after a flash flood, triggered by a cloudburst and incessant rainfall, struck the district on Wednesday morning. With the latest recovery, two people have been confirmed dead, while three others remain missing. The body of a 35-year-old woman was found on Wednesday. Search operations entered the fourth day on Saturday, with rescue teams launching raft operations from the dam side of the Panyor Lower Hy-



droelectric Project to trace the missing persons swept away from the NEEPCO Colony.

State Disaster Management Secretary Dani Sulu said the operation is being carried out jointly by personnel of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), district police and local volunteers. To strengthen the operation, an Indian Air Force helicopter and a state Civil Aviation helicopter have been deployed to airlift additional SDRF personnel and rescue equipment to the affected area.

The flash flood devastated the NEEPCO Colony at Poosa, damaging houses, disrupting road connectivity and triggering landslides at several locations.

According to preliminary

estimates, around 30 houses were completely damaged or washed away at the NEEPCO Colony, while another 10 houses were destroyed and 14 partially damaged in the Poosa and Pitapool areas. A total of 128 households has been affected in the district. A relief camp has been set up on the NEEPCO campus, where 60 displaced people are currently taking shelter.

Meanwhile, restoration of road connectivity is progressing in Keyi Panyor and Papum Pare districts. The Potin-Kimin road has been reopened for light vehicles, while the Hoj-Sagalee stretch has also been restored, officials said. The Yachuli-Pistana-Ambam-Selsango-Parang-Sagalee-Hojltanagar (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Myanmar opium surge fuels drug smuggling in Northeast: Report

NEW DELHI, June 27: The threat of drug trafficking from across the Myanmar border into India's north eastern states and up to the hinterland has "dramatically" escalated due to more than 50 per cent expansion of illicit opium cultivation and production in the neighbouring country, as per a latest report.

The document published by the federal anti-drug agency Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) for 2025, added this development in Myanmar is an "accelerated" threat as it is the "single most important supply zone" for the global gap left after the "dramatic collapse" of Afghanistan opium.

The report said the 1,643-km-long India-Myanmar international border functions as a "major" entry point for methamphetamine and heroin from the Golden Triangle region, "exacerbated" by porous terrain and the Free Movement Regime (FMR), particularly across Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. India is geographically wedged between the Golden Crescent on its northwestern side (Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran) and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NSF committed to inclusive consultative process on ILR

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 27: The Inner Line Regulation Commission (ILRC) of the Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Saturday asserted that it remains committed to conducting an objective, credible and inclusive consultative process to strengthen the implementation of the Inner Line Regulation (ILR) in Nagaland while upholding and protecting the legitimate rights and interests of the indigenous Naga people.

The ILRC issued the statement after concluding a consultative meeting with representatives of the Bhojpuri Samaj and Bihari Samaj in Dimapur on Saturday as part of its ongoing stakeholder consultation process on the effective implementation of the ILR in the state.

The statement said the ILRC held a meaningful and productive interaction with the two organisations, enabling it to receive valuable inputs, concerns and recommendations. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two ULFA(I) militants tasked with killing people in Tinsukia held: Assam Police

TINSUKIA, June 27: Two militants of the proscribed ULFA(I) were arrested with arms and ammunition in Assam's Tinsukia district on Saturday, with a top official saying that they were tasked with killing people in Tinsukia town.

The operation was carried out in Jagun by a team of Assam police with the help of central security agencies based on intelligence reports, Tinsukia Senior Superintendent of Police Mayank Kumar

said. Two ULFA(I) cadres -- self-styled second-lieutenants Siyor Asom alias Humenjyoti Baruah and Manoj Asom alias Papu Moran -- both residents of Tinsukia district, were apprehended, the SSP said, adding that they were involved in attacks on security agencies at Kakopathar and Jagun earlier.

Two AK-56 rifles, 172 rounds of AK ammunition, two hand grenades, a medicine kit, syringes

and opioids, food items for survival in jungles, backpacks and other war-like stores were recovered from them.

Kumar said that preliminary investigation revealed that the two cadres were "tasked to target and kill innocent people in Tinsukia town indiscriminately in an act to create terror".

"The planned modus operandi indicates influence of external actors to destabilise the region," the senior police officer claimed. (PTI)

Polyester content in school uniforms tested in laboratories: Ranoj Pegu



Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, June 27: Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu on Saturday said the state government follows strict specifications while procuring school uniforms and conducts laboratory tests to ensure that the polyester and cotton composition adheres to the prescribed standards.

Responding to allegations regarding the excessive use of polyester in government-supplied school uniforms, Pegu told reporters in Sivasagar that the uniforms are procured in accordance with government guidelines and that random samples are tested to verify their quality.

"The specifications clearly mention the required polyester and cotton composition. We conduct laboratory tests on randomly collected samples from schools to check whether the fabric meets the prescribed standards," the minister said.

He added that suppliers found violating the norms are issued notices and appropriate action is taken against them.

Pegu also clarified that the government does not permit the supply of uniforms made entirely of polyester. "We have prohibited 100 per cent polyester uniforms. The specifications require around 30 per cent cotton in the fabric, and this is verified through laboratory testing," he said.

The minister said the prescribed cotton content is around 30 per cent and that the procurement process continues to follow the approved standards for blended fabric.

Referring to concerns raised by some experts over the health impact of polyester, Pegu said the issue should be viewed in perspective.

"Today, many garments available in the market contain polyester blends. It is not correct to say that every polyester fabric is harmful. The important issue is whether the prescribed blend of cotton and polyester has been maintained," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Timely reporting and active community participation are our strongest shields' Awareness drives held in West Karbi Anglong on child marriage, cybercrime

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, June 27: In an effort to raise awareness about crimes against women and children, the Department of Women and Child Development, West Karbi Anglong, in collaboration with the CHL Sakhi-One Stop Centre (OSC) and Mailoo Police officials, organised two awareness programmes at Lamsakhang under Kheroni on Saturday.

The programmes aimed to educate local residents and students on issues such as child marriage, human trafficking and cybercrime.

The first session was held for members of the local community and focused on the prevention of child marriage and the trafficking of women and girls.

Resource persons highlighted the legal provisions available to victims and discussed the long-term psychological and physical consequences of child marriage and human trafficking. They also stressed the importance



of community vigilance in supporting institutional efforts to combat such crimes.

"Timely reporting and active community participation are our strongest shields in safeguarding women and children from these invisible networks," an official said

during the programme.

The second session was conducted at Adarsha Rashtra Bhasha Hindi School in Lamsakhang, where students and teachers were sensitised to cybercrime, along with the issues of child marriage and human traf-

ficking.

Speakers explained various forms of cybercrime, including cyberbullying and online grooming, and shared preventive measures to help students stay safe online. They also informed participants about the legal provisions aimed at protecting minors in digital spaces.

During an interactive session, officials from the Mailoo Police Outpost encouraged students to remain vigilant, trust their instincts and promptly report any suspicious online or offline activities to the authorities.

The programmes witnessed the participation of village elders, students, teachers and other local stakeholders.

In their concluding remarks, the organisers emphasised that sustained awareness and collective community action are essential to ensuring the safety, security and well-being of women and children in the region.

Rajasthan CM announces steps to promote MSMEs, semiconductor mfg

JAIPUR, June 27: Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma on Saturday announced a series of measures, including the development of artisan markets, financial support for 25 startups and incentives for semiconductor manufacturing, to promote MSMEs and the electronics sector.

Addressing a programme organised here on the occasion of International MSME Day, Sharma said MSMEs form the backbone of the state's economic growth, employment generation and self-reliance.

He said Rajasthan has emerged as the country's fourth-largest MSME state with more than 3.3 million enterprises, attributing the growth to government policies and entrepreneurs' efforts.

The chief minister said that the state government would develop and operate artisan markets under the public-private partnership (PPP) model for handicraft workers, weavers and micro enterprises.

In the first phase, he said, such markets will be set up at Pushkar, Nathdwara, Jaisalmer and Alwar.

He also announced financial assistance under the One District One Product (ODOP) scheme for processing units based on identified



species and plants under the Panch Gaurav Yojana.

To boost investments in the electronics and semiconductor sector, Sharma said the minimum investment threshold under the Rajasthan Investment Promotion Scheme (RIPS)-2024 for selected manufacturing components would be reduced to ₹ 15 crore.

Projects covered under the Centre's Electronics Component Man-

ufacturing Scheme (ECMS) will now be allowed to make investments in five phases instead of the existing three under RIPS-2024, he said.

Monthly skill development and training allowance for women and persons with disabilities employed in the electronics and semiconductor sector will be increased from ₹ 4,000 to ₹ 6,000, Sharma said.

He also said 25 new startups

would receive financial assistance this year through the Rajasthan Venture Capital Fund.

The chief minister said the state had implemented the Direct Allotment Policy-2025 to ensure land availability for industries, under which more than 1,600 industrial plots have been allotted during the past year.

He said the government has reduced the time limit for land-use approval for MSME units in urban areas from 60 days to 30 days and cut the approval period for setting up industries from 120 days to 30 days.

"The state is developing new industrial hubs, including solar panel manufacturing, ceramic, data centre and defence manufacturing parks," he said. During the programme, the chief minister launched the Rajasthan Industrial Development Policy, an ODOF coffee table book and the RAMP (Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance) portal.

He also distributed cheques worth over ₹ 13 crore for loans, grants, and subsidies to beneficiaries of various government schemes, and handed over land allotment letters and offer letters to beneficiaries of RICO schemes. (PTI)

OpenAI names Prabhjeet Singh as Managing Director for its India ops



NEW DELHI, June 27: OpenAI has appointed Prabhjeet Singh as Managing Director for India, one of the company's top-priority markets, a statement recently said.

Singh will be OpenAI's "most senior leader" in India, with responsibility for performance across consumer growth, enterprise adoption and partnerships, regulatory engagement, and operations. His focus will include building partnerships and supporting India's wider AI ecosystem, while helping more consumers, businesses, institutions and government bodies benefit from AI, OpenAI said.

"OpenAI can confirm that Prabhjeet Singh will join as Managing Director for India in September. He will report to Kiran Mani, Managing Director for APAC (Asia Pacific)," according to the company.

The latest appointment is part of OpenAI's con-

tinued investment in India, one of the top priority markets for the company.

Singh joins OpenAI from Uber where he served as President of India and South Asia, and led its mobility business across India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

He is an alumnus of IIT Kharagpur and IIM Ahmedabad.

Sam Altman-led OpenAI has stepped up its India push, deepening partnerships with businesses and developer community, as it lays bold bets on one of the fastest-growing markets for artificial intelligence adoption.

Altman has maintained that AI adoption in India has been "amazing" to watch, and that the company is excited to invest more here. The company announced its first office in New Delhi in November 2025.

One of the most prominent names in the global digital industry, Altman, had recently also signalled a major vote of confidence in India's tech landscape during the India AI Summit in February this year when he lauded the speed of tech adoption here.

"What's happening in India with AI is really quite amazing," Altman had said. He had praised India's current "conviction" to invest across the entire AI stack, and indicated that India's tech ecosystem is on the verge of a massive, AI-driven entrepreneurial explosion.

"The country's conviction to invest in everything from the infrastructure layer to the model layer to the application layer on top, and the rapid adoption of the tools by people here is really quite something," Altman had said at the time. (PTI)

West Bengal govt to focus on reviving MSME sector: Minister

KOLKATA, June 27: The West Bengal government will prioritise the revival of the state's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) sector, including reopening around 8,000 closed factories, a minister said on Saturday.

Addressing an interactive session organised by the Merchants' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI), Minister of State for MSME and Textiles Ashok Dinda said the sector, one of the largest sources of employment in West Bengal, had been "linguishing" over the past several years and needs urgent attention.

West Bengal has around 90 lakh MSMEs employing nearly 1.35 crore people.

"We have a big challenge before the new government. Our aim will be to revitalise the sector," he said.

The minister said that nearly 8,000 MSME factories are currently closed in the state. "The challenge is to reopen these closed units," Dinda said.

Referring to the Centre's 'Vocal for Local' campaign, Dinda said the state government would place emphasis on promoting local industries.

He said the recently tabled state budget has outlined measures to rebuild the MSME sector through the development of industrial clusters and parks. (PTI)

Amber Group eyes USD 2 bn revenue milestone soon; invests ₹ 6,750 cr in UP projects

JEWAR (GAUTAM BUDDHA NAGAR), June 27: Leading electronics and consumer durables contract manufacturer Amber Group expects to touch the USD 2 billion revenue mark in the near term, driven by strong growth across its consumer durables, electronics, and railway and defence businesses, its Executive Chairman and CEO Jasbir Singh said.

Amber Group, which reported consolidated revenue of ₹ 12,306.63 crore (around USD 1.3 billion) in FY26, held a groundbreaking ceremony on Saturday for manufacturing facilities at the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA), with a total proposed investment of about Rs 6,785 crore.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, Union Minister of Railways & IT Ashwini Vaishnav and Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav were present at the event.

The projects include a high-density interconnect (HDI) printed circuit board (PCB) and semiconductor substrate manufacturing unit being set up through its joint venture Ascent-K Circuit, as well as an expanded air-conditioner and components manufacturing complex by Amber Enterprises.

According to Singh, Amber's electronics business is currently growing at 40-45 per cent annually, while its railway and defence division has returned to a 30-35 per cent growth trajectory.

However, the consumer durables business continues to grow in line with industry trends, he said. Overall, the consumer durables business is having a slow volume growth, margin pressures, slower consumption demand, and erratic seasonal demand.

"We are very excited about the way we are building blocks, adding horizontal and vertical expansion on both volume and value sides," he said. Responding to a query on Amber's roadmap to the USD 2 billion revenue mark, Singh said he will not share any guidance on that; however, he said, "So all three divisions are witnessing growth. I think very shortly we will reach that number."

Ascent-K Circuit is a 70:30 joint venture with the Korean Circuit to manufacture High-Density Interconnect (HDI) Printed Circuit Boards (PCBs), Flexible Printed Circuit Boards (FPCBs) and Semiconductor Substrates.

Besides, Amber Enterprises will set up a 100-acre manufacturing facility in Sector 8 at YEIDA for Room Air Conditioners (RACs), Copper Clad Laminates (CCL) and other critical components, strengthening backward integration and localisation within India's consumer durables industry.

"This is a landmark occasion for us. Currently, nearly ₹ 40,000 crore worth of PCBs are imported into the country. The larger purpose of this project is import substitution and, subsequently, exports,"

Singh added.

The facility, supported under the Centre's Electronics Component Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS) and backed by incentives from the Uttar Pradesh government, will initially cater to domestic demand from mobile phone and laptop manufacturers before targeting export markets.

Singh said the investments would be executed in phases through a combination of internal accruals, debt and equity, including foreign direct investment from Korea Circuits.

"This is 70-30 JV. So FDI is going to come from Korea in this project and as far as Amber is concerned, that will be partly debt-funded and partly through our own internal accruals," he said.

For the current financial year, Amber plans capital expenditure of around ₹ 1,200-1,300 crore, with a similar amount likely next year.

"Plant and machinery will come next year. But almost a similar kind of CapEx will be done next year as well," he said, adding most of the spending will be directed towards electronics manufacturing, while major capex requirements in its railway and consumer durables businesses have largely been completed.

