

6 NATION ● Police raid houses of 8 arrested in Ayodhya donations case ● BJP govt set to table UCC Bill in Bengal Assembly 7 NORTHEAST ● Kuki-Zo body urges govt to remove highway blockades by Naga groups ● Namsai intensifies electoral roll revision ahead of 2026 polls

10 Arunachal dists hit by floods, toll rises to 3 Heavy rains likely ● Rescue operations underway

ITANAGAR, June 28: The toll in the rain-triggered flash flood in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor rose to three on Sunday after the body of a man was found in adjoining Papum Pare district, as search and rescue operations were underway, officials said. Floods and landslides caused by incessant rainfall were also reported in several other parts of Arunachal Pradesh, where houses were inundated and infrastructure damaged, prompting the local administrations to launch rescue and evacuation operations, they said. Ten districts -- Keyi Panyor, Papum Pare, Kra Daadi, Kurung Kumey, Lower Subansiri, Kamle, Upper Subansiri, East Siang, Leparada and Lower Siang-- have been affected by the rain fury, the officials said. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) also forecast the possibility of more than 200 mm of



rainfall in parts of Arunachal Pradesh over the next 24 hours till Monday morning, prompting the state government to issue an alert and urge people to remain vigilant. The body of Saurabh Kumar Kharwar was found near Hawa Camp, which is around 35 km from flood-hit Poosa in Keyi Panyor district, State Disaster Management Secretary Dani Sulu said, adding a rescue team has been dispatched to retrieve the mortal remains. Five people went missing after a flash flood, triggered by incessant rainfall, struck Keyi Panyor district on Wednesday morning. With the latest recovery, three people have been confirmed dead, while two others remain missing. The body of a 35-year-old woman was recovered on Wednesday, while another woman's body was found on Saturday. Search operations entered the fifth day on Sunday, with a rescue team using rafts from the dam side of the Panyor Lower Hydroelectric Project and another ground team searching for the two missing persons who were swept away from the NEEPCO Colony, another official said. Relief and rescue efforts have also been intensified in the affected region. An additional 23 personnel from (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Frustration grows in Venezuela as earthquake death toll reaches 1,430

LA GUAIRA (VENEZUELA), June 28: Tensions flared Saturday as desperation grew in Venezuela's state of La Guaira as rescuers and civilians searched for earthquake survivors and the death toll rose sharply to 1,430. Venezuela's government said families reported at least 68,900 people missing, three days after the one-two punch of 7.2 and 7.5 magnitude earthquakes devastated the South American nation. Venezuelans looking for loved ones and neighbors used shovels, heavy equipment, ropes and bare hands atop mounds of toppled concrete throughout La Guaira, one of the hardest-hit states. They were joined by a growing number of international rescue teams who began to climb through the rubble, offering a small glint of hope to anguished families. Tensions peaked over what many Venezuelans viewed as an inadequate response by the government,

whose soldiers, firefighters, police and military cadets were evidently underprepared to respond to the scope of the tragedy. Many felt every minute ticking away as they ran out of time to rescue people alive. Frustration was amplified by efforts to project the image of a robust state response. "There's a pile of bodies over there from last night. Newborn babies," said Mileidy Romero, who was among those searching in the seaside town of Caraballeda. "At 8 p.m. (yesterday) there were people alive down there, and they haven't bothered to rescue them. We've located several bodies, and they haven't helped us recover them either. What are they waiting for?" Aid agencies consider the first 48 to 72 hours as crucial for retrieving people alive, though that can be extended if they have access to food and water. Venezuelan officials said 17 flights carrying more than 1,600

rescue team members had touched down by Saturday. Acting President Delcy Rodriguez said on state television that more than 14,000 members of the military and police are patrolling the area, where access is now blocked and special permits are required to enter. But many in disaster zones said they had seen little of their government. Some people climbed the remnants of buildings and cried out names, hoping for any proof of life. Dust coated coastal communities. In punishing heat, more people wore masks as the stench of decomposition spread. In other parts of La Guaira, teams unloaded stacks of bodies from white trucks onto the ground of a dirt hospital parking lot, where they were to be identified. With the absence of hard hats, rescuers and civilians used motorcycle helmets as they searched piles of debris that were once people's belongings: (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

KC Venugopal to review Assam poll setback

GUWAHATI, June 28: All India Congress Committee (AICC) general secretary (Organisation) K C Venugopal will review the party's poor performance in the Assam Assembly elections on July 1, officials said on Sunday. A senior Assam Congress member, who requested anonymity, told PTI that Venugopal will be in the state for a two-day visit from June 30 and will deliberate on the ways to strengthen the organisation post the loss in the state. "An organisational meeting has been called on July 1 at the state headquarters Rajiv Bhawan. Venugopal will review the organisation's performance and is likely to give us the roadmap for the future," he added. Already, a letter has been issued by Assam Congress general secretary (Organisation) Ramanna Baruah to all the party MPs, MLAs, Political Affairs Committee (PAC) members, APCC office bearers, frontal group heads and district presidents with intimation of the meeting and asked them to

attend it. Besides, all the contested candidates of the Assam Legislative Assembly Election have also been invited for the meeting to have feedback from them, the party official said. The Congress and Rajior Dal, who were part of a six-party opposition alliance, won 19 and two seats respectively in the 126-member House. Post its debacle, Assam Congress President Gaurav Gogoi had formed multiple teams to conduct a ground review of each constituency. The teams comprised MLAs, ex-MLAs and senior Congress leaders. They were asked to conduct their reviews from May 29 to June 2 and submit the reports accordingly. However, several members of the teams told PTI that Gogoi has neither invited the teams nor discussed the reports as of now. "We thought that he would call us and discuss the reports. In our reports, we (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

NSF slams Kuki-Zo Council statement on killings of six Nagas



DIMAPUR, June 28: The Naga Students' Federation (NSF) on Sunday termed the recent statement by the Kuki-Zo Council a blatant attempt to divert attention from the fundamental issue -- the cold-blooded abduction, torture and murder of six innocent Naga civilians, whose families continue to await justice. It further said that the use of the term "Kacha Naga" exposed the irony of those whose historical presence and settlement in the Naga

homeland dated back barely a century, during the British colonial period, when they were brought in as porters and coolies for administrative and logistical purposes, now presuming to classify and redefine the identity of the indigenous Naga people. The federation questioned by what authority such groups sought to challenge the identity of the Nagas in their own ancestral homeland. The NSF stressed that the issue was neither political propaganda nor competing narratives, but the brutal loss of six innocent Naga civilian lives. "No carefully worded statement, however crafted, can substitute for justice. No expression of regret can erase the horrifying reality of abduction, torture, murder and the inhuman desecration of the victims' bodies," it stated. The federation reiterated that every individual responsible for the abduction and killing of the six Nagas, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Pulse Polio drive begins in West Karbi Anglong



HT Correspondent BAITHALANGSO, June 28: A three-day Pulse Polio National Immunisation Day (NID) campaign began on Sunday across West Karbi Anglong district as part of the nationwide drive to sustain India's polio-free status. The intensive campaign aims to ensure that every child under the age of five in the district receives the oral polio vaccine (OPV). The campaign was officially inaugurated by Shouvik Dutta, Additional Deputy Commissioner (Health), West Karbi Anglong. The launch ceremony was attended by several health officials and monitors, including State ASHA Programme Manager Hirahito Habib, WHO external monitor Dhansing Phango, Hamren District Hospital superintendent Dr Altaf Hussain, in-charge district immunisation officer C. J. Phango, NHM district media expert Rahul Deka, (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Narasimha Rao transformed India's growth trajectory: Himanta

GUWAHATI, June 28: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Sunday credited former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao with the economic reforms that transformed India's growth trajectory. "Tributes to former prime minister Shri P V Narasimha Rao Ji on his Jayanti. A visionary statesman, his bold economic reforms transformed India's growth trajectory," Sarma said in a social media post, remembering the Congress stalwart on his birth anniversary. Rao's leadership, wisdom and unwavering commitment to national progress continue to inspire generations, he added. Born on June 28, 1921, Rao was India's prime minister from June 21, 1991 to May 16, 1996. (PTI)

India's vision is to make Indian Ocean an 'ocean of opportunity': Modi in Seychelles

VICTORIA (SEYCHELLES), June 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said India envisions an Indian Ocean where maritime security is ensured alongside economic prosperity and where partnership is defined not by size, but by mutual respect and trust. Modi, who held wide-ranging talks with Seychelles President Patrick Herminie, said they agreed that the Indian Ocean is "our shared home" and therefore "its security, sustainability and prosperity are our shared responsibility." "Our vision is to make the Indian Ocean an ocean of opportunity," Modi said after delegation-level talks with Herminie, during which they took stock of the economic partnership between India and Seychelles and discussed new opportunities in industries, connectivity, technology, digital infrastructure and other areas. "We believe the Indian Ocean is our shared home; its security, sustainability, and prosperity are our shared responsibility. This spirit forms the foundation of our MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) Vision," he said. Modi said he believes that the defence and security



of India and Seychelles are "inseparable". He further said, "We will continue our close cooperation in this regard." The Prime Minister said he discussed with President Herminie ways to make bilateral economic cooperation more resilient and future-ready. "We will continue to explore new opportunities for the industries of both our countries. We will also work (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Karachi attack: India trashes Pak allegations

NEW DELHI, June 28: India on Sunday forcefully dismissed Pakistan's allegations of an Indian link to an attack on a military base in Karachi that left four paramilitary personnel dead, saying the neighbouring country should look inwards and take credible action against terror infrastructure on its soil. Reports from Islamabad said Pakistani security forces killed six terrorists and captured another alive after foiling a brazen attack by militants on a Sindh Rangers compound in Karachi on Saturday night. The attack left four paramilitary personnel dead and marked the city's first major terrorist strike since October 2024. Certain elements in the Pakistani establish-

ment alleged an Indian link to the attack. "We have seen Pakistani reports making baseless allegations against India regarding the recent incident in Karachi," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We categorically reject them. Instead of pointing fingers at others, Pakistan would do better to look inwards, take credible action against the terror infrastructure on its territory and rid itself of its proclivity to rely on terrorism as an instrument of state policy," he said. Jaiswal was responding to a media query. Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi has strongly condemned the attack and alleged without proof an Indian link to the strike. (PTI)

Two held with heroin, Yaba tablets worth around ₹ 5 crore

GUWAHATI, June 28: Two persons have been arrested and contraband worth around ₹ 5 crore seized from them in a joint operation by security forces in Assam's Cachar district. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday. The operation was carried out by Assam Police and Assam Rifles on Saturday night, he said. "Happy Sunday! Another step towards a drug free Assam, thanks to @cacharpolice & @official_dgar," Sarma said in a post on X. "In a late night joint operation, 942g of heroin & 10,000 Yaba tablets worth approx ₹ 5 cr were seized. Two accused apprehended," he added. Yaba tablets are illegal in India as they contain methamphetamine, a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act. (PTI)

From seas to skies, India is becoming increasingly self-reliant: PM

NEW DELHI, June 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday highlighted several milestones achieved by the country to become self-reliant as he cited the maiden flight of the made-in-India C-295 aircraft and the successful test of the indigenous Long-Range Land-Attack Cruise Missile. In his monthly radio broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi noted that in India itself, the country has achieved a major success in the aviation sector. Noting that the C-295 aircraft has been made in India, he said, "As many as 40 such aircraft are being built right here in India and this is giving new strength to MSMEs and the aerospace sector". It will also increase employment opportunities, he noted. The first made-in-India C-295 military transport aircraft successfully completed its maiden flight on June 10. The IAF is procuring 56 C-295 transport aircraft at a cost of around Rs 21,935 crore. Forty of these aircraft will be assembled by Tata Advanced Systems Limited in cooperation with Airbus at a production facility in Vadodra.

Modi said in June too, the country achieved some other milestones that fill every citizen with pride. "Recently, I got the opportunity to participate in a Navy-related programme in Kolkata. There, INS Dunagiri, INS Shanshak and INS Agrya were inducted into the Indian Navy's fleet. From the design to manufacturing of these ships, everything is indigenous," he said. The prime minister said in June, the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) also successfully tested an indigenous Long-Range Land-Attack Cruise Missile (LRLACM). "In other words, from the seas to the skies, our India is becoming increasingly secure and self-reliant," he said. The DRDO on June 15 conducted successful flight-test of the LRLACM off the coast of Odisha. The LRLACM is an indigenously built missile with all sub-systems developed by various DRDO laboratories and industry partners. During the broadcast, Modi thanked citizens for heeding to his appeal to avoid buying gold for some time, holidaying abroad and opting for car pool in view of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

'Thousands of rural women stepped forward to save the Hargila' Assam's women-led 'Hargila' bird conservation story finds mention in PM's Mann Ki Baat

GUWAHATI, June 28: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday lauded the conservation efforts in protecting Assam's Greater Adjutant Stork, commonly known as 'Hargila', by biologist Purnima Devi Barman and a group of rural women in the northeastern state. In his monthly radio broadcast 'Mann Ki Baat', Modi made a mention of the conservation story of the 'Hargila Army', and said it has shown that right information can help in changing age-old mindsets. "In today's #MannKiBaat, Adamiya @narendramodi ji highlighted about a special conservation effort of Assam. The Greater Adjutant Stork or 'Hargila', were perceived to bring bad luck & their habitats were destroyed until @StorkSister took up a community-level mission," Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said in a post on X.



The PM said that the 'Hargila', a rare bird that plays a vital role in keeping nature clean, was for a long time considered inauspicious in certain parts of Assam. "People disliked seeing it in their

vicinity. Often, trees housing 'Hargila' nests were even cut down," he said. Barman resolved to change the misconceptions deeply rooted in people's minds, and spoke to women and explained the facts based on science. The women gradually began joining her campaign to save the 'Hargila', and the bird that was once driven away as a bad omen started becoming the identity of the villages of the area, Modi said. "Thousands of rural women stepped forward to save the 'Hargila' -- today, they are known as the 'Hargila Army'. These women also had to contend with societal resistance," the Prime Minister said. Modi highlighted how the women, led by Barman, ultimately succeeded in leaving superstition behind, and added, "They have demonstrated that when the right information is conveyed, even age-old mindsets can change." (PTI)

From floods to war, state-run oil firms prove indispensable despite repeated privatisation bids

NEW DELHI, June 28: Every time India has faced a major crisis - whether devastating floods, a once-in-a-century pandemic or the latest conflict in West Asia that threatened global oil supplies - it has been the country's state-run oil companies that have quietly kept fuel flowing.

For decades, India's public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) have often been criticised for low returns, government intervention in fuel pricing and bloated operations. They have twice been put on the block for privatisation, with plans to sell Bharat Petroleum Corp Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) gathering momentum in 2002 before being halted by a Supreme Court ruling and again in 2020, before the process was abandoned after failing to attract enough bids.

Yet every national emergency has reinforced why governments have been reluctant to loosen their grip on companies that control the country's energy lifeline, analysts and industry officials said.

When unprecedented floods submerged Chennai in 2015, Indian Oil Corp (IOC), BPCL and HPCL scrambled to move fuel through alternative routes, restore inundated depots and keep emergency services supplied even as roads disappeared under water and retail outlets shut.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the companies operated virtually uninterrupted despite nationwide lockdowns. Fuel stations remained open, refineries continued operating with skeletal staff, LPG cylinders were delivered to millions of households under strict mobility restrictions and aviation fuel supplies were maintained for relief and medical flights, they said.

Engineers isolated operating teams inside refineries for weeks to ensure continuous production, while tanker drivers and LPG delivery personnel worked through curfews and containment zones.

The latest conflict in West Asia once again highlighted its strategic importance.

As the Iran war disrupted crude trade routes and raised concerns over supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, India's state refiners rapidly reconfigured operations. They increased LPG production by diverting refinery streams away from petrochemicals, diversified crude procurement across geographies, optimised refinery runs based on available feedstock and coordinated fuel supplies nationwide to avoid local shortages.

"The result was that no corner of the country went without fuel. Unlike several countries, including those in the neighbourhood, India did not see any rationing of fuel," an industry official said.

The companies also leaned on India's strategic petroleum reserves and commercial inventories, while working closely with the government to reassure markets that adequate supplies would be maintained.

All this they did while passing on the least



minimum impact of the spurt in global oil prices to consumers. For a good two-and-a-half months, the three firms absorbed the more than 50 per cent spurt in international oil prices and then raised petrol and diesel prices by ₹ 7.50 a litre each, LPG rates by ₹ 89 per cylinder and CNG by ₹ 6 per kg - much lower than the increase seen in major economies around the globe.

The response reflected a playbook honed over decades: absorb global shocks first and shield consumers for as long as possible.

That came at a cost. Even as IOC, BPCL and HPCL await full government compensation for selling subsidised cooking gas in 2025-26, they chose to hold petrol and diesel prices steady through more than three months of turmoil in West Asia, sacrificing earnings to cushion consumers.

According to Crisil Ratings, the three state-run retailers are estimated to have incurred net under-recoveries of ₹ 40,000-45,000 crore between March and May, after accounting for inventory gains - almost equivalent to their combined annual profits.

Private-sector fuel retailers, by contrast, passed on higher costs more quickly. Companies, such as Nayara Energy and Shell, raised pump prices by a steeper margin during the period, industry officials said.

A similar pattern played out during the COVID-19 pandemic. As demand collapsed and fuel marketing became unviable, several private retailers put up "no stock" signs at outlets across the country. State-run OMCs continued supplies, with the government invoking emergency provisions to ensure private outlets were also supplied with fuel, even if at prices higher than those charged by public-sector retailers.

Industry officials said India could have faced a very different situation had either BPCL or HPCL, which together account for roughly half of the country's fuel retail network and around a quarter of sales each, been privatised under the government's disinvestment plans in the early 2000s or again two decades later.

Unlike state-owned firms, private owners would have been under little obligation to sell petrol, diesel or LPG below market prices or absorb prolonged under-recoveries in the national interest, they said.

"What that would have meant for a country as dependent on imported oil as India can only be imagined," one official said, arguing that public ownership has enabled the companies to prioritise energy security over profitability during successive crises.

Unlike purely commercial energy companies, India's state-run refiners are expected to fulfil a strategic mandate alongside generating profits.

Together, IOC, BPCL and HPCL account for nearly 90 per cent of the country's fuel retail network, operate most of its refining capacity, maintain extensive pipeline infrastructure and supply petroleum products to every corner of the country, including remote regions where private operators often have little commercial incentive to serve.

Their nationwide footprint also enables governments to rapidly execute emergency policy decisions. Whether distributing subsidised LPG cylinders during the pandemic, ensuring diesel availability during natural disasters or managing inventories during periods of global supply disruption, public sector companies have often functioned as an extension of the state's crisis-response machinery.

That strategic role has repeatedly complicated efforts to privatise them.

The Vajpayee government's attempt to privatise BPCL and HPCL in the early 2000s was halted after the Supreme Court ruled that parliamentary approval was required because the company had been nationalised through legislation.

