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Portfolios of 12 newly-inducted ministers allocated
● Ranoj Pegu retains Education deptt

CM keeps Home; PWD, IPR; Jayanta Malla new FM

GUWAHATI, June 8: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday allocated portfolios to 12 newly inducted ministers.

The chief minister retained Home and Political, PWD, Power, Information and Public Relations, and departments not allotted to any other minister.

He made the announcements in a social media post.

Among the senior ministers Ranoj Pegu retained the Education Department, Ashok Singhal has been allocated his previous Health & Family Welfare, and Medical Education & Research, while Bimal Borah has been given Cultural Affairs and Industries, Commerce & Public Enterprises, and Act East Policy Affairs.

Pegu has been also given the responsibility of Tribal Affairs (Plains) and Information Technology.

The Finance Ministry has been given to Sarma's close associate Jayanta Malla Baruah along with Environment and Forest, and Mines and Minerals departments.

"With the approval of the Hon'ble Governor of Assam, I am pleased to announce the allocation of portfolios amongst the members of the Council of Ministers of the Government of Assam," Sarma posted on X.

The 12 ministers were sworn in on June 5, while four other ministers were administered the oath of office on May 12 along with the chief minister.

The portfolios of the four ministers were announced earlier.

Former speaker Biswajit Daimary, who was also inducted into the ministry, has been allocated Handloom, Textiles & Sericulture, Sports and Youth Welfare; Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship; and Indigenous, Tribal Faith and Culture departments.

AGP's Keshab Mahanta, a minister in the NDA government since 2016, has been allocated Revenue & Disaster Management; Science, Technology and Climate Change; and General Administration potfolios.

Pijush Hazarika, a close associate of Sarma since his Congress days, has been given Agriculture, Irrigation and Parliamentary Affairs.

Kaushik Rai, also a minister in the previous government, has been given the responsibility of Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs; Housing and Urban Affairs, and Cooperation departments.

Krishnendu Paul has been allocated Public Health Engineering, Hill Areas and Barak Valley Development portfolios.

Among the newcomers, Ashwini Ray Sarkar has been given the departments of Social Justice & Empowerment, Soil Conservation and Welfare of Minorities & Development.

Another new face, Nilima Devi, elected to the assembly for the first time, has been given the departments of Animal Husbandry & Veterinary, and Fishery.

Susanta Borgohain, another first-time minister, has been allocated the Water Resources and Judicial departments.

The four ministers who were sworn-in on May 12 are Rameswar Teli, Ajanta Neog, Atul Bora and Charan Boro.

Teli, a former Union minister in Prime *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

EU team visits semiconductor project at Jagiroad

Visit expected to open new avenues for int'l investment, technological collaboration, and global industrial partnerships

MORIGAON/GUWAHATI, June 8: A high-level delegation from the European Union on Monday visited Tata Electronics' semiconductor project at Jagiroad in Assam's Morigaon district.

The delegation was led by EU Ambassador to India Hervé Delphin and Ambassador of Belgium to India Didier Vanderhasselt.

Several senior officials and representatives of the EU were also part of the delegation.

Morigaon District Commissioner Anamika Tewari welcomed the delegation and briefed them on the district's overall development, its industrial potential, and the large-scale industrial infrastructure being established at Jagiroad.

The Tata Electronics Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) project is regarded as a landmark initiative in the development of India's semiconductor sector.

During the visit, the delegation was informed about the project's construction progress, the use of advanced technologies and manufacturing systems, efforts to develop a skilled workforce, and future plans.

The delegation appreciated the progress of the project and expressed keen interest in Assam's industrial growth and the emerging opportunities in India's semiconductor manufacturing sector, officials said.

The delegation's visit is expected to open new avenues for international investment, technological collaboration, and global industrial partnerships.

The 'Team Europe Ambassadors' will engage in a bilateral meeting with Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, while a business delegation led by the Federation of European Businesses in India (FEBI) will hold discussions with state officials to identify trade and investment opportunities.

The visit will also see the launch of Assam's first 'Blue Valley Cluster,' a new industrial hub focused on fragrances, flavours, AYUSH and food processing on June 9.

The 4P (public-private-people-partnership) cluster will seek to connect Europe, Northeast India and Bhutan, promoting innovation, research, sustainable manufacturing and business collaborations, an official release said.

The pilot project, led by the Assam government, is aligned with the Blue Valleys initiative, which was introduced at the 2026 EU-India Summit. (PTI)

DDMA introduces CBS for instant disaster alerts in Karbi Anglong

Staff Reporter

DIPHU, June 8: In a significant step towards strengthening disaster preparedness and public safety, the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Karbi Anglong, has announced the implementation of an advanced mobile-based Cell Broadcasting System (CBS) for the dissemination of emergency alerts.

The district administration has advised residents not to panic upon receiving the alerts, which are designed to provide instant warnings during emergencies and natural disasters.

The Cell Broadcasting System, introduced as part of a nationwide public safety initiative of the Government of India, enables authorised disaster management agencies to send time-sensitive warnings directly to all mobile phones located within a specific geographical area. The alerts will be delivered simultaneously across all mobile networks, ensuring that both residents and visitors receive critical information without delay.

According to an official notification issued by District Commissioner and DDMA Chairperson Aranyak Saikia, the alerts will function differently from ordinary text messages in order to immediately attract public attention.

When an emergency alert is issued, mobile phones will emit a distinct high-volume warning tone and vibrate continuously for approximately 30 seconds. On compatible devices, the warning message may also be automatically read aloud.

The DDMA stated that these features have been deliberately designed to ensure that people notice the alerts even in noisy environments or during emergencies. Officials said *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

Fake BTC Executive Member's writing pad used for crores of rupees supply Allotment; one arrested

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 8: A major fraud involving the allotment of contracts in the BTC has come to light. A person identified as Rajib Kumar Brahma has been arrested for allegedly forging the official writing pads and signatures of BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary and Executive Member Prakash Basumatary.

According to allegations, Rajib Kumar Brahma attempted to allot supply contracts worth ₹30 crore in total—₹20 crore under the Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes (WPT&BC) Department headed by Hagrama Mohilary and ₹10 crore under the Social Welfare Department headed by Prakash Basumatary. It is alleged that the contracts were being issued using forged official writing pads and fake signatures.

Based on an FIR lodged by Executive Member Prakash Basumatary, Kokrajhar Police have arrested Rajib Kumar Brahma in connection with the case.

Prakash Basumatary has demanded strict punishment for all those involved in the fraud.

Case number 80/2026 336(3)/316(2)/318(2) BNS.

A person identified as Rajib Brahma, who was arrested by Kokrajhar Police on Friday, allegedly used a fake signature and forged official writing pad of BTC Executive Member Prakash Basumatary to issue supply allotments worth crores of rupees in the Welfare of Plain Tribes and Backward Classes (WPT & BC) and Social Wellfare Department.

Speaking to media persons, BTC Executive Member Prakash Basumatary said that on March 10 and 11, Rajib Brahma allegedly forged his signature and used a fake executive member's writing pad to issue allotments amounting to rupees 20 crore from the WPT & BC Department and rupees 10 crore from the Social Welfare Department under the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

Basumatary stated that he never uses his full signature for official purposes. However, the forged documents carried a full signature in his name, raising suspicion and leading to the detection of the alleged fraud.

He further informed that Kokrajhar Police have already arrested the main accused, Rajib Brahma, and are continuing the investigation into the matter. The police are probing whether others were involved in the forgery and fraudulent *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

Two veteran elephants retire from Assam forest service, five new ones inducted at Manas

GUWAHATI, June 8: Two veteran elephants retired from service in Assam's forest department and were accorded a ceremonial farewell at Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

Five newly trained elephants were also inducted into service at the reserve.

"Not all heroes wear uniforms. Some walk through forests. Today, Manas Tiger Reserve honoured veteran elephants Pramila and Purnima with a guard of honour, traditional gamochas and a ceremonial farewell, recognising years of dedicated service to wildlife conservation," the chief minister said in a post on X.

"As they retire with honour, five newly trained elephants begin their journey in service of our forests and wildlife," he added.

The forest personnel celebrated the invaluable contribution of

camp elephants towards wildlife conservation, anti-poaching operations, habitat management, rescue missions and ecotourism activities in Manas National Park, an official release said.

The elephants, adorned in traditional attire, were taken in a procession from the forest to the camp premises, marking the farewell ceremony attended by forest staff, mahouts and conservation personnel.

A special guard of honour was accorded to the retiring elephants in recognition of their years of dedicated service to the forest department.

Both elephants will continue to receive *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

India asks its nationals in Israel and Iran to stay vigilant, avoid unnecessary travel

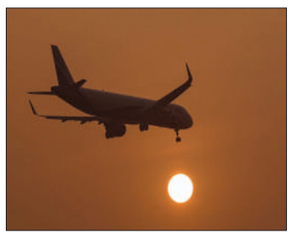
TEL AVIV/DUBAI, June 8: India on Monday asked its nationals in Israel and Iran to exercise utmost caution, stay vigilant and avoid all unnecessary travel to these countries, amid the prevailing security situation in the region following the fresh exchange of fire between the two countries.

Iran fired dozens of missiles across Israel starting Sunday evening after Israel struck Beirut's southern suburbs without warning. After Iran's attack, Israel launched strikes on central and western Iran.

"In view of the latest developments in the region, the Embassy reiterates its earlier advice to all Indian Nationals to avoid any travel to Iran," the Embassy of India in Iran said in a post on X.

It also advised the Indians presently in Iran to exit the country by available means of transport.

In Tel Aviv, the Indian Embassy strongly advised Indians to strictly adhere to the safety guidelines and



instructions issued by the Israeli authorities and the Home Front Command (Updated instructions may be accessed at: http://oref.org.il/eng).

"In view of the prevailing security situation in the region, all Indian nationals in Israel are advised to exercise utmost caution and remain vigilant at all times," it said.

The Indian nationals in Israel have also been advised to "remain in proximity to designated shelters" and "to familiarise themselves with the nearest protected spaces in their area of residence or work."

"Indian nationals are advised to avoid all non-essential and unnecessary travel within Israel until further notice. Citizens are encouraged to monitor local news, official announcements, and emergency alerts regularly," it said.

The number of Indians living in Israel has swelled to over 40,000 in the last two and a half years, and they are dispersed throughout the country.

According to official data, around 9,000 Indians, including students, were in Iran when the conflict began on February 28. More than 1,800 Indians have returned to India so far.

The Indian mission in Israel also posted a 24x7 helpline: Telephone: +972-54-7520711; +972-54-2428378; E-mail: cons1.telaviv@mea.gov.in, for citizens in Israel to contact in case of an emergency. "The Embassy remains closely *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

'Guns N' Roses' to perform in Guwahati on Nov 17

GUWAHATI, June 8: Legendary American hard rock band 'Guns N' Roses' will perform here on November 17, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

This will be the second international concert in the city after Post Malone's performance here in December last.

"Delighted to welcome the legendary Guns N' Roses to Guwahati on November 17, 2026, bringing one of the world's most iconic rock bands to Assam", the CM posted on 'X'.

"Following the historic success of Post Malone's concert, Assam's rise as a global live entertainment destination continues to gather momentum", he said.

Sarma said as fans travel from across India and beyond, they will experience Assam's hospitality, culture and vibrancy, while creating new opportunities for tourism and the local economy. The concert will be held *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

Three of four UNFCCC negotiating groups to emit 9 pc more than their 2030 climate target: Report

NEW DELHI, June 8: Three of the four negotiating groups within UNFCCC are projected to collectively emit 9 per cent more than their 2030 climate target, according to a new report.

The three negotiating groups are: the Umbrella (Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, New Zealand, Norway, Ukraine, the United States and the United Kingdom), the European Union (EU) and the Environmental Integrity Group (Georgia, Liechtenstein, Mexico, Monaco, South Korea and Switzerland).

Countries within the fourth group, called BASIC (Brazil, China, India and South Africa), are more closely aligned with their 2030 commitments, despite lower historical responsibility and

greater developmental constraints, the report said.

The analysis, 'Holding up the Mirror: Tracking Climate Action across United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Negotiating Groups in the Era of Geopolitical Uncertainty', was released by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), a Delhi-based think tank.

The authors of the report used countries' own climate transparency reports submitted to the UNFCCC to assess whether major negotiating groups are on track.

These groups' role is considered key in shaping the direction and effectiveness of global climate governance.

Among the Umbrella Group, EU, and the Environmental Integrity Group (EIG) countries assessed, only Kazakhstan, Georgia, and Ukraine are projected to meet both their 2030 and 2035 climate targets, according to the analysis.

Norway could meet its 2030 target, while New Zealand could meet its 2035 target. However, several others are projected to fall short, the report said.

It also noted that India -- within the BASIC group -- has met its 50 per cent non-fossil installed capacity *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

Guv attends programme to honour soldiers who made supreme sacrifice for nation

GUWAHATI, June 8: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya attended the 'Amar Shaheed Shradhanjali' programme here on Monday to honour the brave soldiers of the state who made the supreme sacrifice in the service of the nation.

The programme was organised by the Directorate of Sainik Welfare at the Assam State War Memorial at Dighalipukhuri and Don Bosco High School here.

Paying homage to the martyrs, the governor said the nation remains forever indebted to its brave sons and daughters who laid down their lives while safeguarding the sovereignty and integrity of the country.

He said the Indian Armed Forces continue to uphold the highest traditions of courage, discipline and dedication while protecting the nation across diverse and challenging terrains.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's observation that the armed forces safeguard not only the nation's borders but also the aspirations and future of its people, the governor said India's soldiers embody the nation's strength, character and unwavering resolve.

As part of the programme, six 'Veer Naris' paid floral tributes to their husbands who attained martyrdom in the line of duty.

The governor also interacted with them and expressed the nation's gratitude for their courage, resilience and sacrifice.

He said their strength and devotion serve as a lasting inspiration for society.

The programme brought together veterans, serving defence personnel, NCC cadets and students, who joined in remembering the gallant heroes of Assam.

The governor called upon all citizens to reaffirm their commitment to national unity and support the welfare and dignity of the families of martyrs, describing it as the most meaningful tribute to *(CONTD. ON PAGE 2)*

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Stock markets slump amid weak global cues, surging oil prices; Sensex tanks 719 pts

MUMBAI, June 8: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slumped nearly 1 per cent on Monday, following a massive sell-off in global equities and a sharp rise in crude prices amid intensifying tensions in West Asia.

Besides, unabated foreign capital outflows and a weak rupee against the US dollar also weighed on investor sentiment, traders said.

Extending losses for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 719.08 points, or 0.97 per cent, to settle at 73,524.26. During the day, it dived 924.4 points, or 1.24 per cent, to 73,318.94.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 243.70 points, or 1.04 per cent, to 23,123. In intra-day trade, the benchmark lost 296.55 points, or 1.26 per cent, to 23,070.15.

A total of 3,117 stocks declined, while 1,249 advanced and 171 remained unchanged on the BSE.

"Iran's missile strikes on Israel in retaliation for Israel's actions in Lebanon have pushed Brent crude prices nearly 3 per cent higher to around USD 96/bbl, raising concerns around inflation and external sector pressures.

"Commodity-led inflation, weaker monsoon expectations and sustained Foreign Institutional Investor outflows are likely to keep the near-term backdrop challenging. Globally, profit booking in AI and semiconductor stocks, along with liquidity-driven selling ahead of SpaceX's mega IPO, further added to global risk-off sentiment," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

Among the Sensex constituents, Eternal, Mahindra & Mahindra, Trent, InterGlobe Aviation, Reliance Industries and Tata Consultancy Services were among the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Power Grid, Tech Mahindra, Bharat Electronics and Bharti Airtel were among the winners.

The BSE SmallCap Select index tanked 1.61 per cent, and the MidCap Select index dropped 1.51 per cent.

Sectorally, Realty dived 2.57 per cent, metal (2.43 per cent), Telecommunication (2.28 per cent), Commodities (2.09 per cent), Industrials (2.06 per cent), Capital Goods (1.98 per cent) and Auto (1.85 per cent).

BSE Hospitals Index emerged as the only winner.

"The renewed escalation, which came despite calls for restraint from the United States, heightened fears of a prolonged regional conflict and a further disruption to global energy supplies," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 4.10 per cent to USD 96.91 per barrel.

The rupee depreciated 56 paise to settle at 95.74 (provisional) against the American currency on Monday.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng ended significantly lower. The Kospi plunged 8.29 per cent, while the Nikkei 225 index dropped 3.85 per cent.

Markets in Europe were trading in the negative territory.

US markets ended sharply lower on Friday. The Nasdaq Composite tanked 4.18 per cent, while the S&P 500 dropped 2.64 per cent and the Dow Jones Industrial Average declined 1.35 per cent.

"Global sentiment has weakened amid a flare-up of tensions in the Middle East, pushing crude towards USD 100/bbl. Simultaneously, global technology stocks have witnessed a sell-off, as investors begin to question the sustainability of the AI-led rally.

"Selling pressure was also seen in semiconductor-heavy indices, showing early signs of valuation fatigue and positioning unwind, although it is premature to classify this as a trend reversal," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Meanwhile, Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 8,776.25 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

On Friday, the Sensex declined 116.67 points, or 0.16 per cent, to settle at 74,243.34. The Nifty dipped 49.85 points, or 0.21 per cent, to end at 23,366.70. (PTI)

Govt cuts subsidised LPG cylinders to Ujjwala beneficiaries to 4

NEW DELHI, June 8: The government has reduced the number of subsidised cooking gas cylinders available annually to beneficiaries of its flagship Ujjwala scheme to four, aligning support with average household consumption levels, a senior government official said on Monday.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY), launched in May 2016 to provide deposit-free LPG connections to adult women from poor households, beneficiaries were initially entitled to 12 subsidised 14.2-kg cylinders a year. The subsidised quota was reduced to nine cylinders last year and has now been cut further to four.

At a news briefing, Praveen Mal Khanooja, Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, said the revised entitlement broadly matches the average annual consumption of Ujjwala beneficiaries.

To encourage the use of cleaner cooking fuel and improve affordability, the government introduced a targeted subsidy of ₹ 200 per 14.2-kg LPG cylinder in May 2022, credited directly to beneficiaries' bank accounts after every refill is purchased for up to 12 cylinders annually. In October 2023, the subsidy was increased to ₹ 300 per 14.2-kg cylinder, with a proportionate benefit extended to 5-kg cylinders.

The latest reduction in the subsidised quota follows increases in LPG prices. The price of a 14.2-kg cylinder in Delhi has risen by a cumulative Rs 89 over two hikes in the past three months, the latest on June 7, taking the retail price to ₹ 942. After accounting for the ₹ 300 subsidy, PMUY beneficiaries pay ₹ 642 for a 14.2-kg cylinder.

He said the revised entitlement broadly reflects the average annual consumption among PMUY households. Beneficiaries effectively receive support of about ₹ 1,000 per cylinder when compared to the government's estimated supply cost of around ₹ 1,600 per cylinder.

Cooking gas LPG prices were raised on June 7 by ₹ 29 per cylinder.

"The increase comes to ₹ 1 per day," he said, adding that for a family of five, the increase comes to 20 paisa per day.

Indian households continue to pay among the lowest prices for cooking gas globally despite a sharp rise in international LPG prices triggered by disruptions in West Asia, he added.

Khanooja said the cost of supplying a domestic LPG cylinder has risen to more than Rs 1,600, following a surge in international prices that followed the outbreak of war in West Asia at the end of February.

India's LPG import costs are linked to the Saudi Contract Price (CP), the global benchmark for the fuel. The benchmark has risen about 46 per cent since February after disruptions linked to the Strait of Hormuz tightened supplies from the Gulf region.

The government, he said, has provided ₹ 52,000 crore in subsidy since 2022.

Despite the price hike, oil companies continue to lose about ₹ 700 per 14.2-kg cylinder, he noted.

Besides LPG, the oil companies are also losing on selling petrol and diesel at rates below cost. On petrol, the under-recovery was Rs 6 a litre, and that of diesel was about Rs 30 per litre.

"Cumulatively, the oil companies are losing ₹ 600-700 crore," he said, giving reasons for the price hikes.

Apart from LPG, the oil companies have also raised petrol and diesel prices by about ₹ 7.50 a litre each in four instalments last month. CNG rates too have been hiked by ₹ 6 per kg. (PTI)

Asia's longest tunnel project at Zojila set to achieve breakthrough today

SONAMARG, June 8: Asia's longest tunnel project, worth Rs 6,500 crore at Zojila, which will ensure all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Ladakh, is set to achieve a breakthrough on Tuesday with the completion of over 13 kms of excavation work.

The 13.15-km tunnel is being built by Hyderabad-based infrastructure major Megha Engineering and Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL) at an altitude of 11,578 feet above sea level, around 24 km from Sonamarg and 103 km from Srinagar. Once completed, the bi-directional tunnel will ensure all-weather connectivity between Srinagar and Ladakh, significantly improving access to Drass, Kargil and Leh, while enhancing civilian mobility, logistics and regional connectivity in this strategically important area.