On exports, Singh said these are minuscule at the moment, but the company has already entered markets such as the United States and the Middle East.

"Exports are a medium- to long-term story for us. As domestic scale improves and disability factors come down, we expect exports to grow significantly over the next three to five years," he said.

Amber currently operates 33 manufacturing facilities across 11 states, with the new projects set to become its 34th manufacturing location. The company follows a strategy of setting up plants close to customers and industrial clusters to strengthen its supply-chain integration.

Meanwhile, in a separate programme, Yogi Adityanath also laid the foundation stone for an Integrated Solar Manufacturing Facility in Jewar, by SAEL Industries.

The project is being developed through its wholly owned subsidiary, SAEL Solar P6 Private Limited (SSP6PL), which will come up on about 200 acres in Sector 8 of YEIDA.

Envisaged as a 5 GW solar cell and 5 GW solar module manufacturing complex, the project is expected to create around 5,000 direct and 15,000 indirect jobs.

Upon completion, the facility will manufacture high-efficiency solar cells and TOPCON modules using advanced technologies, strengthening India's domestic solar manufacturing ecosystem and supporting the country's renewable energy expansion plans. (PTI)

Meta showcases northeast MSMEs on World MSME Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 27: Marking World MSME Day, Meta organised a first-of-its-kind event in Guwahati on Friday, bringing together nearly 350 entrepreneurs and small business owners from across Northeast India to showcase their success stories and explore new opportunities for business growth through digital technologies.

The event highlighted the growing role of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in driving the region's economy and focused on how digital platforms, artificial intelligence (AI) and messaging tools are enabling businesses to expand beyond traditional markets.

According to Meta, more than 92 per cent of businesses using its platforms in India are MSMEs.

Entrepreneurs across the country increasingly rely on Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp to reach customers, build brands and grow their businesses with limited re-

sources. The programme featured entrepreneurs from across the Northeast representing homegrown brands, retailers, artisans and digital creators, who shared how digital technologies and Meta's advertising platforms have helped them reach customers across India and overseas.

The discussions centred on two major growth drivers for small businesses—artificial intelligence and messaging platforms.

Meta highlighted its AI-powered Advantage+ suite and generative AI creative tools, which help businesses automate campaign creation, improve advertising performance and generate marketing content more efficiently.

Founder of Woolah Tea, Upamanyu Borkakoty, said the company's use of Meta's AI-powered Advantage+ Shopping Campaign had significantly improved business performance, resulting in a more than six-fold increase in orders within six months.

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4 hotels in Guwahati,

the introduction of unexplained cash aggregating ₹ 14,74,99,091 into the accounts of the family members and the companies, and the layering of funds through fictitious shareholders, Kolkata-based shell entities and circular bank transfers, before integration into hotel properties and flats in Mumbai, the statement said.

"The persons appearing as shareholders of the three companies were found to be, in large part, persons of no independent means, including fictitious or name-lending shareholders, having no source of income commensurate with the share-capital attributed to them, and were unable to explain the source of the funds," it said.

The attached property comprises four hotels in Guwahati and two residential flats in Mumbai. "Further investigation is underway," the statement added. (PTI)

Small tea growers to

Assam Tea through their hard work and dedication," he said in a post. Hazarika said the inclusion of tea and plantation-class land in the Farmers' Registry Portal would enable eligible growers to obtain Farmer IDs and avail government support.

"Our focus now is to ensure that every eligible small tea grower is seamlessly integrated into this digital ecosystem and receives the support they rightfully deserve," he added. According to Tea Board India data, Assam had 1,33,864 small tea growers cultivating 1,26,107.64 hectares as of March 31, 2025. (PTI)

Zubeen's death case probe

On two of the main accused, festival organiser Shyamkanu Mahanta and Garg's manager Siddhartha Sharma, approaching higher courts for bail, Saikia Garg said, "They have now approached the Supreme Court, and they are within their rights to use the legal provisions. We have faith in our legal system and the law of the land. We hope that we will get a positive result." An exclusive fast-track court is hearing the case in Guwahati.

On the proposed trust in the name of Garg that was announced by her and other family members in January, she said the process will commence soon.

"We will have to build a house at our property at Chenikuthi (in Guwahati) for that. We have to first set up the office and then build the museum. It will take some time," Saikia Garg said.

She said the succession certificate is vital to take forward the plans, and though the court has passed the order allowing her access to select financial assets of her late husband, she is yet to receive the document. "The succession certificate is in process. The order has been passed but it is not with me yet," she added.

Saikia Garg said that some steps are being taken in the social and cultural fields through the Kalaguru Artists Foundation, which was founded by Garg to work in the cultural sector in the state.

Asked about plans for developing Garg's cremation ground at Sonapur on the outskirts of Guwahati, she said, "The government has not informed us what they are going to do. The media will know better than me in this regard." She expressed hope that the new generation will carry on Garg's creations and understand those.

"The new generation will carry forward not just his music, but everything that he had practised, including his ideology, and he will stay immortal," she added. (PTI)

Flood toll rises to two in Arunachal

route has likewise been opened for light vehicular traffic. The IMD has, meanwhile, forecast heavy to extremely heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning in several districts from Sunday.

A 'red' warning (take action) has been issued for parts of Lower Siang, West Siang and East Siang districts on Sunday, while 'orange' alert (be prepared) has been sounded for several adjoining districts. Heavy to very heavy rainfall is expected to continue over parts of central and eastern Arunachal on Monday, with 'orange' warning in place for Lower Dibang Valley and adjoining areas.

Although rainfall intensity is likely to decrease from Tuesday, isolated heavy rain and thunderstorms are expected to persist across several districts before conditions improve further on Wednesday and Thursday. The weather office has advised people living in vulnerable areas to remain alert for landslides, flash floods and waterlogging during the forecast period. (PTI)

Myanmar opium surge fuels

the Golden Triangle on its northeastern flank (Thailand-Myanmar-Laos). These are the two prolific drug-producing regions of the world.

"Despite the 2022 Taliban drug ban, which reduced opium production by 93 per cent from its peak (in Afghanistan), UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime) notes that stockpiles remain sufficient to meet demand through 2026. "It would be analytically imprudent, however, to interpret this contraction as a diminishing threat to India," it said.

On the other hand, the report said, Myanmar's illicit opium production increased by over 50 per cent between 2020-24, with the area under poppy cultivation reaching 45,200 hectares.

This makes the India-Myanmar border the "single most important substitute supply zone for the global gap left by Afghanistan collapse."

India's eastern borders are the "most direct and porous" entry point for this expanding production base, and the consequences are already visible, the report said, pointing to the 140 per cent increase in Amphetamine Type Stimulant (ATS) seizures recorded in India between 2020-2025, culminating in 8.2 tons seized in 2024 alone. "This is the clearest empirical signal of how dramatically the eastern threat has escalated," it said.

The northeastern states of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland are bearing the "sharpest" frontline exposure. The porous border mechanism, including the erstwhile free movement regime along the India-Myanmar border, has created conditions under which the states have transitioned from peripheral transit zones to active staging grounds for distribution into the Indian hinterland, the report said.

It went on to say that the second major trafficking corridor enters India through Champhai in Mizoram, which shares close proximity with Myanmar's Chin state. Drugs are smuggled through unfenced and porous border stretches and routed towards Silchar in Assam's Barak valley through Aizawl and adjoining road networks.

Thereafter, the contraband moves towards Meghalaya and further reaches Guwahati, from where it is "distributed" across mainland India.

The report quoted the UNODC World Drug Report 2025 to say that Myanmar produced 995 tonnes of opium in 2024, which was 50 per cent higher than in 2020.

The NCB report also mentioned that the "most consequential" result of the collapse of the Afghan opium supply was that it has been "redistributed" and "diversified" and this drug was flowing eastward into India. "The broader implication is that India's western exposure is shifting from being a high volume heroin transit problem to a more complex, multi-substance, tech-enabled smuggling problem," it said.

The report also alleged the use of Internet-based communication platforms for drugs trafficking, especially Telegram. "Encrypted messaging platforms such as Telegram, WhatsApp and Signal have emerged as significant channels for drug distribution globally, including in India," it claimed. Unlike darknet markets that require specialised access, these platforms are widely accessible via smartphones, lowering entry barriers and enabling broader reach, the report said.

"Among these, Telegram has become a prominent platform for drug advertising with public channels offering product listings, pricing and delivery details to large subscriber bases," the report charged. Telegram was recently banned in the country during the re-NEET exam.

Talking about its internal issues, the report said the NCB was facing a "critical" shortage of manpower in its legal wing as only one post was occupied out of the 38 sanctioned as of December, 2025.

Similarly, all seven sanctioned posts of technical and cyber cadre were unfilled, highlighting a "significant gap" in NCB's digital enforcement capabilities, as per the report. (PTI)

NSF committed to inclusive

"These submissions will form an integral part of the commission's study and assist in formulating comprehensive recommendations aimed at ensuring the transparent, practical and effective implementation of the ILR in the state," it added. The ILRC reiterated that the consultation process it initiated has, from its inception, been guided by the principles of transparency, inclusivity and equal opportunity.

The commission said it had extended official invitations to all concerned stakeholders and provided each with a fair opportunity to participate in the consultative exercise, recognising that the implementation of the ILR has implications for various sections of society.

It also reiterated the NSF's unwavering position that the Nagas are the only indigenous inhabitants of Nagaland and that the implementation of the ILR is fundamentally intended to safeguard the historical, political, demographic, economic and cultural rights of the indigenous Naga people, as guaranteed under the existing constitutional and legal framework.

Polyester content in school

Pegu maintained that if any school receives uniforms that do not meet the prescribed specifications, the government is prepared to investigate the matter.

"If anyone points out a particular school where the polyester content exceeds the prescribed limit, we will immediately conduct a verification. We are already carrying out random testing of uniforms supplied to educational institutions," he added.

The minister asserted that the state government remains committed to ensuring quality standards in school uniforms supplied under its welfare programmes.

ENGINEERING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/46 of 2026. Dated: 24-06-2026. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN:1: Brief Description of Item** : Lumding Jn.-Provision of Construction of PP Shed at Jagiroad (12 bays), Chaparmukh (16 bays), Haibargaon (6 bays), Hojai (6 bays) & Lanka (8 bays) under Sr.DEN/II/Lumding. **Tender Value** : ₹13,83,04,402.27/-; **Earnest Money** : ₹27,66,100/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 28-07-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 29-07-2026.** Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 28-07-2026 in the website www.irops.gov.in

DRM(W)/Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

AFFIDAVIT

My educational records and certificates, including SEBA Board Registration Certificate; HSLC Admit Card, HSLC marksheets; character certificate issued by Headmaster of Voso-koida English High School, Donkumkam and caste certificate my name has been written as Biren Ronghang. But subsequently I adopted and started using the name Dewinson Ronghang in my day-to-day life and public dealings. Because of this adoption of name and in my documents like Aadhaar Card; bearing Aadhaar, PAN Card; and Elector's my name has been recorded as 'Dewinson Ronghang'. Therefore, the name 'Biren Ronghang' and 'Dewinson Ronghang' is the same and one identical person i.e me. This is intended for the purpose of declaring and confirming that both names belong to the same person and for recording/correcting my name as Dewinson Ronghang in all official records, documents, certificates, and future transactions.

Dewinson Ronghang,
S/o- Manik Ronghang,
Vill.- Kuthor Bangla Gaon, Hongkram,
P.O. & P.S.- Baithalangso,
Dist.- West Karbi Anglong, Assam

Kaushik Rai reviews development projects, inspects key infrastructure in Cachar

Minister stresses quality and timely completion of projects during review in Lakhimpur and Silchar

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, June 27: Assam Minister for Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs, Housing and Urban Affairs and Cooperation, Kaushik Rai, on Saturday reviewed the progress of key development projects in Lakhimpur Co-District and inspected major infrastructure works in Silchar, emphasising quality execution and timely completion of projects aimed at improving public services.

The minister chaired a review meeting at the Lakhimpur Co-District Office with district officials and contractors to assess the implementation of projects undertaken by various departments.

The meeting was attended by Lakhimpur Co-District Commissioner Dhruvajyoti Pathak, Cachar District Development Commissioner Rajib Roy and senior officials.

Reviewing works executed by the Public Works Department (Roads), Rai assessed the progress of projects under Asom Mala, Mukhyamantrir Unnoto Pakipath, Mukhyamantrir Pakipath, tea garden road schemes and other road connectivity initiatives.

He directed officials to maintain



construction quality while ensuring timely completion.

The minister also reviewed Public Works Department (Buildings) projects, including the Integrated Co-District Commissioner's Office at Lakhimpur, a 100-bed district hospital, a mini stadium, school buildings and a law college.

He instructed the executing agencies to adhere to quality standards and avoid delays.

Officials of the Public Health Engineering Department briefed the minister on drinking water sup-

ply schemes, rural water distribution projects and sanitation initiatives.

Rai reviewed measures to ensure uninterrupted access to safe drinking water, particularly in rural areas.

The meeting also reviewed the functioning of the Power Department, with discussions focusing on uninterrupted electricity supply during the monsoon, strengthening rural electrification and addressing consumer grievances.

The Education Department pre-

sented updates on school infrastructure, construction of academic buildings, implementation of government education schemes and the integration of technology in classrooms.

The minister stressed the need to improve educational infrastructure and learning standards.

Officials of the Social Welfare Department highlighted the progress of Model Anganwadi Centres and early childhood education initiatives, while the Health Department reviewed measures to strengthen healthcare institutions and expand medical services in rural areas.

The minister also reviewed flood control, erosion protection and drainage improvement works undertaken by the Water Resources Department ahead of the monsoon.

The Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department presented updates on livestock healthcare services, vaccination programmes, veterinary infrastructure and the proposed Multi-Care Veterinary Hospital.

Earlier in the day, Rai inspected the under-construction District Library in Silchar and directed engineers and contractors to complete

the project within the stipulated timeframe while maintaining high construction standards.

He later visited the construction site of the new Silchar Circuit House and reviewed the progress of work in the presence of District Development Commissioner Rajib Roy and Public Works Department officials.

He instructed the executing agencies to ensure timely completion without compromising quality.

The minister also inspected the construction of the Integrated District Commissioner's Office for Cachar in Silchar and directed officials to complete the project on schedule.

The new administrative complex is expected to improve coordination among government departments and enhance public service delivery.

Rai said the ongoing infrastructure projects across Cachar and Lakhimpur would strengthen public facilities, improve connectivity, enhance administrative efficiency and expand access to essential services, reaffirming the State Government's commitment to creating durable public infrastructure for socio-economic development.

Pramod Boro pays tribute at Martyr Sujit Narzary Memorial Park

UPPL president says memorial will preserve legacy of Bodoland movement martyrs for future generations



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 27: United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) president, Rajya Sabha MP and former Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), Pramod Boro, visited the Martyr Sujit Narzary Memorial Park in Kokrajhar on Saturday and paid tribute to the sacrifices of those who laid down their lives during the Bodoland movement.

Boro offered floral tributes at the memorial and observed a moment of silence in honour of martyr Sujit Narzary.

He said the visit was a gesture of respect and gratitude towards all those who sacrificed their lives for the aspirations of the people of Bodoland and the cause of peace and justice.