Nearly two decades later, the Narendra Modi government revived plans to sell its majority stake in BPCL as part of a broader asset monetisation programme, but the process was shelved after prospective bidders withdrew amid market uncertainties.

Successive governments have continued to open fuel retailing to private players and encourage competition, but have stopped short of relinquishing control over the public sector companies that remain central to India's energy security architecture.

With India importing more than 88 per cent of its crude oil requirements and geopolitical disruptions becoming more frequent, policymakers increasingly view energy resilience as a strategic capability rather than simply a commercial business.

For investors, state ownership can sometimes constrain profitability through government-directed interventions. For policymakers, however, the same ownership provides something difficult to replicate through markets alone: an integrated nationwide energy network that can be mobilised at short notice when a crisis strikes.

Time and again, India's public sector oil companies have demonstrated that while their commercial role may be debated, their strategic value becomes most visible when the country's energy security is under stress, analysts added. (PTI)

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10 Arunachal dists

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) left for Keyi Panoyr district on Sunday to strengthen ongoing search-and-rescue operations, he said. The Indian Red Cross Society, Arunachal Pradesh State Branch, is also sending relief materials to the flood-hit area. The supplies are scheduled to be airlifted from Naharlagun helipad to Possa via Ziro by an MI-17 civil aviation helicopter, subject to favourable weather conditions, the officials said. The State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) has not received any fresh requisition for additional personnel, and its existing deployment in Keyi Panoyr remains unchanged, they said.

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 Possa and Pitapool areas. A total of 128 households have been affected in the district. A relief camp has been set up on the NEEPCO campus, where 60 displaced people are currently taking shelter.

In East Siang district, floodwaters inundated at least 10 houses in the Ledum area, with one almost completely submerged as the water flow changed its course following continuous rain, an official report said.

Two cattle were swept away, while a community toilet and a rice mill were on the verge of being submerged. Three shops were also damaged by the flood, it said.

As a precautionary measure, residents of around 12 houses in the affected area were evacuated to safer places. The displaced families have taken shelter at their relatives' houses, while a community Dere (Prayer Hall) has been identified as a relief shelter. No casualties or missing persons have been reported so far. A vital bridge in the area also collapsed due to the flood, disrupting connectivity, the officials said.

Meanwhile, rescue teams carried out three separate operations at Pasighat and in other parts of East Siang district, rescuing a total of 24 people, including eight labourers.

The operations were conducted at Yago and Oyan, with all those stranded brought to safety.

In Lower Siang district, a massive landslide at Siji blocked the flow of the Siji river near the Likabali check-post between Siji and Magi, leading to the accumulation of water in the upstream.

The authorities concerned warned of a potential threat to life and property in downstream areas, and police personnel have been deployed to alert people living on the riverbanks to move to safer locations.

The State Disaster Management Department said the IMD has warned of heavy to extremely heavy rainfall across several parts of the state, raising the likelihood of flash floods, landslides and waterlogging in vulnerable areas. According to the Meteorological Centre at Itanagar, West Kameng, Lower Subansiri, East Siang, Papum Pare, Lepa Rada, Lower Siang, West Siang and Lower Dibang Valley are likely to receive heavy rainfall (6-11 cm in 24 hours) at isolated places on Monday and Tuesday. The weather forecast also indicates that thunderstorms accompanied by lightning are likely over many parts of the state during the period, increasing the risk of localised flooding, landslides and disruption of road connectivity in vulnerable areas.

The IMD has advised residents, particularly those living in flood- and landslide-prone areas, to remain vigilant and avoid unnecessary travel during periods of intense rainfall. (PTI)

Frustration grows in

Eddie Murphy and Nemo DVDs, a kitchen sink, mattresses and shoes.

Some, frustrated by the government's response, blocked an excavator from leaving the site of a collapse and pulled the operator from its cabin shortly after state workers took selfies in front of flattened buildings and left without helping. The ruling party's officials often take selfies to show participation in government-related events.

A few feet away, at least five bodies wrapped in blankets. A member of the crowd, Yeison Marcano, said those searching had received some assistance from an investigations unit but neither police nor the National Guard helped. "They came to eat arepas and take pictures to make it look like they were working," Marcano said. "They didn't even get their uniforms dirty like we have. We've been here for three days." A minute later, a man tried to grab a firefighter, shouting and cursing. "Silence! Silence!" rescuers shouted as they tried to confirm whether someone was trapped alive. Meanwhile, an older man was pulled from the rubble of a public housing building. Visibly disoriented, he begged a nurse for water. He fought with personnel who put him into a pickup truck, screaming, "My family! My family!" (AP)

Pulse Polio drive

and district community mobiliser Swapna Teronpi. According to district health data, the target population comprises approximately 41,883 children under the age of five. Of these, Donkamokam accounts for 20,426 children, followed by Baithalango with 11,713, Umpanat with 7,072, and Zirikinding with 2,612.

According to Dr Climen Teron, in-charge chief medical and health officer, the department has adopted a two-pronged strategy to ensure maximum coverage and that no child is left out. On the first day of the campaign, parents brought their children to designated fixed immunisation booths set up across the district.

Over the next two days (June 29-30), dedicated healthcare teams will conduct door-to-door visits to identify and immunise children who missed the booth sessions. To ensure the smooth implementation of the campaign, the District Health Department has set up 245 polio booths and deployed 397 ASHA workers, 29 ASHA supervisors, 175 volunteers and 24 field supervisors. The West Karbi Anglong District Health Department has appealed to parents, guardians and community leaders to bring all eligible children for vaccination and cooperate with the visiting health teams to ensure 100% coverage.

NSF slams Kuki-Zo

including members of all armed Kuki narco-militant groups as well as every civilian found, through due process, to have participated in or facilitated the crimes, must be identified, arrested, prosecuted and punished in accordance with the law. Further, it demanded that the Government of India immediately abrogate the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Kuki narco-militant groups, under which, it alleged, countless atrocities and gross human rights violations had been committed with impunity. The federation said it would remain steadfast in its pursuit of justice until the truth prevails and those responsible are held accountable.

KC Venugopal to

highlighted the party's shortcomings as well as how the BJP gained the upper hand due to several of their decisions," one of the members said. With Venugopal taking stock of the party's performance, it is expected that the constituency-wise reports will be discussed on July 1 in his presence.

"He will give us guidance and ways to strengthen the party in the future. We need to rejuvenate our workers, who are highly demotivated after the assembly election," the official said.

The NDA, comprising the BJP, Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and Bodoland People's Front (BPF), secured a sweeping mandate in the assembly polls, winning a record 102 seats. The BJP alone bagged 82, its first single-party majority in the state, while AGP and BPF won 10 seats each. The AIUDF and Trinamool Congress fought separately as single entities and have two and one MLAs respectively. (PTI)

India's vision is

towards enhancing connectivity between India and Seychelles. This will not only boost our bilateral trade but also strengthen our ties with East Africa and the Indian Ocean region," he said.

Modi also said India will share its successful experience in digital public infrastructure with Seychelles.

After the talks, the two sides unveiled 19 outcomes, expanding cooperation in areas ranging from defence and maritime security to digital payments, space, healthcare, agriculture and education.

The outcomes included an extradition treaty, an agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, an agreement to advance UPI-based digital payments in Seychelles, an umbrella line of credit agreement with the Export-Import Bank of India and an agreement for preliminary preparations for a new Seychelles National Hospital, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

The two sides also announced the gifting of a fast patrol vessel to Seychelles, the handover of 10 utility vehicles and five Laser Radial class boats to the Seychelles Defence Force, the completion of the refit of PS Zoroaster for the Seychelles Coast Guard and the upgradation of a Dornier aircraft with a glass cockpit.

Modi said his visit came at a historic juncture as Seychelles marks 50 years of independence and the two countries celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations. "Over these five decades, we have transformed friendship into trust, trust into cooperation, and cooperation into the welfare of our people," he said. (PTI)

From seas to skies

the West Asia situation. "I am grateful to every citizen of the country; not only have they supported my appeal, they are also actively cooperating in every way," he said.

The prime minister said he had also requested farmers to adopt chemical-free farming, protect their farmlands, and maximise the use of natural fertilisers. Referring to an initiative to prepare the youth for new technology while keeping them rooted in their heritage, he said the Central Sanskrit University in Delhi is launching a B.Tech program in Artificial Intelligence and Data Science. "This marks a crucial step towards integrating modern technology with India's traditional knowledge," he said.

Modi said Indian culture is reaching various corners of the globe, noting that in the Dominican Republic, where the Indian population is just around 100, a team has been formed by some Spanish-speaking locals who have named it as "Brahmakamal Dominicana." "The members study Vedic literature together and are learning to chant Vedic mantras. They have received no formal training on this; but they have learnt the correct pronunciation by listening to audio recordings," he said.

Modi said far more young people are now pursuing sports as a career and shared that a special initiative has been taken in Nagaland where the 'Nagaland Baby League' of football was launched.

Children, both boys and girls aged 5 to 12 can participate in it. "It not only inspires them and nurtures their speed and talent but also helps establish their identity," he said. Talking about Meghalaya's root bridges, Modi said India has now sought inclusion of the root bridges in the UNESCO World Heritage Site Network.

Jawa 42 Ivory now available on Amazon, Flipkart

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 28: Jawa Yezdi Motorcycles has expanded the availability of its recently launched Jawa 42 Ivory by enabling online bookings through Amazon.in and Flipkart, making the neo-classic motorcycle more accessible to customers across the country. The company said the Jawa 42 Ivory has received a strong response from riders since its launch, with enthusiasts appreciating its retro-inspired styling and contemporary performance.

By bringing the motorcycle to India's leading e-commerce platforms, Jawa aims to simplify the ownership journey by allowing customers to initiate bookings online before completing the purchase through authorised dealerships.

Early owners have highlighted both the motorcycle's riding experience and distinctive styling. Shaileendra S Nanekar of Pune said the motorcycle offered a noticeable improvement in power and comfort over his previous commuter bike while attracting attention wherever it was parked.

Hari from Andhra Pradesh said the Ivory colour complements traditional attire and gives the motorcycle a timeless appeal, while Prem Kumar of Puducherry described the pastel finish as the feature that immediately drew him to the motorcycle.

The Jawa 42 Ivory retains the design language of the Jawa 42 with a soft pastel paint scheme, signature '42' decals and a checkered flag motif on the fuel tank, blending classic styling with modern elements.

Powered by a liquid-cooled J-Panther engine paired with a six-speed gearbox, the motorcycle features optimised throttle mapping, an assist and slipper clutch, and braking and handling systems tuned for Indian road conditions.

Fusion CX to invest ₹ 100 cr in Bengal Silicon Valley IT campus; over 9,000 jobs planned

KOLKATA, June 28: Fusion CX, a multinational customer experience and business process solutions provider, said it will invest ₹ 100 crore over the next three years to set up an IT and ITeS campus at the Bengal Silicon Valley Tech Hub in New Town near Kolkata.

The Kolkata-headquartered company said it has secured 1.06 acres of land in Action Area II for the proposed project, which will house an 11-storeyed facility with a built-up area of around 2 lakh square feet.

The upcoming campus is expected to generate employment for more than 9,000 people at full capacity and further strengthen West Bengal as Fusion CX's largest offshore delivery cluster. "West Bengal offers a lot of potential. We are hopeful that the new government will make the investment climate conducive. We will invest around ₹ 100 crore over the next three years in this facility. The campus has the potential to generate employment for more than 9,000 people at full capacity," Fusion CX co-founder, managing director and CEO Pankaj Dhanuka told PTI.

"We started our journey in West Bengal in 2004. Today, Fusion CX operates delivery centres in 15 countries, employing over 15,000 people, while West Bengal remains our largest offshore delivery cluster. We stayed rooted in

this state through its most challenging business years because this is where Fusion CX was born," he said.

Dhanuka said the state's talent pool, improving infrastructure, and strategic location as a gateway to eastern and northeastern India have made it a natural base for global customer experience delivery operations.

"West Bengal offers a rare combination of a highly capable workforce, competitive real estate, and a government that is actively building the infrastructure for technology-led growth. The Bengal Silicon Valley campus is how we grow into that opportunity at scale," he added.

Fusion CX currently employs more than 4,700 people across five delivery centres in West Bengal -- Kolkata, Howrah, Durgapur, Kalyani and Siliguri -- serving clients in sectors such as telecom, e-commerce, BFSI, healthcare and retail. The company said the investment follows the launch of its Centre of Excellence for E-Commerce in Siliguri in August 2025. The facility onboarded four major e-commerce clients within three months of commencing operations. Dhanuka said the company has been registering annual growth of around 35 per cent over the last few years and expects the momentum to continue in the current fiscal, supported by AI-driven service augmentation. (PTI)

SS Innovations wins global Surgical Robotics Award

Indian MedTech firm named Outstanding Company at SRT Industry Awards 2026, outperforming global industry leaders



GUWAHATI, June 28: Indian medical technology company SS Innovations International has been named Outstanding Company at the Surgical Robotics Technology (SRT) Industry Awards 2026, becoming the first Indian company to receive the prestigious global recognition dedicated exclusively to surgical robotics.

The award marks a significant milestone for India's MedTech sector, with SS Innovations International emerging ahead of several internationally renowned surgical robotics and medical technology companies, including Intuitive, Medtronic, Johnson & Johnson MedTech, Distalmotion, Meril, MicroPort, THINK Surgical, FUTEK and Precision IO Group.

Now in its fourth edition, the Surgical Robotics Technology Industry Awards are organised by Surgical Robotics Technology (SRT), a global news and intelligence platform focused exclusively on the surgical robotics ecosystem, in partnership with QNX.

The awards recognise organisations, technologies and industry leaders for excellence in innovation, clinical impact, technological leadership and commercial achievement in robotic-assisted surgery.

Other winners this year included Steve Bell, who received the Industry Leadership Award; Microbot Medical, recognised as the Innovative Start-up; Sentante, which won the Groundbreaking Technology Award for the Sentante Robotic System; Moon Surgical, honoured with the Software Innovation Award for Maestro Insights; and Dr Brian Cohen of Cohen Orthopedic, who was named Outstanding Healthcare Provider.

Reacting to the recognition, SS Innovations International Founder, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Dr Sudhir Srivastava said the award was a proud moment for both the company and India.

"Winning the Outstanding Company award at the SRT Industry Awards is a proud milestone for SS Innovations International and for India. This recognition validates our commitment to developing world-class surgical robotic technologies that are innovative, accessible and affordable. It inspires us to continue advancing our mission of transforming surgical care through cutting-edge technology and expanding access to robotic surgery across the world," he said.

The company has gained international recognition through its flagship SSI Mantra Surgical Robotic System, developed in India to make robotic-assisted surgery more accessible and affordable.

The platform supports minimally invasive procedures and has contributed to expanding the adoption of robotic surgery through technological innovation and advances in telesurgery.

SS Innovations International said the latest recognition reflects the growing confidence of the global surgical robotics community in the company's technological capabilities and reinforces India's emergence as an important hub for advanced medical technology innovation.

NAME CORRECTION

I ABDUL SALAM, S/o- Late Israh Ali, do hereby declare by an Affidavit sworn before the Executive Magistrate, Nagaon, on 19/06/2026, that my actual and correct name is ABDUL SALAM. However, in my son's passport bearing Passport No. N8115801, my name has been erroneously recorded as MOHAMMED ABDUL SALAM. I hereby declare that above both names refer to one and the same person. Henceforth, I shall be known and identified as ABDUL SALAM for all purposes.

Sd/-
Abdul Salam
Kumbhirdubi,
Kampur,
Nagaon

Morigaon targets 1.41 lakh children; Dima Hasao achieves 86% first-day coverage as districts join nationwide campaign

Pulse Polio drive begins across state districts

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 28: The National Pulse Polio Immunisation Drive commenced across several districts of Assam on Sunday, with health authorities launching intensive campaigns to vaccinate children below five years of age and reinforce the country's polio-free status.

In Morigaon, the district administration, in collaboration with the Joint Director of Health Services, launched a three-day immunisation campaign targeting 1,41,345 children below the age of five years.

The programme was inaugurated by Joint Director of Health Services Dr Sailendra Bardhan Bora, who said elaborate arrangements had been made to ensure that every eligible child receives the Oral Polio Vaccine (OPV).

The inaugural programme was attended by district immunisation officer Dr Niranjan Konwar, National Health Mission district programme manager Jufin Sultana, district family planning coordinator Baharul Ulum Chowdhary and circle officer Naba Kumar Medhi.

A felicitation programme preceded the launch. Health officials said 914 Pulse Polio booths have been established across the district, with 3,426 booth workers deployed to carry out the campaign.

The drive will continue until June 30, with health teams conducting house-to-house visits to vaccinate children who miss the booth-based immunisation.

In Golaghat, the District Health Society launched the campaign at the District Early Intervention Centre of Swahid Kushal Konwar Civil Hospital.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (Health) Jintu Bora inaugurated the programme in the presence of



Joint Director of Health Services Dr Rajib Ranjan Gogoi, State Observer Dr Amiya Kumar, Additional Chief Medical and Health Officer Dr Sanjib Saikia, Superintendent Dr Dilip Deka, District Immunisation Officer Dr Kabita Uzir and officials of the National Health Mission.

Polio drops were administered to children during the inaugural programme. Dr Gogoi stressed the importance of timely vaccination in protecting children against poliomyelitis.

Health authorities said the campaign would be supervised by 170 supervisors, while ASHAs, Auxiliary Nurse Midwives, medical officers, NHM personnel and 1,464 Anganwadi workers have been engaged in the drive.

Door-to-door visits will be conducted on June 29 and

30 to ensure that no eligible child is left out.

In Biswanath district, the Lokra Battalion of Assam Rifles organised a Pulse Polio Immunisation programme at its Unit MI Room as part of the nationwide initiative.

A total of 48 children below the age of five years received the Oral Polio Vaccine during the drive.

The Battalion Medical Team, in coordination with local health authorities, also conducted awareness programmes for parents and guardians on the importance of routine immunisation and prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases.

Assam Rifles stated that the initiative reflected its continued commitment to supporting national public health programmes, strengthening civil-military relations and contributing to community welfare.

In Dima Hasao, the campaign got off to an encouraging start, with the district achieving 86 per cent of its target population on the opening day.

The programme was inaugurated by Dima Hasao Autonomous Council Executive Member in charge of Health and Family Welfare Probata Johari at Mahur Public Health Centre in the presence of Joint Director of Health Services Dr Sarsing Rongpi, senior doctors and health workers.

In-charge chief medical and health officer Dr Merina Chansang said the district aims to immunise 28,602 children below five years of age across 827 villages.

A total of 558 Pulse Polio booths have been established and 2,192 personnel, including ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers and supervisors, have been deployed.

Door-to-door vaccination will continue on June 29

and 30 to ensure complete coverage.

Karbi Anglong also launched the Sub-National Immunisation Day under the Intensive Pulse Polio Immunisation (IPPI) programme.