In tunnelling, a breakthrough refers to the moment when teams involved in excavation work from both sides meet at a given point.

Union Minister for Road, Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari will attend the breakthrough ceremony on Tuesday, the minister's office said. "The Zojila Tunnel is one of India's most challenging infrastructure projects taking shape in the heights of the Himalayas. Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the guidance of Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari, Indian engineers have turned the challenges into an opportunity. The project is set to achieve a historic milestone with the significant breakthrough blasting of the main tunnel on June 9, 2026," the Ministry of Road, Transport and Highways said.

The tunnel is also expected to boost economic activity, tourism and regional development. Besides, it will address transportation challenges through the Zojila Pass, which remains closed for several months every year due to heavy snowfall, avalanches and extreme weather conditions.

MEIL won the project from the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation (NHIDCL) and began constructing the tunnel in October 2020.

In a statement issued here, the company said, "It is constructing the tunnel using the advanced New Austrian Tunnelling Method (NATM), which is regarded as one of India's most significant engineering achievements in mountain infrastructure." (PTI)

Punjab ministers Arora, Sood inaugurate 66 kV Grid Substation in Derabassi

CHANDIGARH, June 8: Punjab Industries and Commerce Minister Aman Arora and Power Minister Tarunpreet Singh Sond on Monday inaugurated the newly commissioned 66 kV Grid Substation at Focal Point, Mubarikpur, Derabassi. Constructed at a cost of approximately ₹ 9.60 crore, the 66 kV Grid Substation has been established to strengthen the power infrastructure of the rapidly growing industrial and residential areas of Mubarikpur, Derabassi and Lalru, an official statement said. Equipped with a capacity of 40 MVA (MegaVolt-Amperes), the grid will significantly improve the reliability of power supply, reduce load on the existing network and benefit industries in Punjab Small Industries & Export Corporation Ltd Focal Point, Mubarikpur, adjoining industrial units and nearby residential areas.

Addressing the gathering, Arora said no state can progress without industrial growth and added that the Bhagwant Mann government has made Punjab a promising destination for industry and investment through progressive policies and industry-friendly initiatives.

Expressing confidence that Punjab would surpass its investment target of ₹ 65,000 crore during the current fiscal year, he assured industrialists of resolving their pending issues on priority. Sond highlighted several landmark initiatives undertaken by the Punjab government for industrial development. He said the government is upgrading Punjab's power infrastructure on a war footing to ensure uninterrupted electricity supply and added that power outages would soon become a matter of history in the state.

MLA Derabassi Kuljit Singh Randhawa thanked both ministers for dedicating the project to the people and said the construction of the substation had commenced in 2023 and its successful commissioning marks an important milestone for the region. (PTI)

Over 58 cr Jan Dhan accounts bring crores of Indians into formal banking system: FM

NEW DELHI, June 8: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said that over 58 crore Jan Dhan accounts have brought crores of Indians into the formal banking system.

The Jan Dhan scheme has ensured that benefits under welfare schemes, low-cost insurance, and pensions reach without leakages, the Finance Minister's office said in a post on X.

"Garib Kalyan is Hon'ble PM Shri @narendramodi's guarantee of dignity, opportunity and empowerment for every Indian," she said.

India has stood out globally in its fight against poverty and deprivation, she added.

Launched on August 28, 2014, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY) is one of the world's largest financial inclusion initiatives.

Fifty-six per cent of the PMJDY account holders are women, while 67 per cent of accounts are opened in rural and semi-urban areas.

As much as ₹ 45 lakh crore was transferred directly to beneficiary accounts through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT).

Ninety-four per cent of India's adult population has a bank account now.

Accounts opened under the scheme offer a zero balance facility, free RuPay cards, accidental insurance, and an overdraft facility.

It has helped people step into the formal financial system, changing lives and transforming the nation's economy. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

CM keeps Home

Minister Narendra Modi's second government, was allocated Labour Welfare, Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare and Transformation and Development departments.

Neog, the finance minister in Sarma's previous cabinet, was allocated the portfolios for Women and Child Development, and Tourism.

Bora, the agriculture minister in the previous government, was given the charge of Panchayat and Rural Development, Implementation of Assam Accord, Border Protection and Development, and Excise departments.

Boro, also a minister in the previous government, retained the Transport and Welfare of Bodoland departments.

"I extend my best wishes to all my colleagues in the council of ministers. I am confident that working together with dedication and commitment, we will continue to serve the people of Assam and further accelerate the journey of progress and prosperity of our state," the CM posted on X.

The strength of the Assam cabinet is 17, including the CM, while the optimal strength of the state cabinet is 19 in the 126-member Assam assembly.

The cabinet comprises 13 BJP ministers, two from the AGP and one from the BPF.

The NDA won a record 102 seats in the 126-member assembly, including 82 from the BJP. NDA constituents Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) and the Bodoland People's Front (BPF) bagged 10 seats each. (PTI)

Fake BTC Executive

allotment process. The incident has created concern within official circles, and authorities are expected to take stringent action against those found responsible.

DDMA introduces CBS

the system will be used to issue rapid and location-specific warnings related to severe weather conditions and natural disasters, including heavy rainfall, thunderstorms, lightning strikes, flash floods, floods and cyclones.

The authority emphasised that the alerts form an integral part of the government's disaster mitigation and public safety framework. Citizens have been urged to treat all such notifications seriously, follow official instructions promptly and refrain from spreading rumours or misinformation.

The DDMA expressed confidence that the new system will significantly enhance early warning capabilities and help minimise risks to life and property during emergencies in Karbi Anglong

Two veteran elephants

lifelong care and veterinary support under the forest department.

The newly inducted elephants are Manalisa, Raja, Bubul, Bijoy and Birshing, and they went through a rigorous three-month training programme under experienced mahouts and handlers, during which they were familiarised with commands, patrolling protocols, field operations and interaction with forest staff.

The elephants are now ready to assist in anti-poaching patrols, wildlife monitoring, habitat management and other conservation duties, the release added. (PTI)

India asks its

engaged with the relevant authorities and will continue to issue updates as necessary," the Indian mission in Tel Aviv said. (PTI)

'Guns N' Roses'

at the Veterinary Ground at Khanapara. This will be 'Guns N' Roses' third visit to the country after their performance in Mumbai last year, and also in 2012 at the same venue along with Bengaluru.

Besides Guwahati, the band will also perform in Bengaluru on November 14 as part of the Asia leg of their ongoing world tour.

The Assam government had approved a new policy in May last year for promoting 'concert tourism' with Guwahati, Dibrugarh and Jorhat as hubs and also joined hands with Bigtree Entertainment, which operates online ticketing platform BookMyShow, to organise various national and international musical concerts in the state. (PTI) (PTI)

Guv attends programme

the nation's immortal heroes. The programme was attended by former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Eastern Command Lt Gen Rana Pratap Kalita, GOC, HQ 51 Sub Area Maj Gen Ajay Kumar Sarma, Director of Sainik Welfare Brig Palash Chowdhury; Principal of Don Bosco High School, Fr. Alex Mathew; and several other dignitaries. (PTI)

Three of four

target ahead of schedule. The country is also progressing on its emissions intensity and carbon sink goals, and has achieved about 37 per cent reduction in GDP emissions intensity and created around 2.4 billion tCO2e of additional carbon sink.

In a statement, Ravi S Prasad, distinguished fellow at the CEEW, said, "South Asia and the wider Global South are showing that development and climate action can move together, but this requires fairness in how ambition is judged and support is delivered."

"Wealthy economies must move faster, both to meet their own targets and to keep enough carbon space for countries still addressing basic development needs," he added. (PTI)

Cairn records highest-ever gas output from Hazarigaon field

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, June 8: Cairn, Vedanta Oil & Gas, has achieved its highest-ever gas production from the Hazarigaon field in West Jorhat, marking a significant milestone in the company's efforts to strengthen domestic energy production and support India's energy security.

According to a press communiqué issued by the company, Cairn recorded a peak gas production of 178,361 standard cubic metres per day (scm/day) during extended well testing (EWT) at the Hazarigaon asset this month.

The achievement highlights the production potential of the field and the growing role of the Northeast in the country's energy sector.

The company stated that during FY26, the field maintained an average gas production of around 102,000 scm/day during the testing phase, reflecting consistent operational performance.

The Hazarigaon field is estimated to have a recovery potential of approximately 2 million barrels of oil equivalent (boe) or 11.76 billion cubic feet (BCF) of natural gas.

Operating under the Discovered Small Fields (DSF) programme, Cairn has emerged as a key player in Assam's evolving energy landscape.

Fire reported on oil tanker with 24 Indian seafarers

NEW DELHI, June 8: A fire was reported aboard an oil tanker carrying 24 Indian seafarers off the coast of Oman on Monday, as Israel and Iran exchanged fresh attacks in their first major escalation since the ceasefire.

The Madagascar-flagged MT Marivex reported a fire around 1.30 pm IST, Opesh Kumar Sharma, a director in India's Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, said at a news briefing.

Sharma declined to comment on the cause of the fire but said the vessel was carrying 24 Indian crew members.

The tanker was empty and located well outside the Strait of Hormuz, a key shipping route that has been affected by regional tensions, he said.

"This is the preliminary information which we have received... as per available information, all Indian seafarers are safe," Sharma said.

"We are coordinating with the Ministry of External Affairs, our missions abroad, Indian Navy, Ministry of Defence, to ensure their safety." Ship-tracking data showed the vessel at anchor south of Muscat.

The tanker issued a distress call after reportedly coming under attack while sailing toward the Omani port of Duqm, according to preliminary reports.

The incident came as Israel and Iran renewed hostilities. Israel on Monday struck a petrochemical facility in southwestern Iran and carried out attacks on other military targets, despite reports that US President Donald Trump had urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to avoid further military action. (PTI)

India records USD 7.1 current account surplus in Q4 FY26 on services exports, higher remittances

MUMBAI, June 8: India recorded a current account surplus of USD 7.1 billion, or 0.7 per cent of GDP, in the January-March quarter of 2025-26, helped by services exports and higher remittances, according to Reserve Bank data released on Monday.

The surplus was USD 13.7 billion or 1.4 per cent of GDP in the fourth quarter of 2024-25.

However, for the entire fiscal 2025-26, the current account deficit stood at USD 25.2 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP compared to USD 22.9 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in 2024-25.

While the merchandise trade deficit at USD 83.4 billion in Q4 2025-26 was higher than USD 59.3 billion in the year-ago quarter, net services receipts increased to USD 60.4 billion from USD 53.3 billion.

Services exports increased on a year-on-year basis in major categories, such as computer services and other business services, said RBI's data on Developments in India's Balance of Payments during the Fourth Quarter (January-March) of 2025-26.

Personal transfer receipts under the secondary income account, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, rose to USD 43.5 billion in Q4 2025-26 from USD 33.9 billion a year ago.

In the financial account also, foreign direct investment (FDI) recorded a net inflow of USD 4.2 billion in Q4 2025-26, higher than USD 0.4 billion in the year-ago period.

On the other hand, foreign portfolio investment (FPI) invested a net of USD 12 billion in the final quarter of 2025-26 against the outflow of USD 5.9 billion a year earlier, the RBI said.

The data also showed that net outgo on the primary income account, mainly reflecting payments of investment income, decreased to USD 11.1 billion in the fourth quarter from USD 11.9 billion in the January-March period of 2024-25.

The RBI further said that non-resident deposits (NRI deposits) recorded a net inflow of USD 3.3 billion compared to USD 2.8 billion in Q4 2024-25.

"Foreign exchange reserves increased by USD 7.2 billion (on a BoP basis) in Q4 2025-26 as compared to an accretion of USD 8.8 billion in Q4 2024-25," it added.

On India's Balance of Payments in 2025-26, the data showed that net invisible receipts at USD 312 billion were higher in 2025-26 than USD 264.0 billion a year ago, primarily on account of net services receipts and net personal transfers.

Net invisible receipts comprise services, primary income and secondary income accounts.

In 2025-26, foreign exchange reserves depleted by USD 23.6 billion (on a BoP basis) compared to a depletion of USD 5 billion a year ago.

Net FDI inflows stood at USD 6.9 billion in 2025-26.

FPIs recorded net outflows of USD 16.4 billion in 2025-26 against net inflows of USD 3.6 billion in the year-ago period.

The depletion in foreign exchange reserves was higher at USD 23.6 billion against a reduction of USD 5 billion a year ago. (PTI)

OUTSOURCING OF MANPOWER FOR FUEL ISSUER, HELPER & COMPUTER OPERATOR

E-Tender Notice No. Sr.DEE/LMG/OP/01 of 2026-27 Dated: 03-06-2026. Works tenders through "E" Tendering system for and on behalf of the president of India are invited for the works as detailed below:- **Tender No. EL/LM/26-27/OP/01. Name of work:** Outsourcing of Manpower for Fuel issuer, Helper & computer operator at RCD/Lumding & RCD/Agartala for a period of 550 days. **Tender Value:** ₹1,37,81,450.90/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹2,18,900/-. **Date & time of Closing of tender:** At **11.00** hrs. **& opening at 11.30** hrs. on **25-06-2026.** The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available upto **11.00** hrs. on **25-06-2026** in the website **www.ireps.gov.in**

Sr. DEE/G & CHG/Lumding

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

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REPAIRS, RESTORATION/ MAINTENANCE OF SIGNALING ASSETS

Tender No. SNT-08-LMG-2026-27 Dated: 03-06-2026. Works tenders through "E" Tendering system for and on behalf of the president of India are invited for the works as detailed below:- **Name of work:** Reliability improvement by means of repairs, restoration/maintenance of signaling assets under the jurisdiction of SSE/Sig/Hill/Lumding/IC. **Tender Value:** ₹1,66,44,293.22/-. **Earnest Money:** ₹3,32,900/-. **Date & time of Closing of tender:** At **15.00** hrs. **& opening at 15.30** hrs. on **25-06-2026.** The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website **www.ireps.gov.in**

Assistant Signal & Telecom Engineer/Works, Lumding

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Sr. DEE/G & CHG/Lumding

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CPI protests govt's failure to curb price rise

Party slams Centre over inflation, unemployment and economic policies; seeks action against attack on journalists in Guwahati

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 8: The Communist Party of India (CPI), Sivasagar District Council on Monday staged a sit-in demonstration in front of the District Commissioner's office, protesting the rising prices of essential commodities, petroleum products, cooking gas and medicines.

Addressing the gathering, CPI Assam State Secretary Kanak Gogoi criticised the Narendra Modi-led government for what he described as its failure to control inflation and protect the interests of common people.

He alleged that despite coming to power with public support, the government had burdened citizens with continuous price hikes.

Gogoi further claimed that the Centre was unable to regulate large corporate houses and questioned the government's justification for rising fuel prices.

Referring to the profits reported by major public sector oil companies, he said Indian Oil, Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum had earned substantial profits during the current financial year and questioned the reasons behind the continued increase in fuel prices.

He also asked why the government was not increasing imports of cheaper crude oil from countries such as Russia and Iran.

The CPI leader also raised questions over expenditure reportedly incurred during the tenure of former Assam Legislative Assembly Speaker Biswajit Daimary and demanded greater transparency in public spending.

Alleging that the Modi government had failed to address key issues such as unemployment, healthcare, education and food security, Gogoi said the country's economic policies had adversely affected ordinary citizens.

He also expressed concern over the depreciation of the Indian rupee against the US dollar.

The party strongly condemned the recent attack on journalists in Guwahati and alleged anti-Assamese slogans raised by outsiders during the incident.

It demanded strict action against those involved.

Following the demonstration, CPI leaders submitted a memorandum containing 13 demands to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma through the District Commissioner. Several party leaders, workers and supporters participated in the protest programme.

KAAC reviews progress of Pumped Storage Projects in Karbi Anglong

Staff Reporter

DIPHU, June 8: In a major initiative aimed at strengthening clean energy generation and ensuring long-term energy security, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, chaired a high-level review meeting on the progress of proposed Pumped Storage Projects (PSPs) in Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts.

The meeting was held on Sunday evening at the Kajir Ronghangpi Guest House in Taralangso and focused on accelerating the implementation of hydroelectric power projects in the hill districts.

The review meeting was attended by Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister and the Power Department, KK Dwivedi; Member of Parliament Amarsing Tisso; local MLAs; Executive Members; Members of Autonomous Council (MACs); the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of KAAC; and senior administrative officials.

District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia, KAAC Principal Secretary Dilip Terang, the Superintendent of Police, senior officials from the Revenue and Forest Departments, Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), and representatives of project stakeholders were also present.

During the meeting, Ronghang highlighted the importance of Pumped Storage Projects in enhancing clean energy production and strengthening power grid stability.

He stressed the need for close coordination among all departments and stakeholders to address challenges and ensure timely execution of the projects.

The discussions focused on key issues such as inter-departmental coordination, land-related matters, environmental concerns and strategies to expedite implementation while maintaining sustainable development practices.

Participants also deliberated on measures to safeguard the interests of local communities and ensure that the projects are carried out in an environmentally responsible manner.

Ronghang said the successful implementation of the projects would significantly strengthen the region's power infrastructure and contribute to socio-economic development by generating employment opportunities and improving infrastructure across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong.

The meeting reaffirmed the commitment of the KAAC and the state government to promoting renewable energy initiatives and supporting sustainable development in the hill districts.

EM Akhtara Ahmed holds media interaction in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 8: Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) in charge of the Information and Public Relations Department, Begum Akhtara Ahmed on Monday held an interaction with journalists and representatives of various media organisations from across the five districts of the BTC at the office of the RO-cum-CHD, I&PR Department, Kokrajhar.

The meeting served as a platform for a constructive exchange of views on issues relating to public communication, dissemination of information, transparency in governance and the role of the media in highlighting developmental activities and welfare programmes undertaken by the government.

At the outset, the Information and Public Relations Department and the Bodoland Journalists' Association felicitated EM Akhtara Ahmed and thanked her for convening the meeting to discuss matters concerning the media fraternity.

During the interaction, journalists shared their experiences, concerns, suggestions and demands on various issues affecting media professionals and public communication in the BTC region.

Addressing the gathering, Ahmed appreciated the feedback and suggestions put forward by the journalists and acknowledged the vital role played by the media in creating an informed and aware society through responsible reporting.

She reiterated the commitment of the BTC administration and the Information and Public Relations Department to maintaining close coordination with media organisations in the larger public interest.

The Executive Member also assured the participants that the issues and proposals raised during the interaction would be taken up for discussion with BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary and the concerned departmental officials for appropriate consideration.

Among others present at the programme were Pradeep Brahma, OSD, I&PR, BTC; Anshuma Mahilary, Joint Director, DIPR; Gagan Chandra Narzary, RO-cum-CHD, I&PR, BTC; Sameswar Basumatary, Additional Director, I&PR, BTC; Manaswita Mahanta, in-charge DIPRO, Kokrajhar and other officials of the department.

New 108 Ambulance service launched at Dongkamukam

HT Correspondent

HAMREN, June 8: In a significant boost to emergency healthcare services in West Karbi Anglong, the Government of Assam has launched a new 108 Basic Life Support (BLS) Mrityunjoy Ambulance Service at Dongkamukam under the management of GVK EMRI.

The newly deployed ambulance is aimed at addressing the long-standing challenge of providing timely medical transportation to patients from remote and inaccessible areas during emergencies.

According to Surajit Kalita, district in-charge of the 108 Mrityunjoy Ambulance Service in West Karbi Anglong, the vehicle has been strategically stationed to cater to Dongkamukam and several surrounding hill villages.

The primary coverage area includes Linchika, Ronghidi and Phongjangre, while residents of neighbouring Hawaipur, Kheroni and Baithalangso will also benefit from the service.

The ambulance is equipped with essential life-support facilities and will operate round the clock to provide emergency medical assistance and patient transportation to healthcare institutions.

ABSU welcomes special Bodo medium TET

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 8: The All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) has expressed its heartfelt gratitude to the Education Department, Government of Assam, for announcing the Special Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) for Bodo and other medium Lower Primary (LP) and Upper Primary (UP) teachers, scheduled to be held on June 28.

In a statement issued on Monday, ABSU described the decision as a significant step towards addressing the long-standing shortage of qualified teachers and strengthening the educational ecosystem across various mediums of instruction.

Emphasising the importance of education in preserving language, culture and identity, the union stated that education forms the foundation of a community's future and plays a crucial role in ensuring social progress and cultural continuity.

ABSU noted that since 2007 it has consistently worked for the upliftment, expansion and revitalisation of Bodo medium education.

The union reiterated its belief that the future of the Bodo community is closely linked to the strength of its educational institutions and the availability of qualified and dedicated teachers.

The student body said schools are not merely centres of learning but institutions that nurture and transmit a community's values, identity and aspirations to future generations.

It stressed that the sustainability of Bodo medium education depends on competent teaching personnel alongside supportive policies and infrastructure.

Appealing to all eligible candidates, ABSU urged aspiring teachers to appear in the Special TET with sincerity and commitment, describing the examination as not only an employment opportunity but also a chance to contribute to society and the advancement of education.