The memorial, dedicated to martyr Sujit Narzary, stands as a tribute to those who participated in the Bodoland movement and serves as a reminder of their contribution to the region's history.

The foundation stone of the memorial was laid on August 5, 2022, during Pramod Boro's tenure as Chief Executive Member of the BTR.

The project was undertaken to

create a permanent place of remembrance where people can honour the martyrs and learn about their role in the Bodoland movement.

Speaking on the occasion, Boro said the completion of the memorial had fulfilled the vision behind the project and described it as a symbol of gratitude and respect for those whose sacrifices contributed to peace and development in the region.

He said that although the sacrifices of the martyrs could never be repaid, it was the responsibility of the present generation to preserve their legacy and uphold the values for which they fought.

He added that the courage and determination of the martyrs would continue to inspire the people of Bodoland in their pursuit of peace, unity and progress.

Several UPPL leaders, party workers and supporters accompanied Boro during the visit.

The party said the memorial would serve not only as a place of remembrance but also as a source of inspiration for younger generations to understand the history of the Bodoland movement and the sacrifices made in pursuit of a better future for the region.

Demow youth appeals for financial help for eye surgery

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 27: A youth from Athabari near Demow has appealed for financial assistance to undergo an urgent eye surgery after sustaining serious injuries in a road accident earlier this month.

Bishal Baruah was critically injured in an accident on June 17 and is currently undergoing treatment at a hospital in Dibrugarh.

He recently underwent spinal surgery, and his family has said the mounting medical expenses have placed them under severe financial strain.

According to family members, Bishal now requires an eye operation, for which they are seeking financial support from the public.

Well-wishers who wish to contribute towards his treatment may do so through the UPI ID: gonin2841@okicici.

The family has appealed to generous individuals and organisations to extend assistance to help meet the cost of the life-changing surgery.

HCDG College to celebrate 61st foundation day

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 27: HCDG College, Nitaipukhuri, will celebrate its 61st Foundation Day on July 1 with a series of programmes highlighting the institution's legacy and contribution to higher education in the greater Nitaipandehing area.

According to the organisers, the day-long celebration will commence with a sapling plantation drive on the college campus, followed by various commemorative programmes.

The celebrations will conclude in the evening with the ceremonial lighting of earthen lamps across the college campus.

Three held for poaching protected Hornbill in Margherita

Arrests made after video of killing of Oriental Pied Hornbill sparks outrage among conservationists

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, June 27: Three persons have been arrested for allegedly poaching a protected Oriental Pied Hornbill in Tinsukia district, triggering widespread condemnation from environmentalists and wildlife enthusiasts.

The incident reportedly took place on Friday afternoon in the Inthem area under the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency, where the rare hornbill, locally known as the Dhanesh bird, was allegedly killed for its meat.

The alleged poaching came to light after a video of the incident surfaced on social media, prompting officials of the Margherita East Range Forest Office to launch an operation.

Forest officials apprehended three accused—Phatto Mura (22), Kanai Bhadra (45) and Binod Manjhi (21), all residents of Inthem. The trio was arrested under the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, produced before the Margherita Sub-Divisional Magistrate's Court on Saturday and remanded to judicial custody.

NFR illuminates Lumding Station with architectural facade lighting

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 27: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has commissioned architectural facade lighting at Lumding Railway Station, enhancing its visual appeal and improving passenger amenities as part of its ongoing infrastructure modernisation initiatives.

The project features energy-efficient RGB LED facade lighting with programmable illumination effects, providing uniform lighting across the station's frontage, domes, columns and other architectural elements.

Weatherproof outdoor fittings and cabling have also been installed to ensure reliable operation under varying weather conditions.

According to NFR's official statement, the newly installed lighting system not only enhances the station's appearance during the night



but also promotes sustainable infrastructure through the use of long-life LED technology, which is expected to reduce maintenance requirements while ensuring efficient illumination.

With the completion of the project, Lumding

Junction has emerged as a prominent illuminated landmark in the Northeast Frontier Railway zone, reflecting the organisation's commitment to modern, passenger-friendly and environmentally sustainable railway infrastructure.

The architectural facade lighting initiative forms part of NFR's broader efforts to combine functionality with aesthetic improvement while upgrading railway stations across the region.

Officials said such projects are aimed at improving the travel experience and providing world-class facilities for passengers.

Northeast Frontier Railway reiterated its commitment to strengthening rail infrastructure and enhancing passenger amenities through sustainable and innovative development initiatives across its network.

Kokrajhar reviews preparedness for Census 2027 housing enumeration

Officials discuss planning and coordination for House Listing and Housing Census operations

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 27: An interactive session on the House Listing and Housing Census (HLO) under Census 2027 was held at the Circuit House in Kokrajhar on Saturday to review the district's preparedness and strengthen coordination for the upcoming census exercise.

The session was attended by District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty, while Joint Director of the Directorate of Census Operations, Assam, Bikash Nath, participated as the special guest.

Additional District Commissioners Anis Rasul Mazumdar, Banti Talukdar, Suprava Roy, Dipan Barman, Krishan Jyoti Deka and Himadri Sekhar Bordoloi, Sub-Divisional Officer (Civil), Parbatjhora, Hare Krishna Deka, Circle Officers, Assistant Commissioners, Charge Officers and other district officials were also present.

During the meeting, Bikash Nath reviewed the preparedness and progress of Census 2027 across various census charges in the district.

He addressed queries raised by officials and provided guidance on the effective implementation of the House Listing and Housing Census.

Emphasising the importance of meticulous planning, inter-departmental coordination and timely execution, Nath urged officials to ensure that census operations are conducted accurately and in accordance with the prescribed guidelines.

Addressing the gathering, District Commissioner Pankaj Chakravarty described the House Listing and Housing Census as the foundation of the decennial Census exercise and called upon all officers to discharge their responsibilities with sincerity and precision to ensure the successful conduct of Census 2027 in Kokrajhar district.

Cachar ready for APSC Preliminary Examination

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, June 27: The Cachar district administration has completed elaborate preparations for the smooth and transparent conduct of the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination, 2025, scheduled to be held across the district on July 5. A large number of aspirants are expected to appear for the prestigious examination at designated centres in Cachar.

The district administration, in coordination with the Assam Public Service Commission, has put in place comprehensive arrangements to ensure the examination is conducted in a secure, disciplined and fair manner.

Candidates have been advised to strictly adhere to the instructions issued by the Commission.

They must carry their e-Admission Certificate (Admit Card), a recent passport-size photograph and the original photo identity card prescribed by the Commission. Entry to the examination centre will not be permitted without the admit card. The administration has urged candidates to report to their respective examination centres at least two hours before the commencement of the examination to facilitate frisking and verification.

Candidates will be allowed to enter the examination hall up to 30 minutes before the start of the examination, while no entry will be permitted 20 minutes after the examination begins.

Only blue or black ballpoint pens will be allowed for marking answers on the OMR answer sheet. Candidates have been prohibited from carrying mobile phones, smart watches, health bands, Bluetooth devices, calcu-

lators, electronic gadgets, books, written materials, bags or any communication devices inside the examination hall. Possession of any prohibited item, irrespective of whether it is switched on or off, will be treated as use of unfair means and may lead to disqualification.

The Commission has informed that the OMR answer sheet will comprise an original red sheet and a blue carbon copy. After completing the examination, candidates must detach and retain the blue carbon copy while submitting the original red OMR sheet to the invigilator before leaving the hall.

Candidates have also been instructed to carefully fill in all required particulars, including the examination centre, venue, roll number, Test Booklet Number and Test Booklet Series on the OMR sheet.

They have been advised to verify that the Test Booklet contains all pages and immediately report any discrepancy to the invigilator.

The examination will carry negative marking, with one-fourth of the marks allotted to a question being deducted for every incorrect answer. Candidates will not be permitted to leave the examination hall before the completion of the allotted time for each paper.

Strict discipline will be enforced throughout the examination. Copying, communicating with other candidates or engaging in any form of malpractice will result in immediate disqualification. Candidates will also not be allowed to use the washroom during the first and last 30 minutes of the examination, while any permitted visit during the examination will be restricted to a maximum of five minutes.

Padma Shri Pokhila Lekthepi dreams of museum to preserve musical legacy

Veteran Karbi folk singer calls for support to safeguard five decades of cultural heritage

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 27: Fresh from receiving the Padma Shri, one of the country's highest civilian honours, veteran Karbi folk singer Pokhila Lekthepi has returned to her home in Sarsing Terang Nihang village near Diphu, where she spoke of her lifelong journey in music, her continued financial hardships and her dream of establishing a museum to preserve her artistic legacy.

Lekthepi, popularly known as the "Queen of Melody", was conferred the Padma Shri by President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on June 23 in recognition of her outstanding contribution to Karbi folk music and her role in preserving the indigenous cultural heritage of the Karbi community.

Now residing with her son and family members, the veteran singer said she plans to shift to a new house being constructed for her by the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

Despite receiving national recognition, she said she still lacks a proper place to preserve the numerous certificates, trophies, mementoes and awards she has earned



during her career spanning more than five decades.

"Since 1974, I have received many certificates, trophies and awards, but I have no library or display room to preserve them. I hope to build a small museum or library and will request the KAAC Chief Executive Member to help me if possible," she said.

Expressing gratitude for the Padma Shri, Lekthepi described the honour as beyond her imagination.

"I come from a rural background and could not pursue higher education. I never imagined receiving

such a prestigious award. It has become possible only because of the love, blessings and support of the people," she said.

Recalling the formative years of Karbi modern music, Lekthepi said she made her first public performance at the Karbi Youth Festival in Diphu in 1974 when she was around 14 years old.

She said Karbi modern music was still in its infancy at the time and that she, along with several musicians and lyricists, worked tirelessly to develop a distinct musical identity rooted in Karbi folk

traditions.

She recalled forming the Sanglin Music Group with artists including Dhaniram Tisso, Bishnu Lekthe, Joysing Rongpi, Robising Teron, Arun Teron, Probat Teron and Sanjay Hanse.

The group composed and recorded numerous songs and released several cassette albums, including the popular Kanghon, helping popularise Karbi music across Assam.

Her growing popularity led to recordings for All India Radio, Guwahati, while songs such as Dampo Ne Bangso Apirthe Pen earned widespread acclaim beyond the Karbi community.

Lekthepi also collaborated with former KAAC Executive Member and musician Bidyasing Rongpi and later recorded several Assamese and Karbi duet songs with the late singer Zubeen Garg after being introduced by music promoter Longsing Teron.

Their collaborations featured in albums including Manai and Jontro.

Having composed and sung more than 300 songs over a career of more than 50 years, Lekthepi

thanked the KAAC Chief Executive Member for arranging her travel and accommodation in New Delhi during the Padma Shri ceremony. She also expressed gratitude to the Karbi Cultural Society for assisting her with documentation and other formalities related to the award.

Addressing the younger generation, particularly women, Lekthepi said the Padma Shri should inspire Karbi women to pursue their aspirations with confidence and determination. "Karbi women are progressing in every field and are capable of achieving great success if they remain determined and dedicated," she said.

Over the years, Lekthepi has received numerous honours, including the KAAC Best Singer Award (1988 and 2009), Bishnu Rabha Dibok Award, Shilpi Amulya Kakoti Memorial Award, Queen of Melody Award, Best Karbi Award, Luit Gaurav Award, Shilpi Bota, Culture of Resistance Award, Assam Gaurav Award, Prag Pre-rona Award, DPRC Award and the Jayanta Hazarika Inspirational Award, in addition to the Padma Shri.

Oja-Pali: A traditional folk performing art

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

Oja-Pali is an invaluable treasure of Assam's cultural heritage and a living symbol of the cultural, religious, and social consciousness of the Assamese people. Through this semi-dramatic performing art, the depth, diversity, and spiritual richness of Assamese folk life are expressed in a remarkable manner. Since the pre-Sankari era, the melodies, rhythms, dances, and narratives of this art form have spread the fragrance of mythological stories, religious beliefs, and philosophies of life throughout the villages of Assam. Oja-Pali is not merely a performing art; it is the heartbeat of Assamese society, conveying messages of religion, morality, social harmony, and ethnic unity among ordinary people. Through the sweetness of its songs, the rhythmic elegance of its dance, the depth of its acting, and the narrative style of its storytelling, Oja-Pali has presented a distinct identity of Assamese culture before the world. The beauty of this art lies not only in its artistic value but also in its social and religious significance.

The roots of Oja-Pali are deeply connected with the traditions of Indian classical music, where the influence of the Odra-Magadhi style is clearly evident. According to scholars, Oja-Pali originated within the cultural environment of ancient Kamarupa. This cultural setting was rich and diverse, where the cultures, religious beliefs, and artistic traditions of various communities merged together. According to popular belief, many mythological stories are associated with the origin of Oja-Pali. One such belief states that Arjuna, in his Brihannala form from the Mahabharata, brought this art from heaven to earth. According to this tradition, during the period when the Pandavas lived in disguise, Arjuna, as Brihannala, imparted instruction in dance and music, which later evolved into the earliest form of Oja-Pali. This legend reflects the mythological importance of the art and connects it with a divine origin. Another popular belief holds that a woman named Parijat mastered this art through a dream and later taught it to her disciples. Practitioners of "Biyahar Oja-Pali" firmly uphold this belief and regard it as an integral part of their tradition. Apart from these legends, references to Oja-Pali can be found in the thirteenth-century scholar Vedacharya's Smriti-Ratnakar, in Assam's copperplate inscriptions, in Guru-Charit Katha, and in various literary works of the Vaishnavite period. These historical records prove that Oja-Pali has been an inseparable part of Assam's cultural life since ancient times. The art flourished particularly in the old districts of Kamarupa, Darrang, and Goalpara. It occupied a distinguished place among the visual and auditory arts of Darrangi culture. Under the patronage of the Darrang kings, the development of this art accelerated significantly. They provided Ojas with financial and social support, along with various musical instruments, enabling the tradition of Oja-Pali to survive through generations. The origin of the name Oja-Pali is also fascinating. The term is derived from the Sanskrit word "Panchalika," which referred to songs associated with puppet performances. Earlier, the songs of Oja-Pali were performed alongside puppet shows. Over time, however, Panchali puppet performances and Oja-Pali evolved into separate traditions. This process of evolution gave Oja-Pali a distinct identity. Another popular belief attributes the origin of Oja-Pali to two individuals named Byaskalai and

The roots of Oja-Pali are deeply connected with the traditions of Indian classical music, where the influence of the Odra-Magadhi style is clearly evident. According to scholars, Oja-Pali originated within the cultural environment of ancient Kamarupa. This cultural setting was rich and diverse, where the cultures, religious beliefs, and artistic traditions of various communities merged together. According to popular belief, many mythological stories are associated with the origin of Oja-Pali. One such belief states that Arjuna, in his Brihannala form from the Mahabharata, brought this art from heaven to earth. According to this tradition, during the period when the Pandavas lived in disguise, Arjuna, as Brihannala, imparted instruction in dance and music, which later evolved into the earliest form of Oja-Pali. This legend reflects the mythological importance of the art and connects it with a divine origin. Another popular belief holds that a woman named Parijat mastered this art through a dream and later taught it to her disciples. Practitioners of "Biyahar Oja-Pali" firmly uphold this belief and regard it as an integral part of their tradition



Kendukalai. These traditions reflect both the mythological and historical significance of Oja-Pali. The art became popular among different communities of Assam, serving as a medium through which mythological narratives were communicated to common people. Its antiquity and the legends surrounding it present a vivid picture of the depth and diversity of Assam's cultural heritage. The various stories and historical records associated with its origin further strengthen its cultural importance.