The district-level programme was inaugurated at the Diphu Urban Health Centre by Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council Deputy Secretary Bidyashri Langthasa. The district has set a target of vaccinating around 94,000 children below five years of age.

Health workers will conduct house-to-house visits over the next two days to vaccinate children who miss the booth-based campaign, while the Health Department appealed to parents and guardians to ensure every eligible child receives the vaccine.

In Cachar, more than 1.9 lakh children received the Oral Polio Vaccine on the opening day, accounting for nearly 70 per cent of the district's target of 2,78,073 children.

The campaign was inaugurated at Urban Primary Health Centre, Silchar, by MLA Rajdeep Roy and at Kalain Community Health Centre by MLA Kamalashya Dey Purkayastha.

The district has established 1,312 Pulse Polio booths and deployed 5,228 frontline workers, 267 supervisors, medical officers, mobile teams and transit teams to ensure complete coverage, including in remote areas.

Door-to-door vaccination began on Sunday evening and will continue until June 30.

Health authorities across the districts appealed to parents and guardians to ensure that every child below five years of age receives the Pulse Polio vaccine, irrespective of their previous immunisation status, to help sustain India's hard-earned polio-free status.

Ranoj Pegu reviews higher education institutions in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, June 28: Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu recently visited Jagannath Barooah (JB) University and the Jorhat Institute of Science and Technology (JIST) to review academic activities, infrastructure development and the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

During the visit, the Minister held separate meetings with the authorities of both institutions and reviewed their academic progress, infrastructure projects and future development plans.

At Jagannath Barooah University, Vice-Chancellor Prof Jyoti Prasad Saikia briefed the Minister on the functioning of the university, which was upgraded from the erstwhile Jagannath Barooah College (Autonomous) by the state government.

Faculty members and students were also present during the interaction.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Dr. Pegu said he was touring higher education institutions across Upper Assam, many of which had been upgraded by the state government during its previous term, to assess their progress and requirements.

He informed that infrastructure development works worth Rs 10 crore at JB University were nearing completion.

The Minister also reviewed the academic activities of the university's 26 departments under the Arts, Science and Commerce streams and took stock of the implementation of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) under the National Education Policy.

Pegu also received a memorandum submitted by the university students' union highlighting various issues and demands.

Earlier, the minister visited the Jorhat Institute of Science and Technology at Sotal, where he held discussions with the Principal and faculty members on academic activities, infrastructure and the institute's future development.

Established as Science College in the early 1970s, the institution was later upgraded and renamed the Jorhat Institute of Science and Technology, emerging as one of Assam's leading technical education institutes.

The minister said the state government remains committed to strengthening higher education through improved infrastructure, academic reforms and effective implementation of the National Education Policy.

Pijush Hazarika reviews agriculture projects

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 28: Assam Agriculture Minister Pijush Hazarika on Sunday reviewed key agricultural initiatives in Nagaon district, inspecting ongoing projects and interacting with farmers during a day-long visit organised by the Agriculture Department.

The minister began his visit by inspecting a farmer registration camp at Kathiatoli under the Nonoi Agricultural Development Circle.

He reviewed the registration process and interacted with farmers, highlighting the importance of enrolment for availing benefits under various government schemes.

Later, accompanied by Barhampur MLA Jitu Goswami, Hazarika visited an under-construction special horticulture garden spread over 100 bighas at Kathiatoli and assessed the progress of the project.

The minister also chaired a review meeting with Nagaon District Commissioner Devashish Sarma, District Agriculture Officer Nikhil Narayan Baruah and other departmental officials to discuss irrigation requirements and agricultural development in the district.

As part of the visit, Hazarika participated in a coconut sapling plantation programme organised jointly by the Nagaon District Agriculture Department and the Nagaon Krishi Vigyan Kendra at Borkochari village under the Nonoi Agricultural Circle.

The event was attended by local farmers, agriculture officials and MLA Jitu Goswami.

In a symbolic gesture of solidarity with the farming community, the minister, along with the MLA, the District Commissioner, the District Agriculture Officer and farmers, entered the paddy fields at Borkochari village in Kandali. Hazarika drove a tractor and also took part in paddy transplantation, encouraging farmers ahead of the ongoing cultivation season.

Pilot project promotes environmental awareness, pollution control and sustainable practices among school students

Aaranyak, APCB honour 20 young eco-ambassadors in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 28: Biodiversity conservation organisation Aaranyak, in collaboration with Samagra Shiksha Assam (SSA), Kamrup Metro, and with support from the Assam Pollution Control Board (APCB), has successfully concluded its pilot initiative, "Pollution Abating Schools in Guwahati", by felicitating 20 students as Young Eco-Ambassadors for their outstanding contribution to environmental conservation.

The concluding consultation programme was held on June 25 at the National Science Centre, Khanapara, bringing together students, teachers, school administrators, environmental experts and government officials to review the outcomes of the initiative and discuss strategies for expanding similar programmes in the future.

The project was implemented in Dakshin Beltola High School and Krishna Nagar Vidyapeeth High School with the objective of promoting environmental awareness, pollution abatement practices and sustainable behaviour among school students through education, infrastructure development and student-led environmental action.

Besides honouring 20 Young Eco-Ambassadors, the organisers

Ranoj Pegu outlines development roadmap during Nagaon University visit

Education Minister stresses AI integration, infrastructure and quality education to strengthen higher studies

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 28: Assam Education Minister Ranoj Pegu paid a courtesy visit to Nagaon University on Sunday, where he outlined a vision for the institution's future with a focus on infrastructure, academic excellence and the integration of technology into higher education.

The programme, coordinated by Dr Bhuvan Chandra Chutia, Director of the Internal Quality Assurance Cell, was attended by faculty members, university officials and students.

Vice-Chancellor Dr Hitesh Deka welcomed the gathering and presented an overview of the university's achievements, ongoing initiatives and future development plans.

Addressing the audience, Dr Pegu highlighted the importance of strengthening infrastructure, improving the quality of education and creating a vibrant academic environment.

He stressed the need to integrate artificial intelligence into higher education and advocated the use of information technology in human-



ities disciplines to equip students with skills that enhance employability and self-reliance.

The minister also spoke on strategies for the long-term development of Nagaon University, emphasising the role of technology-driven education in preparing students for emerging career opportunities.

Nagaon-Batadroba MLA Rupak Sarma, who is also the president of the Nagaon University Former Students' Association, attended the programme and thanked the Education Minister for his continued support to the university.

Poetry defies definition: Asam Sahitya Sabha president

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 28: Asam Sahitya Sabha president Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami has said that poetry cannot be confined within any fixed definition, describing it as an art form that transcends conventional boundaries.

Addressing the Kabya-Kakali (Poetry Confluence) and Kabya-Shibir (Poetry Workshop) organised by the Kabi Sammilan Sub-committee of the Asam Sahitya Sabha in collaboration with its Jorhat Central Office and hosted by the Tarajan Sammilita Branch Sahitya Sabha, Dr Goswami remarked that "no expert in the world has been able to define poetry—it cannot be contained within a single finger's breadth."

In his address, Asam Sahitya Sabha principal secretary Debajit Bora said Kabya-Kakali was more than a poetry recital, describing it as a platform for nurturing new ideas, linguistic aesthetics and creative expression while

bringing together both veteran and emerging poets from across Assam.

The afternoon session, held from 2 pm, was conducted by poet Dr Pranay Phukan and anchored by Kabi Sammilan Sub-committee convener Naba Rajan. Poet and critic Rajib Bora presented a critical appraisal of the poems recited during the programme.

Twenty-five poets, including Bijay Rabidas, Punya Devi, Punjan Baruah, Gangamohan Mili, Baidya Bright Burhagohain, Ranjit Gogoi, Utpal Doley, Muih Saikia, Dandiran Bora, Ankur Borogohain, Sushanta Bora, Jayanta Dutta, Bablu Prasad Baruah, Pranjal Kumar Khaund, Dr. Deepa Thakuria, Jonmoni Sahu, Monalisa Saikia, Swapnali Kalita, Jatin Mili, Bandana Kaushik Bordoloi, Samir Shankar Dutta, Lakshi Prasad Regan, Abhijit Gogoi and Ashanta Ratul Dutta, presented their original compositions.

also awarded 12 students for their outstanding performance in an inter-school essay competition, which attracted participation from 210 students representing schools across Kamrup Metropolitan district.

Throughout the project, Aaranyak conducted baseline and post-intervention Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) assessments, strengthened Eco-Clubs, organised environmental awareness campaigns, cleanliness drives, plantation programmes, biodiversity documentation, wall painting and wall magazine activities, composting demonstrations and behavioural change initiatives focusing on waste management.

Students also participated in drawing and painting competitions, conservation theatre, responsible citizen role-play, waste craft preparation, quizzes, extempore speeches and popular science writing activities aimed at fostering environmental consciousness.

As part of the initiative, waste management infrastructure, including compost pits, waste segregation bins and school gardens, was established in the participating schools to encourage sustainable practices.

The programme was attended by Assam Pollution Control Board Chairman Dr Arup Kumar Misra, former Member Secretary Gautam Misra, Senior Public Relations Officer Kanteswar Kalita and other APCB officials, along with Aaranyak Secretary General and Executive Director Dr Bibhab Kumar Talukdar.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Arup Kumar Misra stressed the importance of environmental stewardship and urged students to adopt responsible practices for a cleaner and healthier future.

Dr Bibhab Kumar Talukdar highlighted the need to reduce pollution, promote responsible environmental behaviour and minimise the use of single-use plastics.

Senior Education Officer of the National Science Centre, Premodhar Das, encouraged students to work collectively towards building a sustainable future.

Jayanta Kumar Pathak, Assistant Director and Head In-Charge of Aaranyak's Environment Education and Capacity Building Division, highlighted the encouraging behavioural changes observed among participating students, particularly in waste segregation, composting, biodiversity conservation and pollution prevention.

Chinthong village headmen protest TVDC chairman appointments

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, June 28: The Chinthong Rong Asar Amei (Chinthong Village Headmen's Society) has strongly opposed the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) over alleged irregularities in the appointment of Chairmen for the newly constituted Tribal Village Development Committees (TVDCs) under the No 3 Chinthong Council Constituency.

Addressing a press conference at Chinthong Rongiangphong on Sunday, village headmen (Gaonburhas) expressed resentment over the exclusion of recognised traditional village heads from leadership positions in the newly formed development committees.

The leaders of the Rong Asar Amei said that although 23 TVDCs had been constituted in the constituency to oversee grassroots development, only seven recognised Gaonburhas had been appointed as Chairmen.

They alleged that the remaining 16 posts were given to political workers and individuals who do not hold the traditional status of village headmen.

The society stated that village headmen had been demanding the formation of TVDCs for nearly eight

years and welcomed the government's decision to establish the committees.

However, it termed the appointment of political workers to key posts as unfortunate and contrary to the objective of strengthening traditional village governance.

The issue has generated discontent among the Gaonburha community, particularly as Chinthong falls under the home constituency of KAAC Deputy Chairman Abhijit Kro. The traditional leaders questioned how such appointments could take place despite long-standing demands to recognise village headmen in the functioning of the TVDCs.

The Chinthong Rong Asar Amei has appealed to KAAC chief executive member Tuliram Ronghang to revoke the appointments of the 16 non-Gaonburha Chairmen and replace them with recognised village headmen.

The society warned that the objective of the Tribal Village Development Committees—to facilitate development in remote tribal villages—would be undermined if political considerations were allowed to take precedence over traditional leadership.

Class VIII student receives artificial limb after public support

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, June 28: A Class VII student from Demow, who was born without a leg, has received an artificial limb after coordinated support from public representatives, healthcare providers and community organisations.

Birina Chaura, daughter of Dinesh Chaura and Ritu Chaura of Athabari near Demow and a student of Demow Town MV School, was fitted with an artificial limb at the Tolaram Bafna Artificial Limb and Caliper Centre in Amingaon, Guwahati, on June 27.

Her condition had earlier been highlighted in the media and on social media, drawing widespread attention.

Nagaon District Muay Thai Association constituted

MLA Rupak Sarma named Chief Advisor

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 28: The Nagaon District Muay Thai Association was constituted on June 27 with the objective of promoting the Olympic combat sport among the youth and creating opportunities for aspiring athletes in the district. The district-level committee was formed during a meeting held at Pensioners' Bhavan in Nagaon.

Local MLA Rupak Sarma was named chief advisor of the newly constituted association. Simanta Bora was elected President, while Nanu Das was appointed working president.

Amar Jyoti Bharali was elected secretary, Dhiraj Das joint secretary and Chandra Mallika Borthakur treasurer.

Speaking on the occasion, members of the newly formed association expressed confidence that the organisation would play a vital role in popularising Muay Thai across the district and nurturing young talent through structured training and competitive exposure.

They said the association aims to identify promising athletes and provide them with opportunities to compete at the state, national and international levels, while contributing to the overall development of the sport in Nagaon.

The members also highlighted that the formation of the district body would help strengthen the sport's organisational structure and encourage greater participation among the youth.

Sonitpur admin moves to preserve historic Tezpur rock inscription

District plans post-monsoon conservation of 9th-century Harjara Varman inscription with tourist infrastructure

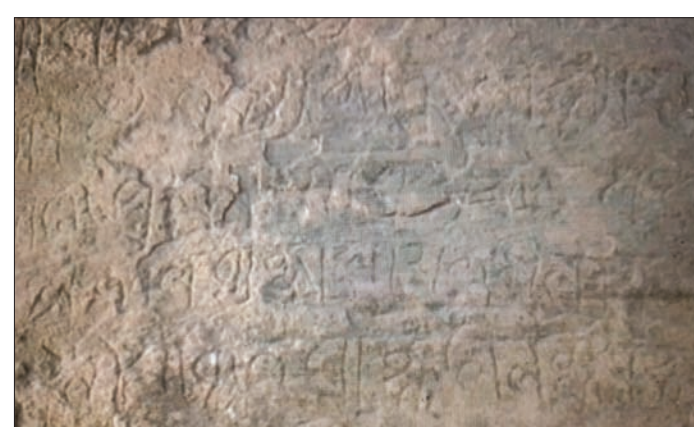
HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 28: The Sonitpur district administration has initiated steps to preserve the historic Harjara Varman Rock Inscription, a ninth-century Sanskrit epigraph regarded as one of the most significant sources for reconstructing the ancient history of Assam.

District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das, accompanied by engineers from the Public Works Department and other officials, inspected the historic Rudrapad (Bhairavpad) site on the banks of the Brahmaputra on Sunday, where the inscription is engraved on a massive rock partially submerged in the river.

The inspection followed a memorandum submitted on June 26 by a delegation of the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, led by its president Dhruvajyoti Das and former president Dr Bhupen Saikia, urging immediate preservation of the nine-line Sanskrit inscription issued by Harjara Varman, a ruler of the Salastambha dynasty, the second royal dynasty of ancient Assam.

Responding promptly to the appeal, the District Commissioner convened a meeting with concerned officials before visiting the



site with PWD engineers and representatives of the Tezpur Sahitya Sabha, including vice-president Dwijen Nath, secretary Dr Pallab Bhattacharya and former secretary Panjaj Baruah.

Speaking after the inspection, Das said preservation work would commence after the monsoon through a coordinated effort involving the Water Resources Department, the Archaeological Department and the Public Works Department.

He announced that a permanent guide embankment and an access bridge would be constructed to fa-

ilitate safe visits by tourists and researchers, while expert-designed conservation measures would be implemented to protect the inscription from erosion and water damage.

The District Commissioner also said an inspection and oversight committee comprising archaeologists and eminent citizens of Tezpur would be constituted to supervise the preservation work.

Highlighting the inscription's historical importance, Tezpur Sahitya Sabha secretary Dr Pallab Bhattacharya said the Gupta Era date 510 (829 AD) mentioned in

the inscription has enabled historians to determine the approximate reigns of kings belonging to the Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasties of ancient Assam.

He described the Tezpur Rock Inscription as an invaluable historical record and expressed concern that such an important monument had been left vulnerable to deterioration.

He added that, given its location near the historic Bhairavpad tourist site, the inscription also holds significant tourism potential.

Dr Bhattacharya commended the District Commissioner for responding swiftly to the Sabha's appeal.

The demand for preserving the inscription has been raised for several years by historians, archaeologists and civil society organisations, including the late historian Prof Madhav Chandra Das, archaeologist Dr Satish Chandra Bhattacharya and the Asamiya Bhasha Unnati Sadhini Sabha.

With the district administration now initiating conservation measures, there is renewed hope that one of Assam's most valuable historical monuments will be safeguarded for future generations.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Isn't it strange that religious prejudices - beliefs none possess, not even the saints, so they have lamented - divide brothers and sons from their fathers. You see, I except mothers and sisters; the female is not a religious animal. If she were, the world would have ceased long ago - George A. Moore

Manipur crisis deepens

Manipur is deeply divided in several zones. Recently several from the Naga community were abducted and the mutilated bodies of two of them were found. In the past few weeks, the fighting between the Meitei and Kuki people has involved a third ethnic group, the Nagas. Kukis have clashed with Nagas in the hills of Manipur, amid disputes over rights of residence and control of the territory. More than a dozen people have been killed, including three Kuki church leaders who were shot in an ambush on May 13. Dozens have been kidnapped. It is the most violent outburst in that region of the state since May, 2023, when clashes between the Kukis and the Meiteis killed hundreds. Central government sent in paramilitary troops to suppress the fighting, which they achieved by severing the state into parts. The Meitei people, mostly inhabiting the state capital, Imphal, and the surrounding plains, remain at war with the Kukis people, who mostly live in the hills. Each group has established safe areas behind battle lines, and tens of thousands have been displaced. They frequently blame each other for outbreaks of violence. This is the gravest crisis in the state since the swearing-in of chief minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh on February 4, 2024, and the lifting of President's Rule on February 13.

It is now little more than three years for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) ruling the state of Manipur. It is also three years of turning the state into a land of the dead... Children snatched from mother's arms and thrown in blazing flames. Women unrobed publicly in broad daylight and molested. Homes turned into ashes. Hunger ruling the roost. With blatant clarity, facts point towards the failure of the Manipur state government to quench the violence, prevent displacement, and protect human rights. Since May 3, 2023, at least 200 people have been killed and more than 60,000 had to leave their roots and look for new shelters. Businesses, villages, and places of worship have been destroyed. They stand burnt, attacked, looted, and vandalized. There are hostages taken by armed groups. Recently twenty people have been victims of such barbarity. They are mostly from the Kuki and Naga communities in Manipur following growing inter-ethnic tensions that is worsening the security crisis across the state's hill districts.

The continued abduction of civilians and the recurrence of ethnic violence underscore the failure of authorities in Manipur to establish security, uphold the rule of law, ensure justice, truth and reparation, and protect human rights. The Centre's insensitivity to the continuing violence is obvious by the fact that the prime minister visited Manipur only for a few hours in September last year and his government, with extreme passivity has continued to maintain that most of the killings took place in the initial weeks of the violence in 2023.