The union expressed hope that the successful conduct of the Special TET would help address the shortage of qualified teachers in Bodo medium schools and contribute significantly to improving the quality of elementary education in the state.

Reaffirming its commitment to strengthening Bodo medium education, ABSU stated that while a language survives through its speakers, it thrives through its schools. The union added that the future of Bodo medium education depends on collective efforts, visionary policies and dedicated educators.

ABSU once again thanked the Education Department for responding positively to its long-standing demand and expressed confidence that the Special TET would usher in a new phase of opportunity, quality and sustainability for Bodo medium education in Assam.

Five cyber fraud accused arrested in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 8: Nagaon Police have arrested five persons allegedly involved in cyber fraud and recovered a large number of mobile phones, ATM cards and bank passbooks during a special operation against cyber crime.

According to police sources, the arrests were made following a complaint lodged by Ainul Haque Laskar of Madhya Shialmari near Nagaon town, who alleged that he had been cheated of ₹ 9,78,196 by the accused.

Based on the complaint, Nagaon Sadar Police Station registered a case (No. 436/2026) and launched an investigation.

The arrested persons have been identified as Ejazul Haque, Benacha Khatun, Faruk Ahmed, Ikramul Hussain and Saidur Rahman.

During the operation, police seized several mobile phones, ATM cards and passbooks believed to have been used in the fraudulent activities. Preliminary investigation revealed that the group was allegedly involved in multiple cyber crime cases across Nagaon and Morigaon districts, besides other areas of the state.

Police described the arrests as a major breakthrough in their ongoing crackdown on cyber fraud networks and said further investigation is underway to identify other possible links and victims connected to the racket. Officials added that efforts are being made to trace the flow of the defrauded money and uncover the full extent of the cyber crime network.

Record 538 students participate in Art Attack drawing competition

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, June 8: In a landmark event for the art and cultural community of West Karbi Anglong, the inaugural edition of 'Art Attack', an initiative of Lalit Kala Kendra, was successfully organised at Vivekananda Vidyalaya, Jirikinding recently.

The mega drawing competition witnessed the participation of a record 538 students from various schools across the region, making it one of the largest children's art events ever held in the district.

To encourage and recognise young artistic talent, all participants were awarded certificates and trophies, while selected students received Special Jury Awards for their outstanding performances.

The event received an overwhelming response from students, parents and educational institutions.

Following the success of the programme, the organising team comprising Dhanajit Pathak, Jitu Marak, Nilotpal Goswami, Monuj Mahanta, Jintu Deka, Bishwa Barman, Ashaka Sharma, Akash Mukherjee and Pawal Vishwakarma expressed gratitude to the authorities of Vivekananda Vidyalaya, participating schools and parents for their support and cooperation.

Encouraged by the enthusiastic response, the organisers announced plans to take the Art Attack initiative to other districts of Assam in the near future.

In Group A (Class III), Sarkangthir Tisso secured the first position, followed by Hirjir Ronghangpi in second place and Munthi Englang in third.

The Special Jury Awards were presented to Kelia Hansepi, Klari Beypi, Camphass Samayang, Rimiki Khyrwang, Rupmeli Tokbipi, Rupbika Terangpi, Serdihun Phangchopi, Dhoni Rangnang, Levi Tisso and Rimjir Millikpi.

In Group B (Classes IV-VII), Riki Laram won the first prize, while Deepjyoti Takbi and Klingsan Tokbi secured the second and third positions respectively.

The Special Jury Awards were awarded to Sarmindar Hanse, Saluatian Terang, Jirlim Phangchopi, Jinone Phangcho, Sarongri Kramsa, Imon Bey, Jirana Engtipi, Klarbong Tisso, Sodar Bey and Nongeh Tisso.

In Group C (Class IX), Himal Khada emerged as the winner, followed by Pretesha Phangchopi and Sakari Sten in second and third places respectively.

The Special Jury Awards went to Nikelash Phangcho, Helas Timung, Mehessor Rongpi, Sermen Timung, Joseph Rongphar, Aas Lamare, Bijoy Phangcho, Piribika Timungpi, Rukasen Phangcho and Kwirinus Nyrten.

The successful conduct of the event highlighted the growing interest in art among students and provided a valuable platform for young talents to showcase their creativity and artistic skills.

Mayor of Kashi calls on Governor

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 8: A delegation from the ancient city of Kashi, led by Varanasi Mayor Ashok Kumar Tiwari, paid a courtesy call on Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya at Lok Bhavan on Monday.

Welcoming the delegation, the Governor said the visit reflected the enduring cultural and spiritual ties between Kashi and Guwahati, two of India's most prominent centres of faith, heritage and civilisation.

During the interaction, Governor Acharya and the visiting delegation held discussions on strengthening cultural exchanges, promoting tourism and preserving the rich civilisational values that have shaped the country's identity over centuries.

The deliberations also focused on enhancing people-to-people connections and exploring collaborative initiatives to showcase the unique spiritual, cultural and historical significance of both cities.

The Governor observed that Kashi and Guwahati, with their deep-rooted traditions and sacred heritage, stand as powerful symbols of India's cultural continuity and spiritual unity.

Appreciating the delegation's efforts in addressing civic challenges, Acharya emphasised the importance of such visits in facilitating knowledge-sharing and the exchange of best practices in urban governance and civic administration.

He expressed confidence that greater interaction between institutions and stakeholders of the two cities would strengthen cultural understanding and contribute to national integration.

Members of the delegation shared insights into various developmental and civic initiatives being undertaken in Kashi and expressed interest in exploring avenues of cooperation with Assam in the areas of tourism, heritage conservation, civic administration and social development.

Bhawa Prasad Deori to receive Bharatiya Sahitya Bota 2026

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, June 8: Eminent Assamese writer, poet and social thinker Bhawa Prasad Deori of Diphu has been selected for the prestigious Bharatiya Sahitya Bota 2026 (Indian Literature Award 2026), conferred by the Indian Literature and Art Society, a government-recognised national literary and cultural organisation based in Bengaluru.

According to an official communication issued by the society on June 2, Deori has been chosen along with several distinguished literary personalities from different parts of the country in recognition of his outstanding contribution to literature and culture.

The announcement has been widely welcomed across Karbi Anglong and Assam's literary circles.

A prominent voice in Assamese literature for more than three decades, Deori has consistently written on issues relating to Assam's national life, social values, indigenous identity and contemporary social realities.

Over the years, he has authored more than 500 essays and articles published in leading Assamese newspapers and magazines, including Saptahik Janambhumi, Amar Asom, Niyomiya Barta and Sadin.

He has also written over a dozen books, earning a distinct place in Assamese literary discourse.

Among his notable works are Samajik Mulyabodh Aru Budhijibir Bhumika (2008), Asomor Jatiya Chinta (2018) and Bhinna Dristi Aru Bhinna Chinta (2022).

Apart from his literary contributions, Deori has played an active role in promoting tribal and indigenous literature and culture in Assam through his association with various literary, cultural and social organisations.

Born on January 13, 1962, at Kenya Pukhuri near Langhin Tiniali in Karbi Anglong district, he is the eldest son of late Khagen Deori and late Samibala Deori.

A retired officer of Assam Gramin Vikash Bank, he currently resides at Rongmili in Diphu.

Five premium varieties sent from Sonitpur following request from New Delhi

10,300 premium Tezpur litchis dispatched to Prime Minister's Office

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 8: The world-renowned Tezpur Litchi has once again earned national recognition, with 10,300 premium-quality fruits being dispatched from Sonitpur district to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in New Delhi on Monday.

The consignment was sent following a request from the Prime Minister's Office after Prime Minister Narendra Modi reportedly appreciated the unique taste and quality of Tezpur Litchi during an earlier occasion.

The fruits are expected to be distributed among Union Cabinet ministers and senior government officials.

The initiative was coordinated by Biswajit Saikia and Pankaj Das, joint secretaries of the Tezpur Litchi Festival Organising Committee, who facilitated the collection, packaging and dispatch of the consignment.

Several prominent litchi growers contributed to the initiative, including Kaushik Neog of Tezpur, Sarat Chandra Saikia of Besseria, and cultivators Abdul Jalil and Abdul Khalek.

The farmers began harvesting the fruits early in the morning to ensure fresh delivery.

The consignment comprised five premium varieties of Tezpur Litchi—Bombaiya, Shahi, Ilachi, Bilati and Piyaji—carefully selected and packed before being dispatched to New Delhi.

The development comes just a day after the conclusion of the two-day Tezpur Litchi Festival and is being seen as a major boost for local growers.

It further reinforces Tezpur's reputation as one of India's premier litchi-producing regions and highlights the growing national recognition of its GI-tagged fruit.

MAKRCS condemns alleged attack on Assamese man

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 8: The Madhya Asom Koch Rajbongshi Chhatra Santha (MAKRCS) has strongly condemned the alleged assault on an indigenous Assamese man by a group of Hindi-speaking individuals in Guwahati, terming the incident deeply unfortunate and unacceptable.

Addressing the media on Monday, the organisation's General Secretary, Ratul Rajbanshi and Nagaon district vice-president, Udipta Narayan Rajbongshi, expressed concern over the incident and called for immediate action against those involved. The student leaders alleged that outsiders should not be allowed to create unrest in Assam and asserted that any attempt to target indigenous people would be strongly opposed.

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THE HILLS TIMES

VOL.III, ISSUE 92, GUWAHATI, TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2026

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A rose does not answer its enemies with words, but with beauty.— Matshona Dhliwayo

Split in TMC

Trinamool Congress has split. The handiwork of the BJP is discernible in wrecking the outfit to which it was once allied and later turned a bitter political adversary. Inarguably the most significant indication in this regard was accepting Mamata Banerjee as the leader of the splinter group now led by Ritabrata Banerjee. But she has been given a hitherto unheard rank of "paramashwadata" or adviser. Banerjee's new post rekindles memories of the way by which Lal Krishna Advani was sidelined and made a "Margdarshak' when Narendra Modi first became the prime minister. An adviser is sans the authority of the supremo. And above all, no longer can the "paramashwadata" bring in her nephew Abhishek Banerjee whom his detractors blame for the disastrous poll results and consider to be the proverbial straw on the camel's back. The dissidents who have broken away and formed a group to form a party of their own have not yet received Mamata's blessings. Canny politician that she is, Banerjee knows that Ritabrata is working to render her powerless. This new group is getting backing from the state BJP and advised by the top leaders from Delhi. The Delhi BJP leaders including the PM and Amit Shah want to make use of this anti-Mamata group to split the Trinamool Congress MP's in Parliament. TMC has 27 members in Lok Sabha at the moment.

What appeared to be a combination of happenstance and coincidence at a first glance was actually a planned action of the saffron camp against a formidable political adversary. Be it the apparently chance meeting between chief minister, Subhendu Adhikari and Trinamool legislator Ritabrata Banerjee at the national Capital or the staying away of several TMC MLAs from the post-poll stock taking meeting of Mamata Banerjee and her stay-in demonstration , the incidents formed the links of a chains of a takeover plan tried and tested earlier. Of course, the entire episode would never have occurred had not the charges of fake signatures of MLAs endorsing Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay to the post of leader of the Opposition did not crop up. Ritabrata and Sandipan Saha, both Trinamool MLAs turned out to be whistleblowers and set the ball rolling for the split.

What had been a "half chance', in cricketing parlance was converted into a catch. And as the old cricketing adage goes ' catches win matches."Ritabrata Banerjee and majority of MLAs have certainly won this round engineering the split. But it would be a vastly different Trinamool Congress Legislature Party they would be heading than the one led by Mamata Banerjee between 2011 to 2026. Forsaking hammer and tongs at the BJP, the present Trinamool legislature party is not going to rub the Treasury bench occupants or chief minister Adhikari the wrong way. On the plea of "expediting development" the Ritabrata -led Opposition would cooperate with the ruling dispensation.

Noisy scenes of walkouts and protests would be conspicuous by their absence during coming Assembly sessions. The Opposition read TMC is likely to cast itself in a "constructive role" during sessions given it is an outfit being led by a legislator already expelled from it.

War and the future of World Economy

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Dipak Kurmi

The global economy stands today at one of the most uncertain crossroads of the twenty-first century. For decades, economists, policymakers, and international institutions promoted the idea that economic interdependence would reduce the likelihood of large-scale conflicts and create a more stable world. Nations became increasingly connected through trade, investment, technology, and energy networks. Factories in one continent depended on raw materials from another, while consumers thousands of miles away relied on products assembled across multiple countries. This intricate web of globalization created unprecedented economic growth, but it also produced a hidden vulnerability. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East have exposed that vulnerability with alarming clarity. What initially appears to be a regional political confrontation quickly transforms into a global economic crisis because the modern world is deeply interconnected. Markets no longer react only to actual disruptions; they react to expectations, fears, and uncertainties. A missile launched in one region can trigger stock market declines in another. A threat to a strategic shipping route can send energy prices soaring across continents. Investors, businesses, and governments are now confronting a reality that many preferred to ignore: economic prosperity remains fragile when geopolitical stability is absent. The Middle East occupies a uniquely significant position in this equation. It is not merely a geographical region; it is a critical artery of global energy supply. Any disruption involving oil-producing nations or vital maritime corridors immediately affects transportation, manufacturing, agriculture, and household consumption worldwide. Rising crude oil prices inevitably translate into higher production costs, increased transportation expenses, and growing inflationary pressures. Consumers experience these consequences in their daily lives through more expensive food, fuel, utilities, and essential goods. Businesses, meanwhile, face shrinking profit margins and mounting operational costs. Governments find themselves trapped between controlling inflation and supporting economic growth. The result is an environment characterized by uncertainty, caution, and declining confidence. Economic growth slows not because resources disappear, but because the confidence necessary for investment and expansion begins to erode. History repeatedly demonstrates that prolonged geopolitical conflicts rarely remain confined to battlefields. Their economic consequences travel across borders, influencing financial systems, trade relationships, and development prospects far beyond the regions directly involved in warfare.

Compounding these challenges is the increasingly fragmented nature of international politics. Economic policymaking has become intertwined with strategic competition, national security concerns, and shifting alliances. The return of protectionist policies, aggressive sanctions, and trade restrictions has further complicated an already unstable global landscape. The foreign and economic policies associated with President Donald Trump have contributed significantly to this transformation. His emphasis on national economic interests, strategic tariffs, and unilateral decision-making reflected a broader trend toward economic nationalism that is now visible across many parts of the world. While such policies may provide short-term advantages for specific domestic industries, they often generate uncertainty throughout international markets. Businesses thrive in environments where rules are predictable and long-term planning is possible. When trade agreements become uncertain and geopolitical tensions intensify, companies become reluctant to invest, expand operations, or commit resources to future projects. The consequences extend beyond boardrooms and financial institutions. Developing economies that depend heavily on international trade and foreign investment often experience disproportionate damage. Currency volatility increases. Borrowing costs rise. Debt burdens become more difficult to manage. As the United States dollar strengthens during periods of global uncertainty, countries with substantial foreign debt obligations face growing financial strain. Simultaneously, investors increasingly seek safe assets, withdrawing capital from riskier markets. These developments create a cycle of economic vulnerability that can persist long after immediate political tensions subside. International institutions designed to facilitate cooperation often struggle to maintain consensus among competing powers. The result is a world where economic fragmentation gradually replaces integration. Instead of expanding global cooperation, nations focus on securing their own interests, strengthening domestic production, and reducing dependence on potentially unreliable partners. Such strategies may appear rational from a national perspective, yet collectively they contribute to slower global growth and reduced economic efficiency. The very foundations of globalization are being questioned. Policymakers who once championed interconnected markets now speak of resilience, security, and strategic autonomy. This shift represents more than a temporary reaction to current conflicts. It signals a fundamental rethinking of how economies should operate in an era defined by geopolitical rivalry and recurring instability.

One of the most visible manifestations of this transformation can be seen in global logistics and transportation networks. Modern commerce depends upon the uninterrupted movement of goods through maritime routes, air corridors, ports, and supply chains. When conflict threatens these systems, the effects are immediate and far-reaching. The disruptions affecting shipping routes through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal illustrate how vulnerable global trade remains. Shipping companies forced to reroute vessels around the African continent face significantly longer transit times and substantially higher operating costs. Delays ripple through entire supply chains. Manufacturers wait longer for components. Retailers struggle to maintain inventories. Consumers encounter shortages and rising prices. These logistical challenges extend beyond commercial inconvenience; they represent a structural threat to economic stability. Air transportation faces similar difficulties. Closed airspace and altered flight paths increase fuel consumption and operational expenses, ultimately affecting passengers and cargo operators alike. Meanwhile, shortages of critical industrial materials further complicate the situation. Modern economies rely on a vast array of specialized resources whose production is often concentrated in specific regions. Disruptions in the supply of energy products, industrial gases, metals, and chemical inputs can affect entire sectors ranging from agriculture to advanced technology. The semiconductor industry offers a striking example. Even minor interruptions in the supply of key materials can slow production, affecting electronics, automobiles, telecommunications, and countless other industries. Agriculture is equally vulnerable. Fertilizer shortages and rising transportation costs threaten food production at a time when many countries are already struggling with inflation and climate-related challenges. The combined effect is a world economy increasingly characterized by scarcity, volatility, and uncertainty. Governments respond by prioritizing national interests and strategic reserves. Businesses seek alternative suppliers and regional production hubs. Consumers adjust spending habits as prices rise and economic confidence weakens. These adaptations may reduce immediate risks, but they also contribute to a broader trend toward economic regionalization. The seamless global marketplace envisioned during the height of globalization is gradually giving way to a more fragmented system defined by competing blocs, strategic partnerships, and selective interdependence.

Looking toward the future, the long-term implications of these developments are profound. Even if current conflicts eventually subside, the economic structures emerging from this period are unlikely to resemble those of the recent past. Countries have learned difficult lessons about excessive dependence on distant suppliers, concentrated production networks, and vulnerable energy sources. As a result, economic resilience has become a strategic priority. Governments are investing heavily in domestic manufacturing capabilities, alternative energy systems, critical infrastructure, and technological innovation. Renewable energy, nuclear power, and advanced storage technologies are receiving renewed attention as nations seek to reduce exposure to geopolitical shocks. Simultaneously, efforts to diversify supply chains are reshaping patterns of global investment and trade. Regional partnerships are becoming increasingly important. Businesses are prioritizing reliability and security alongside traditional considerations such as cost efficiency. Financial systems are also entering a period of transformation. The dominance of the United States dollar, while still significant, faces growing challenges as countries explore alternative payment mechanisms and local currency arrangements. Discussions surrounding de-dollarization, once confined to academic and policy circles, have gained greater practical relevance. Central banks are increasing gold reserves, developing digital payment systems, and pursuing new forms of financial cooperation. These trends suggest the emergence of a more multipolar economic order. Such a transition, however, is unlikely to be smooth. Competition among major powers may intensify. Financial volatility could increase. International institutions may struggle to adapt to changing realities. Yet within these challenges also exist opportunities. Technological innovation, energy diversification, and regional cooperation have the potential to create new engines of growth. Whether the future global economy becomes more resilient or more fragmented will depend largely upon the choices made by political leaders, businesses, and international organizations in the years ahead. The central lesson of the present crisis remains unmistakable. Economic prosperity cannot be separated from geopolitical stability. Wars may begin with political calculations and military objectives, but their consequences extend far beyond the battlefield. They shape investment decisions, influence employment opportunities, alter living standards, and redefine the prospects of entire generations. The future of the world economy will therefore depend not only on economic policies and financial strategies but also on the ability of nations to pursue cooperation, dialogue, and lasting peace in an increasingly interconnected world.

Assam's changing landscape: Key trends in governance and growth

By: Manab Hazarika

Over the past several years, Assam has witnessed notable changes across multiple sectors, ranging from law and order, security and governance to wildlife, tourism and social welfare. These developments have often been cited as indicators of a state attempting to move beyond the troublesome decades of insurgency, instability and administrative challenges.

While assessments of governance has inevitably attracted differing political interpretations, several measurable trends in recent times have suggested that Assam's socio-economic and security landscape has undergone significant transformation. Under the leadership of the present government led by Chief Minister Himata Biswa Sarma, emphasis has been placed on strengthening law and order, promoting investment and tourism, protecting indigenous interests and addressing many long-standing social concerns.

Security, Law and Order and Counter-Insurgency Operations

For decades, insurgency and militant activities remained among the most significant challenges confronting Assam. It not only affected the everyday life of its citizens but also discouraged investment and constrained economic growth. In recent years, however, sustained counter-insurgency efforts, peace accords and rehabilitation initiatives have reportedly brought back stability to the state.

The scale of improvement becomes evident when the recent security indicators are compared with Assam's insurgency-hit decades. While the state witnessed 686 insurgency-related incidents in 1998, 643 in 2000 and 583 in 2009, the corresponding figures stood at just 18 in 2022, 13 in 2023 and 5 in 2024. Similarly, civilian deaths have declined from hundreds annually in the late 1990s and early 2000s to only 2 in 2022 and none in 2023 and 2024, while no security personnel fatalities were reported from 2019 to 2024. For many years, the sate wide bandhs declared by various organizations had become a recurring feature of public life in Assam. Such disruptions often affected transportation, education and commercial activity in the state. But since senior IPS officer, Gyanendra Pratap Singh, assumed charge as the Director General of Police (DGP), Assam, in 2023, public unrest has witnessed a sharp decline. Today, dharnas are a rare sight in the state and it is a significant credit for the government in Assam which took a firm stand and eradicated what had kept the state paralysed for a long time.