The performance of Oja-Pali is a complex, captivating, and multi-dimensional artistic expression in which melody, rhythm, tempo, dance, acting, bodily gestures, and storytelling blend harmoniously. Through this performance, religious, moral, and social messages are conveyed to audiences. Generally, the performance is conducted by an Oja leading a group of four to six Pali performers. The Oja serves as the principal guide of the troupe, directing the songs, demonstrating dance movements, and creating a profound impact on the audience through storytelling. The Palis accompany the Oja by repeating the lyrical verses and maintaining rhythm through the use of Khuti-Tal or Manjira. A special performer known as the Daina Pali introduces humor, making the performance lively and engaging. His wit, comic remarks, and timely observations add a unique dimension of entertainment. The bodily movements, facial expressions, and acting skills of the Oja greatly enhance the beauty of the performance. The presentation begins with the Oja performing the "Swasti Mudra," invoking the blessings of the deities. This gesture creates a spiritual atmosphere and immerses the audience in devotional sentiments. It is followed by the "Sanghari Mudra," through which homage is offered to the gods and goddesses, further deepening the religious significance of the per-

formance. Thereafter, the singing of verses begins, where classical ragas blend with local folk melodies to bring mythological stories to life. The Palis synchronize their movements with the rhythm and repeat the verses, enhancing the grace and flow of the presentation. Through humor, the Daina Pali reflects various social realities such as economic hardship, social change, and cultural transformations. The performance thus combines the elegance of classical music with the simplicity

performance reflects the joys and sorrows, hopes and struggles of everyday life, thereby strengthening the social relevance of Oja-Pali. People from different communities gather to witness these performances, symbolizing social unity and harmony.

The subject matter of Oja-Pali is highly diverse and profound and is broadly divided into two categories: epic-based and non-epic-based. Epic-based Oja-Pali presents songs and dances based on the Mahabharata, Ramayana,

Gaan, Padma Purana Gaan, and Tukuriya Oja-Pali. Sukananni Oja-Pali is particularly associated with the worship of Goddess Manasa. The primary subject matter is drawn from Sukavi Narayandeva's Padma Purana, especially the story of Beula and Lakhindar. Through simple language and melodies, it conveys religious and moral teachings. Bishahari Gaan and Marai Gaan describe the glory and power of Goddess Manasa. Tukuriya Oja-Pali is especially popular among the Rabha commu-

movements and those of the Palis reflects its traditional character. Through this dance, profound devotion within the Shakta tradition and unwavering faith in Goddess Manasa are expressed. The performance embodies a remarkable combination of emotion, energy, and devotion, offering audiences a deeply spiritual experience. Through Deodhani Dance, the heritage of Assam's Shakta tradition and its cultural values find powerful expression.

The costumes and adornments of Oja-Pali symbolize its cultural and religious significance. A Sukananni Oja generally wears a white dhoti, a cheleng chador, and a sandalwood mark on the forehead. His turban is oval-shaped with a front portion resembling a ridge. The costume of the Ramayana Oja differs slightly. They wear red and yellow gamocha turbans, anklets on their feet, and silver bracelets on their hands. The front of the Pali's turban is decorated like a peacock's feather and is made with ten folds of white cloth. Earlier, Sukananni Ojas kept long hair tied in a bun like women, but this practice has disappeared in modern times. Such variations in attire reflect the religious and cultural identity of Oja-Pali. Since it is closely associated with religious ceremonies, special importance is given to white garments. Ornaments such as anklets, bracelets, and distinctive turbans add a unique elegance to the performance. The selection of costumes reflects both local cultural influences and religious traditions. Through their attire, performers present their cultural and religious identity before the audience.

Oja-Pali is not merely a per-

formance. This social relevance brought Oja-Pali closer to the hearts of ordinary people. The art fostered a sense of unity among Assam's diverse communities. Through its performances, respect for local language and culture is expressed, contributing to its popularity. Oja-Pali presents a beautiful picture of cultural and religious harmony among the various communities of Assam.

The rulers of Assam played a significant role in the patronage of Oja-Pali. The kings of Darrang, in particular, contributed immensely to its growth and preservation. They provided Ojas with Sukananni manuscripts, Khuti-Tal, Bortal, drums, and other musical instruments. Under the patronage of King Dharmarayan of Darrang, Sukavi Narayandeva composed the Padma Purana consisting of 10,500 verses, which became the foundation of Sukananni Oja-Pali. This text gave a systematic structure to the songs and verses of the tradition. The kings also established training centers in places such as Barabari, Byaspara, Swetamadhar, and Dahi, where Oja-Pali was taught under royal patronage. As a result, the tradition survived through successive generations.

In modern times, the popularity of Oja-Pali has declined to some extent. The influence of Western culture, the rise of modern entertainment media, and the indifference of educated society have pushed this art toward decline. The economic hardship faced by artists and the lack of social recognition have further hindered its growth. Although Oja-Pali continues to enjoy some popularity in rural areas, its appeal has diminished among urban and educated audiences. The absence of sustained governmental support has also posed a major challenge. Though the Government of Assam included Oja-Pali in national cultural programmes in 1974 through the Department of Information and Public Relations, little effort has subsequently been made to promote it. As a result, the art now faces the threat of extinction. Coordinated efforts are necessary for its preservation and revival. Through the cooperation of government agencies, cultural organizations, and society at large, Oja-Pali can be revitalized. Training programmes in educational institutions, regular performances at cultural events, and promotion through modern media can generate interest among younger generations. Works such as Lalit Chandra Nath's Sukananni Sangeetar Rengoni serve as valuable resources for learning this art. Such initiatives can help preserve the heritage of Oja-Pali. Greater social awareness and improved living conditions for the artists associated with this tradition are equally important.

Oja-Pali is an invaluable treasure of Assamese culture. Through its songs, dances, performances, and spiritual consciousness, it has projected the identity of the Assamese people before the world. Yet, under the influence of modernity, this art now stands endangered. It is the responsibility of all of us to preserve and promote it. Through governmental and social initiatives, the heritage of Oja-Pali can be revitalized and the glory of Assamese culture further strengthened. By safeguarding this tradition, we can demonstrate our commitment to our cultural heritage and preserve this priceless legacy for future generations. Oja-Pali will continue to remain an inseparable part of Assamese culture, provided that we sustain our collective efforts toward its preservation and promotion.



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forming art; it is a powerful medium of religious, moral, and social consciousness in Assamese society. Through this tradition, stories from epics and Puranas were communicated to ordinary people. Along with religious teachings, Oja-Pali promoted ethnic unity, patriotism, and social awareness. Through the humor of the Daina Pali, various social issues such as poverty, social change, and cultural transformation were highlighted. The songs of Sukananni Oja-Pali often reflect changing social realities. Such songs created awareness about social transformation and the influence of modernity. They portrayed not only religious messages but also the joys, sorrows, hopes, and hardships of everyday



The Sunday Haat

By: Meenakshi Gogoi

The bright rays of the mesmerising, setting sun spread its orangish hues across the sky, resembling a fine piece of artwork to the goers. The rays falling over the green rice fields signalled to the farmers that it was time to return home as the day ended, paving the way for a breezy evening. Maloti finished plucking a few ripe pumpkins and some leafy veggies from her farmland and reached home, carrying the vegetable bamboo basket on her head. She took a quick shower and lit an earthen diya, completing her evening prayers. Her young daughter, Nomita, came home playing with her village friends. She was served with a glass of hot, sweetened milk and a bowl of puffed rice mixed with roasted peanuts. Maloti sat beside the fireplace, the earthen chowka, at one corner of the veranda. She prepared her aromatic cup of ginger tea with bay leaves and left some in the sauceman for her husband, who was on the way home. Nomita suddenly asked, "Maa, I want to accompany father to the haat bazar tomorrow?" Maloti replied, "If the weather is fine, then you can go. I hope your father won't mind." In a moment, Nomita's eyes glistened with joy.

Soon after, her father, Tilok, arrived home. He brought three large sacks of harvested pumpkins and rice to sell off in the Sunday haat. He took a quick bath and sat beside the fireplace, wearing the Naga shawl over a kurta and dhoti. It was a cold November evening, and the warmth of the fire was very satisfying. Maloti served him hot tea and crunchy-crispy jaggery-mixed rice laddus. Nomita, in her enthusiasm, asked, "Deuta, I want to go with you to the haat tomorrow. It has been some time since I last accompanied you to the haat bazar." Tilok replied, "Well, you have to sit with me for hours until I sell off our farm produce. Will you sit for long without roaming the haat?" "Yes, of course. I will take my drawing copy with coloured pencils. I will sit and draw to pass my time," replied an enthusiastic Nomita. Tilok could very well sense the willingness in Nomita's talk about visiting the haat next morn-



ing, to which he agreed. After dinner, Nomita went to her room and cleaned her small, messy bed. She arranged all her playthings, books, and copies and placed them on her desk table. She picked a yellow full-sleeved frock with leggings, socks, and a sweater to wear to the haat bazar the following day. She cleaned her canvas shoes to wear with the dress. All the articles she needed—her drawing copy, colour pencils, eraser, scale, a handkerchief and a vaseline tube were put in a designed, woven macrame bag. Like a big girl, Nomita organised her things properly and fell asleep with sweet thoughts.

The next morning, Nomita went to the haat bazar with her father in their neighbour's van. Their neighbour was a farmer who had to sell off his rice harvest. It was a fine Sunday, with light rays of the sun. They chose a shady spot under a tall banyan tree after reaching the haat. Tilok placed his farm produce on a thick woven mat and sat beside. Nomita sat next to her father with her

bag and water bottle. Their neighbour sat a little away. She was ecstatic to view the bustling crowd gathered in the haat from nearby villages and town. The vendors' and little children's noisy screams had filled the air. She spotted a few sweet and snack shops with people eating and buying food from them, talking and laughing with friends and family. Nomita's observant eyes wandered around the multi-coloured dresses of the young girls and adult women, a few children clinging on top of their father's bodies to beat walking in the crowd. Some older women and men were busy selling local veggies and wild herbs. The haat bazar had small stalls selling a variety of farm produce and other household items. People were seen buying items at reasonable prices and enjoying their Sunday afternoon. Tilok had sold off a good quantity of his farm produce and given money to Nomita to satisfy her sweet tooth. She quickly got some eatables and a cup of tea for her father.

Nomita finished her eating, and soon after, she began drawing a beautiful crayon artwork depicting that ongoing Sunday haat scene. Her drawing covered different aspects of the haat. An old woman selling bananas, alocasia leaves, and local ferns, vendors selling crispy-juicy hot jalebis, farmers sitting in line with their farm produce and buyers purchasing necessary household things. At one corner, her drawing highlighted two children playing ludo who had accompanied their mother to sell off her farm-grown leafy veggies. The buyers purchasing her father's farmland produce were amazed to find Nomita's drawing very thoughtful, displaying shades of fine colours perfectly depicting the real haat scenes. Her father told one of the buyers it was the beautiful effect of the yearly summer Art classes conducted by an NGO in their village that she had attended consistently. The Art classes had quenched her insane thirst for drawing landscapes, crowded places and human figures. It

honed her drawing and painting skills. Undoubtedly, the buyers praised her grooming art talent. The future artist in her had to find a suitable way to depict human bodies and their excitement, joy, and smiles in small bazars, as Nomita's drawing had portrayed.

After a long day spent in the haat, they returned home. Tilok was delighted to sell off all the pumpkins and rice. He handed some money, a sweet, and snack packet to Maloti. He wrapped a shawl around her shoulders, which he had bought from the haat with delight. Maloti knew the selling was fine, judging by his joyful face. She quickly prepared some tea, and they sat beside the fireplace while eating their evening supper. Nomita enthusiastically showed her artwork to Maloti, who praised her and encouraged her to draw more such fine paintings. The evening was spent in content, with good hopes of welcoming more such wonderful evenings in the coming weekly Sunday haats.

Tips for healthy and beautiful nails in the summer



By: Shahnaz Husain

Just like your skin, your nail plate and cuticles are more vulnerable in the heat. Sun exposure, chlorine, sea salt, and higher sweat production can cause dryness, discoloration, lifting and brittleness.

Hot weather, air conditioning, and sun exposure rapidly strip moisture from the keratin layers of your nail plates, causing nails to expand, crack and break easily.

Prolonged UV exposure can cause discoloration, yellowing, and dullness to bare nails.

This could affect your nail health and cause them to chip more quickly.

Whether you're rocking gel, lacquer, or natural nails, keeping them looking fresh during hot weather requires more than just a professional application; it needs a regimen that protects and preserves.

Here are the top tips to help your mani survive and thrive all summer long!

1--Hydrate ----

Prolonged soaking in water/exposure to the sun can cause nails to expand and become more vulnerable to premature chipping and peeling.

Staying hydrated is key to keeping your nails healthy and strong.

Your body typically gets about 20% of the water it needs from the foods, fruit and vegetables you eat throughout the day. Foods that typically provide the highest water content are raw fruits and vegetables.

Drink plenty of water and include water-rich hydrating fruits and vegetables in your diet, such as cucumbers, watermelon, Lettuce, Peaches, and strawberries.

Regularly apply a moisturising hand cream or nail oil to your nails and cuticles to keep them hydrated. Applying cuticle oil can increase the circulation around your nails, stimulating nail growth. The oil can also help improve the health and appearance of your nails. If you paint your nails, cuticle oil can also protect your polish for a lasting shine.

2---Don't forget to exfoliate:--- Just like your skin, your nails and cuticles can benefit from exfoliation.

Nail exfoliation is a technique that helps buff out ridges and other uneven textures on the nail plate to ensure smooth, long-lasting nail polish. Gently exfoliating can stimulate blood flow to the nail area, which can contribute to stronger and healthier nails. Use a gentle nail brush or an exfoliating scrub on the nail area to remove dead

skin cells and any residual buildup from the surface of your nails and cuticles. Healthy, well-exfoliated nails provide a better base for nail polish, helping it last longer. Plus, it can create a smooth canvas for traditional nail polish application. Nail exfoliation can help loosen cuticles that have become attached to the nail plate and soften ridges in the nail, allowing for a smoother, shinier finish.

3--Nail Polish Break ----
While many women love to have their toenails painted their favourite colour during open-toe season, the truth is, your toenails could benefit from a break from polish. While it's fun to wear nail polish, it's important to take a break now and then, especially during summer, to maintain healthy nails.

Leaving nail polish on too long can be dangerous because the pigment in it can seep into the top layers of your nails and dry them out. Constant polish wear can weaken nails and make them prone to breakage.

Nails derive oxygen and nutrients from the blood supply and not the air; however, they do need breaks in between manicures for other reasons.

Prolonged wear of nail polish can result in the appearance of keratin granulation (rough and white patches on the surface of the nail), peeling, ridges and splits, discoloration, and dehydration.

4--Diet and nails ----

Your balanced diet also affects your nail growth.

When you choose nutritious food for healthy nails, you can easily take good care of your nail health from the comfort of your home.