A Tectonic Time Bomb

The recent catastrophic earthquake that tore through the heart of Venezuela has sent a shudder not just through the fault lines of South America, but through the collective conscience of urban planners and geologists worldwide. Within the span of a few agonizing seconds, a pair of massive tremors registering magnitudes of 7.1 and 7.5 brought large swaths of the capital city, Caracas, and the coastal state of La Guaira to their knees. The numbers trickling out from official channels paint a grim picture of human suffering, with nearly a thousand confirmed dead, several thousands injured, and countless families looking at mountains of rubble where their homes stood just days prior. It is a human tragedy of immense proportions, but from a purely scientific and developmental standpoint, it is also a stark, uncompromising warning. For a country like India, which shares an even more volatile relationship with the shifting crust of our planet, the rubble of Caracas is a mirror reflecting our own vulnerabilities and the heavy price of institutional complacency.

To truly understand what happened in Venezuela, we have to look beneath the surface, both literally and metaphorically. Geologically, Venezuela is not Japan or Chile, countries that are accustomed to the frequent, violent jolts of the Pacific Ring of Fire. Instead, it sits atop a boundary where the South American and Caribbean tectonic plates grind past each other sideways. In this type of strike-slip boundary, the earth does not lift upward in a dramatic display of mountain building; it slips laterally. Because of this specific motion, the strain does not release itself in small, regular intervals. Instead, it accumulates quietly, almost invisibly, over generations. The ground behaves like a tightly wound spring, gathering tension over decades while the cities above grow, populate, and forget the danger lurking beneath their foundations. Then, on a random afternoon, the earth settles its accounts all at once.

Seismologists have identified this particular disaster as a doublet, a phenomenon where two major earthquakes occur in close succession, interacting with each other in a complex chain reaction of structural failure. What made this doublet particularly lethal was its shallowness. Originating less than thirty kilometers beneath the surface, the full fury of the seismic waves was directed straight into the foundations of the buildings above, leaving no buffer zone to absorb the energy. It was a worst case scenario for any modern metropolis, but the true tragedy lies in the fact that the scale of destruction was amplified by human choices, specifically the lack of adequate structural preparedness.

India has reacted to this disaster with its characteristic global empathy, quickly offer-



ing relief teams, medical supplies, and logistics support to help Venezuela navigate the chaotic immediate aftermath of the disaster. This immediate humanitarian impulse is commendable, but the real test of India's leadership will lie in whether it can look at the lessons written in the ruins of Caracas and apply them to its own territory.

The uncomfortable truth is that India is sitting on a tectonic time bomb along the Himalayan arc, and our current approach to seismic safety suggests that we are choosing to ignore the alarm bells. The reality of India's seismic risk became disturbingly clear earlier this year through a series of institutional decisions that received far less public attention than they deserved. For over a decade, the Bureau of Indian Standards had commissioned extensive, rigorous research into the seismic hazards along the Himalayan front. The findings of this long-term scientific endeavor were clear and deeply concerning. The data revealed that the existing safety regulations vastly underestimated the true potential of a mega-earthquake in the region. The scientists recommended a massive overhaul of India's seismic zone map, suggesting that design forces in the highest-risk areas needed to be nearly doubled to withstand a realistic tectonic event. They even proposed adding a completely new sixth zone to a classification system that had historically stopped at five, acknowledging that certain regions faced an unprecedented level of threat.

Yet, this vital piece of scientific consensus never saw the light of day. It was abruptly shelved following an order from the Cabinet Secretariat. The justification offered for burying this research was purely economic. The government argued that upgrading the

safety standards would materially affect and financially burden the massive infrastructure projects currently underway across the nation, including multi-billion dollar metro rail networks, highways, and high-rise commercial complexes. In essence, the state chose to prioritize immediate balance sheets and construction timelines over long-term human safety. By refusing to update the building codes to match the reality of the science, we have chosen to build tomorrow's infrastructure on a foundation of deliberate denial.

To put this institutional denial into perspective, one only needs to look at how our neighbors handle the exact same threat. The Himalayan mountain range is the result of a violent, ongoing collision between the Indian plate and the Eurasian plate. This is a single, continuous front of immense geological stress. Yet, the way different countries on this front design their buildings varies wildly. In India's highest risk classification, Zone Five, structures are designed to withstand a ground acceleration of just 0.36g, where g represents the acceleration due to gravity. This is a technical measure of how violently the ground can shake during a tremor.

Meanwhile, Pakistan and Nepal, sharing the very same mountain range and facing the exact same tectonic forces, design their buildings to withstand nearly 0.25g more, setting their standards closer to 0.75g. In countries like the United States and Japan, engineers design critical structures to survive a full g or even more. India's standards are dangerously low, based on a calculation of risk that our own scientists have proven to be obsolete.

This gap between scientific reality and policy implementation becomes terrifying

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

Border issues and the security of Assam

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

Judged from the perspective of geographical location and geopolitical context, Assam's borders constitute an extremely sensitive nerve centre of the state's political, economic, and social security. No state can ever achieve internal peace and development if its boundaries remain insecure. In the case of Assam, this simple truth has been proven repeatedly. As the gateway and lifeline of Northeast India, the state's territorial boundaries are essentially divided into two distinct and highly complex segments. One comprises the international borders with Bangladesh and Bhutan, while the other consists of the inter-state boundaries shared with Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Mizoram. Both these segments have currently brought a profound crisis concerning the preservation of the state's existence. While the international border has continuously generated threats in the form of illegal infiltration and challenges to national security, the inter-state borders have persistently questioned the territorial integrity of Assam. In recent years, particularly in the context of 2026, these problems have assumed a new and alarming dimension. The state government and the central administration have undertaken various measures from time to time to address these issues. Nevertheless, the ground reality remains deeply concerning. Continuous pressure from across the borders and mutual distrust have transformed the peripheral regions of Assam into zones of undeclared conflict. Such circumstances have not only deteriorated law and order but have also erected a formidable barrier to the state's overall economic progress. Ordinary people living in border areas are compelled to lead lives marked by fear and uncertainty every day. Farmers cannot cultivate their lands without apprehension. Traders cannot conduct business without disruption. Therefore, if Assam's overall security and future direction are to be determined, a dispassionate, uncompromising, and rational analysis of these border issues is absolutely essential. Historical claims and political rhetoric alone cannot provide a lasting solution. What is required is a precise, technologically advanced, and practical strategy. Unless past mistakes are corrected and a robust framework is established in accordance with present realities, these problems will gradually push the state toward decline.

The roots of the present complexities were sown during British rule when boundaries were drawn merely for administrative convenience and later compounded by the post-independence political process of carving new states out of Assam. During the 1960s and 1970s, when Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and other states were created from Assam's territory, traditional tribal boundaries and customary land rights between the hills and plains were largely

ignored. Instead, boundaries were determined primarily through official notifications and maps placed on administrative tables. As a result, a deep and irreparable gap emerged between constitutional boundaries and historical boundaries. Because of this divergence, Assam regards the boundary defined under the 1933 government notification as constitutional and final. However, states such as Mizoram base their claims on the Inner Line Notification of 1875 and continue to assert historical rights. Similarly, Nagaland advances claims over forest areas within Assam on historical grounds. These differences have gradually evolved into a persistent source of conflict. Neighbouring states have repeatedly entered Assam's territory, destroyed forests, carried out unauthorized construction, and established police outposts. Such actions have not only reduced Assam's territorial space but have also severely damaged the traditional spirit of brotherhood and mutual dependence among the northeastern states. Inter-state borders are no longer merely disputes over parcels of land. They have increasingly become undeclared contests of political dominance and ethnic pride. Consequently, economic blockades, violent clashes, and unpleasant confrontations have become recurring features. This atmosphere of instability places enormous pressure on Assam's internal security apparatus. The police force is often compelled to focus on border protection rather than conventional crime control. A significant portion of administrative resources and energy is spent managing these disputes.

Recent developments concerning Assam's border disputes with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh have presented a mixed picture of hope and disappointment. Assam shares a border extending over more than eight hundred kilometres with Arunachal Pradesh. Through the Namsai Declaration of 2022 and subsequent agreements, both states have managed to resolve disputes involving numerous contested villages in a cordial manner. This undoubtedly represents a commendable and positive development. However, the reality concerning the dispute with Meghalaya remains highly sensitive and complex. Of the twelve disputed areas along the Meghalaya border, an agreement was signed to resolve six during the first phase. Yet serious tensions continue regarding the remaining six highly contentious regions. Areas such as Lapangap and Mukroh along the West Jaintia Hills-Karbi Anglong boundary remain volatile. High-level meetings have been held and commitments have been made to maintain peace. Nevertheless, farmers living in border areas still struggle to gain access to their agricultural lands. Various organizations in Meghalaya continue to demand the removal of Assam Police outposts, while Assam's administration remains compelled to assert

its territorial claims firmly. In such a sensitive situation, political goodwill and air-conditioned conference room meetings alone are insufficient. Restoring trust and confidence among the people at the grassroots level is far more important. Residents of border regions are not merely pawns in a political game. Ensuring their security and livelihoods is the primary responsibility of both state governments. Yet prolonged legal processes and the absence of strong political determination have forced these people to live amidst endless hardship and uncertainty. Their lives remain suspended in a state of perpetual insecurity.

The situation along Assam's borders with Mizoram and Nagaland is even more severe, conflict-ridden, and complicated. The bloody clashes that occurred along the Mizoram border in recent years, resulting in the deaths of Assam Police personnel, remain among the darkest chapters in the history of India's internal security. Although ministerial-level discussions and regional committees have been initiated with Mizoram, the fundamental disagreement regarding historical notifications remains unresolved. Mizoram continues to maintain its long-standing position without any significant concession, making a permanent settlement extremely difficult. Meanwhile, the border dispute with Nagaland poses a grave threat to Assam's economy and ecological system. Encroachment into Assam's reserved forests from the Nagaland side has continued for years. Under the protection of armed elements, forests have been cleared and non-Assamese settlers have allegedly been established in these areas, while tea plantations have also emerged in encroached lands. Despite ongoing proceedings before the Supreme Court, such encroachments have not ceased. Economic blockades, abductions, and extortion continue to occur frequently in border regions. Consequently, development in Assam's border districts has been severely hampered. This situation clearly demonstrates that administrative directives or judicial verdicts alone cannot resolve territorial disputes. A strong, decisive, and coordinated national intervention is necessary. While the Assam government has deployed police forces to protect its territory, maintaining a perpetual confrontational posture toward neighbouring states is incompatible with the broader goals of democratic progress. These disputes repeatedly undermine the vision of collective development for Northeast India. It is deeply unfortunate and troubling that two states within a democratic nation like India often behave toward one another in a manner resembling hostile international rivals.

Alongside the instability of inter-state boundaries, the most serious and long-term threat confronting Assam arises from the international border with Bangladesh. A substantial portion of this border consists of riverine stretches and open terrain, enabling illegal infiltration to continue for

decades. This infiltration is not merely a matter of ordinary migration. It is viewed by many as a systematic and silent challenge with the potential to alter Assam's demographic structure. In his historic report to the President of India, former Governor Lieutenant General S. K. Sinha explicitly warned that sustained infiltration from Bangladesh could eventually reduce indigenous people in Assam to a minority within their own homeland. He further argued that it constituted a major threat to India's national security. According to contemporary concerns expressed in 2026, this threat is perceived to have reached a critical stage. Assam Police and the Border Security Force have recently intensified operations against illegal infiltration. Reports of arrests, deportations, and the dismantling of networks involved in producing forged identity documents have become frequent. These developments indicate how individuals crossing the border have often exploited loopholes within the system to integrate into the mainstream. Such demographic changes are believed to influence political power equations, weaken indigenous land rights, and place immense pressure on the state's limited resources. Viewed from a pragmatic rather than emotional perspective, many argue that Assam's future will face serious challenges if infiltration cannot be effectively controlled. Protecting the political and economic rights of indigenous communities therefore requires a border management system capable of preventing unauthorized entry.

Traditional barbed-wire fencing has repeatedly proven inadequate for addressing this international border challenge. Particularly in riverine and sensitive sectors such as Dhubri and Karimganj, geographical conditions make physical fencing extremely difficult. Consequently, both the central and state governments have increasingly emphasized the use of advanced technology. Modern surveillance systems have introduced a new dimension to border security. The deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles, thermal imaging devices, night-vision cameras, and high-capacity radar systems has significantly strengthened monitoring capabilities. The Ministry of Home Affairs has moved beyond the traditional concept of border protection and promoted a broader regional security framework. Under this approach, border security is no longer viewed as the exclusive responsibility of the Border Security Force. Instead, local police, district administrations, and citizens are expected to participate in a comprehensive security network. The objective is to ensure that infiltrators or hostile elements cannot easily find refuge within the country after crossing the border. This combination of technology and human resources has helped curb human trafficking, cattle smuggling, and the illegal trade in narcotics to a considerable extent. Nevertheless, the underlying problem has not been completely

eliminated. Regardless of technological sophistication, ultimate success depends upon the integrity of those operating these systems and the political will supporting them. Corrupt networks continuously seek ways to exploit vulnerabilities. Therefore, alongside technological measures, improving infrastructure and connectivity in border regions remains equally important. Only when border residents receive adequate governmental support will their sense of national responsibility and commitment to security strengthen.

Weak border security inevitably produces serious consequences for a state's internal security, and Assam's recent history has demonstrated this repeatedly. Porous international boundaries and disputed inter-state borders have enabled anti-national elements to establish bases of operation. Various insurgent groups in Northeast India have used the dense forests along the Assam-Nagaland and Assam-Arunachal Pradesh borders as safe havens and routes for transporting arms. Likewise, the Bangladesh border has allegedly served not only as a route for unauthorized migration but also for the movement of counterfeit currency, sophisticated weapons, and members of extremist organizations. Over the past several years, Assam Police have successfully dismantled a number of militant networks, many of which were reportedly linked to cross-border infiltration channels. Such developments pose a serious threat to Assam's long-standing social fabric and communal harmony. The deterioration of internal security has also inflicted significant damage upon the state's economy. Investors and industrialists are naturally reluctant to commit capital in an environment perceived as unstable and sensitive. Without investment, unemployment increases. Furthermore, substantial public resources that could have been devoted to development projects must instead be spent on law enforcement and maintaining extensive security deployments. As a result, critical sectors such as education, healthcare, and employment generation often receive inadequate attention. Border issues, therefore, cannot be viewed solely through legal or geographical lenses. They represent a profound political, social, and developmental challenge directly linked to Assam's future prosperity. Ignoring them would amount to jeopardizing the state's future.

Northeast India is often described as the "Asha Lakshmi" of the nation. Yet persistent border disputes and divisions among the region's states repeatedly undermine this vision. Ideally, borders should function as centres of economic cooperation and cultural exchange rather than zones of conflict and bloodshed. Had these disputes not existed between Assam and its neighbouring states, Northeast India might today have emerged as a powerful and integrated economic region. Resolving inter-state issues requires an entirely new and broader perspective. Instead of relying exclusively

when you look at the demographics of India's population. Nearly eighty percent of all Indians live under moderate to severe seismic threat. We often focus our anxieties on the glittering glass skyscrapers of our financial hubs or the sprawling concrete networks of our mass transit systems, assuming that these are the places where a disaster will strike hardest. But history and statistics tell a very different story. Ninety five percent of all deaths caused by earthquakes occur in one to three story residential houses. These are the small, self-built homes in crammed urban colonies, semi-urban towns, and rural villages. They are built by local masons without the supervision of structural engineers, and they exist entirely outside the reach of any building code or municipal enforcement.

When an earthquake strikes a document-scarce, highly dense country like India, it does not just destroy concrete; it tears apart the fragile socio-economic fabric of the poorest communities. If a well-to-do family loses their home, they often possess the financial resilience, insurance, and legal documentation to rebuild their lives over time. But for the hundreds of millions of poorer residents, a collapsed house means the total erasure of their life savings and their only tangible asset. Getting a birth certificate or a property deed out of a local municipal authority in the wake of a disaster is a Kafkaesque ordeal that many simply do not survive economically. The structural vulnerability of these low-rise buildings transforms a natural hazard into a humanitarian catastrophe that entrenches poverty for generations.

The science of predicting earthquakes remains, for the foreseeable future, an exercise in filling the vast gaps of our ignorance with hope. We cannot predict the exact day, hour, or minute when the Indian plate will decide to slip beneath the Himalayas with a violence that matches the Caracas doublet. We cannot prevent the earth from following its ancient, rhythmic movements. What we can control, however, is the integrity of the structures we build upon it. We can choose to enforce strict engineering codes for public infrastructure, and we can choose to democratize seismic safety by educating local masons on low-cost reinforcement techniques for everyday residential housing.

Venezuela's tragic evening is a loud, clear message sent across the oceans. It tells us that nature does not care about our economic timelines, our infrastructure budgets, or our political optics. It reminds us that institutional complacency is a choice, and that when the ground finally decides to settle its accounts, the only thing that will stand between life and death is whether or not we chose to be ready.

on historical documents and prolonged legal battles, states must embrace a spirit of mutual accommodation and cooperation. Rather than exploiting public emotions for political gain, governments should focus on creating joint economic zones and improving shared infrastructure in border regions. Assam's geographical position also carries immense strategic significance for national security. The narrow Siliguri Corridor serves as the crucial link connecting the Northeast to mainland India. If instability continues within Assam, hostile external powers could potentially exploit this vulnerable region. Countries pursuing aggressive strategic objectives may seek opportunities arising from internal discord. Therefore, the central government should regard these border disputes not merely as ordinary law-and-order issues between states but as matters of national security requiring urgent attention and resolution. Fratricidal conflicts can only weaken the region; they can never contribute to its prosperity. Unless these issues are resolved, the dream of comprehensive development in Northeast India will remain unrealized.

Ultimately, Assam's border problems are not ordinary administrative complications. They represent a fundamental question concerning the state's present and future existence. Standing at this critical and sensitive juncture, Assam must adopt a firm, realistic, and uncompromising approach to safeguarding its security and identity. With regard to inter-state borders, it is essential to maintain friendly relations with neighbouring states while refusing to compromise on territorial integrity and legitimate land rights. Similarly, in the context of international borders, governments and administrative authorities must pursue a policy of absolute zero tolerance toward unauthorized infiltration. Modern technology and large-scale deployment of security forces alone will not suffice. Public awareness and a vigilant civic spirit among indigenous communities are equally important. In the long struggle against demographic pressure and territorial encroachment, every conscious citizen of Assam must act as a vigilant guardian. Political leadership must rise above narrow vote-bank considerations and sincerely prioritize the long-term interests of the state. Only a secure, peaceful, and strong Assam can lead the entire Northeast toward progress and prosperity. Every loophole along the border is not merely a breach in territory; it is a dangerous breach in the lifeline of the nation itself. Unless these vulnerabilities are permanently addressed, the existence of the Assamese people may one day be remembered only as a tragic historical narrative. Therefore, while time still permits, confronting reality and moving courageously toward a decisive and lasting solution remains the greatest national responsibility of the present era. There is no alternative.