During Singh's tenure, there were also multiple weapon seizures and surrenders by extremists with no new or active extremist groups emerging during this period. The improvement in the security situation has also been reflected in the phased withdrawal of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) from several districts of Assam. It is now in effect in only three districts in Assam, namely, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, and Charaideo.

The Success Story of Rhino Protection

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, recently shared through Twitter (now X) some pictures of the pride of Assam, the beautiful one horned rhino grazing amidst the greenery of the wild. "With ZERO poaching, every visit to Assam's national parks throws up such magnificent visuals of the one-horned rhino, basking in all its glory", he wrote in his post.

The poaching of the precious one horned rhino in the state has been a continuing menace for many decades in the state. In 2022, however, Assam accomplished something that conservationists had long thought unattainable—recording no rhino poaching for the first time in 45 years. The reduction in rhino poaching incidents in recent times has lead to a significant climb in the statistics of rhino population in Assam.

A key role in this shift was played by former Assam DGP and now Director General of CRPF, Gyanendra Pratap Singh, under whose leadership the Assam Police moved from traditional forest patrolling to a technology-driven intelligence and enforcement approach in anti-poaching efforts. Strengthened surveillance and coordinated efforts between the forest officials and the local communities have majorly contributed to these outcomes.

It is also to be noted here that G.P. Singh's work can be also extended to the strengthening of crime detection and overall law enforcement in Assam. For example, under his leadership, the Assam Police had successfully pushed back many Bangladeshi infiltrators along the India-Bangladesh border.

The Growth of Tourism in Assam

With improvements in security and connectivity, Assam has also successfully positioned itself as a major tourism destination in Northeast India. The state's cultural heritage and wildlife reserves have attracted growing numbers of domestic and international visitors in recent times. Based on the data published by the government, domestic tourist arrivals rose from 22,86,630 in 2004-05 to 43,339,485 in 2011-12 and reached 98,12,195 by 2022-23, while international tourist arrivals steadily increased from 7,285 to 16,400 and finally to 18,946 over the same periods. The Assam government has also launched several major ecotourism and heritage projects to boost tourism in the region that includes - the Kaziranga Orchid Park, the Saraighat Lake Park in Amingaon and the Sikhna Jwhwlao National Park just to name a few. Further, increased tourism activity has also generated economic opportunities for local communities and small businesses.

Fight against Corruption and Drugs

Further various efforts to strengthen transparency and accountability have also featured prominently in public discourse surrounding governance in Assam. Various actions targeting corruption and administrative irregularities have been undertaken with the stated objective of improving public service delivery and institutional credibility. From 2021 to 2024, a total of 256 accused individuals indulged in corruption have been arrested, out of which 236 were public servants.

Meanwhile, as drug trafficking and substance abuse emerged as major concern across the region of Northeast India, the Assam government has in response facilitated extensive crackdowns and enforcement drives to curb the spread of drugs. In line with the government's zero-tolerance policy on narcotics, the Assam Police under G.P. Singh conducted extensive anti-drug operations. The intensified crackdown led to 5,427 cases registered, 8,769 arrests, and drug seizures valued at ₹1,304.73 crore in the year 2023 and 2024.

The Focus on Women and Children

Alongside the concerns of security and law and order, much attention has also been directed towards social welfare and the protection of vulnerable groups like women and children. Initiatives aimed at reducing crimes against women and children, improving access to welfare schemes and strengthening legal enforcement have formed part of this broader agenda of the government.

In 2023, the state launched two major drives against child marriage, resulting in the registration of 5,877 cases and the arrest of more than 6,000 individuals. These interventions contributed to a significant decline in teenage pregnancies, which fell from 9,330 cases in 2022 to 3,401 in 2024. The campaign also coincided with improvements in key social indicators, including the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR), Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Through a collaborative effort involving the Assam Police, UNICEF, and the UTSAH Child Rights Organisation, The Assam Police Sishu Mitra Programme was launched on 2019 to ensure the sensitive, empathetic, and legally compliant handling of child-related cases. Further, effective investigation and prosecution have resulted in 1,174 convictions in crimes against women and children between 2021 and 2024.

Conclusion

The concept of protecting Jati, Mati and Bheti has remained a recurring theme in Assam's political discourse. Policies relating to indigenous rights, cultural preservation and demographic concerns have frequently been framed within this broader objective.

Supporters of the present government argue that several administrative and legislative measures, like eviction against illegal encroachments on places of cultural importance and forest areas across the state, have been carried out to safeguard Assamese identity. According to official sources, 238 sq km of area has been freed in 170 eviction drives in the state.

While some of the challenges continue to exist, as they do in any developing state, the broader narrative in Assam today has increasingly shifted from a concern of instability and conflict to one focusing on better governance and building development opportunities for the region.

Israel's defiance of Trump shatters the truce in the US-Iran war

By: Asad Mirza

Marking exactly 100 days since a catastrophic conflict reordered the Middle East, a fragile, US-brokered truce violently collapsed as Israeli jets struck deep inside Iranian territory. By directly defying President Donald Trump's explicit warnings to exercise restraint, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has pushed the region into uncharted waters, leaving a heavily anticipated peace deal dead in the water.

The conflict that began as a series of sharp, asymmetric naval skirmishes in the Persian Gulf has reached its grim centennial. Over the past 100 days, the United States and Iran have engaged in an exhausting war of attrition that has triggered what the International Energy Agency calls the worst energy crisis in modern history. The conflict has seen the US Navy forced into escorting commercial vessels through the heavily contested Strait of Hormuz, direct American missile strikes against Iranian military radar and drone installations, and subsequent Iranian retaliatory strikes on Western bases across the region - including a devastating drone and rocket attack on Kuwait International Airport.

Yet, just as a fragile ceasefire brokered on April 8 appeared to offer a diplomatic exit ramp, a dramatic sequence of events over the last 48 hours has pushed the region closer to a total, uncontained regional war. At the heart of this latest escalation is a widening, highly public rift between the White House and Jerusalem, exposing the stark limits of American leverage over its closest Middle Eastern ally.

The immediate catalyst for the collapse of the truce began in Lebanon, where an unexpected exchange of fire rapidly dismantled weeks of delicate diplomacy. Following a rocket barrage launched by Iran-backed Hezbollah into northern Israel, the Israeli Air Force launched a severe retaliatory airstrike targeting the southern suburbs of Beirut - a heavily fortified stronghold of the militant group.

Tehran viewed the strikes on Beirut as an egregious violation of the standing agreements regarding Lebanon's sovereign borders. In a calculated move designed to re-establish deterrence without triggering an outright regional invasion, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) retaliated on June 7 by firing a salvo of approximately ten ballistic missiles at the Ramat David Airbase in northern Israel, the precise installation from which the Israeli jets that struck Beirut had departed.

This specific sequence of military events unravelled with frightening speed over a 48-hour period. It began with the initial Hezbollah rocket attack into Northern Israel, which triggered the immediate Israeli retaliatory strike on Hezbollah strongholds in Beirut.

The Iranian missile response, while precise, was relatively measured in its payload, signaling Tehran's desire to stay within the bounds of controlled escalation. However, the political fallout was immediate.

Iran's top negotiator and Parliament Speaker, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, took to social media to proclaim that the ongoing US naval blockade of Iran, combined with Washington's perceived "green light" for Israeli operations in Lebanon, had effectively nullified previous diplomatic understandings.

As sirens wailed across Israel and the region braced for impact, President Donald Trump moved behind the scenes to save his administration's signature foreign policy initiative. Trump had frequently claimed that Washington and Tehran were "very close to a final peace deal" that would permanently dismantle Iran's enriched uranium program in exchange for economic concessions.

Fearing that an unrestricted regional cycle of violence would destroy months of secret negotiations, Trump spoke candidly to journalists, stating that both Israel and Iran had effectively "done their part" through an equal exchange of strikes and that further escalation was unnecessary. This diplomatic breakdown exposed the deeply diverging strategic agendas of the two allies. On one side, Washington's primary objectives are to secure a grand peace deal, prevent an all-out regional war, maintain global oil stability, lift the volatile naval blockade, and eventually leverage frozen assets for regional rebuilding.

On the other side, Jerusalem's uncompromising position is driven by the need to permanently dismantle the Iranian nuclear threat and completely eradicate Iran-backed proxy networks operating on Israel's borders. Because of these existential concerns, Israel increasingly rejects any US-brokered truces that leave these fundamental security threats intact.

The White House remained visibly shaken by the insubordination, refusing to comment on whether the strikes were carried out with any level of American coordination. The military confrontation on the ground is closely mirrored by a fierce diplomatic stalemate over the fate of frozen Iranian financial assets. Prior to the latest round of strikes, the Trump administration had floated a highly controversial legal strategy to utilise billions of dollars in frozen Iranian foreign reserves to compensate Gulf allies for infrastructure damage caused by IRGC drone strikes and naval aggression over the course of the 100-day war.

Tehran has fiercely rejected the proposal, warning that any attempt to expropriate its sovereign funds would be treated as an act of international piracy. Concurrently, President Trump has dug in his heels regarding the sequencing of sanctions relief, explicitly stating that his administration would not unfreeze a single dollar of Iranian assets before a comprehensive, verified nuclear and ballistic treaty is fully signed and finalised. This financial gridlock is heavily influenced by the dual nature of the Iranian resistance axis, which operates across both an economic and a military core. On the economic front, Iran maintains a total rejection of asset seizures for damages, demands the complete and immediate lifting of the naval blockade, and insists on upfront sanctions relief before making concessions.

On the military front, this resistance is backed by a commitment to symmetrical ballistic missile strikes, active threats against all regional US military bases, and the ongoing capability to disrupt vital international maritime transit corridors.

With Israel's latest counter-strike, the entire architecture of the proposed peace deal has been thrown into complete limbo. The diplomatic progress made during previous rounds of negotiations in Doha has effectively evaporated. As the war enters its second 100 days, the international community faces a deeply volatile landscape. The conflict has moved past the stage of proxy skirmishes and localised containment; it is now a direct, state-on-state war characterised by a complete breakdown of international legal norms and deterrence. (IPA Service)

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The engine of growth, but the insecure middle class

The challenge of the 'missing middle' and the question of economic security

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

India is today one of the world's fastest-growing major economies. Its growing economic power, large youth population, digital revolution, and expanding consumer market are constantly being discussed on the global stage. At the heart of this development journey, if any socio-economic class plays the most important role, it is India's middle class. This class drives consumption, saves, invests, pays taxes, invests in education and skills, and sustains economic activity. In any modern economy, the middle class is considered the engine of growth because its income and aspirations drive both production and the market. In India, too, the middle class is considered the foundation of future economic growth, social stability, and democratic strength. Yet, ironically, a large segment of the Indian middle class itself is not financially secure. While it has risen above poverty, it has not achieved lasting prosperity and security. This phenomenon is identified in economics as the "missing middle," or the "vanished or vulnerable middle class."

The "missing middle" refers to a situation in which the middle class, situated between the rich and the poor, is not strong enough or economically stable enough to withstand a crisis. Millions of families in India are considered middle class based on income, but lack adequate savings, social security, access to quality healthcare, or long-term financial stability. As a result, they can quickly fall into financial crisis in the face of illness, job loss, business losses, or economic recession. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this reality to a stark conclusion. During the pandemic, millions of families who considered themselves part of the middle class suddenly found themselves in financial difficulties due to the loss of income, rising medical expenses, and unstable employment. This made it clear that despite being large in numbers, India's middle class is vulnerable in terms of security.

The greatest strength of the Indian middle class is its consumption potential. This class accounts for a significant portion of the country's demand for housing, vehicles, electronics, education, health, insurance, tourism, and digital services. As middle-class incomes rise, they purchase more goods and services, leading to industry expansion, increased investment, and the creation of new jobs. This is why a strong middle class is considered a key factor in the economic success of developed countries. If India, too, wants to progress towards becoming a developed nation, it must strengthen and secure its middle class. However, this class is currently faced with numerous challenges.

The primary challenge relates to the quality and stability of employment. A large proportion of employment in India remains in the unorganized sector. Those employed here do not receive regular salaries, provident funds, pensions, health insurance, or other social security benefits. A significant number of educated youth are also working in jobs that are not commensurate with their qualifications. While employment opportunities are increasing, many are temporary, contract-based, or low-paying. The gig economy and platform-based employment have created new opportunities, but they too lack long-term security. This makes it difficult for the middle class to plan their future financially.

Another major challenge is the rising cost of health and education. In India, the limited availability of quality government health and education services forces the middle class to rely on private institutions. Expenditures on children's education, coaching, higher education, and healthcare consume a significant portion of a family's income. Years of savings can be wiped out in the event of a serious illness or accident. Numerous studies show that personal health expenditure in India remains high. This situation makes the middle class economically insecure and puts them under constant financial pressure.

The third challenge is inflation and the rising cost of living. In metropolitan areas and large cities, prices of housing, transportation, energy, food, and other essential services have steadily risen. Although incomes are rising, they often do not keep pace with inflation. As a result, real income and purchasing power are affected. The middle class has to take on more debt to maintain their standard of living. The increasing burden of home loans, vehicle loans, education loans, and consumer loans also increases financial insecurity.

A significant aspect of the "missing middle" problem relates to social security. India offers numerous welfare programs for the poor, such as free rations, health insurance, housing assistance, and other social benefits. Higher-income groups, on the other hand, have private resources and investments that can help them cope with risks. However, the middle class is often caught in the middle. They are not eligible for government assistance programs, while also finding it difficult to afford the full cost of private security and services. This is why they can quickly slide into economic instability in the event of an unexpected crisis.

The limited growth of small and medium enterprises in India also exacerbates the problem of the "missing middle." Small businesses often lack adequate access to finance, technology, and markets, preventing them from scaling up. Consequently, they fail to generate large numbers of high-quality jobs. If small and medium enterprises are strong, they can expand the middle class through job creation and income growth. However, many enterprises currently struggle with regulatory complexities, capital constraints, and competitive pressures.

Another challenge facing the middle class is their limited ability to build wealth. In developed countries, the middle class possesses housing, pension funds, investment portfolios, and other financial assets that provide long-term security. In India, a large number of middle-class families have limited savings and focus most of their resources on daily expenses and their children's futures. This prevents them from building sufficient wealth. Despite increased participation in financial markets, a significant number of people remain uninformed about long-term investing.

Multifaceted policy interventions are essential to transform India's middle class into a strong and resilient economic force. First, quality job creation must be placed at the center of the national development strategy. Large-scale employment opportunities must be created in manufacturing, green energy, the digital economy, healthcare, and modern service sectors. Jobs must improve not only in quantity but also in quality and security. Skill development and reskilling programs in the labor market must also be strengthened to prepare the workforce to meet changing technological needs.

Another important step is to increase public investment in health and education. Having access to quality public schools, universities, and hospitals will reduce the burden of personal expenditure on the middle class. This will increase their savings and investment capacity and strengthen economic security. Education and health are not just social services, but also the foundations of long-term economic growth.

Third, the scope of social security should be broadened. Pension, insurance, and income security schemes need to be expanded for those in the unorganized sector, the gig economy, and the self-employed. Social security needs to be expanded to the broader middle class, rather than limiting it to the poor. This will protect families during economic shocks and prevent them from falling back into poverty.

Fourth, affordable housing and financial inclusion should be promoted. Homeownership is a key pillar of economic stability for the middle class. The government and financial institutions should develop policies that provide affordable housing loans and other financial services to the middle-income group. Furthermore, schemes that encourage investment and savings should be made more attractive.

Fifth, special efforts should be made to strengthen small and medium-sized enterprises. By providing financial support, technological advancements, access to digital platforms, and expanding export opportunities, these enterprises can become a new base for growth. As these enterprises grow, they will create quality jobs and expand the middle class.

Sixth, the tax system needs to be made more balanced and equitable. Properly assessing the impact of direct and indirect taxes on the middle class, policies should be formulated that strengthen their purchasing power. Striking a balance between tax collection and social security is the need of the hour.

Ultimately, it can be said that India's middle class is not just an economic category, but the most important social pillar of the country's development journey. This class is a driver of consumption, investment, innovation, and social stability. However, due to the phenomenon of the "missing middle," a large segment of it remains economically insecure. If India is to ensure long-term and inclusive growth, it must strengthen its middle class not just in terms of numbers, but also in terms of security, opportunity, and prosperity. Only policies designed with employment, education, health, social security, financial inclusion, and entrepreneurship at the center can transform this class into a strong and resilient economic force. Only when India's middle class is truly secure, self-reliant, and prosperous will the country's development story become more sustainable, inclusive, and comprehensive.

A Rare confluence of Love, Nature, and Spirit in the World of Art

Twenty-Five years of creation: Anoop–Shubhra's artistic journey

By: Lalit Gargg

Art is not merely an arrangement of colours, lines, and forms; it is also an expression of life's experiences, relationships, and sensitivities. When two artists, each with an independent personality, vision, and style, become companions in life's journey, their creativity gives birth to a new dimension of artistic expression. The twenty-five-year marital journey and parallel artistic odyssey of Dr. Anoop Kumar Chand and Shubhra Chand stand as a remarkable testimony to this extraordinary confluence. This is not merely the celebration of a silver wedding anniversary; it is a celebration of twenty-five years of love, trust, dedication, and creativity. Some journeys are not measured by the passage of time but by the depth of emotions they embody. Some relationships transcend social bonds and become a union of two consciousnesses, where life and creativity become synonymous. The twenty-five-year marital and artistic journey of Anoop and Shubhra is one such rare voyage in which love has evolved beyond a feeling into the very seed of creation, and art has become more than expression—it has become a medium of self-realization.

"Confluence: Two Practices, One Journey"- The joint exhibition, organized by Tarun Art Gallery at the India International Centre, New Delhi, from 4–7 June 2026, offered art lovers a rare opportunity to experience the distinctive styles of these two accomplished artists. Titled "25 Years of Creation," the exhibition was not merely a display of paintings but a public celebration of the life philosophy of two creative souls. It demonstrated how art and life, when they become complementary to one another, can produce a form of creativity that is both profound and transformative. The event reaffirmed the truth that great art is born not only from talent but also from continuous dialogue, mutual respect, and shared dreams.

At a time when much of the world is entangled in a culture of consumption, display, and instant gratification, the artistic journey of Anoop and Shubhra reminds us of the Indian aesthetic tradition in which art is not merely a pursuit of beauty but a path toward the realization of Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram—Truth, Auspiciousness, and Beauty. In Indian thought, art is regarded as sadhana—a spiritual discipline. Sadhana means delving within, refining oneself, and ultimately touching the consciousness that permeates all existence. This essence is clearly reflected in the creative works of both artists.

Anoop's art engages in a profound dialogue with nature. In his paintings, the sea waves, wildlife, rural landscapes, folk culture, and human emotions are not merely visual subjects but manifestations of the living consciousness pulsating within nature itself. He does not perceive nature as an object but as a living entity. His work conveys the message that humanity and nature are not separate realities; they are interconnected threads of the same existence. His colours carry environmental concern, his lines embody compassion, and his forms express a deep reverence for life. Through nature, folklife, and social concerns, Anoop explores and interprets the inner world of human beings.

In contrast, Shubhra's art leads us from the visible world into the invisible realm. On her canvas, colours cease to be mere colours and become meditative states. Through circles, spirals, and various manifestations of energy, she expresses the cosmic rhythm that vibrates through every particle of creation. Spirituality in her work does not emerge through religious symbols or rituals; rather, it manifests as an expansion of consciousness. Viewing her paintings often feels like witnessing colours in meditation and forms engaged in a silent, profound dialogue. Her artistic universe is shaped by abstraction, spirituality, and cosmic energy. The circles, spirals, and rhythmic interplay of colours are not simply visual structures but journeys into deeper states of awareness, inviting the viewer to move from the outer world toward the inner self. One artist is a poet of nature; the other, a painter of the soul. One listens to the heartbeat of the earth, while the other translates the silence of the cosmos into colour. Yet, despite the differences in their artistic directions, their destination remains the same—the expansion of human sensitivity. Indeed, the art of Anoop and Shubhra represents two significant dimensions of Indian philosophy. Anoop reaches the soul through nature, while Shubhra reaches the cosmos through the soul. One travels from the outer world inward; the other journeys from within outward. Yet both seek the same goal: the expansion of consciousness and a deeper understanding of life.

Their twenty-five years of married life reflect the same artistic philosophy. It is not merely a story of living together but of growing together. In many relationships, one personality tends to overshadow the other; however, Anoop and Shubhra have carefully preserved each other's individuality. They chose collaboration over competition and dialogue over dominance. This is why both artists possess distinct artistic identities while maintaining a remarkable harmony in their personal lives. Their shared journey teaches us that the highest form of love is not possession but coexistence—where one does not attempt to change the other but rather creates space for hidden potential to flourish. When such love merges with art, it becomes creation; when it merges with life, it becomes culture.