Nails are mostly made up of keratin, a natural protein in our bodies. Focus on consuming foods that provide keratin, the protein that makes up nails, and other nutrients like biotin, zinc, iron, and vitamin C. Minerals are crucial for nail health, especially during summer when nails are more susceptible to dryness and damage. Nuts are also highly recommended.

Many foods contain essential nutrients, protein, and vitamins that keep your nails strong and beautiful and prevent them from becoming brittle, weak, or damaged. Iron deficiency can cause brittle nails, and protein deficiency can lead to ridges.

Dark, leafy vegetables are a pertinent part of a balanced diet for one's holistic development. Spinach, kale, broccoli, and collards contain enough folate, iron, and calcium to keep your nails growing strong. Beans, legumes, and tofu contain rich protein for nail health.

Jonaki: Stream of Consciousness – A Memory Chest and a Few Snapshots

By: Indranil Gayan

"It's not what I mean, but that's what I'm trying to explain."

— Jean-Luc Godard

We often find ourselves immersed in a whirlwind of thoughts. Certain ideas keep spiraling in our minds, sometimes in disarray, sometimes with quiet clarity. These tangled dilemmas of thought often open doors to new perceptions.

As the poet Devakanta Barua once wrote:

"Come, let us open the door."

But the questions remain:

— What is that door?

— Where is it located?

— Who is trying to open it?

The German poet and critic Goethe once said, "If you would understand the poet, you must go to the poet's land."

Indeed, to truly know the tangible and intangible world of a poet, we must get close to their universe. At times, our ideas might even slip into what we could call a three-dimensional fantasy—a heightened inner world shaped by memory and imagination.

**Poetry in cinema, or cinema in poetry?*

A "poem in images"—that's how the Russian filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky, often called "the poet of cinema," once described the medium. He said:

"A poet is someone who can use a single image to send a universal message."

In India, Bengali filmmaker and writer Aditya Vikram Sengupta's debut film *Jonaki* (*Asha Jaor Majhe* (*Labour of Love*)) is a poetic visual meditation on life. It not only won the prestigious 62nd National Award but also received widespread critical acclaim. Four years later, in 2018, he released *Jonaki* (*Firefly*)—an unconventional and deeply surreal film. Based primarily on his own personal experiences, *Jonaki* reflects the fragmented dreamscapes of an 81-year-old woman who lay bedridden for four years before passing away. Through surreal episodes, the film attempts to represent her conscious and subconscious memories—an evocative journey between life and death.

In this context, Tarkovsky's "stream of consciousness" style, particularly seen in his film *Mirror* (1973), becomes relevant. This technique, both literary and cinematic, seeks to capture a character's internal thought process in its raw and fluid form. One might say that *Jon-



aki* begins and ends in memory—if we accept that the story indeed concludes where the director intended it to.

Cinema often demands imagery—deliberately chosen, carefully crafted—to reflect new ideas, emotions, or philosophies. In *Jonaki*, the visual imagery is not only rich but also layered with metaphor. Sengupta does not shy away from introducing unconventional artistic dimensions. These images do not merely represent the filmmaker's personal expression—they also carve a path beyond traditional cinematic thought.

Thus, *Jonaki* may not appeal to every viewer, but it has undoubtedly carved a niche among discerning audiences with a taste for refined aesthetics.

Although the filmmaker does not explicitly declare its narrative structure or conceptual framework as overtly philosophical. Over time, modern realism has shifted in tone and form. The shadows and illuminations of Western modernity alone cannot completely anchor this film in the viewer's psyche.

Postmodern and post-surrealist thought may often shout from the rooftops, trying to define the contemporary intellectual landscape. But in reality, such rhetoric has failed to solidify its position in the minds of the masses. Because of this, films like *Jonaki*, rooted in certain nuanced and experimental traditions, continue to tread challenging paths.

Despite everything, thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, and Roland Barthes—dominant voices of the 1980s—continue to be invoked. Derrida notably rejected the very idea of fixed interpretation. Ironically, while we attempt to discard one school of thought, we simultaneously formulate another. Postmodernism often appears to mislead or blur our cognitive faculties. At times, it suppresses surrealistic imagination under the burden of hyper-rationalized intellect.

Despite debates, diverging schools of thought, and the presence of symbolic markers—be it linear storytelling, Freudian metaphors, Barthesian ideas of author-reader dynamics—the director of *Jonaki* has deliberately left much unsaid. What was left untold or unexplained becomes a space for the viewer's own interpretation. And in doing so, he succeeds.

Echoes Eternal

By: Himadri Chekanidhara

Are you sitting blank
In the dark,
Waiting
For a right time to come;
Does your feet feel numb
And paralyzed?

There was a door up ahead,
A fluorescent bulb glows dimly
Hung above the front door,
An unknown pair of boots
In the carpet.
How could you still move
When the dark
Is full of mysteries,
With werewolves
Moving around you?

Time ticks
With echoes eternal
Across this infinite darkness,
And you can't wait
You can't move
You call desperately
To the door.
Your hands are short
For the calling bell

Fingers fall frail,
You try to wait
But your tears are dry
You want to,
But you wait,
Because you had wanted
To wait forever,
When your dreams flew.

What if it was a dreaming
And the door
Was never there,
Would there be despair
For the unattainable?

You've called upon the door
Do not wait,
Take a walk outside,
The dark has shown you
enough
To be inside.



DON'T BE OVER THE MOON, BLACK SPOTS CATCH ALL EYES

By: Bipul Chandra Kalita

Gold diggers, don't be over the moon
After looting people's dreams;
Ruin pious missions,
Your existence poisons visions
And deeply stains your white apron...
All are widely eying your fallen images:
Lost originality,
Lost rays of personality,
All speak aloud how you've lost yourself!
Wisdom beautified your original simplicity
When you were a freshman,
Baring everything to honesty
Dazzling yourself without any hard labour;
I loved your virgin smile and its meaning,
Adoring carelessly your gesture's solemnity...
Greedy eyes winked at you to change your mindset:
No corrigendum at all
To correct or safeguard your originality,
Only intentions to sideline my noble desires!
Sparky success makes you blind to your bleak status,
Winging the careless bird in you
To fly to the height of forgetfulness
To get hidden behind its thickest bush;
Don't be over the moon, black spots catch all eyes:
Distorting beauty's comfortable zones,
Greedy eyes winked at you to divert your esteemed originality
And lead you to your intellectually framed fake world...

Bihar: Ex-JD(U) president RCP Singh meets Nitish Kumar, fuels rapprochement chatter

PATNA, June 27: Four years after quitting the JD(U), R C P Singh on Saturday called on party supremo Nitish Kumar, asserting that their "relation is intact" and that "when a meeting takes place, a new inning begins".

The former JD(U) president, who quit the party in 2022 following allegations of trying to engineer a split within its ranks, met the former chief minister at his 7, Circular Road, residence here.

The bureaucrat-turned-politician told PTI Videos that his association with Kumar had been "25 years long" and claimed that Kumar's "body language suggested that he was happy to see me".

"I met Nitish Babu after more than four years. It was a pleasant meeting, and we had a cordial conversation. After all, I have worked with him for more than 25 years. Our relation is intact," Singh told PTI Videos.

"When a meeting takes place, a new inning begins," he said,

adding that he will meet the JD(U) chief again in the future.

JD(U) spokesperson Neeraj Kumar, however, frowned upon speculations that Singh could return to the party.

"Our party had a very bitter experience with him. His activities in the party reflected a well-planned strategy to plunge it into the abyss. He had brought our number in the Bihar assembly to as low as 43. How low will he take us now?" he told PTI Videos.

He was alluding to the party's dismal performance in the 2020 assembly elections when JD(U) could secure only 43 seats in the 243-seat assembly, remaining a distant third, followed by the RJD's 75 and the BJP's 74 seats.

Neeraj Kumar said he doesn't trust Singh and alleged that the former JD(U) leader described Nitish Kumar as "unworthy of remaining active" in politics during the assembly elections.

Hailing from Nalanda district, to which his patron also belongs, Singh was an Uttar Pradesh cadre IAS officer who impressed Kumar when the latter was the Railway Minister, and he was on central deputation.

Upon becoming the chief minister of Bihar, Kumar appointed Singh as his principal secretary, a post he held till 2010, before taking voluntary retirement and joining the JD(U).

Popularly known as "RCP", Singh had a meteoric rise in the JD(U) and became its national president in 2020, even though his performance as the national general secretary (organisation) in the assembly polls was called into question when the party put up its worst-ever performance.

His acceptance of a Union cabinet berth in 2021 caused him to run afoul of Nitish Kumar, who was opposed to the JD(U) getting a "token representation" in the council of ministers. (PTI)

'India lone voice of silence': Sonia slams govt for not calling out Israel's 'Gaza genocide'

NEW DELHI, June 27: In a blistering attack on the Modi government, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi on Saturday said its "stony silence" and "inaction" on Israel's "Gaza genocide" are not just morally reprehensible but also inexplicable from a national interest perspective.

Gandhi, the Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson, claimed that India has alienated itself from its historical allies in Palestine, Iran, and the larger Middle East and has distanced itself from global public opinion, while letting Pakistan swoop in to claim the space of a mediator.

In an article for The Indian Express, Gandhi also termed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel ahead of the US-Israel joint attack on Iran a "bewildering strategic decision".

This is the fourth article on West Asia within one year that Gandhi has penned. In March, she wrote a piece on the Iran war in which she said the Modi government's silence on the targeted assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is not neutral but an abdication, and raises serious doubts about the direction and credibility of India's foreign policy.

In her latest article, the Congress leader said the spirit of Indian nationhood demands that it speaks up for Palestinians whose children have been so brutally targeted and the calculus of national interest demands that India respond to the global public opinion against the Israeli regime's "genocidal actions" in Gaza and its "brutal displacement and dispossession of lakhs of Palestinian families in the occupied West Bank".

"The Modi government's continued silence simply cannot be explained rationally or morally," she said.

In September 2025, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory concluded that Israeli authorities were committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, she said in her article titled 'India remains silent on Gaza, the world continues to speak up'. In June 2026, the same commission — now headed by Justice (retired) S Muralidhar, a distinguished Indian jurist — has poignantly reiterated that Israeli

actions are intended to destroy the very existence of the Palestinians in Gaza by targeting their children, Gandhi said.

"The 94-page report is a harrowing read, with grim details on the extent of the devastation perpetrated by Israel in Gaza and the genocidal intent underpinning its actions. At least 20,000 children have been killed, and another 44,000 have been wounded, many for life," she said.

The targeting of children is not incidental, but a deliberate strategy, Gandhi asserted.

"Twenty-seven per cent of those killed or wounded have been children and many of the boys were found with bullets on the head and neck. Ninety-seven per cent of Gaza's schools have been destroyed," she said. Healthcare infrastructure, including paediatric hospitals, has been destroyed, resulting in a 300 per cent increase in miscarriage and childbirth complications, Gandhi said.

In the two-and-a-half years since the "dastardly, horrific, and absolutely unacceptable attack" by Hamas on Israel, it has become clear that the retaliation of the Israeli armed forces and political leadership has been characterised by "wanton cruelty and barbarity", she said.

"Senior Israeli leaders, down from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his senior cabinet colleagues themselves, have called for the 'complete siege' and 'total annihilation' of Gaza, denounced the Palestinians as 'animals' who have 'no right to exist', and defined success for Israel as 'hundreds of thousands fleeing Gaza'," Gandhi said.

Despite this clear "genocidal intent", the support of President Donald Trump's government in Washington DC has enabled the Israeli government to continue its "brutal campaign" against Palestinians, she said, adding that the rest of the world has felt the pricking of its conscience.

The UN has been unable to act with any resolve due to American obstruction, but through its agencies it has played a stellar role in the documentation of Israeli war crimes, she said.

Leading powers historically associated with the Western bloc — including France, the UK, Canada, and Australia — have recognised



Palestinian statehood after decades of indifference to the Palestinian cause, she pointed out.

South Africa, a country with which India has shared a long history of anti-colonial solidarity, has dragged Israel to the International Court of Justice for its violations of the Genocide Convention of 1948, Gandhi noted.

She also pointed out that several European states have restricted arms sales to Israel, and several Latin American nations have downgraded or severed their ties with the country. The International Criminal Court has even issued arrest warrants for the Israeli political leadership, she said.

A very large number of countries with whom India enjoys close relations have recognised Israel's actions in Gaza as genocide, Gandhi said.

"Amidst the growing public backlash against Israel and the international community's cognisance of the unjustifiable brutality unleashed on Gaza, India remains a lone voice of silence," she asserted. Justice Muralidhar's report, which has sparked renewed conversation and activism against the Gaza genocide, has been met with "stony silence" from the Narendra Modi government, the former Congress chief said.

It is hardly surprising — recall that Justice Muralidhar had been transferred out of the Delhi High Court after he called out the Delhi Police's inaction on BJP leaders' inflammatory statements in the run-up to the 2020 Delhi riots, she pointed out. Gandhi said India was historically exceptional among the nations of the world for our commitment to postcolonial solidarity, national sovereignty, and international peace.

"Today we are exceptional in our continued indifference to the flagrant violation of the global rules-based order, to the suffering

of our fellow peoples in the Global South, and to the abasement of human dignity that is on open display in Gaza and the West Bank," she said in her article.

Gandhi also recalled Hind Rajab's tragic story and said she is emblematic of the unspeakable cruelty of the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

"A girl of just five, fleeing Gaza City with her family when Israeli forces fired 335 rounds at their car, killing her six family members, leaving her trapped in a car with her relatives' dead bodies while paramedics attempted to rescue her. She was eventually killed, along with two paramedics," she said.

"The Modi government's silence and inaction are not just morally reprehensible but also inexplicable from a national interest perspective," she said.

India is slipping further into Israel's strategic orbit, at a time when the world is increasingly pivoting away from it, Gandhi said.

The prime minister's visit to Israel amidst these circumstances, and only days before Israel's war on Iran and the assassination of its top political leadership, will go down in history as a "bewildering strategic decision", Gandhi said.

"We have alienated ourselves from our historical allies in Palestine, Iran, and the larger Middle East. We have distanced ourselves from global public opinion. And we have let Pakistan, of all countries, itself a state that has and continues to harbour dreaded terrorists, swoop in to claim the space of a mediator — a role to which we would have a natural claim given our historically friendly ties with all players," she said.

India's sacrifice of its strategic interest and morality has yielded us nothing but the friendship between Prime Minister Modi and Prime Minister Netanyahu, who is now under attack all over the world, including in the US, Gandhi said. Sharing the article in a post on X, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge said Sonia Gandhi's evocative piece calling out "Modi Government's silence" and inaction for Palestinian people is a "stark reminder of how our current foreign policy has alienated our historical allies in Palestine, Iran, and the larger Middle East". (PTI)

Sukhu govt deliberately delaying elections in local bodies: BJP



SHIMLA, June 27: Leader of Opposition in Himachal Pradesh Assembly Jai Ram Thakur on Saturday accused the Congress government in the state of undermining democracy by "misusing" the administrative machinery to "manipulate" the outcome of local body elections.

Addressing media persons here, he alleged that after failing to prevent the polls, the state government is now deliberately delaying the election of chairpersons and vice-chairpersons in an attempt to facilitate horse-trading and overturn the people's mandate.