Do you need electrolytes? Will tea cool you down? Is it safe to drink beer? How to stay hydrated in a heatwave

By: Joel Snape

Hydration is important. In temperatures like those we're increasingly seeing in much of the world, sweating can be the only way for our bodies to cool down, and our thirst isn't always the best indicator of how much water we've lost or need. The consequences of not being sufficiently hydrated as temperatures creep towards the 40s can be severe, and can kick in much faster than most people realise. The good news is that remembering to drink plenty of water at regular intervals throughout the day will be enough for most people to avoid the worst. But if you'd like to understand why dehydration is so dangerous, whether you really need extra electrolytes, or if a cup of tea really can cool you down, read on.

To start with, it's helpful to understand that our bodies are producing heat – and therefore losing water – all the time. “All the cells in our body are constantly using fuel for energy for various different processes, whether that's movement or just staying alive,” says Dr Lewis James, a lecturer in sport, exercise and health sciences at Loughborough University. “About 75 to 80% of the energy that we use appears as heat.” If we didn't have any way of dissipating this heat, then even lying on the couch would see your body temperature rise about 1.3C in a single hour (already enough to make you noticeably feverish) – but of course, we do. Normally, we lose a decent amount of heat through a combination of convection and radiation: the blood vessels in our skin dilate, allowing the blood to be cooled by the outside air. The problem is that when the external temperature goes up, this process becomes less effective and eventually stops working altogether. At this point, our main way of losing heat is through sweating: our bodies produce tiny droplets of warm water mixed with trace minerals, which (usually) evaporate on contact with the air, drawing heat

away from the skin in the process. And as we rely more on sweating, it's increasingly important to replace the fluids our bodies are losing.

“During a normal day, a normal individual who doesn't exercise loses very little water through sweat, probably less than 500ml a day,” says James. “But if the outside air temperature is hotter than the body, sweating is one of the only ways that we can lose that heat. Typically, it doesn't get that hot in the UK, but certainly when it's above, say, 35, 36C, that's where it becomes a concern.”

Over the short term, even mild dehydration can impair how your body and brain function. “Typical symptoms include headaches, fatigue, reduced concentration and poorer physical performance,” says Bridget Benelam, a nutrition scientist at the British Nutrition Foundation.

“The body responds [to dehydration] by conserving water: processes like temperature regulation and circulation become less efficient. Over longer periods or at more severe levels, dehydration puts real strain on the body.” This can, she says, lead to impaired cognitive and physical performance, “increase the risk of issues like constipation, urinary infections and falls, and in extreme cases be life-threatening”. At the most severe end, dehydration is fatal, but the problems start to compound before that: you'll be thinking too slowly to look after yourself.

So how can you tell when you're dehydrated? Don't wait until you feel thirsty, as this tends to happen after you've already lost 1 to 2% of your body mass in fluid, meaning that you're already suffering from mild dehydration. The simplest – and, for most people, best – way remains the pee test, says James. Subtle changes in colour can alert you before thirst kicks in. “If you're producing very small amounts of urine and it's very dark in colour – from dark yellow to brown – then that can indicate dehydration,” he

says. “It's not, as you might read in some places, an absolute indication – your kidneys are marvellous at concentrating water when your body thinks it's needed, so you'll sometimes have concentrated urine even when you're not really dehydrated – but it's a fairly reliable signal. And the opposite is also true: if you're producing pale-coloured urine, you're probably well hydrated.”

Realistically, of course, you want to stay ahead of this, which is why it's sensible to make a conscious effort to drink more water at regular intervals. “People often wake up already dehydrated because our bodies lose significant water overnight through respiration and sweating in warm bedrooms,” says the University of Brighton's Dr Neil Maxwell, a specialist in applied environmental physiology. “I would imagine 70-80% of the population will start the day on the back foot by being dehydrated after a hot night during a heatwave. Starting the morning with 300-500ml of water sets a stable baseline before daytime heat spikes.”

Just in case you're considering it, though, there's no real upside to glugging down a day's worth of water first thing in the morning: you'll just excrete anything that can't be immediately used by your tissues or processed by your kidneys. In general, it's better to drink moderate amounts reasonably frequently. “If you have three meals a day, then try to drink a large glass of water with your meals,” says James. “If you're drinking a pint of water with every meal, and then you have the odd drink in between meals, you will most likely have an adequate amount of water every day. Drinking with meals also slows down the rate at which the water passes through your system, and might help you to absorb it better.” If you're exercising, you'll want to step this up a bit: the standard advice is to aim for about 500 to 750ml of water for every hour of intense training, depending on how heavily you sweat. But it also helps

to stay ahead of the game: if you're heading to the gym or out on the road, drink about 500ml of water a couple of hours beforehand, giving your kidneys time to process the fluid, balance your blood volume, and excrete anything it can't handle, so you're not sloshing around unnecessarily.

Does it matter what you're drinking? As long as you're keeping it non-alcoholic (and relatively low-calorie), only in the sense that some drinks might muddy your body's signals. “Sparkling water and diet soft drinks can provide effective hydration, but the carbonation can cause a feeling of fullness or bloating that may prematurely signal the brain satiety centres, causing a person to stop drinking before they are fully rehydrated,” says Maxwell. “Regular consumption of highly acidic diet soft drinks or flavoured waters containing citric acid can contribute to dental erosion, a factor to balance against their hydration benefits – though not a reason to avoid them entirely. Tap water or filtered water remains the gold standard for daily hydration during a heatwave, but the best drink is ultimately the one you will actually consume.”

Fruit juice and milk (or plant-based milk alternatives) are fine for hydration, but come with the caveat that it's easy to overconsume calories if they're your go-to option. “Milk is hydrating, provides some nutrients, including protein, calcium and vitamins,” says Benelam. “Fruit juice and smoothies hydrate and contain vitamins but also free sugars. The recommended limit is 150ml per day – one small glass.” If you're making your own homemade smoothies, of course, you can always cut down on sugar by going heavier on the veg than the fruit: celery, spinach and cucumber all help with hydration while also adding important minerals.

When it comes to tea and coffee, you might have heard that caffeine acts as a diuretic, which causes you to produce and excrete more urine. This isn't really true in any way that

most people need worry about: the effect is so minuscule that you'd need to do around five espresso shots at once to notice a real diuretic effect. “Any diuretic effect you get is massively outweighed by the positive water intake you get from the drink, especially if you're the sort of person who doesn't drink much water otherwise,” says James. Caffeine might mask the symptoms of thirst slightly, and so – once again – you can't rely on the fact that you feel satisfied after you drink it. Otherwise, it's fine.

Booze is a bit trickier. Technically, one low-ABV drink of about 4% can have a net-hydrating effect: though alcohol is a much more potent diuretic than caffeine, a pint of lager or a fruit cocktail can contain enough water to offset the effect. This effect doesn't last, though: as you move to drink two or three, the higher alcohol concentration in your blood starts to suppress the body's anti-diuretic hormone vasopressin, leading to what some people call “breaking the seal”. One pint might be lovely and refreshing, but leave it there.

You might imagine that glugging hot mugs of tea when it's over 30C is counterproductive, but the truth is a bit more nuanced. “The first thing to say is that personal preference matters,” says James. “Most people, if they're not drinking tea, like drinks that are cooler than room temperature more – so in that sense, you're likely to drink more [cold drinks] and so better defend against dehydration. But when we're talking about body temperature, there's some truth to the idea that tea can actually cool you down in certain situations.”

If you have a cup of tea when it's already fairly warm outside, your body's heat receptors detect a rise in internal temperature and send signals to your brain to cool off. As a result, blood vessels near the surface of the skin widen, and your sweat rate goes up – a cooling response that's usually disproportionate to the amount of heat you've taken on board. In contrast, if you

have a cold drink, the opposite happens – the cold fluid in your stomach pulls blood away from the skin, which means the drink is not cooling you down as much as you think. “The warming effect of a warm drink is cancelled out by the increased heat loss, while the cooling effect of a cold drink is cancelled out by the reduced heat loss, except for in very specific scenarios that tend to depend on environment,” says James. “If you're in very humid conditions or you're exercising, you're not able to lose much heat to the environment because the sweat you produce can't evaporate fast enough.” A good rule of thumb, then, is that if the sweat is already dripping off you, it's probably too hot to be relying on tea for hydration.

What about electrolytes? There's been a huge marketing push for these in recent years, with supplement and sports drink companies galore suggesting that topping up your levels of potassium, magnesium and (especially) sodium is a necessary part of hydration for all – not just the athletic or very sweaty. But the evidence for that is, at best, mixed – especially since the majority of people in the UK already take in too much salt. “For the majority of people, you'll get enough electrolytes from food,” says Brunel University's Prof José González-Alonso. “If you're having a banana or an apple during the day, you're already getting electrolytes – there's nothing magical about sports drinks.” If you're exercising intensely or for a decent amount of time (more than 60 minutes, in hot weather), sweating much more than normal, or simply unable to snack regularly, then it can be helpful to top your levels up. If you're drinking a lot of water, it helps to stop your kidneys from immediately flushing it out. It also helps to balance the risk of hyponatremia, or diluting your blood sodium levels to dangerously low levels (the clue's in the name: hypo means low, natrium is the Latin word for sodium, and emia means

in the blood). “Even recreational exercisers and avid gardeners are at risk of hyponatremia if they aggressively overdrink plain water out of a fear of dehydration,” says Maxwell. “When you lose salt through sweat and flood your system with massive amounts of water, you dilute your blood's sodium levels, which can cause cells to swell and become dangerous.”

This sounds scary, but it's only likely to occur if you're drinking large volumes of water very quickly, with no added salt in between. It bears repeating that, if you're not very physically active and eating and drinking normally, you should be fine. If you're doing something more strenuous – enough to make you sweat a lot – add a couple of salty snacks and consider supplementing with electrolytes. Other good dietary sources include avocados, sweet potatoes and spinach, while plenty of foods have a decent enough water content to top up your levels: cucumber, watermelon, strawberries and mango are all more than 80% water by weight.

So while drinks manufacturers make hydration sound highly technical, best practice is reasonably simple: drink a big glass of water every couple of hours, preferably with food, and add in more if it's hot, you're physically active, or planning to be so. “The nice thing with water is that if you have a little bit too much, that's not a bad thing,” says James. “If you're thinking about energy intake, for example, just having a bit too much carbohydrate on a regular basis can lead to problems down the road, like fat gain or insulin resistance. Whereas if you drink a bit too much water, all you'll do is pee it back out. And so it's fairly easy to make sure you're drinking an amount of water that will mean that you are generally defended from dehydration from most scenarios in your life, with no downside.” (Courtesy: *The Guardian*)

Can Your Family History Predict Cancer? Why Most High-Risk Cases Are Still Missed

By: Chiang Jianbang

While most cancers occur sporadically, around 5 to 10 per cent are linked to hereditary cancer syndromes that can be passed from one generation to the next. Hereditary cancer syndromes significantly increase a person's risk of developing certain cancers.

When most people think about cancer, they think about the ‘gruelling’ treatment. As a medical oncologist, I often see patients after cancer has developed. By then, our focus is on controlling the disease rather than preventing it. But what if we could identify cancers before they develop?

This is where cancer genetics comes in. A common misconception is that genetic testing inevitably leads to preventive surgery. While high-profile cases such as Angelina Jolie's brought attention to hereditary cancer risk and preventive surgery, cancer genetics and patient management strategies have evolved considerably over the past decade.

While most cancers occur sporadically, around 5 to 10 per cent are linked to hereditary cancer syndromes that can be passed from one generation to the next. Hereditary cancer syndromes significantly increase a person's risk of developing certain cancers, but they remain under-recognised and underdiagnosed.

In fact, research conducted in Singapore found that only 17 per cent of patients who meet the criteria for genetic testing are referred for assessment. This means more than 80 per cent of high-risk individuals may be missed. These are missed opportunities for prevention, early detection and better outcomes for patients.

One of the most important clues hiding in plain sight is family history. Family history is one of the most powerful tools we have for identifying hereditary cancer risk. It can provide an early warning sign, allowing individuals and families to take action before cancer develops.

When assessing a patient's risk, we look for patterns such as multiple relatives diagnosed with cancer, cancers occurring at younger ages than expected, or individuals who develop more than one type of cancer. These can all be signs of a hereditary cancer syndrome.

The most common hereditary cancer syndromes we see at the National Cancer Centre Singapore's Cancer Genetics Service are Hereditary Breast and Ovarian Cancer syndrome, often linked to BRCA1 and BRCA2 gene faults, and Lynch syndrome, which is associated with colorectal and uterine cancers. Increasingly, we are also recognising hereditary links in other cancers, including kidney cancers and sarcomas.

Understanding these risks allows us to shift from reactive care to proactive care.

Traditionally, healthcare has focused on treating cancer after it develops. Genetic testing enables us to identify individuals at increased risk of developing cancers and intervene earlier. If we know someone carries a cancer-predisposing gene fault, we can recommend personalised screening plans, more frequent surveillance or preventive measures to help detect cancer at its earliest and most treatable stage.

Importantly, the impact extends beyond a single patient.

When a hereditary cancer syndrome is identified, family members may also be at risk. First-degree relatives, including parents, siblings and children, often have a 50 per cent chance of carrying the same gene fault. This means one diagnosis can provide critical information that helps protect an entire family.

Many people assume that genetic testing will lead to preventive surgery, but this is not always the case. Cancer genetics has evolved considerably over the past decade, and we have more options today. For individuals with hereditary cancer syndromes, enhanced surveillance can also be an effective management strategy. Regular screening allows us to monitor high-risk patients closely and detect cancers early, often without the need for radical preventive surgery.

Genetic testing is also increasingly shaping cancer treatment. Certain inherited gene faults can assist doctors in predicting how patients respond to therapies, including targeted treatments and immunotherapy. This allows us to tailor treatment strategies more precisely for each patient to ensure the best possible treatment outcomes.

As genetic testing becomes more affordable and accessible, many people ask whether it should become part of routine health check-ups.

Genetic testing is not part of routine health check-ups because it measures disease susceptibility rather than providing a definitive diagnosis, which can cause unnecessary psychologic distress, and unneeded follow-up tests. Genetic tests need to be cost-effective, clinically meaningful and supported by appropriate counselling and follow-up care. Identifying individuals who are most likely to benefit from genetic screening is key.

We often compare genetic testing to driving at night with your headlights on. The road ahead may contain obstacles, but with headlights on you can see them coming and navigate around them. Similarly, by identifying cancer risk through genetic testing, we have a better chance of preventing cancer, detecting it early and ultimately saving lives.

So for now, my advice is simple: know your family medical history and talk to your doctor who can advise if you need genetic testing. (Courtesy: *NDTV*)

The world is getting hotter – this is what it is doing to our brains

By: Theres Lüthi

As heatwaves become more intense with climate change, scientists are racing to understand how extreme heat changes the way our brains work.

When Jake was five months old, he had his first tonic-clonic seizure, his little body stiffening and then jerking rapidly. “It was extremely hot, he had overheated and we witnessed what we thought would be the scariest thing we would ever see,” says his mother, Stephanie Smith. “Unfortunately, it wasn't.”

Seizures began to crop up often in hot weather. As soon as the stifling, humid days of summer would arrive, the family would resort to all kinds of cooling methods and a fierce battle to keep the seizures at bay would ensue.

Following a genetic test at the age of 18 months, Jake was diagnosed with Dravet Syndrome, a neurological condition that includes a form of epilepsy and affects around one in 15,000 children. Seizures are often accompanied by intellectual disability and a range of comorbidities such as autism and ADHD, as well as difficulties with speech, mobility, eating and sleep. Heat and sudden temperature changes can bring on a seizure.

Jake is now 13 years old, but has endured countless seizures with the turn of the weather, his mother says. “Increasingly hot summers and heatwaves are adding to the burden of living with this already devastating condition,” says Smith.

Dravet Syndrome is just one of many neurological diseases that are exacerbated by higher temperatures, says Sanjay Sisodiya of University College London and a pioneer in the field of climate change's impact on the brain. A neurologist who specialises in epilepsy, he frequently heard from patients' families that they had more troubles during heatwaves. “And I thought to myself, of course, why shouldn't climate change also affect the brain? After all, so many processes in the brain are involved in how the body copes with heat.”

As he dug into the scientific literature, he discovered a range of neurological conditions that are made worse by rising heat and humidity, including epilepsy, stroke, encephalitis, multiple sclerosis, migraine, along with a number of others. He also discovered that the effects of climate change on our brains are already becoming visible.

During the 2003 European heatwave, for example, about 7% of the excess deaths involved direct neurological problems. Similar figures were also seen during the 2022 UK heatwave.

But heat can also alter other ways our brains function – making us more violent, grumpy and depressed.

So, as the world warms due to climate change, what can we expect the effect on

our brains to be?

The human brain is, on average, rarely more than 1C (1.8F) higher, on average, than our core body temperature. Yet our brains – as one of the more energy-hungry organs in our bodies – produce a fair amount of their own heat when we think, remember and respond to the world around us. This means our bodies have to work hard to keep it cool. Blood circulating through a network of blood vessels helps to maintain its temperature, whisking away excess heat.

This is necessary because our brain cells are also extremely heat sensitive. And the function of some of the molecules that pass messages between them are also thought to be temperature dependent, meaning they stop working efficiently if our brains get too hot or too cold.

“We don't fully understand how the



different elements of this complicated picture are affected,” says Sisodiya. “But we can imagine it like a clock, where all the components are no longer working together properly.”

Although extreme heat alters how everyone's brains work – it can, for example, adversely affect decision making and lead to people taking greater risks – those with neurological conditions are often the most severely affected. This is for many reasons. For example, in some diseases, perspiration may be impaired.

“Thermoregulation is a brain function and can be disrupted, if certain parts of the brain are not functioning properly,” says Sisodiya. In some forms of multiple sclerosis, for instance, the core body temperature appears to be altered. In addition, some drugs that treat neurological and psychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia affect temperature regulation, leaving those taking them more vulnerable to heatstroke, or hyperthermia as it is known medically, and at a greater risk of heat-related death.

Have you noticed any cognitive or

mood swings when it's too hot outside? You're not alone.

Heatwaves – and elevated nighttime temperatures especially – can affect people's sleep, affecting our mood and potentially worsening the symptoms of some conditions. “For many people with epilepsy, poor sleep can increase the risk of having seizures,” says Sisodiya.

Evidence suggests that hospital admissions and mortality rates among people with dementia also increase during heatwaves. Part of this may be due to age – older people are less able to regulate their body temperature – but their cognitive impairment may also mean they are less able to adapt to extreme heat. They may not drink enough, for example, or forget to close the windows, or go out into the heat when they shouldn't.

Rising temperatures have also been linked to an increase in stroke incidents and mortality. In one study that analysed stroke mortality data from 25 countries, researchers found that out of 1,000 deaths from ischemic stroke, the hottest days contributed two excess deaths. “That may not seem like a lot,” says Bethan Davies, a geriatrician at University Hospitals Sussex, in the UK. “But given that there are seven million deaths from strokes a year worldwide, heat may well be contributing to over 10,000 additional stroke deaths per year.” She and her co-authors warned that climate change is likely to exacerbate this in years to come.