Every successful work of art is rooted in a profound experience, just as every successful marriage rest upon trust and cooperation. The story of Anoop and Shubhra beautifully illustrates this truth. Their closeness began during years of research and study and was not merely an emotional attraction but a meeting of ideas, sensitivities, and artistic vision. Over time, their relationship matured into a partnership where each encouraged the growth of the artist within the other. Their marriage exemplifies the idea that matrimony is not merely a social institution but a shared spiritual journey of two souls. While many marriages struggle with conflicts of personality, they have created a harmonious synthesis of individuality. This is why their relationship remains as vibrant and creative today as it was twenty-five years ago.

"25 Years of Creation" is neither merely an exhibition nor simply a celebration of a silver wedding anniversary. It is a celebration of the belief that art has the power to make human beings more humane. It celebrates a consciousness that transforms love into creation and creation into spiritual practice. It celebrates a vision in which life and art are no longer separate but merge to give birth to a new experience of existence. Looking back on their twenty-five-year journey, one realizes that they have not merely created paintings; they have built bridges of sensitivity. They have not merely scattered colours across canvases; they have illuminated lamps of consciousness. Their art invites us not only to observe the external world but also to look within ourselves. This is the hallmark of great art and perhaps the most significant achievement of this artistic duo.

The creative partnership of Anoop and Shubhra reminds us that when love is enriched by spiritual discipline and discipline is enriched by art, life itself becomes a masterpiece. This celebration of twenty-five years is a celebration of that living masterpiece—where spirituality resides in colours, creativity flows through relationships, and infinite possibilities of life shine through every act of creation. This silver milestone is not the end of a journey but the beginning of a new chapter. Through their lives and their art, Anoop and Shubhra have demonstrated that when love is united with creativity, it enriches not only two individuals but society as a whole. Their journey serves as an inspiration for future generations, showing that marriage is not merely about living together but about growing together, creating together, and dreaming together. In this unique confluence of art and life, love is the colour, trust is the line, and creativity is the canvas upon which they have inscribed an enduring, beautiful, and inspiring story for the past twenty-five years.

When will the property be inspected?

By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

Whenever corruption, black money, and disproportionate assets are discussed in the country, a question repeatedly arises in the minds of ordinary citizens: when will a comprehensive and impartial investigation of assets be conducted? The luxurious mansions, expensive farmhouses, multi-story buildings, and real estate worth crores of rupees that are being built in urban sectors, posh colonies, and developed areas often leave people wondering. It's natural to wonder what sources of income these properties were built from and whether their prices are in line with the individuals' declared incomes. This question isn't directed at any particular individual, but rather at the transparency and accountability of the system.

Citizens' faith in democracy remains strong only when they believe that the law is equal for all. If a person becomes wealthy through their hard work, talent, business, employment, or investments, this is a testament to their success and should be respected. However, when an unusual discrepancy is observed between a person's income and wealth, calls for investigation become natural. Acquiring wealth is not a crime, but its legality and source must be clear. This is the foundation of good governance and accountability.

Today, most Indian cities have developed areas where mansions and buildings worth crores of rupees stand. Most of these assets must have been acquired through legitimate means. There are millions of businessmen, industrialists, doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists, and entrepreneurs in the country who have achieved economic success through years of hard work and struggle. Doubting their hard work and achievements would not only be unfair but also send a negative message to society. However, it is equally true that in some cases, there is a discrepancy between the size of assets and declared income, which raises questions. An impartial investigation in such cases is a necessity of the democratic system.

The common citizen's concern isn't just about wealth, but also about the inequality that exists within society. On one hand, middle-class families struggle to build a home, investing their entire life's savings, taking out bank loans and paying installments over years. On the other hand, some individuals amass immense wealth in a short period of time. When this disparity becomes so stark, questions arise. If these questions aren't answered through transparent investigation and accountability, distrust of the system grows.

In any democratic society, greater transparency is expected from those holding public office. Government officials, elected representatives, and those involved in the management of public resources are custodians of the public trust. Therefore, details of their income and assets should be more clear and public. If a public servant acquires assets commensurate with their legitimate income, they need not fear any investigation. Rather, such investigations can serve as a means of verifying their integrity. However, if irregularities are found, it is equally important to bring them to justice.

The problem isn't limited to declared assets. Benami property also poses a significant challenge to the country. Often, the true owner registers their property in the name of a relative, employee, or acquaintance. This makes it difficult to trace the true ownership and source of the funds. The government has enacted laws to prevent benami transactions, but their effective implementation remains a challenge. The goal of financial transparency will remain unfulfilled until the true beneficiary of the property is identified.

From a technological perspective, asset verification is now much easier than ever before. Banking systems, income tax returns, digital payments, property registration, GST records, and various government databases allow for a comprehensive analysis of an individual's financial activities. Technologies such as artificial intelligence and data analytics are capable of identifying where unusual discrepancies exist between declared income and actual assets. If these tools are effectively utilized, the verification process can become more transparent, quick, and fair.

It is also essential that investigations be based solely on facts and evidence, not political or personal interests. Public trust will be maintained only when the law is applied equally to all, not selectively. If an ordinary employee reports his or her income, influential individuals, high-ranking officials, and public representatives should also be held to the same standards. The strength of the law lies in its fairness, not its severity.

The impact of ill-gotten wealth isn't limited to the government treasury. It also exacerbates social inequality. When some people circumvent the rules and gain unfair advantage, they outperform those who follow the rules. As a result, honest citizens feel discouraged. Young people begin to believe that the path to success lies more through influence and connections than through hard work and talent. This situation is detrimental to any society because it erodes moral values and social trust.

Transparent asset audits are also essential to respect honest taxpayers. Those who pay taxes regularly, accurately report their income, and follow the law should feel that the system is treating them fairly. Failure to effectively address corruption and illegal wealth can lead to frustration even among honest citizens. Conversely, when the law is enforced fairly, their faith is strengthened, and they feel a respected part of the system.

The media and civil society can also play an important role in this direction. Investigative journalism, the use of the Right to Information Act, and public debate have increased transparency in many areas. However, this process requires accountability. Accusing someone without evidence or damaging their reputation based on rumors is inconsistent with democratic values. Therefore, the demand for transparency must be based on facts and documents.

The independence of investigative agencies is also crucial. Public confidence will be undermined if they operate under political or other pressure. Therefore, they must be provided with adequate resources, modern technology, and an independent working environment. A system should be developed in which investigations are based solely on facts, documents, and evidence. This will ensure effective action against the guilty and protect innocent people from unnecessary hardship.

Wealth investigations are not just a legal matter but also a question of social consciousness. Society must also decide what kind of success it wishes to honor. If grand mansions, expensive cars, and outward display remain the only criteria for success, corruption will continue to receive implicit social approval. True respect should be given to those who have achieved success based on honesty, hard work, and moral values.

The need today is not to investigate any particular individual or group, but to create a system in which the source of every significant asset is clear, and every citizen can be confident that the law applies equally to all. If someone has built a mansion with legitimate income, they should have no hesitation in proudly submitting their details. But if someone has acquired wealth through illegal means, it is also the responsibility of democracy to hold them accountable.

Ultimately, the question of "when will asset audits be conducted?" is not merely an administrative one, but a moral, social, and democratic one. It concerns public trust, the credibility of the law, and the transparency of governance. Only when a clear link is established between income and assets, when investigations are impartial, when benami properties are effectively controlled, and when the law is applied equally to all, will democracy be strengthened. The greatest strength of any nation is not its buildings, mansions, or economic figures, but its citizens' trust in the system. To maintain that trust, it is essential that asset audits not remain merely a topic of discussion but become a permanent part of transparent and accountable governance.

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7.8 magnitude quake in Philippines kills at least 32

Buildings fall and sets off tsunami

MANILA, June 8: An offshore magnitude 7.8 earthquake rocked the southern Philippines on Monday, killing at least 32 people, injuring more than 200 others mostly in damaged buildings and sending a 1-metre (3-foot) tsunami into nearby coasts.

A few buildings collapsed and key infrastructure sustained quake damage in the city of General Santos, and tsunami damage was reported in at least one coastal village. Smaller waves were measured in Indonesia and Palau and as far away as southern Japan.

The quake also triggered a landslide in Sarangani province in the southern Philippines that killed 13 villagers. Rene Punzalan, a disaster-mitigation official for the province, told the DZBB radio network that the landslide hit houses in the mountainous town of Glan. Four other villagers died in Sarangani for still-unclear unclear reasons, he said.

"It's a major earthquake," Teresito Bacolcol, the director of the Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology said, warning people to seek advise before returning to damaged buildings and houses which could collapse due to aftershocks.

"Our pickup truck suddenly jerked and I thought we had a flat tire," said Rod Sosmeña, regional director of the Office of Civil Defense, told The Associated Press from the hard-hit port city of General Santos, where he was travelling when the quake struck at 7:37 am.

"The shaking was very strong and people dashed out of houses into the streets," Sosmeña said.

Another regional disaster-response official, Ednar Dayanghirang, told The AP that he was able to "hardly stand and keep my balance when the ground shook as I was leaving my house" in the southern port city of Davao.

General Santos is a port city of more than 700,000 people that is a regional hub for the tuna export industry and other commerce.

The quake, the strongest to strike the country this year, was centered at sea off Mindanao, the second most populous island in the Philippine archipelago. According to Bacolcol, the quake occurred at a depth of 33 kilometres (20 miles), about 32 kilometres (20 miles) southwest of Maasim town in Sarangani province.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. ordered the cancellation of classes and directed disaster-response agencies to immediately get to work in quake-hit provinces, saying "the national government is moving and we will not leave Mindanao behind."

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Center said the threat of a tsunami largely passed about five hours after the quake. Philippine officials also lifted a tsunami warning by mid-afternoon. Six shanties on stilts were damaged in a coastal village in Zamboanga del Sur due to the quake and taller waves, officials said.

Assessing damage and casualties

At least 19 people were killed, mostly in collapsed buildings and landslides, while thousands of villagers were displaced, Office of Civil Defense spokesperson Junie Castillo said without providing specific details.

Among the dead were seven people in General Santos, where a few small buildings, including a popular hamburger joint, collapsed or were severely damaged, Sosmeña said.

The other deaths were caused by falling debris, a damaged mosque and a landslide in the southern provinces of Sarangani, South Cotabato and Davao Occidental and on Balut Island, Sosmeña and another reginal disaster-response official, Ednar Dayanghirang, said.

Sosmeña said authorities were checking reports of some students being trapped in a two-story school that collapsed in General Santos. He could not immediately provide details but the national police said at least 12 people were missing in General Santos.

The Bureau of Fire said without elaborating that it was involved in search and rescue efforts in a damaged building and a warehouse in General Santos.

Public schools had reopened nationwide Monday after the summer vacation from April to May. Dayanghirang said more than 100 students attending morning flag-raising ceremonies in his southern region sustained bruises and some fainted in panic.

The international airport in General Santos was temporarily shut, and 17 domestic flights were canceled, the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines said.

The DZRH radio network in Manila reported that a small commercial building where its provincial station was located partly collapsed and staffers dashed to the ground floor without injuries. It wasn't clear if other people were trapped in the rubble of the four-story office building. Debris also fell from other buildings, hitting tricycle taxis parked below.

Tsunami waves near 3 feet measured

Waves of 1 metre (3 feet) were generally monitored in the provinces of Sultan Kudarat and Sarangani. A 1.4-metre (4.6-foot) wave was monitored at one time in the coastal area of Kiamba town in Sarangani, Bacolcol said.

The quake was also felt in Malaysia's Sabah state on Borneo island. Sabah is just a boat ride away from southern Philippines. An 83-centimetre (2.7-feet) tsunami was measured by a gauge off Indonesia's Sulawesi island, and the PTWC said 30-centimetre (1-foot) waves were measured in Palau.

Waves up to 20 centimetres (7.8 inches) were detected on the remote Japanese island of Chichijima and the central Japanese town of Kushimoto, the Japan Meteorological Agency said.

The U.S. Geological Survey reported the depth of the original quake at 55 kilometres (34 miles). Variations in measurements by different agencies are common in the immediate aftermath of an earthquake. Aftershocks as strong as 6.5 magnitude were recorded.

The Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, is often hit by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions due to its location on the Pacific "Ring of Fire," an arc of seismic faults around the ocean. The archipelago is also lashed by about 20 typhoons and tropical storms each year. (AP)

Indian envoy Vinay Mohan Kwatra meets senior US counter-terror official

WASHINGTON, June 8: India's Ambassador to the US Vinay Mohan Kwatra discussed threats posed by terrorism across the world during a meeting with senior US counter-terrorism official Sebastian Gorka.

"Had an engaging conversation with @SebGorka Deputy Assistant to the President & Senior Director for Counterterrorism, National Security Council," Kwatra said in a post on X on Sunday.

"We shared perspectives on the threats of terrorism, and our counter-terrorism cooperation outlined in India-USA Joint Statement of February 2025," Kwatra said.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump, in February last year, reaffirmed that the global scourge of terrorism must be fought, and terrorist safe havens eliminated from every corner of the world.

"They committed to strengthen cooperation against terrorist threats from groups, including Al-Qaida, ISIS, Jaish-e-Mohammad, and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba in order to prevent heinous acts like the attacks in Mumbai on 26/11 and the Abbey Gate bombing in Afghanistan on August 26, 2021," said a joint statement issued after Modi's meeting with Trump here on February 13, 2025.

The US had also announced the extradition of 2008 Mumbai terror attack mastermind Tahawwur Rana.

Trump and Modi had also called on Pakistan to expeditiously bring to justice the perpetrators of 26/11, and 2016 Pathankot air base attack, and ensure that its territory is not used to carry out cross-border terrorism.

The leaders also pledged to work together to prevent proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems, and prevent terrorists and non-state actors from accessing them, the joint statement from February 2025 had said. (PTI)

Pakistan's human rights body raises alarm over violence in PoK

LAHORE, June 8: Pakistan's human rights body on Monday said that it is "deeply alarmed" by the ongoing violence in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), where 11 people, including four police officers, were killed and hundreds injured during violent clashes.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) also expressed serious concerns about the so-called regional government's decision to proscribe the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC) under anti-terrorism legislation.

The JAAC was outlawed on Friday by authorities, citing concerns over public order and security.

India maintains that Pakistan has been in illegal possession of Indian territory in the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh.

According to Commissioner Sardar Waheed Khan, at least seven civilians and four policemen were killed during Sunday's clash between police and JAAC protesters in PoK's Rawalakot.

Authorities have arrested over 100 people before and after the clashes.

Clashes broke out after tensions flared over the death of a trader, who was allegedly shot during a confrontation with law enforcers on Friday night. Officials accused the demonstrators of attacking the Combined Military Hospital in Rawalakot on Sunday.

In a statement on Monday, the HRCP strongly condemned the use of excessive force and the deaths of civilians and law enforcers alike, as well as communication blackouts.

"While dialogue is essential, it cannot be meaningful amid the continued political disenfranchisement of the region's people. The right to peaceful protest must be upheld, and grievances addressed transparently," it said.

The commission urged both the federal and the so-called regional government "to avoid further escalation, respect people's fundamental rights and commit to genuine, inclusive negotiations."

The HRCP has also announced sending a fact-finding mission as soon as possible to assess the situation.

It questioned the government's decision to ban JAAC under anti-terrorism legislation ahead of its planned protest on June 9.

It also condemned the imposition of internet and communication blackouts utilised to suppress information during periods of unrest.

Last year, at least nine people, including three police officers, were killed and hundreds injured during widespread protests against exorbitant electricity tariffs and flour prices in PoK.

The JAAC has long been demanding the abolition of 12 so-called refugee seats in the so-called Legislative Assembly in PoK.

The seats are reserved for so-called refugees from Kashmir who settled in Pakistan after 1947. JAAC alleges that these seats were often used by mainstream Pakistani political parties to influence the formation of governments in Muzaffarabad.

India has lodged a strong protest with Pakistan over the elections, maintaining that PoK has been "illegally and forcibly" occupied by Pakistan.

Reiterating its position, India has said the entire Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh are integral and inalienable parts of India by virtue of the "complete, legal and irrevocable accession" of Jammu and Kashmir to India in 1947. (PTI)

Xi, Kim express hopes for greater ties between China and North Korea

SEOUL, June 8: Chinese President Xi Jinping and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un underscored their commitment to deepen cooperation in a closely watched summit on Monday, as Xi made a rare visit to Pyongyang in a likely attempt to reassert Beijing's unique influence over its socialist neighbour.

It's Xi's first visit to North Korea in seven years. Earlier Monday, he was given a lavish welcome upon arrival at Pyongyang's international airport. He and his wife Peng Liyuan were greeted by Kim and his wife Ri Sol Ju, who broadly smiled and clapped.

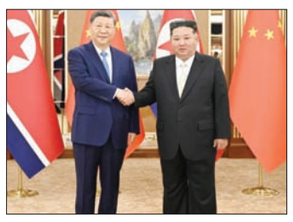
Xi later arrived at Pyongyang's main square, where a military honour guard and thousands of people, including children carrying balloons and hopping, staged a welcoming ceremony. Buildings surrounding the plaza were draped in the two countries' flags, giant portraits of Kim and Xi and red-and-yellow banners welcoming the Chinese leader and celebrating the nations' "friendship and unity."

Xi and Kim express their hopes for greater ties

In a summit later Monday, Xi expressed China's willingness to expand cooperation in a wide range of areas including trade, agriculture, construction and technology, China's state broadcaster CCTV said in an online report.

Xi said the two countries should strengthen strategic cooperation and firmly safeguard their respective sovereignty and security interests, according to the report.

Kim said Xi's visit "clearly demonstrates how unbreakable" the North Korean-China relationship is, CCTV said. It cited Kim as saying that consolidating a new era of friendship between the two countries is the "unchanging strategic choice" of North Korea.



Full details of the meeting weren't available. But foreign experts earlier predicted the meeting would have big ramifications on bilateral ties and beyond, as they both seek to fully restore their traditional alliance in the face of separate confrontations with the US.

Xi and Kim last met in Beijing in September, after viewing a military parade alongside Russian President Vladimir Putin and other foreign leaders.

Sway over North Korea could help Xi's dealings with US

Xi's trip comes after his back-to-back summits with US President Donald Trump and Putin in Beijing last month. Xi is expected to meet Trump again on a planned US visit in September.

Xi will try to demonstrate China's "sway over the Korean Peninsula" and "a leadership role in entire Northeast Asia in the age of strategic competition with the US," said Kwak Gil Sup, the head of One Korea Centre, a website specialising in North Korea affairs.

China has long been North Korea's economic lifeline and main diplomatic backer. Experts say China has avoided fully enforcing UN sanctions on North Korea and sent clandestine aid to help its impoverished neighbour stay afloat. This year marks 65 years since the two countries signed a mutual defence treaty.

But there have been questions about their ties in recent years, with North Korea prioritising cooperation with Russia by supplying troops and weapons to support its war against Ukraine. In return, North Korea has received economic and military assistance from Russia.

Restoring an exclusive influence over North Korea would give Xi a leverage in dealings with Trump, who has repeatedly expressed his desire to restart diplomacy with Kim, experts say.

"Implementing UN Security Council resolutions and enforcing sanctions do not appear to be priorities for China," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

Kim needs Xi's support for his push for nuclear state

Xi would likely offer Kim economic aid packages such as shipments of rice and fertilisers, a resumption of Chinese group tourism to North Korea and joint economic projects, analysts said.

"North Korea can't solely rely on Russia. It needs to align with China," Kwak said.

Xi could also refrain from pressing Kim on the issue of denuclearisation of North Korea, and vaguely speak about peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. That would be essential for Kim, who is desperate to win international recognition as a nuclear weapons state as a way to call for lifting of UN sanctions on North Korea.

"Chinese officials have taken the position of not speaking publicly about denuclearisation on the Korean Peninsula while still maintaining it as a long-term goal. Kim appears to want Xi to accept North Korea as a nuclear neighbour," Easley said.

After last month's summit between Trump and Xi, the White House said the two leaders confirmed their shared goal to denuclearise North Korea. But China only said the leaders discussed the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula. On Sunday, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, dismissed as "false information" the US readout of the Xi-Trump meeting.

Last week, Kim unveiled a new plant to produce nuclear ingredients and vowed to bolster the country's nuclear forces "at an exponential rate." He also observed sea trials of a new naval destroyer and called for speeding up efforts to build a nuclear-armed navy.

South Korean President Lee Jae Myung told reporters Monday that North Korea is producing enough nuclear ingredients annually for about 10-20 bombs and is close to perfecting intercontinental ballistic missile technology. Lee said the world must first focus on convincing North Korea to freeze its nuclear materials production and ICBM program as a short-term goal.

On Sunday, Kim's sister and senior official, Kim Yo Jong, echoed her brother, calling a US push for the denuclearization of North Korea an "escapist and anachronistic dream."