BJP workers and leaders on Sat-

urday lodged a symbolic protest outside the offices of the deputy commissioners across the state, demanding immediate announcement of the election dates for the posts of chairpersons and vice chairpersons.

BJP Rajya Sabha MP Harsh Mahajan, who was participating in the protest outside the DC office in Shimla, was admitted to IGMC hospital due to dehydration and low blood pressure.

"Due to a sudden health-related issue, I had to undergo medical treatment at the hospital for a short while and now I am fine," he said.

Thakur announced that the BJP is preparing a list of officers who, the opposition party alleged, are acting under political pressure by delaying elections or targeting BJP-backed elected representatives through administrative action. He warned that such actions would be legally challenged.

He said the Congress government initially made every possible effort to postpone the elections by invoking the Disaster Act, altering election rules and creating procedural hurdles. (PTI)

INS Sudarshini arrives in US, to take part in 250th anniversary celebrations

NEW DELHI, June 27: Indian Navy's Sail Training Ship, INS Sudarshini, has arrived at a port in the United States as part of a transoceanic expedition, and will join the country's 250th anniversary celebrations during her stay, officials said on Saturday.

The ship arrived in Baltimore, Maryland, on June 26. Prior to arriving there, 'Sudarshini' participated in Sail 250 Virginia celebrations at Norfolk from June 19-23, joining tall ships from across the world, and representing India in the Parade of Sail and the City Crew Parade, an Indian Navy spokesperson said.

The US has hosted a series of events across the country and in other countries, including India, as part of the anniversary celebration under the banner of 'Freedom 250'.

The US celebrates the anniversary of its independence on July 4 annually, popularly known as the Fourth of July celebrations.

The sail training ship arrived in Baltimore, as part of the landmark transoceanic expedition, 'Lokayan 26', the spokesperson said. (PTI)

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Hinduism embraced diversity, allowed other religions to flourish: J&K L-G Sinha

SRINAGAR, June 27: Jammu and Kashmir Lieutenant Governor (LG) Manoj Sinha said on Saturday that Hinduism is the world's oldest living religion and that it allowed other religions to flourish in the country by embracing diversity and coexistence.

The LG made these remarks while addressing the Interfaith Dialogue organised by the National Council for Promotion of Urdu Language (NCPUL) and Inter-Faith Harmony Foundation of India, at SKICC here.

Highlighting India's legacy as an ancient civilisation rooted in mutual respect, Sinha said diverse faiths coexist and flourish in the country, teaching the world the wisdom of peace.

"The world recognises that Hinduism-Sanatana Dharma, the world's oldest living religion, never imposed itself. Instead, it embraced diversity and coexistence. Ancient India built a foundation of respect, giving Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism freedom to flourish," he said.

The LG said in a world facing conflicts and intolerance, the core spirit of Sanatana Dharma and Indian philosophy can serve as a guiding light.

"Today, the world may be divided by religion, language, and race, but Indian thought has the unique power to bridge these divides," he said.

Sinha said India is a living idea that declares humanity should live together as one family.



The young generation must carry this vision forward, reminding the world that peace is possible through mutual respect, he said.

"In intellectual, spiritual, and cultural vocabulary, I call this 'Indianness'-Bhartiyata, the ethos that offered the world the vision of equal respect for all religions, the pursuit of truth, unity in diversity, the idea of the world as one family (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam), and a shared cultural consciousness," he said.

The LG said ancient texts, the Vedas and Upanishads, symbols of a knowledge tradition older than five thousand years, have always taught harmonious living.

"They taught humanity that people of different faiths should live together while respecting one another's beliefs. That is the eternal princi-

ple. Thousands of years ago, our sages said the truth is not confined to a single path. Truth is infinite, and many routes lead to it.

"That is why India has always seen diversity not as division but as a blessing. This outlook is reflected in the crown jewel of India, Jammu Kashmir, where for centuries the spirit of harmony and coexistence has been part of life," he said.

The LG said people often use the word 'Kashmiriyat', which actually springs from the philosophy of 'Indianness'-Bhartiyata and symbolises the fundamental sentiment India has taught the world since the Vedic age, equal respect for all religions, cultures, and traditions.

The LG stated that when Islam came to India in the 12th and 13th centuries, and many Sufi saints and Islamic scholars came here, they found a unique Indian culture rooted in love, spirituality, compassion, and equality.

"Sufi saints were inspired by the vision of the Vedas, Upanishads, Buddhism, and Jainism, and they learnt the ideals of co-existence from Indian scriptures. Moreover, numerous Sanskrit texts and repositories of knowledge were translated into Arabic.

"Our ancestors prayed, 'Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinaa, Sarve Santu Niramaya' -- may all be happy, may all be free from illness. This prayer is not for one religion or sect, but it is a prayer for the welfare of all humanity. I believe this is India's identity," he said. (PTI)

Congress open to tie-up with like-minded parties for 2027 Goa polls

PANAJI, June 27: The Congress on Saturday said it is open to allying with any political party willing to fight the ruling BJP in the 2027 Goa assembly elections, provided they have a common programme based on shared ideology.

Addressing a press conference after a meeting of the Goa Congress's political affairs committee, AICC Goa in-charge Manikrao Thakare said the party has authorised state unit chief Girish Chodankar to hold talks with like-minded parties.

"After consultations with everyone, we are willing to form alliances with any party that wants to fight the BJP, provided there is a common programme based on our shared ideology so that we can contest the elections together," Thakare said.

He said that the committee also discussed the party's election preparedness and decided to expedite organisational strengthening across the state.

Committees would be constituted at the village, block, district and state levels to prepare for the polls, he said.

Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao, who heads the party's elec-



tion committee, has been entrusted with preparing the election strategy and programmes, Thakare said.

He also attacked the BJP government in Goa, alleging it had failed to work in the interest of the people.

"We want to assure the people of Goa that the Congress stands with them and their concerns. Across Goa, people have said this government is not working in the interest of the public. The government has completely failed," he alleged.

Congress had fought the 2022 assembly election in alliance with the Goa Forward Party and won 11 seats. However, it was later reduced to only three MLAs in the 40-member House, after eight of them switched sides to the BJP soon after the polls. (PTI)

Water released from Pandoh Dam, authorities issue alert

MANDI (HP) June 27: The Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) authorities on Saturday issued an alert that water will be released from the Pandoh Dam, which is situated 20 km upstream of Mandi town. Due to a rise in incoming water flow in Pandoh Dam, authorities will release around 2,000 cusecs of water into the Beas river, due to which, the water flow in the Beas River will increase to over 6,000 cusecs, a release issued here said.

Authorities have requested locals living along the bank of Beas to avoid going near the river and not engage in any water related activities starting Saturday. For the construction of the 990 MW Beas Satluj Link Project, the flow of Beas river has been diverted by constructing a diversion dam at Pandoh. However, when water levels are high during the summer and rainy season the excess water is released into Beas river.

The release of water sometimes creates havoc downstream in Mandi, Hamirpur and Kangra districts, and has also caused loss of lives and widespread damage to property in the past. (PTI)

India mastered cryogenic engine technology once denied to it: ISRO chief

BENGALURU, June 27: India has mastered the cryogenic engine technology once denied to it, ISRO Chairman V Narayanan said on Saturday. He said the country is preparing for the first uncrewed Gaganyaan mission, advancing Chandrayaan-4, a lunar sample return mission, and Chandrayaan-5, a joint long-duration mission with Japan involving a heavier rover.

Delivering the 17th Air Chief Marshal LM Katre Memorial Lecture at the HAL Management Academy under the aegis of the Air Force Association, Karnataka Branch, Narayanan outlined India's progress in space technology and its roadmap towards establishing an Indian space station by 2035 and landing an Indian astronaut on the Moon by 2040.

"We have developed a cryogenic rocket engine, the technology which was denied to India," Narayanan said. He explained that India had transformed technology denial into technological leadership by developing three cryogenic propulsion systems and setting multiple world records in the process. Narayanan said the first uncrewed Gaganyaan mission was the immediate focus before India proceeds with crewed spaceflight.

"We are now working on the first uncrewed mission this year. Then once we review the result, we'll come back to the crewed mission," he said during the lecture.

He said Chandrayaan-4 would be India's first lunar sample return mission, while Chandrayaan-5, to



be undertaken jointly with Japan, would deploy a 350-kg rover capable of operating for nearly 100 days, compared with the 25-kg rover and 14-day operational life of Chandrayaan-3.

Highlighting India's rise in space technology, Narayanan said the country had evolved from launching a gifted seven-kg sound-

ing rocket in 1963 to building some of the world's most advanced launch vehicles and spacecraft.

Recalling India's cryogenic engine programme, he said technology denial had ultimately strengthened indigenous capabilities.

"Today, I think the countries that denied the technology. Today we have developed three cryogenic propulsion systems," he said.

Referring to the country's long-term vision, Narayanan said India was working towards establishing its own space station by 2035 and sending an Indian to the Moon by 2040.

"By 2040 Indian will land on the Moon using an Indian launcher with our national flag," he said.

He said Chandrayaan-2 had

placed the highest-resolution camera in lunar orbit, while Chandrayaan-3 had made India the first country to achieve a successful soft landing near the Moon's south pole.

The ISRO Chairman credited the Indian Air Force and Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for their critical contributions to programmes such as the reusable launch vehicle and Gaganyaan, saying India's launch vehicle and satellite programmes could not have reached their present stature without HAL's support.

He also highlighted ISRO's role in national security, saying all Indian satellites had performed flawlessly during Operation Sindoor and contributed to national requirements. (PTI)

RAM TEMPLE DONATIONS ROW

BJP betrayed Hindus by playing with their emotions, says Uddhav

YAVATMAL (MAHARASHTRA), June 27: Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Saturday invoked the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple in Ayodhya to target the saffron party over Hindutva and accused it of betraying Hindus by playing with their emotions.

He also vowed that the Shiv Sena (UBT) will lead protests to ensure "BJP-mukt Ram".

Addressing a rally in the Yavatmal-Washin constituency represented by dissident Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Deshmukh, who has joined Shiv Sena, Thackeray accused the BJP of breaking political parties to divert the attention of people from real issues.

"Real Hindutva teaches humanity. We reject your (BJP's) Hindutva of looting temples. We want 'BJP-mukt Ram' and Shiv Sena (UBT) will lead such protests," he added.

He said Shiv Sena (UBT) had given many silver bricks before the construction of the Ram Temple.

"These silver bricks have been stolen. What happened to the money given by Shiv Sena?" Thackeray asked.

On Friday, Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut claimed the party had not received the receipt for ₹ 1 crore it had donated to the trust.

Thackeray said this is an insult to Hindutva. "This is not only the betrayal of Shiv Sena, but also of Hindus in the country". (PTI)

Naga people had exercised restraint and expected justice for the six civilians killed, says L Adani

Manipur Naga body seeks PM's intervention, judicial probe into alleged killing of six civilians



NEW DELHI, June 27: The United Naga Council (UNC) on Saturday urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene in the state's situation, alleging that Naga-inhabited areas face security threats.

The UNC, an apex body representing 21 Naga tribes in Manipur, demanded a court-monitored probe

into the killing of six Naga civilians.

Addressing a press conference at the Press Club of India here, leaders of the council said they submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister seeking immediate intervention regarding what they described as the deteriorating security situation in Naga areas of

Manipur.

The council alleged that Kuki militant groups abducted 20 Naga civilians on May 13 following the killing of three Thadou church leaders earlier that day.

It said 14 of them were released on May 15, while the remaining six were later found dead.

The UNC claimed that Naga village guards released 14 Kuki detainees on June 9 as a humanitarian gesture, but alleged that the bodies of the six missing Naga civilians were recovered the following day. Demanding a time-bound, independent and court-monitored investigation, the council also sought the arrest and prosecution of those allegedly involved in the abduction and killings.

It called for enhanced security arrangements in Naga-inhabited areas, alleging that civilians had faced intimidation, hostage-taking

and armed movement in vulnerable regions. The council urged the Centre to uphold the 2015 Framework Agreement on the Indo-Naga peace process.

It alleged that recent incidents in parts of Manipur involved cross-border armed movement and posed a threat to India's eastern frontier.

"Our appeal to the Prime Minister is direct: Honour the Framework Agreement, secure the Naga areas and stop treating armed aggression against Naga civilians as a local disturbance," UNC leader KS Paul Leo said.

Another leader, L Adani, said the Naga people had exercised restraint and expected justice for the six civilians killed.

The council demanded that the Centre declare the Kuki National Front-President (KNF-P) group a terrorist organisation and either revoke the Suspension of Operations

(SoO) agreement with Kuki militant groups or strictly enforce its provisions.

Among its other demands, the UNC sought action against those it alleged were involved in the killings, restoration of security along National Highways, a judicial inquiry into attacks since March this year, and an assurance that no administrative arrangement would affect what it described as Naga ancestral lands.

The organisation maintained its commitment to peace and coexistence while urging the Union government to ensure justice and security for civilians in Manipur.

The delegation, comprising senior Naga leaders including Ng Lorho, Vareiyu Shatsang, Samson Remei, AC Thotso, KS Paul Leo and L Adani, said they had also been meeting political leaders, civil society groups and other stakeholders in Delhi. (PTI)

Kuki-Zo group says its chief's remarks not meant to suggest community responsible for Naga killings

CHURACHANDPUR/IMPHAL, June 27: A day after the Kuki Zo Council (KZC) chairman Henliethang Thanglet sought an apology for the killing of six Naga hostages in Manipur, the organisation stated that certain portions of his remarks had been "misconstrued as an admission of responsibility by the Kuki-Zo community".

In a statement on Friday, the KZC stated that the chairman's expression of sorrow was made purely in the spirit of humanity, compassion, and moral responsibility and "was not intended to assign collective guilt". The clarification came as an influential Naga students' organisation expressed anger at the apology issued by the KZC chief over the killing of six Naga hostages in the state.

The bodies of those six civilians who were abducted on May 13

from Leilon Vaiphei village in Kangpokpi district were recovered on June 10 from the vicinity of a Kuki Zo village. The recovery took place a day after 14 Kuki individuals, who were abducted by armed groups in Senapati district nearly a month ago, were released.

Addressing a press conference at Churachandpur district headquarters, Thanglet had said, "I admit the Kuki-Zo people made a grave mistake in killing the six Naga civilians. It was done out of emotion. I strongly condemn it. I am very sorry and apologise on behalf of my people."

In the statement issued on Friday, the Kuki-Zo group said, "KZC wishes to categorically clarify that the Chairman's expression of regret was made purely in the spirit of humanity, compassion, and moral responsibility."

"His remarks were never intended

to assign collective guilt to the Kuki-Zo people or to suggest that the Kuki-Zo community was responsible for the killings," it said.

As the bodies of the six victims were recovered from nearby areas inhabited by Kuki-Zo people, the Chairman expressed sincere sorrow and extended an apology to the bereaved families as a gesture of empathy and shared human grief, according to the statement.

"The Council reiterates that no political, social, or community institution representing the Kuki-Zo people sanctioned, endorsed, or supported the killing of innocent civilians," it said.

The KZC said that it has consistently maintained that the perpetrators of the crime remain unknown and that a fair, impartial, and credible investigation is necessary to establish the facts and bring those responsible to justice.