A disproportionate share of the burden of heat-related stroke will be in middle- and low-income countries, which are already most affected by climate change and experience the highest rates of stroke. “Rising temperatures will exacerbate health inequalities both between and within countries and social groups,” says Davies. A growing body of evidence suggests that older people as well as those with a low socioeconomic position are at an increased risk for heat-related mortality.

A hotter world is also harming the neurodevelopment of the very youngest. “There is a link between extreme heat and bad pregnancy outcomes such as premature births,” says Jane Hirst, professor of global women's health at Imperial College London in the UK. One recent systematic review of the scientific research found that heatwaves are associated with a 26% increase in preterm births, which can lead to neurodevelopmental delays and cognitive impairments.

“However, there is a lot we do not know,” adds Hirst. “Who is most vulnerable and why? Because clearly, there are 130 million women who have babies every year, a lot of them in hot countries, and this does not happen to them.”

What we're seeing today in people with neurological disorders could become relevant for people without neurological disorders as climate change progresses –

Sanjay Sisodiya

Excessive heat due to climate change may also put additional strain on the brain, leaving it more vulnerable to damage that can lead to neurodegenerative diseases. Heat also affects the barrier that normally protects the brain, making it more permeable and increasing the risk that toxins, bacteria and viruses can cross over into our brain tissue.

This could become more important as temperatures increase, as so too will the spread of mosquitoes that transmit viruses that can cause neurological disease, such as Zika, chikungunya and dengue. “The Zika virus can affect foetuses and cause microcephaly,” says Tobias Suter, a medical entomologist at the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute. “Rising temperatures and milder winters mean that the mosquito breeding season begins earlier in the year and ends later.” (Read David Cox's story on how the US's mosquito season is already changing.)

Heatwaves are capable of influencing a whole range of factors, from the electrical firings of the nerve cells to suicide risk, climate anxiety and even the stability of medication for neurological conditions.

But exactly how rising temperatures affect our brains are still being investigated by scientists. Heat affects people in very different ways – some thrive in hot weather, others find it unbearable. “Different factors might be relevant for this differential sensitivity, and one of them may be genetic susceptibility,” says Sisodiya. Genetic variants could influence the structures of proteins that might render some people more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. “There may be thermo-latent phenotypes that will only become apparent when those environmental pressures are sufficient to bring them out,” he says. “What we're seeing today in people with neurological disorders could become relevant for people without neurological disorders as climate change progresses.”

There are still other questions that remain to be answered too. For example, is it the maximum temperature, is it the length of a heatwave or the nighttime temperature that has the greatest impact? It may well differ for each person or by neurological condition.

But identifying who is at risk and why will be crucial to developing strategies to protect the most vulnerable. These could include early warning systems or insurance to compensate day labourers for lost wages due to extreme heat.

“The era of global warming has ended, the era of global boiling has arrived,” UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres announced, when July 2023 was confirmed to be the hottest month on record. Climate change is here and it is intensifying. The era of the hot brain is just beginning. (Courtesy: *BBC*)

Police raid houses of 8 arrested in Ayodhya donations case



AYODHYA (UP), June 28: Ayodhya police on Sunday conducted simultaneous raids at the residences of all eight people arrested in connection with the alleged embezzlement of donations at Ram temple, police sources said.

Police teams, accompanied by local magistrates, carried out searches at the homes of the accused, including Lav Kush Mishra, Avinash Shukla and Ramshankar Yadav, the sources said.

The raids came two days after all eight accused were remanded in judicial custody till June 29 by a court in Ayodhya. Police are expected to seek their custodial remand when they are produced

before the court on Monday.

During Sunday's searches, the police collected documents, including Aadhaar cards, PAN cards and bank-related details from the residence of accused Manish Yadav after asking his family members to open the locked house, the sources said.

Searches were also carried out at the residences of other accused, including Ramshankar alias Tinnu Yadav, where family members were questioned and documents examined, while the police also spoke to neighbours and relatives of some of the accused to gather information about their assets, background and activities.

The eight accused -- Avinash Shukla, Anukalp Mishra, Lav Kush Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey, Ram Shankar Mishra, Subhash Srivastava and Ramshankar alias Tinnu Yadav -- were associated with counting cash and valuables received as donations at the Ram Temple.

According to the prosecution, investigators have so far recovered ₹ 79.85 lakh. The case has been registered under provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita related to theft by servant, criminal breach of trust, receiving stolen property and criminal conspiracy, besides sections of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

The FIR was registered on the recommendation of a preliminary report submitted by a three-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), which was constituted by the Uttar Pradesh government after allegations of misappropriation of funds of the temple surfaced earlier this month.

The issue has snowballed into a major controversy with opposition parties, including the Congress and Samajwadi Party, targeting the BJP and the RSS. (PTI)

The sources indicate a growing view among the government's top brass that key ministries need fresh blood. Additionally, there are political compulsions to balance the cabinet based on regional, state, caste and loyalty factors.

Two Union ministers -- Pankaj Chaudhary and Harsh Malhotra -- have already been given the responsibility to head the party units of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, respectively. It is highly likely that the BJP will follow its 'one man, one post' rule, which would lead to their exit from the government.

Two other Union ministers -- George Kurian and Ravneet Singh Bittu -- were not renominated by the BJP for the recently concluded Rajya Sabha elections. Their tenures in the Upper House concluded on June 21.

While Kurian has already resigned from his post, Bittu continues to be a minister. It is learnt that he has been asked by the top brass to focus on the upcoming Punjab

elections. Bittu, a former Congress leader and grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, is a prominent face of the influential Jat Sikh community. More representatives from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab are likely to find a place in the Modi ministry, as Assembly elections are due in these three states next year.

Following the BJP's landslide victory in West Bengal, some of its MPs from the state could be inducted into the Union Ministry.

There is a possibility that a few representatives of the rebel Trinamool Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) groups will secure ministerial berths.

While the 20 rebel TMC MPs announced their merger with the West Bengal-based Nationalist Citizens Party of India and declared their allegiance to the ruling NDA, the six dissident Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs have joined the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. (PTI)

The government has sought to project the legislation as a governance reform rooted in constitutional principles, arguing that uniformity in civil laws would strengthen legal equality and remove perceived disparities arising from religion-based personal laws.

Opposition parties, however, have termed the issue as a legal one. At a strategy meeting with party legislators and senior leaders on Friday, TMC chairperson and for-

mer CM Mamata Banerjee directed the party to mount an aggressive resistance to the Bill inside and outside the Assembly, arguing that the proposal raises larger questions about constitutional morality, social consent and India's plural character. Senior TMC leaders have accused the BJP of attempting to use the legislation as a political instrument rather than pursuing genuine legal reform.

"The question is whether the UCC is genuinely being brought for the welfare of citizens and constitutional values, or whether it is being used as an instrument of political polarisation," a senior TMC leader said, reflecting the party's official position.

Leader of Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee, whose rebel faction has challenged Banerjee's leadership, has also questioned the government's urgency.

"I don't understand what the hurry is. A matter like the UCC requires extensive discussion and consultation," Banerjee said recently, arguing that legislation affecting personal laws and family matters should not be rushed through without broader public debate.

In West Bengal, where questions of identity, migration, religion and citizenship have long shaped political discourse, the proposal is likely to acquire significance beyond its legal provisions, potentially emerging as a key fault line between the BJP government and an opposition seeking to regain political ground after its electoral defeat.

The debate also comes at a time when the BJP government has begun rolling out several high-profile promises made during the election campaign, including administrative reforms, welfare restructuring and initiatives linked to border management and the identification of illegal immigrants. (PTI)

BJP Chief calls upon party cadres in Telangana

HYDERABAD, June 28: Alleging that the ideals of the Telangana agitation have not been realised even 12 years after state formation, BJP President Nitin Nabin on Sunday urged the party cadres to strive to install the BJP's 'Double Engine government' in Telangana, to achieve rapid progress in the state.

Nabin, who began a three-day visit to Telangana, virtually inaugurated the offices of nine district units of the BJP from here.

If the dream of 'Viksit Bharat' is to be realised, the lotus should bloom in Telangana as well, he said.

"The Narendra Modi government is serving Telangana people through Central government schemes. But I know that Telangana cannot be put on the development track for which statehood was dreamed of, until the double engine government was formed," he said.

When the BJP had only two seats in the Lok Sabha, one was in Telangana, he recalled.

Hailing that BJP is gradually winning every state in the country, he said the day is not far when party would succeed in Telangana as well.

It is only the BJP cadres who can defeat the corrupt Congress in Telangana, he said. (PTI)

BJP govt set to table UCC Bill in Bengal Assembly

KOLKATA, June 28: Less than two months after ending the TMC's 15-year rule in West Bengal, the BJP government is likely to place before the Assembly on Monday one of its most consequential and politically contentious promises -- the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill -- triggering what is likely to be the first major ideological debate of the post-election era.

The proposed legislation, which seeks to establish a common civil framework governing marriage, divorce, inheritance and adoption irrespective of religion, is expected to dominate the ongoing Budget session and set the stage for a wider debate over identity, equality, secularism, constitutional rights and the relationship between personal laws and state authority.

For the BJP, the Bill represents the fulfilment of a core electoral commitment and an assertion of its long-standing position that all citizens should be governed by the same set of civil laws. For the opposition, it raises questions about social consensus, constitutional safeguards and whether a reform affecting diverse communities can be implemented without wider consultation.

The move comes well ahead of the six-month deadline promised by the BJP in its 'Sankalp Patra' ahead of the Assembly elections. While unveiling the manifesto, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had pledged that a BJP government would implement the UCC in West Bengal within six months of assuming office, projecting it as a measure aimed at ensuring equality before law irrespective of faith.

The legislation seeks to replace religion-based personal laws in matters such as marriage, divorce, succession, inheritance and adoption with a common legal framework applicable to all citizens, while retaining constitutional exemptions available to certain categories. CM Suvedu Adhikari on Friday formally signalled the government's intention to move ahead with the legislation during the current session.

"The way it (UCC) was implemented in Gujarat, Uttarakhand and Assam by following a procedure. Similarly, it will be implemented in West Bengal. I will inform the Assembly on Monday," he had said.

His remarks provided the clearest indication yet that the BJP gov-



ernment intends to move swiftly on one of its signature electoral promises and model Bengal's framework on mechanisms adopted in other BJP-ruled states.

The CM's emphasis on procedure appeared aimed at countering criticism from opponents who have argued that a reform with significant social and legal implications should be preceded by extensive consultations.

Ahead of the Bill's introduction, state BJP president Samik Bhattacharya sought to address one of the principal concerns surrounding the proposal, asserting that constitutionally protected tribal communities would remain outside its ambit.

"The BJP's position on the UCC is longstanding and unequivocal. It is part of our political commitment and election manifesto," Bhattacharya said in a social media post on Saturday.

Seeking to reassure tribal groups, he said members of Scheduled Tribes recognised under Articles 366(25) and 342 of the Constitution would remain exempt from the proposed law and that their customs, traditions and special rights would continue to be protected. Bhattacharya also rejected allegations that the proposed legislation was linked to family-size regulation, saying such provisions were "neither the objective nor a part of the UCC".

The government has sought to project the legislation as a governance reform rooted in constitutional principles, arguing that uniformity in civil laws would strengthen legal equality and remove perceived disparities arising from religion-based personal laws.

Opposition parties, however, have termed the issue as a legal one. At a strategy meeting with party legislators and senior leaders on Friday, TMC chairperson and for-

mer CM Mamata Banerjee directed the party to mount an aggressive resistance to the Bill inside and outside the Assembly, arguing that the proposal raises larger questions about constitutional morality, social consent and India's plural character. Senior TMC leaders have accused the BJP of attempting to use the legislation as a political instrument rather than pursuing genuine legal reform.

"The question is whether the UCC is genuinely being brought for the welfare of citizens and constitutional values, or whether it is being used as an instrument of political polarisation," a senior TMC leader said, reflecting the party's official position.

Leader of Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee, whose rebel faction has challenged Banerjee's leadership, has also questioned the government's urgency.

"I don't understand what the hurry is. A matter like the UCC requires extensive discussion and consultation," Banerjee said recently, arguing that legislation affecting personal laws and family matters should not be rushed through without broader public debate.

In West Bengal, where questions of identity, migration, religion and citizenship have long shaped political discourse, the proposal is likely to acquire significance beyond its legal provisions, potentially emerging as a key fault line between the BJP government and an opposition seeking to regain political ground after its electoral defeat.

The debate also comes at a time when the BJP government has begun rolling out several high-profile promises made during the election campaign, including administrative reforms, welfare restructuring and initiatives linked to border management and the identification of illegal immigrants. (PTI)

Modi govt cabinet reshuffle buzz gains momentum

NEW DELHI, June 28: A reshuffle in the council of ministers of the Modi government seems imminent, with indications from the top echelons of the ruling dispensation that the exercise may be carried out anytime from now -- possibly before the Monsoon session of Parliament begins.

Sources aware of the deliberations said the reshuffle in the Union Council of Ministers will be carried out in tandem with the announcement of a new BJP team under its president Nitin Nabin.

"Team Nitin Nabin" is likely to be announced soon, as the BJP top brass is believed to have finalised the list, with younger faces expected to be deployed in prominent organisational roles. The sources indicate that the BJP president also held consultations with a few Union ministers of state last week.

There are strong possibilities of some Union ministers being sent to take organisational roles in the BJP and party office-bearers being in-

ducted into the Modi ministry. Speculation is also rife about portfolio changes for some ministers, while the future of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan is under a cloud, given a spate of controversies relating to matters under his ministry, especially the NEET paper leak and irregularities in the CBSE digital marking system.

The sources suggested that the reshuffle, if it happens, may take place sometime in July, ahead of the Monsoon Session of Parliament which normally begins in the third week of the month.

The date for the ministerial shake-up is expected to be fixed taking into account the prime minister's packed schedule.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is on a three-day tour to Seychelles from June 27 to 29, and he is also likely to travel to Indonesia, Australia, and New Zealand between July 6 and 11. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi is also scheduled to visit New Delhi from July 1

to 3. The sources indicate a growing view among the government's top brass that key ministries need fresh blood. Additionally, there are political compulsions to balance the cabinet based on regional, state, caste and loyalty factors.

Two Union ministers -- Pankaj Chaudhary and Harsh Malhotra -- have already been given the responsibility to head the party units of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, respectively. It is highly likely that the BJP will follow its 'one man, one post' rule, which would lead to their exit from the government.

Two other Union ministers -- George Kurian and Ravneet Singh Bittu -- were not renominated by the BJP for the recently concluded Rajya Sabha elections. Their tenures in the Upper House concluded on June 21.

While Kurian has already resigned from his post, Bittu continues to be a minister. It is learnt that he has been asked by the top brass to focus on the upcoming Punjab

elections. Bittu, a former Congress leader and grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, is a prominent face of the influential Jat Sikh community. More representatives from Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Punjab are likely to find a place in the Modi ministry, as Assembly elections are due in these three states next year.

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VB G RAM G will guarantee only centralisation, financial stress on states: Congress

NEW DELHI, June 28: Claiming that several states have raised concerns over the MGNREGA-substitute VB G RAM G Act, the Congress on Sunday said the new law would guarantee only centralisation and further financial stress on the states. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government, "vengeful and petty" as ever, bulldozed the repeal of MGNREGA through Parliament without any thorough consultation with the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, state governments, or the other relevant stakeholders.

Now it emerges that several states have raised concerns regarding its substitute, VB G RAM G, scheduled for launch on July 1, Ramesh said on X.

Even the BJP-governed states such as Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttarakhand have opposed the huge additional expenditure burden that is set to be levied on states once the new law comes into force,

he said. Four other state governments have opposed the blackout period of the scheme during the peak agricultural season, Ramesh said, adding that at least five states have sought a hike in wages for rural workers.

Even Madhya Pradesh, the home state of the Union rural development minister (Shivraj Singh Chouhan), is voicing concerns around the Modi government's new pet project, Ramesh alleged.

"MGNREGA guaranteed right to work derived from the Constitution. VB G RAM G will guarantee only centralisation and further financial stress on states," Ramesh said. The Congress leader also shared a chart on X that listed the "Modi government's four attacks on your right to work".

It alleged that through the VB G RAM G Act, the government is "attacking" the right to work, right to fair wages, Panchayati Raj and state finances. (PTI)

He also shared a link to a report in his post. The defence ministry, without naming anyone, said, "Certain reports circulating in sections of the media and on social media platforms have incorrectly suggested that the supreme sacrifice of six bravehearts during Operation Sindoor have been acknowledged or brought to public notice for the first time only recently".

"It is clarified that the nation paid homage to these fallen heroes at the earliest opportunity, well before the reports in question. During the official press conference held on May 11, 2025, then director general of military operations paid solemn tribute to these brave soldiers and specifically acknowledged their sacrifice in the line of duty during Operation Sindoor," the statement said.

These bravehearts were "conferred

sitting on a fast in support of both issues. Many people ask me, you were doing a movement in Ladakh, why are you with BJP now. Education, which is the issue here, has been close to my heart for the last 40 years, since I was a student," he said.

"I did engineering, but never took a job because I felt the key to all generations is in education. When some youth raise their voices on issues with the education system, how could I have remained silent? It was natural for me to support them," Wangchuk added.

He said the focus should be on using education to "build children's lives and give direction to the nation".

Referring to his work in Ladakh, Wangchuk said protecting the Himalayas was everyone's responsibility as billions of people depend on water originating in the region.

"I wish the government had shown sensitivity, we would not have had to go through this and sit here in such heat," he said.

Wangchuk said that in the ab-

sence of accountability, peaceful protest was the only option available in a democracy.

"When there is no accountability, we are forced to take the only way possible in a democracy -- peaceful protest, and we will do that," he said.

He also praised the protesters, saying that many youths were observing hunger strikes despite the heat, and appealed to people to make it a community hunger strike and observe at least a day-long fast.

Wangchuk was released from Jodhpur prison in March 2026, after spending nearly six months in detention under the National Security Act for his involvement in the Ladakh statehood protest that had turned violent.

Earlier, Dipke had appealed to farmers, students and organisations to join the protest and support the call for accountability.

On Sunday morning, he said on X that several farmers' leaders from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab were being placed under house arrest to prevent them from reaching Jantar Mantar.

The protest also turned into a platform for other grievances involving students and educational institutions, with the family of Amaira, a Class 6 student who died last year after falling from the fourth floor of Neeraja Modi School in Jaipur in an alleged suicide case, joining the agitation seeking justice for their daughter.

Amaira's parents alleged that no action had been taken against the school or teacher and that police had not filed a chargesheet so far.

"We send our children to school with some trust. It was not negligence, it was murder by the school. She was very kind and spread goodness in the world. Today would have been her 10th birthday," her mother said.

Dipke said the incident needed to remain in public memory, alleging that the police and school had tried to suppress the matter when it happened.