Kim Jong Un has focused on enlarging and modernizing his nuclear arsenal since his high-stakes diplomacy with Trump collapsed in 2019. The North Korean leader said in September that he still had "good personal memories" of Trump but urged the US to withdraw its demand for North Korea to denuclearize as a precondition for resuming diplomacy. (AP)

Trump asks Netanyahu not to strike Iran; says 'very close' to peace deal

WASHINGTON, June 8: US President Donald Trump has asked Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu not to retaliate to Iran's latest barrage of missiles, saying it would jeopardise the ongoing negotiations for a peace deal to end the three-month long conflict.

US media outlet Axios reported that after Iran launched missiles at Israel on Sunday, Trump spoke to Netanyahu in a bid to prevent fresh tensions between the two nations from derailing the peace deal.

Trump also asked Iran to return to the negotiating table.

"We're very close. I would say an agreement would be signed on Monday, Tuesday or Wednesday of this coming week. And now this takes place," Trump told Fox News.

"You've shot your missiles, that's enough. Get back to the table and make a deal," Trump said, referring to Iran's strikes at Israel.

"The Iranian strikes didn't hurt anybody. Hopefully Israel is not going to retaliate," Trump told Axios.

"If Bibi strikes them back, it's just going to keep going like the last 47 years, or the last 3,000 years," he said.

Trump reiterated that Washington is close to reaching an agreement and warned that escalating tensions could derail the effort.

"Each of them had their fun. Israel had its strike, and Iran had its strike. We don't need another one," Trump said.

Speaking to Financial Times, Trump said Netanyahu would likely have to accept whatever agreement the US ultimately reaches with Iran.

"He won't have any choice," Trump said of Netanyahu, asserting that he "calls the shots".

The interview was published as Iran launched missiles at Israel in its first attack since a ceasefire took effect in April.

Trump also criticised Israel's strikes on Beirut on Sunday, saying he was "not happy about it".

Trump told Netanyahu during the call to hold off because "we are close to doing something good in terms of a deal", Axios reported, quoting a US official.

Netanyahu pushed back but ultimately "pseudo agreed" to stand down, the official said, adding that Sunday's call was calmer than last week's tense exchange between the leaders, and Trump did not raise his voice at Netanyahu on this occasion. (PTI)

UN protests women's arrests in Afghanistan for alleged clothing violations

KABUL, June 8: The United Nations' mission in Afghanistan has expressed concern over what it says are arrests and detentions of women in western Afghanistan for allegedly not adhering to regulations governing how they should dress.

The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan said on X late Sunday that the arrests and detentions in the city of Herat raise "serious human rights concerns."

It did not provide details. Afghanistan's Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice dismissed the reports of arrests as "rumours."

"We remind the de facto authorities that all people have the right to freedom of movement and that all persons, both women and men, are entitled to equality before the law," the UN mission said on X. It had expressed concern over similar arrests in the Afghan capital, Kabul, last year.

A human rights monitor, who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to release details to the media, said Monday that monitors had verified at least 16 arrests and detentions, including of a pregnant woman, in Herat since Friday over alleged non-compliance with dress requirements.

On Friday, imams in mosques in Herat issued announcements during prayers on behalf of the vice and virtue ministry that women were not allowed to leave their homes without wearing the hijab. The human rights monitor said the arrests and detentions began shortly after that.

"The issues being spread about women being arrested in Herat are all rumours," the vice and virtue ministry's information office said in a statement.

It added that "hijab is a divine command, a law that we are obliged to implement." The headscarf and loose clothing cover the entire body.

Afghan authorities have imposed draconian restrictions on women and girls since the Taliban seized power in the country in 2021 in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of US-led forces.

They have included bans on education beyond primary school and on working in all but very few professions, as well as strict regulations on what women are allowed to wear in public. Government regulations stipulate that women can only go out in public when wearing full hijab as well as a face covering that leaves only the eyes visible. Many women in Afghanistan use face masks like those worn during the COVID pandemic to comply with regulations. (AP)

Hong Kong proposes to let city leader decide what counts as national security offense

HONG KONG, June 8: The Hong Kong government on Monday proposed legislation that would allow the city's leader to designate certain criminal acts as national security offenses, stepping up its efforts to stamp out challenges to its rules in the city where critics say freedoms have been eroding.

After massive democracy protests rocked the Asian financial hub in 2019, Beijing imposed a national security law that has been used to arrest many leading activists. The city's government in 2024 enacted another security law, targeting other crimes such as espionage and disclosing state secrets.

Critics said the two security laws have stifled the city's Western-style civil liberties that Beijing had promised to maintain when the former British colony returned to Chinese rule in 1997. But the authorities insist the laws are crucial for the city's stability.

In a document submitted to the legislature Monday, the Security Bureau and the Department of Justice proposed the subsidiary legislation to state clearly the classification mechanism for the term about "other offenses endangering national security under the law" of Hong Kong.

They said if the chief executive issues a certificate to ascertain that the act in a criminal offense case involves national security, then the case would fall into that category.

If a suspect is charged with a national security offense, but also faces an alternative charge for the same act, then that alternative charge will also be considered as an offense endangering national security, they said.

"Amid the present complicated geopolitical landscape, national security risks still exist. Stating clearly the above mechanism by way of subsidiary legislation can improve the legal system and enforcement mechanisms for Hong Kong to safeguard national security," they said in the document.

The legislation was meant to refine details of procedural matters and bring greater certainty to the implementation of certain provisions, the authorities said.

"The subsidiary legislation does not involve the creation of any new criminal offense, penalty or enforcement power," they said.

The government said the city should complete the legislative process "as soon as possible" and that it will finalize the proposed legislation after listening to the views of lawmakers. The legislation would take effect on the day when it is published in the government's gazette. (AP)

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MLA and Advisor for Industries and Commerce Hekani Jakhalu described the four centres as pilot projects developed after extensive study

Nagaland CM launches food processing, incubation centres to boost rural economy and employment

DIMAPUR, June 8: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Monday inaugurated four incubation and food processing centres across the state under the Special Assistance to States for Capital Investment (SASCI) 2024–25, aimed at strengthening market linkages for farmers and entrepreneurs while creating employment opportunities for the youth.

After inaugurating the Food Processing Centre at the State Industrial Area, Toluvi, Dimapur, Rio virtually launched three other projects — the Incubation Centre for Entrepreneurs and Infrastructure Development at the Industrial Growth Centre, Ganeshnagar under Chümoukedima, the Incubation Centre for Food Processing at Tuensang, and the Modern Aggregation Centre at Longnak in Mokokchung.

Addressing the gathering, Rio said small-scale industries, particularly food processing, offer the most viable path for Nagaland's economic growth.

He said the incubation units are aligned with the Government of India's vision of building a "Viksit Bharat" and can serve as catalysts for rural entrepreneurship and value addition.

Rio noted that there is strong demand for such initiatives from both farmers and the state government.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's target of transforming India into a developed nation by 2047, he stressed the need for collective efforts to ensure Nagaland is not left behind in the country's growth trajectory.

He said the benefits of the centres would directly reach farmers once the units become fully operational, and added that the government plans to replicate the model across all districts.

Such expansion, he said, would enable each region to identify and process crops best suited to its local conditions, thereby enhancing productivity and income generation. Expressing confidence in the state's youth, Rio said Nagaland possesses abundant talent and rich natural resources. He urged

young entrepreneurs to take advantage of the opportunities created through the new facilities and contribute to sustainable economic growth by combining traditional knowledge with innovation.

MLA and Advisor for Industries and Commerce Hekani Jakhalu described the four centres as pilot projects developed after extensive study and planning based on local potential. She said the department aims to replicate the model across the state and ensure that every district has an independent processing centre by 2028.

Emphasising the importance of value addition, Jakhalu said food processing is not merely about installing machinery but about creating an integrated value chain linking farms, factories and markets. She described the sector as a critical bridge between agriculture and manufacturing.

Advisor for SCERT and Food Processing Achumbemo Kikon said the department would be guided by six key pillars — Production, Processing, Preservation, Packaging, Pricing and Patenting — to advance the sector in mission mode. He stressed that processing infrastructure would be effective only if supported by adequate production and called for cooperation from farmers, villages and stakeholders to strengthen the state's economy.

Among those present were Minister for Rural Development Metsübo Jamir, Advisor for Urban Development and Municipal Affairs Zhaleo Rio, Advisor for Agriculture Mhathung Yanthan, Advisor for Science and Technology Kuzholuzo Nienu, Advisor for Sericulture and Minority Affairs Imkong L. Imchen, and MLA Dr Sukhato A. Sema. (PTI)

Arunachal inks pact for AI centre of excellence at NIT

ITANAGAR, June 8: Arunachal Pradesh on Monday took a step towards advancing its digital transformation agenda with the signing of a pact for setting up an Artificial Intelligence Centre of Excellence (AI CoE) at NIT here.

The MoU was signed between the State Council of IT and e-Governance (SCITeG), under the state Information Technology and Communication department, and the National Institute of Technology (NIT) Arunachal Pradesh, an official statement said.

The agreement was signed by NIT Arunachal Pradesh director Prof MV Aware and SCITeG Director-cum-Member Secretary Neelam Yapin Tana in the presence of state IT and Communication secretary Dr Sonal Swaroop.

The initiative, approved by the state government, is part of Chief Minister Pema Khandu's vision of building a Digital Arunachal through the strategic adoption of Artificial Intelligence. The proposed AI CoE will be established with financial and technical support from IndiaAI under the Union ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

SCITeG, the state's nodal agency for information technology and e-governance, has been entrusted with leading the initiative.

Under the chairmanship of Nyamar Karbak, the council will spearhead efforts to promote innovation and accelerate digital transformation across government, industry, academia and society.

The AI CoE is envisaged as a research and innovation hub focused on cutting-edge technologies. It will serve as a think tank, incubator and skill development centre aimed at fostering AI-driven solutions, supporting startups, strengthening governance mechanisms and enhancing capacity building in the state.

NIT Arunachal Pradesh, a premier technical institution of national importance, will play a key role in supporting the initiative through its academic and research ecosystem.

The institute's faculty expertise, research capabilities and talent pool are expected to contribute significantly to advanced AI research, innovation and human resource development in the sector, the statement added. (PTI)

NU trains entrepreneurs to strengthen local poultry production

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 8: As Nagaland continues to depend heavily on imported poultry products despite growing local demand, Nagaland University has taken a step toward strengthening the state's production capacity by training aspiring poultry farmers and entrepreneurs in modern poultry production practices through a five-day hands-on training on poultry production technology.

During the programme, participants were trained on poultry housing, brooding and chick management, feeding practices, disease prevention, vaccination, record-keeping, and enterprise management.

The farmers' cell of the School of Agricultural Sciences (SAS), Nagaland University, Medziphema campus, organised the programme from June 1 to 5, a varsity release said on Monday.

Speaking at the valedictory programme, Dr Mary N Odyuo, associate professor and in-charge of the farmers' cell said, "The five-day hands-on training on poultry production technology was organised to equip farmers, youth, and aspiring entrepreneurs with scientific knowledge and practical skills in poultry production, enabling them to pursue poultry farming as a sustainable livelihood and enterprise in Nagaland."

She noted that despite the growing demand for poultry products in Nagaland, farmers and entrepreneurs often face challenges such as limited access to technical knowledge, disease management practices, inadequate housing and feeding systems, and a lack of exposure to modern poultry production technologies. T

The training sought to bridge these gaps, she added.

Prof. Catherine Rutsa, head, department of livestock production and management, stressed the importance of conducting skill development and capacity-building programmes for youth, particularly in the livestock and poultry sectors.

She said this programme has equipped participants with practical knowledge and skills, noting their enthusiasm and proactive engagement throughout the sessions.

Sikkim: Union minister Ajay Tamta inspects works on Rangpo-Ranipool stretch of NH-10

GANGTOK, June 8: Union Minister of State for Road Transport and Highways, Ajay Tamta, on Monday inspected works along the 26.4-km Rangpo-Ranipool stretch of National Highway 10 in Sikkim, an official statement said. He also reviewed the progress of the ongoing slope stabilisation and road safety works.

The MoS is on a three-day visit to the state to review road infrastructure development projects.

During the inspection, the minister assessed various infrastructure measures being implemented to improve the highway's resilience, including micropiling, RCC retaining walls, river training works, rockfall barriers and hillside stabilisation systems, the statement said. He also reviewed the proposed 240-metre cut-and-cover tunnel planned under the NH-10 upgradation project, aimed at enhancing road safety and reducing disruptions caused by landslides and adverse weather conditions, it said. (PTI)

MNF nominee Zothansangi Hmar files nomination for Rajya Sabha poll

AIZAWL, June 8: Mizo National Front (MNF) candidate Zothansangi Hmar on Monday filed nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha election, officials said.

Hmar, an advocate associated with the legal cell of Mizoram's main opposition party, submitted her nomination on the final day for filing papers before assembly secretary Zothansanga Ralte, who is the Returning Officer for the election to the lone Rajya Sabha seat.

Earlier on June 5, the ruling Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) candidate K Laltluangkima filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha polls.

Now two candidates are in the fray for the election to the lone Rajya Sabha seat in the state, officials said.

The ZPM now has 27 legislators in the present assembly, while the MNF holds 10 seats, they said.

BJP, which has two members in the 40-member Mizoram assembly, and Congress, having one legislator, did not field any candidates.

As per the Election Commission's schedule, scrutiny of nomination papers will take place on Tuesday, while candidates may withdraw their candidatures until June 11.

Voting for the Rajya Sabha election will be conducted from 9 am to 4 pm on June 18, with counting of votes set to commence immediately after polling ends at 5 pm. (PTI)

CM Lalduhoma hails AIR as vital force for unity among Mizo ethnic groups

AIZAWL, June 8: Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma on Monday hailed All India Radio (AIR) as a vital medium for fostering unity among the Mizo or Zo ethnic groups, serving as a powerful voice for communities across diverse regions.

Speaking at a function marking the 90th anniversary of AIR, Lalduhoma said the public broadcaster has been one of the most significant and trusted voices in the country since its inception.

He said AIR's broadcasts reach not only different parts of India but also neighbouring countries, helping strengthen bonds among Zo communities spread across regions.

The CM also commended the broadcaster's cultural impact, describing AIR as an excellent model for the proper use of the Mizo language.

In doing so, he said, the network contributes significantly to preserving the language while safeguarding vital events and records from Mizo history.

As the largest radio network in the country and one of the largest globally, AIR broadcasts in 23 languages and more than 146 dialects, according to officials.

Boasting the highest number of multilingual broadcasts in the world, its signal reaches over 100 countries, they said.

The CM also highlighted AIR's important role in India's Independence struggle and its enduring promotion of national unity.

He said the AIR Aizawl station, established on July 31, 1966, served as a crucial lifeline of news and information during periods of unrest or secessionist movement in the state.

During curfews when communities could not gather, the radio brought people together in spirit through the broadcast of hymns and religious songs, he said.

"AIR remains an important guardian of cultural heritage. Achieving AIR Artist status remains a highly respected distinction among renowned Mizo singers," Lalduhoma said.

Director of AIR and cluster head of Mizoram, DR Lalropuia, who spoke on the occasion, highlighting AIR's enduring relevance and public respect despite rapid technological advancements. (PTI)

Surrendered militants threaten rail-road blockade for implementation of peace accord

AGARTALA, June 8: Surrendered militants who had laid down arms two years ago, on Monday, threatened to resort to a rail and road blockade in three locations of Tripura on June 12, demanding immediate implementation of the peace accord which they signed with the state and central governments.

Around 1,200 cadres of the National Liberation Front of Tripura (NLFT) and All Tripura Tiger Force (ATTF) had laid down arms before Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha in Sepahijala district's Jampaijala in September 2024, following an agreement with the Centre and the state government.

The Centre had announced a Rs 250 crore package for the overall development of the surrendered militants as well as the indigenous people.

"It's been two years since we entered into a peace agreement with the Centre and the state government for the welfare of our cadres and tribal people. Accordingly, a package of Rs 250 crore was declared for the rehabilitation of our people. But nothing has happened so far," Prasenjit Debbarma, leader of the surrendered militants, said at a press conference here.

Debbarma alleged they had written a letter to Chief Secretary JK Sinha seeking a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah when he visited the state recently to discuss the issue.

"Unfortunately, we received no response from the government regarding a meeting with the Union Home Minister", he said.

Debbarma said out of 1,200 surrendered militants, only 79 have been accepted by the government so far, while the decision on the remaining cadres is still pending, with looming uncertainty over their rehabilitation. (PTI)

World Food Safety Day observed in Dimapur

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, June 8: The food safety wing of the Nagaland health & family welfare department, in collaboration with the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India and Eat Right India, observed the 8th World Food Safety Day 2026 here on Monday by conducting a hands-on training session on food safety measures for hoteliers and stakeholders.

Held under the theme "From Burden to Solutions-Safe Food Everywhere", the food technicians provided practical demonstrations and awareness on clean hands, food adulteration, and food contamination during the programme.

Addressing the event as the special guest, S Tainiu, secretary, health & family welfare, highlighted the significance of World Food Safety Day in raising awareness about the importance of safe food and the collective responsibility of ensuring food safety from production to consumption.

She noted that millions of people fall ill every year due to contaminated food, with children under the age of five among the most vulnerable groups. Tainiu urged all stakeholders, including government agencies, food business operators, hoteliers, and consumers, to work together in promoting a culture of food safety.

She stated that ensuring safe food is a shared responsibility and that commitment to food safety contributes to better public health outcomes, consumer confidence, and the sustainable growth of the hospitality and food service sectors.

She encouraged participants to become advocates of food safety and to apply safe food practices in their homes and workplaces.

Arunachal's Tawang on alert over threat of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood

ITANAGAR, June 8: Fresh concerns over weather-related hazards have emerged in Arunachal Pradesh, with the authorities in Tawang district stepping up preparedness measures amid fears of a possible Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) in the Mago Chu basin.

Incessant rainfall in the past couple of days also left the area near the Inter-State Bus Terminus (ISBT) complex at Lekhi waterlogged, disrupting normal movement.

The Tawang district disaster management department has issued an alert after receiving inputs from the Centre for Earth Science and Himalayan Studies (CESHS) on Sunday, which flagged the possibility of a GLOF triggered by rapid glacier retreat and unstable terrain around the Khangri Glacier, officials said on Monday.

The advisory was shared with the Indian Army, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and Border Roads Organisation (BRO) to ensure preparedness among all stakeholders. Tawang deputy commissioner and District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) chairman Namgyal Angmo has urged residents to remain vigilant and closely follow official updates.

Superintendent of Police Tasi Darang advised people residing along the Mago Chu and Tawang Chu river systems, particularly in low-lying areas, to keep emergency supplies ready and stay prepared for any eventuality. As part of efforts to assess the situation, Thingbu Assistant Commissioner Thutan Wangchu, accompanied by residents of Mago village, conducted an inspection of the Khangri Glacier, locally known as Neh-Goh Gangri, recently.

The assessment found that the glacier, located at an altitude of over 17,000 feet on the western fringe of the Gorichen range, has witnessed noticeable snow and ice loss over the years. (PTI)

IFCSAP urges early notification of APFRA rules

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, June 8: The Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP) has urged the State Government to notify the Rules under the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978 (APFRA) at the earliest following the submission of the report by the High-Power Committee constituted to examine the matter.

In a statement issued on Monday, IFCSAP said the report relating to the framing and implementation of the Rules under APFRA has been duly submitted to the State Government after an extensive consultative process involving various stakeholders.

The organisation expressed appreciation to the Government of Arunachal Pradesh and the High-Power Committee for conducting wide-ranging consultations and facilitating what it described as a democratic, transparent and participatory process on issues relating to the implementation of the Act.

"With the consultative process now concluded and the report duly submitted, the Government should take appropriate steps within a reasonable timeframe to consider the recommendations and bring the Rules into force in accordance with law," the statement said.

The organisation stated that it expects the Government to act expeditiously in fulfilling its constitutional and statutory obligations and indicated that it would continue to monitor developments closely. IFCSAP also said it would pursue appropriate legal remedies, if necessary, to ensure compliance with the directions of the Gauhati High Court and the applicable statutory framework.

Clarifying its position on the ongoing debate surrounding the legislation, IFCSAP said the question of repealing the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act, 1978, was never part of the mandate assigned to the High-Power Committee. The organisation maintained that any demand for repeal of the Act would have to be pursued separately through constitutional, legislative or judicial channels, as the committee's mandate was limited to matters relating to implementation of the Act and framing of the Rules.

IFCSAP further noted that the Arunachal Christian Forum (ACF) had not opposed the framing of Rules during the proceedings before the Gauhati High Court and that the issue remained uncontested before the court.

"In this context, statements issued at the concluding stage of the consultative process regarding the framing of the Rules are both surprising and regrettable," the statement said.

The organisation asserted that the State Government had provided adequate opportunities to all stakeholders, including the ACF, to present their views and concerns during the consultation process. Rejecting allegations that the proposed Rules are targeted against any religion or religious community, IFCSAP described such claims as misleading and unsupported by legal or factual grounds.