The killings of Kuki-Zo civilians, the destruction of villages, attacks on churches, the murder of religious leaders, and all other acts of violence must be investigated thoroughly and impartially, the statement said.

"Lasting peace cannot be achieved through selective security measures or selective justice," it said.

In a statement earlier in the day, All Naga Students' Association, Manipur (ANSAM), the apex body of Naga students and youths in the state, expressed its "strongest indignation" and "repudiated the so-called apology issued by leaders of Kuki-Zo Council on the brutal murder of the six Naga hostages after abduction".

Meanwhile, a group representing the Zomi community students on Friday sought to distance between them and Kukis. (PTI)

Woman held with suspected heroin in Deomali, 51 grams seized

HT Correspondent KHONSA, June 27: In a major anti-narcotics operation, Deomali Police, in coordination with the local administration, arrested a woman and seized 51 grams of suspected heroin during a search conducted at Batey Colony in Deomali, Tirap district.

The operation was carried out on June 25 by a police team led by Inspector Wangke Ronrang and Sub-Inspector Ngalo Jilen, along with the Police Station Ready Team, in the presence of Executive Magistrate and Circle Officer of Soha, Toko Kacha, and an independent witness.

The accused has been identified as Nyamyang Thingnok (39), wife of Nayami Thingnok and a resident of Batey Colony.

Police said she was wanted in connection with an earlier case involving the alleged peddling and supply of narcotic substances in the Deomali area.

During the search of her residence and the surrounding premises, police recovered 51 grams of suspected heroin, 9,700 believed to be proceeds from the sale of narcotics, a mobile phone and other incriminating articles.

Rio calls for Naga unity, accurate census

HT Correspondent DIMAPUR, June 27: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio called for unity among Nagas, protection of indigenous identity, and collective responsibility in ensuring an accurate Census 2027.

Inaugurating the Kohima village multipurpose hall at Ziekezou in Kohima village, Rio urged all sections of society, including village councils, churches, tribal hohos, urban local bodies, civil society organisations, and community leaders, to ensure that the upcoming census is conducted honestly and accurately.

He recalled that Nagaland had rejected the 2001 Census due to abnormal population growth figures caused by inflated enumeration, while the 2011 Census recorded a decline in population.

He said inaccurate census data had adversely affected planning, allocation of resources, education, and welfare schemes, and called upon citizens to ensure that the 2027 Census reflects the true demographic picture of the State.

"The data we provide today will determine the future of our children for decades to come," Rio said, appealing for active public participation in the census process on Friday.



Rio highlighted Nagaland's unique traditional institutions, saying the British administration had recognised the distinct identity, customs and self-governance systems of the Nagas, leading to the enactment of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, which introduced the Inner Line Permit system. He noted that these constitutional safeguards continue today under Article 371(A) of the Constitution of India.

Emphasising the importance of village councils, Rio said Nagaland was exempted from the 73rd

Constitutional Amendment because of its traditional system of local governance. He explained that village councils function through consensus-based selection rather than electoral contests, preserving unity within villages and preventing divisions.

On the Register of Indigenous Inhabitants of Nagaland (RIIN), Rio said the exercise was introduced to protect the rights of indigenous Nagas after instances where indigenous certificates had allegedly been issued to non-Nagas.

Arunachal Guv expresses concern over low conviction rate in POCSO cases

ITANAGAR, June 27: Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen K T Parinaik (Retd) on Saturday expressed concern over the low conviction rate in cases registered under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in the state and called for strengthening the Directorate of Prosecution and a coordinated 'Whole of State' approach to ensure the safety of women and children.

Chairing a high-level review meeting at Lok Bhavan here, the governor said crimes against women and children, particularly POCSO cases, cause lifelong trauma to victims and their families while shaking the conscience of society. Stressing the need for urgent action, he said every case represents a child whose trust, safety and future have been compromised, an official statement said.

Parinaik said the responsibility of protecting women and children



cannot rest solely with law enforcement agencies.

He urged 'gaon buras', community leaders, educational institutions, parents and civil society organisations to actively support efforts to prevent such crimes.

The governor also directed deputy commissioners and superintendents of police to address the issue in mission mode through co-ordinated district-level action, adding that greater community vigilance can make a significant difference. The meeting was attended

by Principal Secretary (Home) Kaling Tayeng, Director General of Police Dr S D Singh Jamwal, Commissioner of Women and Child Development Nyalie Ete, secretary-cum-ex-officio Director of Prosecution Nani Grayu and Assistant Inspector General of Police S Singhpho.

The officials deliberated on measures to strengthen prevention, investigation, prosecution and victim support mechanisms.

Deputy Inspector General of Police (Crime) Dr Joy Tirkey presented an overview of crimes against women and children in the state and briefed the governor on "Project Abhaya", a community-based initiative of the Arunachal Pradesh Police aimed at raising public awareness, strengthening police-public trust and promoting community participation in ensuring the safety and well-being of women and children. (PTI)

Manipur govt committed to promoting sports: CM

IMPHAL, June 27: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Saturday reaffirmed his government's commitment to promoting sports and creating opportunities for aspiring footballers, particularly women, through sustained support for grassroots development and sporting infrastructure.

He made the assurances during an interaction with nine players of the Indian Women's Football Team from the state. The players apprised the achievements of Manipuri footballers and highlighted the need to further strengthen women's football in the state.

During the interaction, the team informed Singh that 23 players represented India, of whom nine players are from Manipur and were part of the recently held Sixth South Asian Football Federation



(SAFF) Women's Championship-winning team.

The delegation also informed the chief minister that all nine Manipuri players are members of the SAFF Championship-winning squad and several of them also represented the country at the AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia.

The players appealed to Singh to

De-addiction centre, Brahma Kumaris observe Anti-Drug Day at Jollan



HT Correspondent

JOLLANG, June 27: Stepping Stone De-addiction and Rehabilitation Centre, in collaboration with the Brahma Kumaris RajYoga Meditation and De-addiction Centre, observed the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking with an awareness programme at Geko Sports Club, Jollan recently.

The programme brought together recovering youths, social workers, police officials, spiritual educators and community members to promote awareness against substance abuse and encourage rehabilitation through a combination of counselling, legal awareness and spiritual guidance.

The event began with a welcome song presented by inmates of the Stepping Stone De-addiction and Rehabilitation Centre, highlighting the themes of hope, recovery and resilience.

Delivering the welcome address, Managing Director of the rehabilitation centre Kago Nyime described addiction as a multidimensional social challenge requiring family support, community participation and holistic rehabilitation. He reaffirmed the institution's commitment to helping individuals rebuild their lives through counselling and rehabilitation.

Officer-in-Charge of Niti Vihar Police Station Takhe Tasso spoke on the legal provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and urged young people to stay away from narcotics while encouraging public cooperation in combating drug trafficking.

Another speaker, Padam, highlighted the social, economic and legal consequences of drug abuse and appealed to the youth to embrace discipline and responsible citizenship.

Delivering the keynote address, Professor Jayadeba Sahoo of Rajiv Gandhi University and senior faculty trainer of the Brahma Kumaris spoke on the theme, Transforming Craving into Character, Dependency into Dignity.

He emphasised the role of RajYoga meditation in strengthening self-control, emotional resilience and self-respect, describing spiritual awareness as an important component of sustainable recovery from addiction.

One of the highlights of the programme was the sharing of personal experiences by several recovering youths, who recounted their struggles with substance abuse and their journey towards rehabilitation.

Their testimonies underscored the importance of professional support, family encouragement and personal determination in overcoming addiction.

BK Jyoti spoke on the harmful physical, psychological and social effects of drug abuse, while BK Junu, Manager of the Brahma Kumaris centre, encouraged participants to adopt a lifestyle based on meditation, positive thinking and spiritual values.

She later guided the gathering through a RajYoga meditation session and administered an anti-drug pledge, with participants resolving to remain free from intoxicants and support efforts to build a drug-free society.

Social worker Obin Cozy appreciated the collaborative initiative and stressed that the fight against drug abuse requires coordinated efforts involving families, educational institutions, law enforcement agencies, healthcare professionals, spiritual organisations and the youth.

The programme concluded with a collective pledge to promote awareness, support rehabilitation and strengthen community participation in combating substance abuse through compassion, education and social responsibility.

Programme under Sahakarita Utsav 2026 highlights responsible digital behaviour and dangers of gaming addiction

Online gaming awareness camp held for students at GHSS Borguli

HT Correspondent PASIGHAT, June 27: An awareness camp on the harmful effects of online gaming was organised in Borguli, on Saturday under the Sahakarita Utsav 2026 initiative to promote responsible digital behaviour among students.

The programme was organised by the Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies (ARCS), Pasighat, and the Arunachal State Rural Livelihoods Mission (AR-SRLM), Mebo, in collaboration with Monggu Ane Didum Multipurpose Cooperative Society (MPCS) Ltd and the District Cooperative Union.

The event began with participant registration, followed by a welcome address by Zilla Parishad Member of Mebo (Monggu-Banggo I) and Chairman of Monggu Ane Didum MPCS Ltd, Bapiyang Tayeng.

Officials of the Block Mission Management Unit (BMMU), AR-SRLM, Mebo, briefed students on the Government of India's advi-



sory on online gaming and stressed the importance of responsible use of digital technology.

Cluster Coordinator of BMMU, Mebo, Tokmem Moyong, conducted an awareness session highlighting the adverse effects of excessive online gaming, including addiction, poor academic performance, mental health concerns, physical inactivity and social isolation.

The session concluded with an interactive question-and-answer segment.

District Cooperative Union Chairman Malo Komut and Vice-Chairman Lottek Pertin urged students to strike a healthy balance

between digital engagement, academics, physical fitness and social interaction.

The programme concluded with an anti-online gaming pledge, followed by an address from GHSS Borguli Principal Tani Pada.

Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies (ARCS), Pasighat, L Jongkey delivered the vote of thanks.

Organisers said the awareness camp aimed to help students make informed choices regarding digital technology while encouraging balanced lifestyles that support academic growth, mental well-being and responsible online behaviour.

ments to strengthen grassroots development, provide greater exposure to young players, and ensure a steady pipeline of talent for the national team.

Singh appreciated the outstanding achievements of the players in bringing laurels to the nation and reaffirmed the state government's commitment to promoting sports and creating greater opportunities for aspiring footballers, particularly women, through sustained support for grassroots development and sporting infrastructure.

He said that the players also urged him to ensure better career advancement and promotional opportunities for sportspersons serving in various state government departments, in recognition of their contributions and achievements in sports. (PTI)

France registers 4-1 win over Norway

Ousmane Dembélé scores a first-half World Cup hat trick

FOXBOROUGH, June 27: Not so fast, Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappé. Ousmane Dembélé has just entered the Golden Boot race.

Dembélé scored a first-half hat trick, including one off a feed from Mbappé, to help France beat Norway 4-1 at the World Cup on Friday.

Dembélé's goals came in the seventh, 20th and 32nd minutes. It was the first half-hat trick at the World Cup since Russia forward Oleg Salenko scored three of his five goals in the opening 45 minutes against Cameroon at the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

"It is a unique moment," Dembélé said. "But the most important was to finish first of the group in the group stage, and we are focused on the round of 32, which is the most important."

France, which won the World Cup in 2018 and lost in the final four years ago, had already secured its place in the knockout round before Friday's match. Norway was also assured of a spot in the round of 32 and ended up in second place in the group.

Désiré Doué scored France's final goal in second-half injury time.

Dembélé said changing their approach in the final group match was never a consideration. France has 10 goals through three games.

"We want to win all our matches, but we remain focused," Dembélé said.

The fastest World Cup hat trick took only 7 minutes, 42 seconds. Hungary striker Laszlo Kiss, who



had come on as a substitute, managed that feat late in the match against El Salvador at the 1982 World Cup in Spain.

The quickest World Cup hat trick occurred at the 1954 tournament in Switzerland when Austria striker Erich Probst scored his three goals in the opening 24 minutes against Czechoslovakia.

Dembélé, who won Ballon d'Or as Europe's top player in 2025 and has now scored four goals at this year's World Cup, left the game in the 65th minute. He was replaced by Bradley Barcola.

Thelo Aagaard got Norway on the scoreboard after Dembélé's second goal, finding the back of the net only 14 seconds after the restart. But Dembélé added his third goal less than nine minutes later to push the lead back to two.

Dembélé increased his interna-

tional goal total to eight while Mbappé now has 16 goals and four assists in 17 World Cup matches. He scored two goals in each of France's wins over Senegal and Iraq.

Erling Haaland was among 10 regular starters absent from Norway's starting lineup, presumably to rest. The wholesale changes included Egil Selvik starting in goal in place of Orjan Nyland.

Norway coach Ståle Solbakken said resting so many players was an easy decision for him.

"The break that we had from the last game to this game was the shortest of any team. ... So it's a no-brainer," he said. "The fans around Norway and also in the arena would have like to see Erling. But that is not really the issue. We want to proceed as long as we can in the tournament."

The Norwegians will next face

Ivory Coast in the round of 32 on Tuesday in Arlington, Texas. France will play the same day against one of the eight best third-place finishers in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Mbappé nearly got France on the scoreboard only 21 seconds into the game. He sprinted on the right side and sent a hard shot that hit the crossbar beyond the outstretched arm of Selvik.

Dembélé was operating in space for his first goal when he took a pass from Mbappé and blasted a right-footed shot across Selvik.

On the Paris Saint-Germain player's second goal, Dembélé found space between three defenders at the top of the box and fired in a left-footer beyond Selvik's diving save attempt.

Norway had a chance to close the gap back to one goal in the 49th when France defender Theo Hernandez was whistled for tripping Oscar Bobb in the box. But Jorgen Strand Larsen's penalty shot toward the right corner was batted away by France goalkeeper Mike Maignan.

Before the game, French fans in attendance displayed a banner reading "AVEC TOI DIDIER" (With you Didier), acknowledging France coach Didier Deschamps' mother, Ginette Deschamps, who died this week. The coach missed the match against Norway on Friday because he was in France with family, leaving assistant Guy Stephan in charge.

Stephan said Deschamps would rejoin the team for its next training session on Saturday. (AP)

India seek improved batting show to square Ireland series

BELFAST, June 27: India's star-studded top order will be under pressure to make amends when they take on a buoyant Ireland in the second and final T20I here on Sunday, with Shreyas Iyer's men aiming to level the series after a shocking defeat in the opener.

Playing their first match since their T20 World Cup triumph, the reigning champions were handed one of their biggest upsets as Ireland defended 182 to bowl them out for 148 and register their maiden international victory over India here on Friday.

It was hardly the start Iyer would have envisioned on his return to T20Is after 963 days, and his first assignment as India's T20 captain.

With a five-match series against England beginning at Chester-le-Street on Wednesday, Iyer, who has replaced India's T20 World Cup winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav, would be eager to sign off their brief Ireland tour on a winning note. The biggest concern from the opening game was India's batting collapse. Sanju Samson, India's World Cup hero three months back, lasted just four balls before becoming debutant Jai Moondra's maiden international wicket.

Ishan Kishan and Iyer too fell for single-digit scores inside the powerplay as India slipped into early trouble.

At the other end, Abhishek Sharma carried on in his usual explosive manner, striking the ball cleanly at the top, but lacked support from the other end. His dismissal after the powerplay derailed India's chase.