He said the issue was not limited to a single case and alleged that there were several such incidents involving students. (PTI)

Nation paid homage to Op Sindoor bravehearts at earliest opportunity: MoD

NEW DELHI, June 28 Amid a row surrounding the six martyrs of Operation Sindoor, the defence ministry on Saturday said the nation paid homage to them at the "earliest opportunity", and their memory shall always be honoured with the dignity and reverence, it deserves.

In its statement, the defence ministry said the bravehearts were "conferred with gallantry awards" and that it "constituted a formal and national recognition of their valour and supreme sacrifice".

The statement comes in the backdrop of the Congress's accusation that the government "concealed" the supreme sacrifice made by the six bravehearts during the military operation in 2025 by "not recognising" their martyrdom for a year.

Congress leader Pawan Khera levelled the allegations through social media posts on Friday and Saturday. On Friday, he

also shared a link to a report in his post.

The defence ministry, without naming anyone, said, "Certain reports circulating in sections of the media and on social media platforms have incorrectly suggested that the supreme sacrifice of six bravehearts during Operation Sindoor have been acknowledged or brought to public notice for the first time only recently".

"It is clarified that the nation paid homage to these fallen heroes at the earliest opportunity, well before the reports in question. During the official press conference held on May 11, 2025, then director general of military operations paid solemn tribute to these brave soldiers and specifically acknowledged their sacrifice in the line of duty during Operation Sindoor," the statement said.

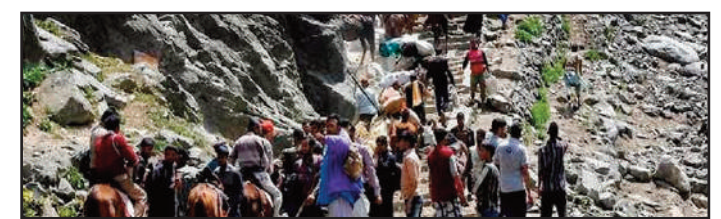
These bravehearts were "conferred



with gallantry awards and this was published in the press release of August 14, 2025. This constituted a formal and national recognition of their valour and supreme sacrifice in keeping with the highest traditions of the Indian defence forces," it said.

Simultaneously, the Indian Army's official social media platforms carried tributes to these bravehearts "without delay",

MEA issues advisory for Mansarovar Yatra



NEW DELHI, June 28: The Ministry of External Affairs has cautioned Indian citizens undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through trips organised by private tour operators, and also asked the pilgrims to verify if their tour operator is duly registered and authorised.

"This Ministry is in receipt of several requests for help and assistance from Indian citizens stuck in Nepal while undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra without the required entry permit and visas for China, through tours organised by private tour operators," the MEA said in an advisory.

The advisory, issued late night on Saturday, is for Indian citizens undertaking Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through private tour operators.

"Citizens are advised not to commence their journey from India until all required travel documents have been obtained for undertaking the complete journey," it says. Commencing travel without confirmed documentation or in anticipation of obtaining the necessary documentation "increases the likelihood of being stranded," it adds.

"Pilgrims are also strongly advised to verify that their tour operator is duly registered and authorised," the MEA said.

In April, the MEA had announced that the annual Kailash Mansarovar Yatra was set to take place from June to August this year via two routes -- Lipulekh Pass in Uttarakhand and Nathu La in Sikkim.

The yatra resumed last year after a gap of nearly five years as part of efforts to normalise the relations between India and China.

It was suspended initially in 2020 because of the Covid pandemic and subsequently because of the military standoff between the two sides on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. (PTI)

the ministry said.

Also, during the Army Day Parade held in Jaipur on January 15 this year, "the chief of the army staff presented the Sena Medal (Gallantry) to the families of three of these gallant soldiers, while the chief of the air staff did the same on October 8, 2025 in a solemn ceremony, reaffirming the defence forces' enduring commitment to honouring those who have laid down their lives in the service of the nation," it said.

The ministry said it is regrettable that "an avoidable and unfounded controversy has arisen around this issue".

"Such narratives not only misrepresent facts but also risk causing unnecessary anguish to bereaved families and detracting from the dignity owed to those who made the supreme sacrifice in service of the nation," it said. (PTI)

Outfit alleges rival faction violated ceasefire norms, reiterates call for "one talk, one agreement"

NSCN-IM accuses ZUF (J) of acting as government proxy

IMPHAL, June 28: The Zeilad, Zeliangrong Region of the NSCN-IM has accused the Jenchui faction of the Zeliangrong United Front (ZUF-J) of acting as a "proxy" of the Government of India and alleged that the outfit was being used to weaken the Naga national movement.

In a statement issued recently, the NSCN-IM claimed that the primary objective of the ZUF (J) was to undermine the Naga movement.

It alleged that there was evidence showing the faction had been used to transport cadres to launch attacks against the NSCN-IM, adding that former cadres had also made similar claims on social media.

The outfit further alleged that the ZUF (J) had misled the Zeliangrong community by advocating a "Zeliangrong Homeland" and described the group as a self-styled organisation aligned with the government to weaken the Naga

movement.

Reiterating its political stand, the NSCN-IM urged all Naga factions operating in the Zeilad and Zeliangrong regions to endorse the Framework Agreement signed between the Government of India and the NSCN on August 3, 2015.

It also reiterated its appeal for reconciliation among Naga groups, stating that the solution lies in "one talk, one agreement."

Referring to an incident in March this year, the NSCN-IM alleged that on March 20, 2026, cadres of the ZUF (J) were transported from Khoupum and dropped at Old Agro Mile (Kaiphundai Kuki Village) by Indian security forces.

It claimed that the following day the cadres attacked an NSCN-IM outpost at Kaiphundai.

The statement further alleged that after the attack, the ZUF (J) cadres did not return to their designated camp but instead began

collecting taxes in the name of the NSCN along National Highway-37 and harassing members of the public, particularly vehicle operators using the highway.

According to the NSCN-IM, the ZUF (J), under the terms of its Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with the Government of India, is required to remain within its designated camp at Mount Ararat and is not authorised to collect taxes.

The outfit said it had repeatedly appealed to the ZUF (J) to stop its alleged activities along NH-37 but received no positive response.

It claimed that, after exercising restraint, its cadres fired blank shots at Kaiphundai on June 26 to prevent further bloodshed in the region.

There was no immediate response from the ZUF (J) or the Government of India to the allegations made by the NSCN-IM. (NNN)

New solar facility makes coaching depot a net positive energy building, boosting green railway initiatives

NFR commissions 345 kWp rooftop solar plant at Agartala depot



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 28: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has commissioned a 345 kWp on-grid rooftop solar power plant at the Agartala Coaching Depot, marking another step towards promoting renewable energy and sustainable railway infrastructure.

The solar power plant has been installed as part of Indian Railways' green energy initiatives and is designed to utilise renewable energy while optimising the use of available rooftop space.

According to NFR, the newly commissioned system is currently generating more electricity than the depot consumes, making the facility a net positive energy building.

The surplus power generated during the day is being exported to the electricity grid, contributing to clean energy generation while re-

ducing dependence on conventional power sources.

Railway officials said the project is expected to result in substantial savings in electricity costs, reduce peak power demand and lower carbon emissions by decreasing reliance on fossil fuel-based electricity.

The commissioning of the rooftop solar plant forms part of Northeast Frontier Railway's broader strategy to adopt clean energy technologies and develop environmentally sustainable infrastructure across its network.

NFR stated that the initiative reflects its continued commitment to enhancing energy efficiency, promoting renewable energy adoption and contributing to the national objective of building a greener and cleaner future through sustainable railway operations.

Kuki-Zo body urges govt to remove highway blockades by Naga groups

KANGPOKPI (MANIPUR), June 28: A Kuki-Zo organisation in Manipur's Kangpokpi urged the central and state governments to remove all blockades, allegedly by Naga groups, along the national and state highways passing through the district.

In a statement, the Committee on Tribal Unity (CoTU) said that following joint deliberation with all civil society organisations (CSOs) of Kangpokpi, it unanimously resolved to "serve a 48-hour ultimatum", effective from Sunday midnight, for removing all blockades. The development came in the wake of price rise and depleting stocks of essential commodities in the Kuki-Zo majority district, caused by the blockades on NH-2 and NH-37, sources said.



CoTU said road transportation, the "lifeline of the people and backbone of economic activities", has remained severely disrupted for over a month due to blockades and unauthorised checkpoints allegedly manned by Naga groups. "This has caused immense hard-

ship in the transport of essential commodities, medicines, medical supplies, and the free movement of the public," it said.

CoTU and participating CSOs demanded that the Manipur government, in coordination with the Centre and security agencies, im-

mediately remove all unauthorised checkpoints and gates along national and state highways and restore unrestricted public access within 48 hours. CoTU warned that failure to comply will compel the Kuki-Zo community to undertake "appropriate and pre-emptive democratic measures" to safeguard the interests, rights, and security of the general public.

Manipur, where more than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic conflict between Imphal Valley-based Meiteis and adjoining hills-based Kukis, is currently witnessing strife between Kukis and Nagas, both hill communities, since February this year. The latest phase of the conflict saw several killings and abductions. (PTI)

Sikkim CM calls for stronger Sikkim-Darjeeling cultural bond

GANGTOK, June 28: Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Sunday underscored the deep cultural and historical ties between Sikkim and Darjeeling in West Bengal while attending the Kirati Khambu Rai Cultural Festival 2026 and the sacred Sakela Ubhauhi celebrations in Darjeeling.

The event was attended by Sikkim minister Bhojraj Rai, West Bengal minister Bishal Lama, Darjeeling MP Raju Bista and other dignitaries.

In a social media post, Sikkim Chief Minister congratulated the Kirati Khambu Rai Cultural and Research Society (KKRSS) for organising the festival, saying it plays a vital role in preserving the language, traditions and identity of the Kirati community.

"Sakela reminds us to live in harmony with nature, honour our ancestors, and strengthen the values of unity, gratitude and mutual respect. Preserving our language and cultural heritage is our shared responsibility and our greatest gift to future generations," Tamang said. Highlighting the close relationship between the two neighbouring Himalayan regions, the CM said, "Sikkim and Darjeeling may be separated by administrative boundaries, but we remain united by our shared language, culture, traditions and history. Let us continue to strengthen this enduring bond."

Tamang also urged the younger generation to embrace their cultural roots while preparing for the future.

"May our culture, language and traditions continue to flourish," he said. (PTI)

Door-to-door verification, awareness drives and dedicated helpdesk launched to ensure accurate and inclusive voter list Namsai intensifies electoral roll revision ahead of 2026 polls

HT Correspondent
NAMSAI, June 28: The District Election Office, Namsai, has intensified the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the Electoral Roll-2026 to ensure a clean, accurate, inclusive and error-free electoral roll through comprehensive verification and updating of voter details across the district.

As part of the exercise, Booth Level Officers (BLOs) are conducting door-to-door visits in all polling station areas to distribute and collect Enumeration Forms. During the visits, electors are being guided on correctly filling up the forms and submitting the necessary supporting documents wherever required.

According to the District Election Office, as of June 17, Enumeration Form distribution has achieved 12.18 per cent coverage in Chongkham Assembly Constituency, 20.85 per cent in Namsai and 19.82 per cent in Lekang.

To facilitate the revision process, the district administration has conducted a series of capacity-building programmes for election personnel.

Physical training sessions for Booth Level Officers were held in Namsai on March 26, Chongkham on March 27 and Lekang on April 25.

In addition, virtual training programmes for BLOs were organised on March 30, June 11 and June 13, while Booth Level Agents (BLAs) received virtual



training on March 30 and May 25.

A meeting with representatives of recognised political parties was also convened on May 25 to ensure their active participation and cooperation in the revision exercise.

Dedicated teams have been constituted at all Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and Assistant Electoral Registration Officer (AERO) offices to receive, verify, compile and upload Enumeration Forms and supporting documents for timely processing of applications.

The District Election Office has also launched an extensive Information, Education and Communication (IEC) campaign through press releases, posters, banners and social media platforms to create awareness about the revision schedule and encourage maximum public participation.

To assist electors, a Special Intensive Revision Helpdesk and Control Room has been established at the District Election Office.

Citizens can seek information

regarding Enumeration Forms, required documents, voter verification and other election-related matters by contacting the dedicated helpline at 93668 11521.

Assistance teams have also been deployed at selected polling stations to provide on-the-spot guidance to voters in filling up Enumeration Forms correctly, thereby reducing errors and expediting the revision process.

The District Election Officer is regularly reviewing the progress of the exercise through monitoring meetings, with special emphasis on ensuring the inclusion of senior citizens, persons with disabilities and voters residing in remote and inaccessible areas.

The District Election Officer stated that through the coordinated efforts of election officials, Booth Level Officers, Booth Level Agents, volunteers, political parties and the public, Namsai remains committed to preparing a free, fair, transparent and inclusive electoral roll while strengthening democratic participation in the district.

Over 46,000 names removed from Mizoram's electoral rolls after SIR

AIZAWL, June 28: More than 46,000 voters have been removed from Mizoram's electoral rolls following the completion of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), a senior official said. The exercise, which began on May 20, concluded on Sunday with all enumeration forms fully digitised, Mizoram Joint Chief Electoral Officer Ethel Rothangpui told PTI.

A total of 46,191 names were deleted from the electoral rolls for reasons including death, untraceable status, permanent migration and duplicate enrolments, she said.

Of those removed, 21,290 were deceased, 8,352 could not be traced, 13,992 had permanently shifted to other states or abroad, and 2,245 were found to have duplicate enrolments, she added.

Rothangpui said 312 eligible voters either refused to enrol or re-enrol during the exercise due to religious beliefs. These individuals had either been included in the 2025 electoral rolls or had relatives enrolled during the previous SIR.

Following the revision, Mizoram's electorate now stands at 8,28,877, representing 94.72 per cent of the more than 8.75 lakh voters recorded in the 2025 electoral rolls, the official said.

The draft electoral rolls will be published on July 4, after which electors can file claims and objections between July 5 and August 4. (PTI)

Contribution to support rescue, relief and rehabilitation efforts in flash flood-hit Possa area of Keyi Panyor district

Rajya Sabha MP Tai Tagak donates ₹ 7 lakh for Yazali flood relief

HT Correspondent
YAZALI, June 28: Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Tai Tagak has contributed ₹ 7 lakh towards relief and rehabilitation efforts for victims of the recent flash floods that devastated Possa in Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district.

The financial assistance was handed over on behalf of the MP by Nada Buda and Tai Arun to Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) Tajing Padung to support the ongoing rescue, relief and rehabilitation measures for affected families.

Expressing deep sorrow over the loss of lives in the flash floods, Tagak conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families and wished a speedy recovery to those injured in the disaster.

He also prayed for strength and resilience for all those affected by the calamity.

The Rajya Sabha MP appreciated the coordinated efforts of the district administration, Arunachal Pradesh Police, the Indian Air Force (IAF), the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), the local MLA, non-governmental organisations, volunteers and local residents for their relentless efforts in rescuing stranded people, providing relief to victims and restoring normalcy in the flood-hit areas.

Appealing to the public to remain vigilant during the ongoing monsoon season, Tagak urged people to avoid unnecessary travel, particularly at night, and to strictly follow weather advisories and safety instructions issued by district administrations across the state.

Reaffirming his solidarity with the people of Keyi Panyor district, the MP assured that he would continue to extend all possible assistance to the affected communities and stand by them during the recovery process.

99.71 per cent enumeration forms for SIR distributed in Sikkim



GANGTOK, June 28: Around 99.71 per cent of enumeration forms (EF) for the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Sikkim have been distributed to eligible voters, an official said on Sunday.

"Phase III of the ongoing SIR of electoral roll in Sikkim has been successfully completed with distribution of 99.71 per cent of enumeration forms EFs to the eligible voters spread over six districts," the official said, adding that the

last date for distribution of enumeration forms in the state was June 28.

Sikkim had a total of 4,71,018 electors as on May 20 at the time of announcement of the SIR in the state. The report said that 91.99 per cent of enumeration forms have been digitised, while 8.01 per cent of enumeration forms remain to be collected.

The successful completion of distribution and digitisation reflects a collective effort of the elec-

tion machinery and active cooperation extended by citizens throughout Sikkim, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Raj Singh Yadav said.

The SIR has been undertaken in accordance with the directions of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to ensure that the electoral roll remains accurate, inclusive, transparent and free from ineligible or duplicate entries, while simultaneously ensuring that every eligible citizen is provided adequate opportunity to be enrolled as an elector, the CEO said.

The exercise represents one of the largest field verification programmes undertaken in the state, involving extensive house-to-house visits by Booth Level Officers (BLOs), active participation of Booth Level Agents (BLAs), Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs), District Election Officers (DEOs), recognised political parties and the electors themselves, Yadav said. (PTI)

Bridge washed away, road connectivity hit as heavy rain batters Sikkim



GANGTOK, June 28: A key bridge in north Sikkim's Dzongu was washed away due to heavy overnight rainfall, disrupting road connectivity in the region, officials said on Sunday.

Movement on the Phidang to Sankalng stretch was affected, after the Bailey bridge over Phee Khola was washed away on Saturday night following incessant rain, they said.

Senior officials, including the sub-divisional magistrate (SDM) of Mangan and local panchayat representatives have reached the site to assess the extent of damage.

"A detailed inspection is underway," an official said. Continuous downpour has also caused extensive damage in the Upper Kaw Khola area of Lingee in south Sikkim, he said. An IMD bulletin said heavy to very heavy rainfall lashed one or two places in Sikkim, while light to moderate rainfall occurred in most parts of the Himalayan state in the past 24 hours till 8.30 am on Sunday. (PTI)

Linguists, community leaders and educators deliberate on standardising script for language preservation

Workshop advances development of Nocte script in Tirap

HT Correspondent
KHONSA, June 28: A significant step towards preserving the linguistic heritage of the Nocte community was taken with the successful organisation of a workshop on the development of the Nocte script at the Deputy Commissioner's Conference Hall in Khonsa recently.

The workshop was organised by the Nocte Script Development Committee (NSDC) in collaboration with the Centre for Endangered Languages (CFEL), Arunachal Institute of Tribal Studies (AITS), Rajiv Gandhi



University. It followed a preliminary ses-

sion held on June 20 and brought together representatives from various Nocte dialect groups to deliberate on the development of a

common script for the language. The programme was convened

by Ngaasah Tangjang and chaired by Tirap Deputy Commissioner Techu Aran.

Resource person Dr Wanglit Mongchan, a linguist from Rajiv Gandhi University, led the technical session and guided discussions on adapting the Roman script for writing the Nocte language.

A drafting committee comprising Gankhu Sumnyan, Noklam Bisai and Wangtum Homcha Lowang was constituted to compile the recommendations and document the deliberations of the workshop.

The workshop witnessed active participation from stakeholders

representing various Nocte villages, teachers from schools and colleges, scholars, local leaders and members of the community. Participants emphasised the need for a common Nocte script to strengthen cultural preservation, promote linguistic identity and facilitate educational development. The organisers said the workshop provided an inclusive platform for community members from different dialectal groups to contribute to the script development process, ensuring that diverse perspectives were reflected in the discussions.