It stated that the framing of Rules is a statutory requirement intended to facilitate the implementation of an existing law enacted by the Legislature and emphasised that once notified, the Rules would remain public documents accessible to all citizens, thereby ensuring transparency and accountability.

The organisation also pointed out that the Rules, like any form of subordinate legislation, can be reviewed, amended or modified by the Government in future in accordance with constitutional principles, public interest and changing circumstances. Expressing concern over attempts to delay or obstruct the notification process, IFCSAP stated that public pressure and confrontational approaches at this stage may not be conducive to democratic consultation and constructive dialogue.

"Democratic societies function through constitutional procedures, legal processes and institutional engagement, which remain the most appropriate avenues for addressing differences of opinion," the statement said.

Reiterating its commitment to constitutional values, indigenous rights, religious freedom and social harmony, IFCSAP expressed hope that all stakeholders would continue to engage in constructive dialogue while allowing the Government to discharge its lawful responsibilities in accordance with the Constitution and the laws of the land.

No.B/22/I/OR/Tender/3510 *Dated Gossaigaon, the 20/052026.*

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders are hereby invited under the provision of Assam sale of Forest Produce Coupes and Mahal Rules 1977 read with Assam Sale of Forest Produce, Coupes and Mahal (Amendment) Rules 2000, under the following terms and conditions for sale of 03 Nos. timber lots under Kachugaon Forest Division, Gossaigaon as mentioned in the enclosed **Schedule-A (Fresh Sale)** which are kept at Sanfan Range, Kachugaon. The serially numbered prescribed tender Form and the Sale Notice can be obtained from the Office of the undersigned in any working day on payment prescribed fee as Rs. 50/- (Rupees Fifty) only for tender Form and Rs. 200/- (Rupees Two Hundred) only for sale notice up to 08/06/2026.

Sd/-
Divisional Forest Officer,
Kachugaon Division, Gossaigaon

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/486

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INDIA bloc meeting

Oppn leaders to write to CJI on SIR, seek Pradhan's resignation

NEW DELHI, June 8: Leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc met here on Monday and decided to write to the chief justice of India on the SIR exercise and "vote loot", besides demanding the immediate resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET-CBSE row.

Addressing a press conference after the meeting, Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge said the opposition leaders also demanded that the Union government convene an all-party meeting to discuss the "precarious economic situation" in the country, unemployment, price rise, farmers' issues and people-centric matters.

Kharge said the INDIA bloc leaders also decided to meet every two months, with the next meeting scheduled in Hyderabad for August, the date for which will be fixed later.

According to sources, leaders of 22 opposition parties along with Independent MP Kapil Sibal attended Monday's meeting held at the Constitution Club here.

Earlier, Kharge had said that leaders of 25 opposition parties met on Monday.

Flanked by Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Mamata Banerjee and other senior leaders of the grouping at the presser, Kharge said, "We have agreed on five issues. A letter would be sent to the chief justice of India (CJI) soon on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, 'vote loot' and 'stealing of elections'.

"It was also unanimously agreed to demand the immediate resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan because he presided over the betrayal of lakhs of youth who appeared in NEET and CBSE," he said.

Also, the Centre should immediately call an all-party meeting to discuss the "precarious" economic situation, unemployment, price rise, farmers' issues, and "atrocities" being committed on the oppressed sections, Kharge said.

"We are going to raise many people-centric issues, which all the parties have unanimously agreed to," he said. "It was agreed that we would meet every two months. The next meeting will be held in Hyderabad in August, the date for which will be fixed later.

"The opposition leaders also decided to continue coordination during the upcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament, with daily morning meetings at the office of the leader of opposition," he said.

The Congress veteran also said that all the opposition leaders aired their views freely at the meeting, which Shiv Sena-UBT's Uddhav Thackeray and JMM's Hemant Soren joined virtually.

The meeting was held in the backdrop of differences emerging among some of the INDIA bloc constituents. The leaders began the deliberations to help forge unity and rework their strategy to take on the BJP, while ironing out differences within after the defeat of regional outfits Trinamool Congress and DMK in the recent Assembly polls in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, respectively.

Those in attendance included Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi and Kharge from the Congress, Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee from the Trinamool Congress, Akhilesh Yadav from the Samajwadi Party, Tejashwi Yadav from the RJD, Omar Abdullah from the National Conference and Mehbooba Mufti from the PDP, along with Left leaders.

NCP(SP) leader Supriya Sule, CPI(M)'s John Brittas, CPI's D Raja and leaders of some smaller parties were also part of the deliberations, while Uddhav Thackeray and Hemant Soren joined virtually.

The DMK and AAP were not part of the deliberations after having opted out of the opposition bloc. Tamil Nadu's ruling party TVK also did not attend the meeting.

Sources said those who were part of the original INDIA bloc were invited for the meeting. (PTI)

TMC MP Sukhendu Sekhar Ray resigns from party, steps down as RS member

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, June 8: Veteran TMC Rajya Sabha MP Sukhendu Shekhar Ray on Monday resigned from the party and stepped down as a member of the Upper House, dealing a fresh blow to the Mamata Banerjee-led outfit amid growing signs that the turbulence in its legislative wing may now be spilling over to its parliamentary ranks.

Ray, among TMC's most recognisable faces in Parliament, announced his decision in the national capital hours before a meeting of the INDIA bloc, to be attended by former West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee and party national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee.

His resignation comes barely days after an unprecedented rebellion in the party's legislature wing in West Bengal, where 58 TMC MLAs broke ranks with the leadership and backed Ritabrata Banerjee for the post of Leader of the Opposition, rejecting the party's official nominee Shovandeb Chattopadhyay.

The revolt, which culminated in Ritabrata's recognition as LoP by the Assembly Speaker, exposed deep fissures within the organisation following the party's defeat in the assembly polls, and fuelled concerns that the unrest could spread beyond the House.

In a statement, Ray cited what he described as rampant corruption in governance and the party organisation, and said public anger against the erstwhile TMC dispensation had reached alarming levels.

The veteran parliamentarian, who had increasingly distanced himself from the party leadership over the past year, also launched a sharp attack on the TMC's handling of the RG Kar hospital rape-murder case, an issue on which he had repeatedly voiced dissent.

"I had publicly spoken out on the RG Kar hospital issue. Since then, I was increasingly isolated within the party. My only fault was that I demanded an internal inquiry against certain police officers because I believed they had a major role in destruction of evidence," Ray told reporters in Delhi.

Ray alleged that efforts were being made at the time to shield those responsible, and said he had mentally decided to leave the party soon after the controversy.

"That was the turning point. I realised I would not remain in the party for long," he said.

Ray also claimed that corruption had become pervasive in several sectors, and that public resentment against the party reached a point where electoral setbacks had become inevitable.

He called for scrutiny of the assets and finances of TMC leaders occupying key positions in the party at the national level, and alleged that many honest voices within the organisation had been marginalised.

"Not everyone in the party is dishonest. But, many sincere people have been sidelined," he said.

The resignation is significant not merely because of Ray's seniority, but also because it marks the first high-profile departure from the TMC's parliamentary wing since the internal turmoil began.

Political observers said the development assumes added significance as it unfolded in Delhi, while the party's top leadership was engaged in consultations with opposition allies at the INDIA bloc meeting.

The timing of the move has also triggered fresh speculation within political circles about the possibility of unrest among a section of TMC MPs. While no parliamentarian has publicly expressed dissent, party sources acknowledged that discussions over the future course of several leaders unhappy with the functioning of the organisation have intensified in recent weeks.

The TMC's tally in the Rajya Sabha came down to 12 with Ray's resignation.

Ray, a constitutional expert, has for years been one of the TMC's principal strategists in Parliament and among its most effective voices on legislative and constitutional issues. Asked about his future plans, Ray said he had not taken any decision about joining another political party, and indicated that he might even retire from active politics.

"I may withdraw from politics altogether," he said. The TMC leadership did not immediately react to Ray's resignation.

With the rebellion in the legislature wing still unresolved, Ray's departure is likely to deepen questions over the TMC's internal cohesion, and raise fresh concerns within the leadership about whether the unrest that rattled its assembly ranks could eventually spread to Delhi as well. (PTI)

INDIA bloc only a figment of imagination, lacks conviction on ground: BJP

NEW DELHI, June 8: Ahead of the INDIA bloc meeting on Monday, the BJP said the opposition alliance is "a figment of imagination" and lacks conviction on the ground.

Top leaders of 23 political parties of the opposition INDIA bloc are likely to meet on Monday to redraw their strategy to take on the BJP and iron out differences amid changed power dynamics after the defeat of regional anchors TMC and DMK in the recent assembly polls.

In a post on X, BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said there is a complete implosion in the INDIA bloc, with disagreements involving the Congress and the DMK, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and the Left parties.

He added that the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has also questioned the Congress' intentions behind forging alliances with regional parties.

"After DMK versus Congress, after JMM versus Congress and after the complete implosion of the INDI alliance, with the Left attacking the Congress, the Aam Aadmi Party has now also targeted the Congress. It has advised smaller regional parties that the only reason the Congress is coming together with them is to strengthen itself, not the nation, and therefore it will not join the INDI alliance," he said.

"There is no INDI alliance. It is just a figment of one's imagination. Cosmetic meetings take place, but real conviction on the ground is never seen," he posted.

Claiming that the opposition alliance lacks a common purpose, Poonawalla said it has "no mission, no vision, only division".

"The INDI alliance never had any mission. It was always about confusion, ambition and division. Those divisions are now playing out on a daily basis. Even when these parties came together, they did so not out of conviction but for convenience," he said. (PTI)

20 TMC MPs write to Speaker backing NDA, triggering split in party's LS unit

KOLKATA, June 8: The crisis engulfing the TMC deepened on Monday as 20 Lok Sabha MPs, led by Chief Whip Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, wrote to Speaker Om Birla declaring support for the BJP-led NDA, triggering a split in the party's parliamentary unit and dealing a severe blow to Mamata Banerjee's authority after the party's Assembly poll debacle.

The development comes barely days after the TMC leadership suffered a setback in the West Bengal Assembly, where 58 of its 80 MLAs defied the party high command's decision to appoint veteran leader Sovandeb Chattopadhyay as the Leader of the Opposition, and elected expelled MLA Ritabrata Banerjee to that post.

The political turbulence that has gripped the TMC since its Assembly election debacle appeared to spill over to its parliamentary ranks on Monday, with a group of dissident MPs extending support to the NDA even as party supremo Mamata Banerjee was in Delhi attending an INDIA bloc conclave to chart a pan-India strategy against the BJP.

Speaking to PTI over phone, Ghosh Dastidar said the MPs had informed the Speaker of their decision to support the NDA.

"Nearly twenty TMC MPs, including me, have decided to write to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and formally support the NDA. We have sent a letter to the Lok Sabha Speaker and stated that we want to support the NDA," she said.

Sources said the dissident MPs intend to argue before the Speaker that Ghosh Dastidar continues to be the valid chief whip of the party in the Lok Sabha and that any subsequent changes announced by the party leadership were not completed through the required parliamentary procedure.

Mamata Banerjee-led TMC had decided to remove Ghosh Dastidar as chief whip and replace her with Kalyan Banerjee, but that was not communicated to the Lok Sabha secretariat, another rebel TMC MP told PTI.

Claiming that she continues to be the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha, Ghosh Dastidar said the decision was taken after consultations among fellow parliamentarians.

"We have accepted the people's verdict and believe that our future political course should be aligned with the NDA," she said.

According to sources in the dissident camp, the MPs have chosen not to immediately resign from the TMC or join the BJP. Instead, they intend to function as a separate parliamentary bloc while supporting the NDA, a strategy designed to ensure protection under the anti-defection law.

The arithmetic is politically significant. The TMC currently has 28 Lok Sabha MPs, with one vacancy following the death of Basirhat MP Haji Nurul Islam. The support of 20 MPs would comfortably cross the two-thirds threshold required for protection under the anti-defection law.

The development came a day after dissident MPs held a closed-door meeting in New Delhi and is likely to intensify questions over the authority of the TMC leadership over its elected representatives. For Mamata Banerjee, the crisis has now moved beyond organisational dissent to the prospect of losing control over a substantial section of the party's parliamentary strength, with potentially far-reaching consequences for both the TMC and the opposition bloc at the national level. (PTI)

Kharge calls for unity in INDIA bloc to confront challenges facing country

NEW DELHI, June 8: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday urged opposition leaders to strengthen unity to confront the political, economic, social and foreign policy challenges facing the country due to the Modi government's "misgovernance".

Addressing a meeting of the Opposition INDIA bloc here, Kharge charged that the assault on the Constitution continues and probe agencies are persistently being used as tools to harass, intimidate, and bully political opponents.

He also highlighted that the economic environment is extremely negative and new investments are not coming in at the pace required to generate new jobs.

The Congress chief also pointed out to the "complete mismanagement" of the examination system due to which the hopes and aspirations of lakhs of youth are being betrayed.

Batting for unity among opposition leaders, he said, "On April 17, 2026, we demonstrated our unity and solidarity in the Lok Sabha in a very decisive manner, when we all came together firmly to defeat the Modi government's malicious bills on delimitation.

"Now we must strengthen that same spirit even further and move forward, so that we can confront the many political, economic, social, and foreign policy challenges facing the country due to the Modi government's misgovernance," Kharge said at the start of the meeting.

Slamming the special intensive revision of electoral rolls (SIR), he said the voting rights of millions of people are being "stripped away" due to it.

"The assault on the Constitution continues unabated. Investigative agencies are being persistently used as tools to harass, intimidate, and bully political opponents," he alleged, adding discrimination is being meted out against non-BJP governments. (PTI)

JMM's Baidyanath Ram, Cong's Pranav Jha, BJP backed Parimal Nathwani file nomination for RS polls

RANCHI, June 8: JMM candidate Baidyanath Ram and Congress nominee Pranav Jha on Monday filed their nominations for two Rajya Sabha seats in the state going to polls on June 18.

Rajya Sabha MP from Andhra Pradesh Parimal Nathwani also filed his nomination papers as an Independent candidate for the elections, exuding confidence of winning the polls with support from the BJP and other political parties in Jharkhand.

INDIA bloc nominees Ram and Jha filed their nominations at the Assembly in the presence of Chief Minister Hemant Soren, former Chhattisgarh CM Bhupesh Baghel, CPI (ML) Liberation MLA Arup Chatterjee and RJD legislator Suresh Paswan.

Nathwani, who had been a two-term Rajya Sabha MP from Jharkhand between 2008 and 2020, filed his papers in the presence of BJP's Ranchi MLA CP Singh and Hatia legislator Naveen Jaiswal.

The nomination papers were submitted to Assembly Secretary Ranjit Kumar, officials said.

Both the ruling alliance candidates claimed they will register victories in the two seats, as the ruling alliance has the required numbers to win the polls.

"We are confident of winning both the Rajya Sabha seats in Jharkhand as we have the required numbers," Ram told reporters after filing his nomination.

Jha said he will win with the support of INDIA bloc legislators.

One of the Rajya Sabha seats in the state fell vacant following the death of JMM co-founder Shibu Soren. The other vacancy is because BJP member Deepak Prakash is scheduled to complete his six-year term on June 21.

"I have to work for Jharkhand, and I did during my past two tenures. On the basis of my work in the state, I will seek support from all political parties. BJP has extended its support, I met Chief Minister Hemant Soren and also sought support from Congress MLAs," Nathwani told reporters on the Assembly premises after filing the nomination.

He said, "Jharkhand has been my Karma Bhoomi, and I have worked in all sectors in the state. If I get another chance, I will work more for the state." (PTI)

Akhilesh alleges massive fraud with Ram Temple money

LUCKNOW, June 8: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday said reports have emerged claiming that crores of rupees from donations offered at the Ram Temple were missing and urged the court to take cognisance of the matter.

Reacting to the allegations, Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai said internal audits are underway, and nothing that substantiates the allegation has emerged so far.

"The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra undergoes internal audits from time to time. Representatives of the trust and the State Bank of India are involved in this exercise. The audit process lasts for several days. The same work is being carried out these days. Nothing noteworthy has come to light yet," Rai said in a statement.

Mahant Dinendra Das, a member of the trust, said, "I have full faith in Lord Ram. If anybody has committed any wrong act, then Lord Ram will himself punish that person. Our trustees will not do such a thing."

He added that any decision made by the government will be acceptable to them. "If there is any doubt, then conduct an inquiry."

In a post on X, Yadav said the issue was "extremely sensitive" for devotees of Lord Ram and described the situation as "highly embarrassing" for the temple trust.

"It is very sensitive news for devotees of Lord Ram across the world that crores of rupees from donations made to the Ram Temple have been found missing," Yadav's post read in Hindi.

The SP chief also questioned the "silence" of the temple trust and the government over the issue.

"The government's silence is suspicious," Yadav said.

"This is an extremely shameful situation for the temple trust. No one is willing to come forward and offer an explanation," he added.

With the allegation, Yadav urged the court to intervene in the matter.

The court should take "suo motu cognisance because the issue is directly related to the profound faith that the Sanatani community across the world places in Lord Ram," he said.

Later, in another post on X, Yadav dismissed Rai's statement as ambiguous.

"The clarification itself lacks clarity. It seems this is a routine weekly affair for them, and so ordinary that they no longer even consider it 'noteworthy'. Their facial expressions and body language betray a sense of despair and hopelessness," he wrote.

The SP leader said all trust members should be brought together to provide an explanation, and CCTV footage should be utilised to cross-verify the figures.

Once all the trustees sit together, the truth will immediately come to light, as not everyone among them is not the same, he suggested.

"When no single individual is at the centre of the suspicion regarding this irregularity, what is the importance of the clarification from just one person.

"It should also be clarified why it took so many hours to issue a mere 40-second explanation, and why even speaking for a minute seems like such a burden. Much like the state government's silence, this clarification, too, is suspicious. It appears that the clarification is merely a verbal formality," he said. (PTI)

Rural tap water coverage reaches nearly 82 pc under Jal Jeevan Mission: Govt

NEW DELHI, June 8: Rural tap water coverage in the country has risen from 3.23 crore households in August 2019 to 15.84 crore households by May 2026, covering 81.87 per cent of the country's 19.35 crore rural households, according to a government document released on Monday.

The document, issued as part of the BJP-led central government marking 12 years in office, said the increase was achieved under the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM), launched in 2019 to provide potable water through functional household tap connections to every rural household.

According to the document, budgetary allocations for the mission increased by 488 per cent between 2020-21 and 2026-27 to ₹67,670 crore. The govt said that 2.77 lakh villages have achieved 100 per cent tap water coverage under the Har Ghar Jal campaign.

Household tap water coverage in aspirational districts increased from 23.62 lakh in August 2019 to 2.20 crore by May 2026, while 1.11 crore households in aspirational blocks had tap water connections by the same date. The number of schools with tap water connectivity increased from 29,711 in August 2019 to 9.23 lakh by May 2026, while coverage in anganwadi centres, it went up from 15,464 to 9.66 lakh during the period.

Tap water connectivity in gram panchayats and community health centres reached 3.93 lakh institutions, covering 77.27 per cent of such facilities, the document said.

According to the document, improved access to clean drinking water has reduced waterborne diseases, strengthened sanitation and supported better educational outcomes, particularly for children and adolescent girls.

The document also highlighted

the progress of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Grameen), launched in October 2014 to address inadequate sanitation facilities in rural India, where around 550 million people lacked access to such facilities at the time.

According to the government, budgetary allocations for the mission increased by 83 per cent from ₹ 3,929 crore in 2014-15 to ₹ 7,192 crore in 2026-27.

Over 12.11 crore individual household toilets have been constructed under the programme so far. During Phase I of the mission, sanitation coverage increased from 39 per cent in 2014 to 100 per cent in 2019, following which India was declared Open Defecation Free (ODF). As of March 2026, over 5 lakh villages have attained ODF Plus (Model) status.

According to the document, ODF Plus includes comprehensive village cleanliness through solid and liquid waste management systems in rural India.

The document said solid waste management systems are active in 5.31 lakh villages, while liquid and greywater management systems are operational in 5.50 lakh villages. In addition, 2,415 plastic waste management units have been established across 5,482 blocks.

It said the achievement of the Swachh Bharat Mission has been associated with a significant decline in morbidity and mortality.

The government also highlighted the progress of the GOBARdhan initiative, which transitioned from 14 operational biogas plants in FY 2018-19 to over 1,213 by May 2026. (PTI)

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4,800 illegal immigrants sent to B'desh from holding centres: Bengal CM

KOLKATA, June 8: West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Sunday said around 4,800 illegal immigrants have been sent to Bangladesh from holding centres set up in the state's border districts, and 836 such people are awaiting deportation from these facilities.

Adhikari asserted that illegal immigration was a big issue, and said his government has already handed over land to the BSF to erect around 100 km of fencing, out of the 556 km required to secure the India-Bangladesh border.

The land handover is a continuous process and is necessary for the security of the country, he said, adding that securing the international boundary is the state government's priority.