Ireland's two debutant pacers, Moondra and Matt Holland, exposed India's top order brilliantly.

While Moondra removed Samson with his very first delivery in international cricket, Holland dismissed Kishan and Iyer before claiming Washington Sundar to finish with three wickets.

With run-rate pressure mounting, Tilak Varma, Washington, Shivam Dube couldn't consolidate. The outcome of the second contest, thus, could hinge on how India's batters tackle the inexperienced but confident Irish pace duo could once again.

Sooryavanshi's debut

The team management is unlikely to press the panic button after one defeat.

Teen sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, who was anticipated by many to make his international debut in

the opener, is expected to remain on the sidelines again as India are unlikely to tinker top order after one defeat. Accommodating the left-hander would require a reshuffle, possibly pushing Samson down the order at the expense of Washington.

The bowling unit, on the other hand, offered several positives. Harshit Rana made an impressive comeback after a four-month layoff due to a knee injury, using his variations smartly to return figures of 3/24.

Arsheep Singh and Axar Patel also bowled well, especially at the death.

However, Iyer's decision to front-load his pace attack left India short of options in the closing overs.

Washington leaked 19 runs in the 16th over before Prasad Krishna endured another forgettable outing, conceding 27 in the 17th and finishing with 0/57.

Those expensive overs allowed Ireland to add around 20-30 crucial runs, which eventually proved decisive. Ireland's innings on the other hand, was built around captain Lorcan Tucker's composed half-century.

After crawling to five off his first 11 balls, Tucker accelerated brilliantly to reach his fifty off 35 deliveries, while Gareth Delany's 49 off 32 provided the perfect support as the hosts posted a competitive 182.

Having already scripted history with their first international win over India, Ireland will be brimming with confidence.

India, on the other hand, will have a little choice but to produce a far more complete performance if they are to avoid losing the series and restore momentum before the England assignment.

Teams:
India: Shreyas Iyer (c), Tilak Varma (vc), Ravi Bishnoi, Abhishek Sharma, Suryansh Shedge, Prasad Krishna, Sanju Samson, Axar Patel, Harshit Rana, Ishan Kishan, Washington Sundar, Arsheep Singh, Shivam Dube, Prince Yadav, Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

Ireland: Lorcan Tucker (c&wk), Ross Adair, Ben Calitz, Gareth Delany, George Dockrell, Stephen Doherty, Matthew Humphreys, Gavin Hoey, Matthew Holland, Liam McCarthy, Jai Moondra, Harry Tector, Tim Tector, Reuben Wilson.

Match starts at 6pm IST. (PTI)

Cape Verde's dream run continues, becoming smallest country into World Cup knockout round



HOUSTON, June 27: Tiny Cape Verde defied odds to become the smallest country to earn a spot in the World Cup knockout round behind the stellar play of Vozinha, the 40-year-old goalkeeper who embodied the grit of his nation.

"We are small," he said. "But we have big hearts and we are fighters."

Cape Verde completed an improbable run through the group stage with a third straight World Cup draw, a 0-0 draw against Saudi Arabia on Friday night to advance in the tournament.

The small island nation off the western coast of Africa, which is making its debut on soccer's grandest stage, already held 2010 champion Spain to a 0-0 draw and then came from behind to get a 2-2 result against Uruguay.

"The team was very eager to show this to the whole world," Cape Verde coach Bubista said while draped in his country's flag. "We are proud of having arrived at this stage. We have shown that we are a small country, but that we fight for the things that we want to achieve."

Cape Verde's three points put the team in second place behind Spain, which beat Uruguay on Friday night and won the group.

Cape Verde will play reigning World Cup champion Argentina in Miami on July 3.

Drawing all three group matches doesn't guarantee advancement at major soccer tournaments. But several teams have done it in the past, including Wales in 1958, Ireland and the Netherlands in 1990, and Chile in 1998. New Zealand, however, also got three draws at the 2010 World Cup and was eliminated.

On the eve of the match, Bubista mused, "everyone is entitled to dream and nothing is impossible."

The Blue Sharks proved him right, overcoming seemingly insurmountable odds as this country of just more than 500,000 reached the round of 32.

A woman, her face painted with a flag of the archipelago, held a sign that read: "Small Islands, Big Dreams."

A dream that these underdogs have made reality as they continue their charmed run on the world stage.

They did it with another strong game from Vozinha, whose tournament success has helped him amass more than 16 million Instagram followers.

He had a save in first half stoppage time, grabbing a header from Mohamed Kanno to keep Saudi Arabia scoreless. Another save came in the 66th minute when he leaped to deflect a shot from Mohammed Abu Al-Shamat.

A third came in the 92nd minute when he stopped a shot by Abdullah Al-Hamdan.

"There is a lot of quality in our national team," Vozinha said. "Maybe for many of you, you think the Cape Verdean player is not good enough. But we came here to show that we have a lot of quality and we are here to compete and our players can play everywhere in the big competition, in the big leagues."

A group of shirtless men in the crowd each painted one letter of his name on their chests as they cheered Cape Verde.

But Vozinha had a much bigger fan among the crowd of 68,278 as his mother Ana Candida Evora watched from a luxury suite, waving a tiny Cape Verde flag. It was her second match of the tournament after missing Vozinha's epic seven-save performance against Spain because of visa issues.

Cape Verde had a chance to score in the 50th minute, but Kevin Pina's shot from distance was just above the crossbar. Another chance came in the 74th minute when Laros Duarte's shot from the middle of the box was stopped by goalkeeper Mohammed Al-Owais.

A last chance to score came in the final seconds when Nuno da Costa sent a shot from the middle of the box wide left.

But it didn't matter because a couple of minutes after the final whistle, Spain completed its victory over Uruguay and set off a joyous celebration among Cape Verde's players and fans, many of whom cried as they rejoiced.

Having led his squad to new heights, Bubista was asked if he could have imagined such a run entering the tournament.

"I've always said that sooner or later Cape Verde would be on such a stage," he said. "Of course it's hard to have such a forecast, but I always knew."

Saudi Arabia was eliminated after finishing with two points in the group stage.

"We were very poor in terms of creating things, controlling the game and creating actions," coach Georgios Donis said. "And one cannot win a game this way. It would be very difficult." (AP)

Belgium defeats New Zealand 5-1 to advance at the World Cup

VANCOUVER (CANADA), June 27: With a flurry of goals, Belgium finally found its footing at the World Cup.

Leandro Trossard scored a pair of goals and Belgium overcame a slow start in the tournament to advance to the knockout round atop Group G with a 5-1 victory over New Zealand on Friday night.

Belgium will face an as-yet undetermined third-place finisher on Wednesday in Seattle. The match was played simultaneously to the other group finale in Seattle between Egypt and Iran, which ended in a 1-1 draw, dropping Egypt out of first.

The Belgians went into the match a surprising third in its group after opening the World Cup with a 1-1 draw against Egypt and a scoreless draw against Iran.

"I think we had the chances as well in the first two games, and we didn't take them. So it's important that we took them today," Trossard said. "And it's always nice to score a lot of goals, and we're just really happy to go through in first place as well, and yeah, a lot of joy."

Kevin De Bruyne, Romelu Lukaku and Alexis Saelemaekers also scored for the Belgians, who were eliminated in the group stage in Qatar four years ago after finishing



third at the 2018 World Cup in Russia.

Elijah Just scored for New Zealand, which needed to win outright to have a chance at advancing. The All Whites head home without a first-ever World Cup win.

Should Belgium win its knockout round opener, it will face the winner of the match against the United States and Bosnia-Herzegovina in the round of 16.

"First, we'll have to win our round of 32 match. I don't even know who we'll be playing yet, so it would be disrespectful to start talking about

the round of 16 already," Belgium coach Rudi Garcia said. "We'll see who comes through."

The finish out the group also means the Belgium won't have to travel far for their first knockout game. The team's training base is in Seattle.

Trossard came oh-so-close to scoring early in the match, but goal-line technology determined that the ball did not cross the line.

New Zealand defender Finn Surman was called for a handball in the box in the 23rd minute, giving Belgium a penalty kick, but video deter-

mined that his arm was in a natural position and play continued.

In a scramble in front of the net, Trossard popped the ball up into the cross bar and it fell into the goal to put Belgium in front in the 28th minute.

It was Belgium's first goal at the World Cup since Michy Batshuayi's goal against Canada in the group opener in Qatar in 2022. Belgium's goal in its 1-1 draw against Egypt in the opener of this tournament was an own goal.

Trossard scored his second early in the second half, striking a rebound off a New Zealand player past goalkeeper Max Crocombe.

De Bruyne added a stunning strike from outside the box in the 66th minute to all but put the game away for Belgium. He celebrated by making a heart with his hands for the sellout Vancouver crowd.

Just's goal avoided the shutout for New Zealand in the 84th minute, but two minutes later Lukaku scored on a header for Belgium and blew a kiss to the fans. Saelemaekers scored in stoppage time.

"It's been a long journey, and proud of the boys," said Just, who had three goals in the tournament. "Everyone worked their hardest, it just wasn't there." (AP)

Vaibhav Sooryavanshi will handle attention well, fame and flash don't affect him: Kumar Sangakkara



MUMBAI, June 27: Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is not the one to get affected by "fame and flash" as the 15-year-old will be able to handle the attention of playing top flight cricket with aplomb, says Rajasthan Royals' head coach Kumar Sangakkara.

The explosive teenager is currently with the Indian team on away tours of Ireland and England and speculations continue to persist on his possible international debut in these T20I assignments.

Sangakkara, who has seen Sooryavanshi from close quarters in the IPL, says the young batter will be a force not just for India but also for world cricket.

"He will have many opportunities ahead, in cricket and commercially. How he balances that, and the support he gets from his family and the team, will be crucial," Sangakkara told Sky Sports.

"But one thing I can say for sure is that Vaibhav loves batting. He loves the game. The fame and flash don't really affect him. He is very grounded and curious about many things."

Sangakkara revealed the young batting sensation is not a cricket freak as he also enjoys other things away from the sport.

"He doesn't just live and breathe cricket all the time. He has space for other things. I have no doubt he will be a force for Indian cricket, world cricket, and in franchise cricket. Mentally, he is in a good place. I

think he will deal with everything that comes with fame very well," Sangakkara said.

Recalling the contest between the Royals and Lucknow Super Giants last season, Sangakkara revealed the confidence Sooryavanshi carries.

"We were playing against Lucknow Super Giants. They needed to defend 220 to stay alive in the tournament. We fielded first, and as the chase was about to begin, Vaibhav was walking out to open. Before heading to the middle, he looked at me, winked, and said, 'Coach, don't worry. It's done,' he said.

"Then he walked into the dressing room and told Donovan Ferreira and Lhuan-dre Pretorius, 'Listen you two, I'm going to hit 13 sixes today. After that, you just finish the job.' He ended up hitting 10 sixes in that game."

"Donovan and Lhuan-dre thought he was joking at first. But when he reached five sixes, they started counting down because they realised he was actually going to do it. That's the kind of confidence Vaibhav has at just 15 years of age," Sangakkara added.

Dinesh Karthik, who is Royal Challengers Bengaluru's batting coach and mentor, recalled how the team's ace pacers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Josh Hazlewood struggled against Sooryavanshi despite having a strong plan.

"Before our game against RR, we discussed what could be a weakness for this young batter. We felt a perfect yorker or a well-directed bouncer might work. But in Guwahati, nothing worked," Karthik said.

"Neither Bhuvneshwar nor Hazlewood could get him out, no matter what they tried. Vaibhav is one of the toughest batters to bowl to. This IPL, he was the toughest, in my opinion."

"The margin for error was very small. He stands with a wide base and strong legs. Anything on the off-side, he just throws his hands at it. In the powerplay, with only two fielders outside, it is very hard to stop him."

Karthik added, "Outside the powerplay, he is smart enough to stick to his strengths. He is not a one-dimensional player. He can take singles and rotate strike, and if you bowl in his zone, he puts you away." (PTI)

Tezpur's Mami Bhagawati Goswami wins three gold medals at Asian Yogasana Cup

HT Correspondent
TEZPUR, June 27: Mami Bhagawati Goswami, a retired teacher from Tezpur, has secured laurels to Assam and the country by winning three gold medals at the 5th Yogasana Sports Asia Cup 2026 held in Malaysia.

The championship, organised by the Asian Sports Yogasana Federation, commenced on June 26 and witnessed the participation of athletes from ten countries.

A resident of Basantipur in Tezpur, Mami Bhagawati Goswami is the wife of Gokul Goswami and formerly served as a subject teacher at Hem Baruah Higher Secondary School, Ghoramari.

Apart from her achievements in Yogasana, Goswami has also made notable contributions to Assamese literature. She has authored three books in Assamese—Barjana, Suwanir Safura Khuli and Spandita Hridoyor Prapti.

She is the daughter of late Balin Bhagawati and late Tarulata Bhagawati of Bahuwakuri near Nagsankar in the Jamugurihat area.

Spain advances beating Uruguay 1-0

GUADALAJARA (MEXICO), June 27: Spain defeated Uruguay 1-0 after another goalkeeping mistake by Fernando Muslera, advancing to the knockout stage of the World Cup and eliminating the South American powerhouse on Friday.

Uruguay, a two-time champion, will go home without any victories in its three Group H games. Spain, the European champion, won the group with seven points and will face the second-place team from Group J — either Austria or Algeria — on Thursday in Inglewood, California.

Alex Baena scored in the 42nd minute after Muslera couldn't fully swat away his shot from inside the area. It was the third blunder of the tournament by the 40-year-old Muslera, who asked coach Marcelo Bielsa to substitute him at halftime. Sergio Rochet came in to start the second half. "He is the one who decided to leave," Bielsa said.

The veteran Argentine coach said he feels like Uruguay deserved better luck considering its performances, and should have earned seven points instead of two from its group matches. But he took full responsibility for the team's failure.

"No one wants to listen to explanations now," Bielsa said. "The blame is on me, I'm the one responsible for the disappointing work that I did. I had a group of quality players."

At 19th in the FIFA rankings, Uruguay is the highest-ranked team to be eliminated so far. "Every match is different and you have to

win every type of match," Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said. "This was a game with maximum difficulty."

De la Fuente said midfielder Yéremy Pino likely suffered a broken collarbone that would sideline him for the rest of the tournament. Pino, who entered the match in the 66th minute, stayed on until the end despite the injury because Spain had already made all five substitutions.

Cape Verde, which played Saudi Arabia to a 0-0 draw in the other group game on Friday, finished second in the group with three points, one more than both Uruguay and Saudi Arabia. Uruguay finished third but without enough points to be among the best eight third-place teams that will advance.

A few Uruguay players cried on the field after the final whistle. Many fans booed the team as it left. The match was one of the most anticipated of the group stage, but it featured few significant scoring chances by either team. "I'm very proud of all the work that we have done," Baena said. "We competed very well."

Uruguay players loudly advocated for a penalty in the final minutes after Federico Viñas went down inside the area.

There was some tension near the field after the final whistle. Uruguay's Agustín Canobbio was sent off in stoppage time for a tackle on Spain defender Paul Cubarsi. His teammates had to escort him off the field, and after the final whistle he returned to try to talk to the referee. (AP)