The event was attended by Tirap Zilla Parishad Chairperson

Adv John K.K. Matey, Lazu ZPM Adv Najen Rangwang, Soha ZPM Wanglem Thingnok, Deputy Director of the Department of Tirap Culture and Language Wangton Lowang, intellectuals, panchayat members and other community representatives.

Describing the workshop as a milestone in safeguarding the linguistic heritage of the Nocte people, the organisers said it marked the beginning of a series of consultations aimed at strengthening the foundation of the proposed script and achieving its wider acceptance across all Nocte dialect groups.

Messi becomes first to score in 7 straight World Cup games while extending goals record



ARLINGTON, June 28: Lionel Messi didn't have much time to try to become the first to score in seven consecutive World Cup games.

Argentina's superstar did it anyway as a second-half substitute.

Messi made it seven straight while extending the all-time men's World Cup scoring record with his 19th goal in Argentina's 3-1 victory over Jordan in a group stage finale on Saturday night.

In his first match since turning 39 three days earlier, Messi scored on a free kick after being taken down just outside the penalty box in the 80th minute. The low kick barely above the grass surface

split two Jordan defenders into the left corner of the net.

It was his 72nd career goal on a free kick, including his 12th for Argentina. Messi now has 123 international goals — second all-time to Cristiano Ronaldo's 145 — in 202 appearances.

Messi had been one of only three players to score in six consecutive World Cup games along with France striker Just Fontaine and Brazil great Jairzinho.

Messi also scored on a free kick against Nigeria in the 2014 World Cup and is among six players since records are available dating to 1966 who scored two free kick goals in the World Cup. He

joined Pelé, Rivellino, Teófilo Cubillas, Bernard Genghini and David Beckham.

"I am very happy for him, for the moment he is having," Giovanni Lo Celso said in translated remarks after becoming the first Argentine other than Messi to score in this tournament, also on a free kick in the 19th minute. "The truth is that seeing him every day excites, excites and infects a lot. So obviously seeing him like that for us is very important."

Messi didn't start because Argentina had already clinched first place in Group J, and the game was further meaningless because Jordan was already eliminated

from the knockout stage.

Nevertheless, the decidedly pro-Argentina crowd of 70,649 at the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys was eager to see him.

Fans started chanting Messi's name as soon as the second half started, and cheered loudly when he came off the bench merely to go through warmups.

The roar was louder when he stepped onto the field in the 60th minute, replacing Lautaro Martinez, who scored on a penalty kick in the first half.

For all the accomplishments of the eight-time winner of the Ballon d'Or as the best player in Europe, Messi has

never won the golden boot as the top scorer in each World Cup. This is his sixth.

Messi now has six goals in this tournament, two clear of Kylian Mbappé, Vinicius Júnior and Erling Haaland.

Messi had been dealing with a minor hamstring injury with Inter Miami that slowed him in the lead-up to the World Cup.

The knockout round for Argentina begins Friday in South Florida, and in this expanded 48-team tournament that would be the first of five matches in 17 days if La Albiceleste makes it to the final on July 19. (AP)

Both squads already into World Cup knockouts Colombia wins Group K after 0-0 draw with Portugal

MIAMI GARDENS, June 28: Colombia's plan was nearly perfectly executed. The only thing missing was a goal.

Didn't matter — it goes into the knockout stage as a group winner.

Colombia finished the World Cup's opening round as the Group K winner after playing Portugal to a scoreless draw Saturday night at Hard Rock Stadium in front of an electric crowd of supporters, the majority of whom were clad in Colombia's bright yellow jerseys.

"We were the better team and deserved to win," Colombia coach Néstor Lorenzo said. "I think we created so many chances. We just lacked finishing. The players were outstanding against a top contender ... not only did we play them on equal terms, we dictated the terms. I think playing against a rival like that, showing this kind of football to all these people, in this heat, was incredible."

He wasn't wrong. Colombia had 24 of the game's 37 attempts on goal, never wiling despite the game-time temperature topping 90 degrees (32 degrees Celsius).

Both squads had already secured spots in the knockout stage before the match, needing only to learn their opponents for the next round.

Colombia opens the knockouts on July 3 against Ghana, which entered with one of the lowest FIFA rankings but also played England to a scoreless tie during the group



stage. Portugal will face Croatia, which beat Ghana 2-1 earlier Saturday, on July 2 as the Group K runner-up — potentially needing to go through Spain to reach the quarterfinals.

"Win, losing or having a draw today didn't make a difference," Portugal coach Roberto Martínez said through an interpreter. "Our goal really is to play eight matches. The path for us really doesn't make a difference. We tried to win the match. Our opponent did the same."

Both squads put forth lively efforts. Bruno Fernandez came close to putting Portugal ahead in the first half, but was denied by Camilo Vargas. Portugal's Diogo Costa had six saves, more than in

Cup with two goals in Portugal's 5-0 win over Uzbekistan.

"First of all, we are satisfied to have made it past the first phase, obviously," Costa said. "But clearly, we aren't fully satisfied because we always want to win. That's what we work for every day. Our focus is on Croatia. We'll be paying even closer attention to them now in this World Cup."

Colombia, which did not qualify for the 2022 World Cup, opened with a 3-1 win over Uzbekistan then topped Congo 1-0.

The match played at the home stadium of the NFL's Miami Dolphins took place in front of a sell-out crowd of 64,478 that included former Colombia soccer star Carlos Valderrama, FIFA President Gianni Infantino — who sat in a suite with FBI director Kash Patel and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio — NFL quarterback Jameis Winston, NBA player Jimmy Butler, musical couple Gloria and Emilio Estefan, actor Matt Damon and former NFL receiver Chad Johnson.

It had been viewed as one of the most sought-after matches of the tournament, both because of South Florida's large Colombian community and the draw of seeing Ronaldo in presumably his final World Cup. The lowest get-in prices hovered around \$3,500 early Saturday on Friday.

Multiple watch parties held

the team's first two matches combined. Davinson Sanchez thought he had given Colombia a lead with a back-post header just a minute into stoppage time, but he was ruled offside — barely, by the tip of a toe, if that much — and the goal was disallowed as those yellow-clad fans whistled in disbelief.

Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal squad, looking for its first World Cup title and a favorite to win the tournament, heads to the knockout stage after an up-and-down group stage.

Portugal opened group play with a surprising 1-1 draw against Congo. Ronaldo faced criticism after failing to score in that match, and answered by becoming the first player to score in six World

Croatia beats Ghana 2-1 to reach World Cup knockout stage

PHILADELPHIA, June 28: Luka Modric lined up for a corner kick intent on trying to float the ball to the top of the 6-yard box. Nikola Vlašić jumped high among the scrum and headed it in for a goal — good enough to advance Croatia in the World Cup and give Modric a slice of tournament history.

The 40-year-old Modric became the oldest player in World Cup history with an assist, and Vlašić and Petar Šucić scored to help Croatia earn a spot in the knockout round with a 2-1 win over Ghana 2-1 on Saturday.

"I told him after the game, you play like you're 20 years old," Šucić said. "He was incredible today. He runs a lot. He goes into every duel. He was incredible with the ball. He is our leader; he is our best player and we're so happy he can lead us in this World Cup. He can play until he wants, he's so good."

Ghana had already secured advancement from the group stage for the first time since 2010.

Vlašić headed home Modric's corner in the 83rd minute to score the winner and put Croatia back in contention after it finished third in 2022. The win means Croatia finished second behind England in Group L, with Ghana third.

"On the goal, I think I needed to do a block," Vlašić said. "But the ball arrived to me so I shot it with my head. It's not like it was some action but thank God the goal went in and we won the game."

Modric at 40 years, 291 days set



the assist record back to records kept since 1966.

Modric won the Ballon d'Or in 2018, the only time from 2008-21 that Lionel Messi or Cristiano Ronaldo didn't win it. He played in his 200th international game in this World Cup and remained the best player for the Vatreni in this tournament.

"Luka was unbelievable today," Vlašić said. "I swear, it seems like he turned time (back) 10 years. Really, one of the best performances I saw him doing in a Croatia shirt."

Šucić scored in the 31st minute for Croatia on an absolute rocket from outside the box for his second career international goal.

Derrick Luckassen scored the equalizer that — after a brief review — sent thousands of fans wearing yellow into a frenzy. Luckassen, brother of the Netherlands' Brian Brobbey, found the bottom right corner in the 73rd

minute to make it 1-1 and the first of the five group stage games in Philadelphia where both teams scored.

Ghana goalie Benjamin Asare briefly kept it a tie game on a diving stop off the top of his hand that sent the ball over the net but failed only a minute later to stop Vlašić.

Vlašić wagged his tongue and ran toward his teammates with outstretched arms in celebration.

Šucić helped Croatia take a 1-0 lead into halftime in a game where a couple of near misses prevented it from building a more comfortable lead. Vlašić bonked one of the posts earlier in the half, and Modric's cross on a free kick into the box was headed over the bar by Marin Pongračić.

Ghana seemed poised to tie the game late in the half when Antoine Semenyo beat his man and fired a shot that slid across the Kentucky bluegrass and went just wide of the

My mother is my biggest support, cutest thing to happen to me: Yarraji

BHUBANESWAR, June 28: Back from a "painful" injury lay-off and set for the Asian Games, hurdler Jyothi Yarraji says the toughest phase of her career brought her even closer to her mother, with the two spending hours talking on the phone "like boyfriend-girlfriend" in what she calls "the cutest thing to happen" in her life.

The knee injury brought her to the brink of an emotional collapse last year but having battled through her fears with some hope and lots of resilience, Yarraji returned with a bang.

She clocked an impressive 12.99 seconds to breach the Asian Games qualifying time of 13.34 seconds set by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI) in her first race of the year.

Yarraji, who won a 100m hurdles silver in the 2022 Asian Games, said her mother has been a constant companion through the difficult days after she suffered a knee injury in June last year and underwent a successful ACL surgery the next month.

"I didn't speak to any psychologist because I have a coach and my mother. My mom is the biggest support for me. Earlier, whenever I spoke to her, she would say stop it (athletics), but now she tells me 'it's okay, work hard, whatever happens we will see, we have faith in you. We are there for you,'" Yarraji told PTI in an interview.

"Earlier my mom didn't even have a phone. So I just bought a phone and gave it to her. So we are like a good girlfriend-boyfriend type. I can call her anytime, we talk on video call. So, that's the cutest thing for me," Yarraji's mother Kumari initially worked as a domestic help and hospital cleaner in Visakhapatnam to support the family, though their financial condition has improved since then.

Asked how her mother coped with the difficult time, Yarraji said, "I did not want to tell her the pain I was having because she's very sensitive person. If I feel 10 per cent pain, maybe she will feel 100 per cent of pain in staying home from far."

"Injuries will happen, I accepted that, it's okay this is my step back. It will take some time and it will be fine. I performed outstanding in the last five to six year. I improved myself. So God has given me one step back that Jyoti, you take rest."

"Now I have come back. I'm like fresh," said Yarraji, who trains at the



Reliance Foundation here.

"I am a strong girl!"

After winning the 100m hurdles gold on Wednesday, she competed in the 200m final the next day, finishing sixth with a time of 24 seconds. Asked if taking part in a non-primary event just after returning to action from a long injury lay-off was advisable, she said she just wanted to run but did not push to the maximum.

"Actually, we didn't plan for that but I was so excited to run. I just don't want results. I just want to run. My knee is not completely fine. At the curve, I'm feeling a little bit pain. So I don't want to take any kind of risk."

"Because I only have three months (coming out from recovery). If I'm pushing very hard, maybe there will be an issue that can come, my knee problem. So that is the reason."

Earlier also, before her injury, she used to run 100m, 200m and 60m hurdles, as well as 4x100m relay.

"I'm a strong girl. I can run any race which gives me the boost up, which gives me the happiness. The sport is not all about winning always. It's about how you're enjoying the event."

"The 100m hurdle is my main event that I don't want to make mistakes. But the other events, I love to just participate. If I'm winning it, yeah, I'll celebrate. I'll just happy."

"Now, I'm just focusing on 100m hurdles. But the 200m is like the joyfulness for the kid inside me. I want to just enjoy. So that's the reason I participated."

Asked about the controversial 100m hurdles race in the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou, China, where she had a fierce argument with the race officials following a false start fiasco, she said, "That's actually a strong point for me. Now everybody knows that whatever the problem it comes, this girl is not moving from the track. So they don't do any trouble for me this time." (PTI)

England beats Panama 2-0 on goals by Bellingham and Kane

EAST RUTHERFORD, June 28: Jude Bellingham and Harry Kane scored early in the second half, lifting England over Panama 2-0 Saturday and into what appears to be a more favorable bracket for the knockout phase of the World Cup.

On a rainy afternoon before a vocal pro-England crowd that made MeLife Stadium seem like Wembley, Panama held the European power scoreless through a first half when neither team mounted threats and Kane had 10 touches, the fewest of any player.

Bellingham put the Three Lions ahead in the 62nd minute from Bukayo Saka's corner kick. Held in bear hug by Jorge Gutiérrez at the top of the 6-yard box, Bellingham stuck out his left leg and stabbed the ball past goalkeeper Orlando Mosquera for his third World Cup goal, his second this year.

Five minutes later, Bellingham crossed from the left flank and Kane outjumped Andrés Andrade to head the ball in for his 82nd international goal. Kane became England's record World Cup scorer with his 11th goal, one more than Gary Lineker.

Wearing red jerseys in a tournament for the first time since beating Sweden in a 2018 World Cup quarterfinal, England finished the group with two wins and a draw for seven points. The English play their Round of 32 match Wednesday in Atlanta, likely against Senegal or Congo. The team that advances faces Mexico or Ecuador in Mexico City.

If the Three Lions had dropped to second, they probably would have faced Colombia or Portugal, with the winner meeting Spain, Austria or Algeria.

Panama went 0-3 for the second time and joined Iraq, Haiti, El Salvador, Canada and Mexico — all but one from the CONCACAF region — as teams that lost their first six World Cup matches. José Fajardo



put the ball in the net for the Los Canaleros in second-half stoppage time, but was called for offside.

Supporters filled the field walls with Cross of St. George flags displaying club names that included Tottenham, Watford and Wolves plus some less-celebrated ones such as Crawley Town, Bristol Rovers and Faversham Town.

England, which won its only World Cup at home in 1966, reached the knockout rounds for the seventh time in eight World Cups.

Jarell Quansah, usually a central defender, replaced right back Reece James, sidelined by a hamstring injury. Nico O'Reilly took over from Djed Spence at left back. Coach Thomas Tuchel replaced three midfielder, using Bukayo Saka, Marcus Rogers and Marcus Rashford instead of Declan Rice, Noni Madueke and Anthony Gordon.

England goalkeeper Jordan Pickford played his 15th World Cup match, second among English players to Peter Shilton's 17. (AP)

Serena Williams commands spotlight ahead of her Wimbledon return

LONDON, June 28: Iga Swiatek is the defending champion. Aryna Sabalenka is the No. 1 women's singles player.

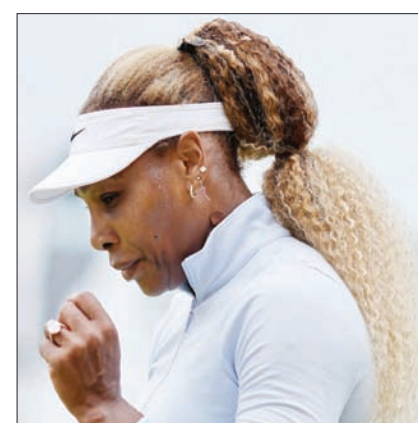
Serena Williams is the star, though, at Wimbledon.

The 44-year-old Williams' presence has been emanating throughout SW19 — the famous post code of Wimbledon — as she prepares to play her first singles match at the event in four years Tuesday when she faces No. 53 Maya Joint in the first round.

Mirra Andreeva, who just won the French Open, was basically crossing her fingers when the Wimbledon draw was announced.

"I was watching like this because I don't think anyone in the draw would have wanted to play against Serena," the smiling Russian teenager said Saturday. "I'm going to speak for myself. I wouldn't want to play against Serena. I would be just very nervous."

Williams had been away from the sport since her farewell to the 2022 U.S. Open but she accepted a wild-card entry to play women's doubles with her sister Venus, who is 46. And then she accepted another to play singles.



Williams' most-recent appearance at Wimbledon was in 2022 when she lost in the opening round to Harmony Tan, who was then-ranked 115th. The American great walked away from tennis — she described it as "evolving" away — after losing in the third round to Ajla Tomljanovic at Flushing Meadows. Her second daughter was born in 2023. Williams, a seven-time Wimbledon

singles title winner, could meet Swiatek in the third round.

Venus provides some motivation. Serena Williams officially returned to tennis earlier this month in a doubles match with 19-year-old Canadian Victoria Mboko at the Queen's Club grass-court tournament.

"Unexpectedly, before her first match she asked me did I have any motivational quotes I use for myself," Venus Williams said Saturday. "I told her what I was using at the time. I don't know if that helped or not. She did win the match."

The Williams sisters will play their first-round doubles match against Colombia's Camila Osorio and Solana Sierra of Argentina.

Serena and Venus have won 14 Grand Slam titles together in doubles, including six at Wimbledon. Their first two doubles titles at the All England Club, in 2000 and 2002, came as wild cards.

"For us it was about the titles, we wanted the Grand Slam titles. We just wanted to bring them home," Venus said. "We did pretty good."

Congo rallies to a 3-1 win against Uzbekistan

ATLANTA, June 28: For 52 years, Congo's standout World Cup memory was a humiliating 9-0 rout at the hands of Yugoslavia in its only other appearance on soccer's biggest stage. Not anymore. Not after a new generation of players made history by advancing to the knockout stage of the World Cup for the first time and set up a clash with England.

"The weight on our shoulders was hard to bear," said striker Yoane Wissa whose two goals helped Congo rally to a 3-1 win against Uzbekistan on Saturday night

Fiston Mayeale was also on target in a dramatic second-half comeback as Congo joined Cape Verde as another surprise qualifier for the round of 32.

"We told ourselves we can't give up, we have to get that win because getting a tie would kick us out. So we got that win," Mayeale said. After holding Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal to a surprise 1-1 draw earlier in the tournament, Congo topped that with its first win at a World Cup.

Trailing to Eldor Shomurodov's lobbed goal in the 10th minute, Sébastien Desabre's team fought back after the break and equalized in the 68th when Wissa was brought down by Abdulkodir Khusanov for a penalty.

Wissa picked himself up and sent Uzbekistan goalkeeper Abduvohid Nematov the wrong way by rolling the ball into the bottom corner to spark a late flurry of goals.

Substitute Mayeale fired Congo ahead 10 minutes later when flicking past Nematov at the near post and was mobbed teammates. Congo's substitutes even raced off the bench and across the field to join in the wild celebrations. (AP)