"We have handed over to the BSF around 100 km stretch of land out of 556 km required for fencing, and prioritised the Chicken's Neck corridor in north Bengal," the chief minister said, while addressing a preparatory meeting for the BJP's special training camp.

The 'Chicken's Neck', officially known as the Siliguri Corridor, is a narrow stretch of land- about 20-22 km wide and nearly 60 km long- in north Bengal that connects the rest of India with the northeastern states. It is considered a critical and sensitive lifeline from both security and strategic perspectives.

West Bengal, among all the states, shares the longest international boundary with Bangladesh, stretching 2,217 km, out of a total of 4,096 km.

Emphasising that his government has started deporting illegal immigrants, who do not fall under the Citizenship Amendment Act, as per a law of the Union government, Adhikari said, "These people are being handed over to the BSF directly." Though the law was applied in other states of the country, the previous Trinamool Congress government in West Bengal did not implement it, he said, adding that illegal immigrants were kept in the state's jails and had availed facilities at the taxpayers' expense.

"Around 4,800 illegal immigrants have been sent back from holding centres set up in the state's border districts," Adhikari said, adding that 836 such people are awaiting deportation from these facilities.

Pointing to the flow of people at the Hakimpur border in North 24 Parganas district, Adhikari said many illegal immigrants have already left on their own.

"The demography of Bengal has changed," the chief minister claimed, adding that the BJP had made infiltration from Bangladesh and demographic change the biggest issues in the West Bengal assembly election, and accused the Mamata Banerjee-led party of being complacent on both issues for political reasons.

Alleging that the census work had not been started in the state by the previous TMC dispensation, Adhikari said the BJP government has commenced the process and that house surveys will take place from August 1 to 15.

"The census will be completed by the end of next February, and delimitation will be held based on it," the chief minister said.

He said the government has already transferred ₹ 3,000 each to 50 lakh women in the state under the Annapurna Yojana scheme, in keeping with the BJP's poll promise for doubling the financial assistance they enjoyed under the Lakshmir Bhandar of the TMC government. "On the very first day, we gave the Annapurna Yojana benefit to 28,25,769 women, which is our biggest achievement," Adhikari said.

Pointing to criticisms from some quarters about the 12-page application form for the Annapurna Yojana beneficiaries, he said, "The money to be given is from the government exchequer. So it has to be properly verified." The chief minister alleged that 27 lakh names out of 2.2 crore Lakshmir Bhandar beneficiaries were not on the voter list, adding that "three lakh more are males who took advantage" of the women-only welfare scheme.

He termed this irregularity as "dangerous corruption".

"Over the next 50 years, the government will benefit from the transparent process we adopted," Adhikari said.

Maintaining that even men took widow allowance in the state during the TMC regime, the CM said, "It seems the Brigade Parade Grounds will have to be turned into a jail."

"Stench is coming from every place you investigate," the chief minister lamented about corruption charges erupting from different places in the state against TMC functionaries.

A large number of criminal cases have been lodged over corruption and extortion charges against leaders and public representatives of the TMC since the fall of the Mamata Banerjee government, and many of them, including sitting and former MLAs, councillors and others have been arrested by the police.

Criticising the TMC for its campaign that Bengal's fish-loving people would be deprived of the delicacies if the BJP came to power in the state, Adhikari said his government will provide fish meals twice a week starting next week at ₹ 5 per person.

Maintaining that his government has many more plans for the benefit of the people, the chief minister said, "We will announce those during the presentation of the state Budget on June 22."

Adhikari said that on the directive of the PM, all central ministries are giving all possible assistance to West Bengal. (PTI)

India's Met infrastructure saw unprecedented expansion over last decade: Union minister

LUCKNOW, June 8: Union minister Dr Jitendra Singh on Monday said that India's meteorological infrastructure has witnessed unprecedented expansion over the last decade, enabling more accurate, location-specific and impact-based weather forecasting services across the country.

Singh, who is the Union minister of state (Independent charge) for science and technology and earth sciences, on Monday launched the new Regional Meteorological Centre (RMC) at Lucknow along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, an official statement said.

He said that India had only 17 Doppler weather radars in 2014, with several states, including Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Uttarakhand, not having even a single radar.

He informed that the network has now expanded to 50 Doppler weather radars and another 50 radars are proposed under Mission Mausam, taking the total to nearly 100 radars over the next two years. This expansion will significantly strengthen real-time weather monitoring and forecasting capabilities across the country, he added.

Addressing the function, Singh said that the progress achieved in weather forecasting and observation systems in the last decade has transformed the manner in which weather services are delivered to citizens, disaster management agencies, farmers, tourists and the aviation sector.

He said that weather forecasting has evolved from broad regional predictions to highly localised and time-specific forecasts.

The minister emphasised that increasing public confidence in weather forecasts is a reflection of the substantial improvements made in observational networks, forecasting models and dissemination systems.

Referring to UP, Singh said the state's geographical diversity and climatic variability make it one of the most important regions for advanced meteorological services.

He noted that UP is highly vulnerable to floods, droughts, heatwaves, thunderstorms and other extreme weather events, making timely forecasting and warning systems critical for public safety and disaster preparedness.

Singh informed that the state had only one Doppler weather radar in 2014, while three are operational now and several more are being commissioned. The state's automatic weather stations increased from 59 to 107, automatic rain gauge stations grew from 132 to 140 and lightning sensors grew from nil to seven, he added.

The minister said that aviation meteorological services are now being provided at 11 airports across UP, reflecting the growing scale of aviation infrastructure in the state.

He also highlighted the significant expansion of meteorological services in Uttarakhand.

Emphasising the importance of the newly declared Regional Meteorological Centre at Lucknow, Singh said that the centre will play a crucial role in decentralising meteorological services and strengthening regional forecasting capabilities. He informed that the centre will cater to UP, Uttarakhand and adjoining regions, enabling more focused monitoring, forecasting and dissemination of weather information.

He said that weather information is now reaching districts, local administrations and panchayats in real time and should be integrated into planning and decision-making processes.

The declaration of the Regional Meteorological Centre, Lucknow marks a significant milestone in the strengthening of India's weather and climate services architecture. The centre is expected to enhance forecasting capabilities, improve dissemination of weather advisories and support disaster management, agriculture, aviation and public safety across the region, the statement said. (PTI)

Land resurvey completed in over 6,500 villages: Andhra CM Naidu

WEST GODAVARI (Andhra Pradesh), June 8: Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday said that land resurvey has been completed in over 6,500 villages across the state, enabling the government to update the land records.

Addressing a public meeting at Siddantham village in this district, the chief minister noted that pattardar passbooks (land documents) have been issued to 26.4 lakh people. "We have completed resurvey in 6,688 villages and updated land records. Pattadar passbooks have been issued to 26.4 lakh people. Passbooks are being issued without errors," he said.

According to the CM, another 62.3 lakh passbooks are due to be issued.

He promised to issue them within a definite timeline, adding that the government has decided to issue 90 lakh error-free passbooks.

Under Resurvey 2.0, Naidu observed that the final Record of Rights has been completed for 1,836 villages. The chief minister asserted that the Revenue Department is being "overhauled" to avoid controversies.

Reflecting on the Godavari district, he said the government is according importance to food processing industries and underscored that aquaculture is key for the local and national economies. Naidu promised to back the aquaculture sector, which is widespread in several coastal districts. Affected by the Middle East war and other causes, he said aquaculture farmers are suffering, especially by inflated aqua feed prices. He said the issue of inflated aqua feed prices has been escalated to the Centre and its decision is awaited.

Further, Naidu said the "refuse from aquaculture can be transformed into nutraceutical medicines" rather than turning into a pollution problem. As farmers are suffering from the rise in fodder price, the CM said he had requested the Centre to extend subsidies and cut taxes on soyabean meal imports.

Further, the TDP supremo highlighted that the NDA government has been ruling the state for two years with focus on welfare, development and good governance. He underlined that the coalition government aims to provide tapped water to every house. (PTI)

Centre has coal reserves for 80 days of power generation: Kishan Reddy

HYDERABAD, June 8: Union Minister G Kishan Reddy on Monday said that the Centre has adequate coal reserves to meet power generation requirements for 80 days.

Speaking to reporters about the achievements of the NDA government since 2014, Reddy also said that exploration has begun in the critical mineral blocks acquired in Argentina, and production is expected to commence at the earliest.

He said the results of coal gasification projects in the country are expected to become visible within the next two years.

"Earlier, there used to be a shortage of coal. Now, the Government of India has coal reserves sufficient for 80 days of power generation. Since the monsoon season has begun, coal production could face disruptions due to heavy rainfall," the union coal and mines minister told reporters here.

"Following the directives of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we have maintained coal stocks sufficient for 80 days," he added.

Highlighting the importance of critical minerals, Reddy said that the Centre is identifying critical mineral reserves and undertaking exploration activities. He added that auctions have also begun in areas where exploration has been completed. The Centre is encouraging private players to import either processed or semi-processed critical minerals into India, he said.

Reddy said that around 143 abandoned coal mines have been identified for closure, and an action plan has been initiated to close all these mines simultaneously.

"By 2028, the closure of these mines will be completed in a scientific manner," he said.

Alleging that the coal sector was plagued by scams during the previous UPA regime, he said the country is now producing a record 1,040 million tonnes of coal annually following major reforms introduced in the coal and mining sectors over the past 12 years.

He said that five lakh people are directly employed and 25 lakh people are indirectly employed in the coal sector, while 50 lakh people work in the mining sector overall. Reddy said the country has emerged as the world's second-largest producer and consumer of coal. He also said India possesses the world's fifth-largest coal reserves, while Coal India Ltd remains the largest coal-producing company globally. (PTI)

Delhi HC seeks Centre, CBSE response to NSUI plea over on-screen marking row

NEW DELHI, June 8: The Delhi High Court on Monday sought the stand of the Centre and the CBSE on a petition by the Congress' student wing seeking an independent inquiry into the alleged irregularities in the on-screen marking (OSM) system for Class 12 exam.

Issuing notice on a PIL by the National Students' Union of India (NSUI), a vacation bench of Justices Neena Bansal Krishna and Madhu Jain asked the central government and the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) to file their responses and listed the matter for hearing on June 12.

The petitioner submitted that the CBSE closed the portal for verifying and revaluing answer sheets last night and requested a direction to keep it open for affected students for one month. Counsel for CBSE, advocate M A Niyaz, submitted that the authorities extended the deadline for closing the portal from time to time, and the education board was duly addressing the grievances of aggrieved students.

He also objected to the maintainability of the PIL, emphasising that the NSUI was a student wing of a political party. "We don't want education to be politicised like this," the counsel submitted. NSUI counsel said that it filed the PIL on behalf of minors and that association with a political party was not a disqualification. The PIL, filed through advocate Rishav Ranjan, also seeks manual rechecking and physical verification of answer sheets of aggrieved students.

In the petition, the NSUI has said the sharp decline in overall performance in this year's Class 12 results has led to widespread concern among students and parents regarding the fairness, consistency and reliability of the OSM system, especially in the light of several requests for scanned answer books and complaints on discrepancies and technical issues acknowledged by the CBSE. It has asserted that concerns around OSM were not confined to a "small set of students" and those whose answer sheets were affected by scanning defects, mismatch errors or other technical failures cannot be made to suffer because of deficiencies in the system. (PTI)

TNEB to recruit at least 15,000 permanent employees: Minister Nirmal Kumar

CHENNAI, June 8: Tamil Nadu Electricity Minister R Nirmal Kumar on Monday announced that the state's electricity board will recruit at least 15,000 permanent employees this year to address severe manpower shortages in the power apparatus.

The Minister also revealed that a newly formulated three-committee tender policy has been implemented across all departments to curb rampant institutional corruption, a move estimated to save the state exchequer 35 per cent in procurement costs.

Addressing a press conference here, Kumar stated that the electricity department is currently grappling with a massive shortage of 70,000 personnel.

"We are in dire need of manpower. As a first step, we are preparing a proposal to recruit at least 15,000 permanent employees this year. This has been initiated under the directives of Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay. There will be no temporary or contractual appointments for these positions," Kumar said, adding that a decision regarding the pending recruitment of 5,500 'Gangmen' will also be announced within a few weeks after consulting the chief minister.

TNEB's Gangman is primarily tasked with assisting linemen, digging pole pits, clearing vegetation, transporting equipment, and general physical upkeep of the local electrical infrastructure.

Highlighting the resolution of long-pending administrative issues, the minister noted that the government recently cleared promotions for 300 Assistant Engineers to Executive Engineers, a backlog that had been languishing for over 15 years due to protracted legal battles.

He questioned why employees were forced to approach courts for their rightful promotions under the previous regime and assured that all remaining promotional backlogs across various cadres -- including the 2012 batch comprising over 700 personnel -- are being cleared rapidly based on recent court guidelines.

Unveiling radical policy changes to check financial irregularities, Kumar claimed that the restructuring of the tender estimation policy has already plugged massive leakages.

"In the past, buffer margins of 30 to 35 per cent were deliberately built into tenders, leading to severe financial losses. For instance, in a single tender worth ₹ 1,500 crore, irregularities and corruption worth ₹ 397 crore were detected. Similarly, transformers worth ₹ 8 lakh were routinely estimated at ₹ 13 lakh," the minister alleged. (PTI)

Physical relationship between consenting unmarried adults no ground to show poor character: SC

NEW DELHI, June 8: The Supreme Court has held that physical relationship between two consenting unmarried adults cannot be a ground to draw an adverse impression about the character of the person in that relationship.

A bench of Justices Manmohan and Manoj Misra made the observation while directing the Telangana State Level Police Recruitment Board to appoint a candidate whose selection as a police constable was set aside due to his involvement in a criminal case arising from a failed romantic relationship.

"Physical relationship between two consenting unmarried adults cannot and should not by itself be a ground to draw an adverse impression about the character of the person in that relationship. There is no law which prohibits two consenting unmarried adults to have a relationship of their choice," the bench said. The top court allowed the appeal filed by the candidate and upheld a Telangana High Court single judge's order directing reconsideration of his appointment to the post of Stipendiary Cadet Trainee Police Constable.

Telangana State Level Police Recruitment Board had cancelled his appointment on the ground that a rape on promise of marriage case registered against him in 2014 reflected moral turpitude.

The case arose from a relationship with a neighbour and was compounded before a Lok Adalat in 2015 after both parties reached a settlement. No charge under Section 376 IPC was ever pressed.

Referring to the case, the top court said the appellant and the victim were neighbours and in a relationship for about four years.

"Not every relationship culminates in marriage. Therefore, merely because the relationship did not culminate in marriage is no ground to believe that one party has cheated the other. "Had it been a case of use of force or extension of threat to force a compromise, the respondent would have been justified in taking a call on the suitability of the appellant for appointment in a disciplined force. However, here there is no material to conclude that the compromise was foisted upon the victim," the bench said.

The apex court said in criminal jurisprudence, unless the charge is proved in a court of law there shall be a presumption of innocence.

"In the instant case, the offence alleged was one of cheating. One of the ingredients of the offence of cheating is false representation/deception. Whether prosecutrix was deceived into entering a relationship, the prosecutrix alone could have disclosed. "The public at large cannot tell whether she was deceived by the appellant. In such circumstances, when the prosecutrix chose not to pursue and had led no evidence, rather had expressed her consent to compound the case, there was no occasion for the respondents to read in between lines and draw an adverse inference regarding the character of the appellant," the bench said. (PTI)

Great Nicobar project vital for strategic interests, its critics suffering 'geographical illiteracy': Govt sources

NEW DELHI, June 8: India is undertaking the Great Nicobar Island project to advance its strategic maritime and economic interests, defence ministry sources said on Monday, dismissing its critics as suffering from "geographical illiteracy". The government is planning to build an international container transshipment port (ICTP), a civilian-cum-naval airport, a township and a power plant under the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) project.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Friday said the government's argument that the Great Nicobar Island project is about defence and a transshipment port is a "lie", and alleged that it is actually about benefiting one businessman so that he can build hotels and casinos on India's most irreplaceable ecological land.

Gandhi released an over 15-minute video based on his visit to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in late April and urged people to sign a petition to tell the government - "we choose green over greed".

The sources said the project is a strategic necessity considering the geopolitical environment and the government wants to leverage the location the way Singapore has used its geographic advantage to build key infrastructures and logistics.

The region has promising hydrocarbons deposits and unless "we have a sustainable presence, it will not be possible to take the advantage", they said. It is learnt that the defence ministry's contribution for the construction of the green field airport will be around ₹ 13,000 crore while the rest of the cost will be incurred by the civil aviation ministry.

The airport shall enhance India's maritime domain awareness (MDA) and operational outreach in a way that standalone expansion of an existing defence facility cannot fully achieve, the sources said. The Airports Authority of India (AAI) has envisaged the airport, with an initial capacity of 1.35 million passengers per annum by 2040.

The sources said the runway at the INS Baaz, the Indian naval air station, in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, will not be part of the GNI project.

The runway of INS Baaz was recently expanded to 4,500 ft and its further expansion requires significant land reclamation and it will impact tribal area, flora and fauna, they said.

The GNI development project is a strategically significant national initiative designed to safeguard India's maritime interest, the sources said.

They said the suggestion that India's strategic requirements in Great Nicobar can be met merely by expanding existing defence assets reflects "incomplete understanding" of the project and the nature of maritime power in the Indo-Pacific. The joint user greenfield and naval air station at GNI also enhances the ability to sustain the presence, support operations and respond to crises and maintain logistic in a forward location, the sources said.

Great Nicobar commands the western approaches to the Malacca Strait, transited by a large share of global seaborne trade. A credible permanent presence of warships combined with air assets carry strategic weight for surveillance, they said. Highlighting the importance of the region, the sources said 80 per cent of China's crude and 70 per cent of LNG imports pass through the Malacca Strait. (PTI)

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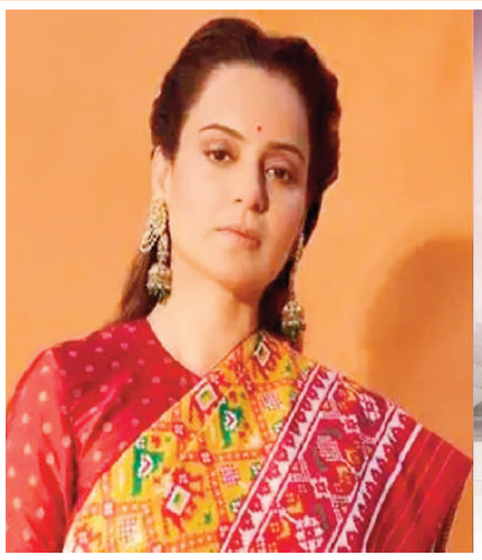
Kangana Ranaut says she didn't get movies after 'Fashion': 'Worked below my intelligence'



The success of "Fashion" did not translate into movies, says actor Kangana Ranaut, recalling a period of struggle where she worked bellow her intelligence to sustain herself in the industry.

The actor-BJP MP from Mandi, who will be next seen in "Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata", has completed 20 years in the industry that began with a hit debut in 2006 with Anurag Basu's "Gangster: A Love Story".

She established herself with films like "Woh Lamhe", "Life in a…Metro", "Fashion", before gaining stardom with "Queen". She subsequently went on to headline powerful women-oriented movies like "Manikarnika: The Queen of Jhansi", "Panga", and "Emergency", among others.

"Whenever you struggle, you should take that time constructively because life is saying something to you and you have to listen to it. When I didn't have a job, when I struggled, at that time, I asked myself a lot of questions, like, 'Why am I not getting a job? Why am I not able to do anything better? This phase was after 2007-2008 when even after 'Fashion', I didn't get a job," the actor told PTI in an interview. Ranaut said she was told to hire a manager who worked for top stars and she did exactly that, but it led her to commercial films like "Rascals" and "Dhamaal".

"I knew that I was working below my intelligence. But at that time, I didn't have that luxury, as people often say today: 'You should do what you love'. It is such a stupid statement. You should do what is needed... You should do what you can do, you can't do what you can't do."

Ranaut, who later went on to direct and produce films, said she finally tasted success when she played "ordinary" women in films like "Queen" and "Tanu Weds Manu".

"When I came to the film industry, all the actresses were Miss World, supermodels, foreigners, all of them were 6 to 6.5 feet tall, and they looked amazing. They were different, they didn't look ordinary, they looked like extraordinary women," said the Himachal Pradesh-born actor.

"Eventually, I got success when I played the role of an ordinary girl, be it Datto (from 'Tanu Weds Manu Returns') or 'Queen'. When I came here, there was no one around (like an ordinary woman). I realized that there is a certain rawness to me, which I got from 'Gangster' or 'Fashion' or 'Woh Lamhe', and that there is a certain rawness to me. So, I felt that this is my USP, the raw talent that I've and I worked on it."

The actor said that spontaneity reflects in her acting style as well.

"I'm one of those actors, and my co-actors would agree that, 'I've got one take. Let's go.' I don't sit around and say, 'Let's go and perfect it, if I get it, it's fine, if I don't get it, I will do one more.' But I know of actors, who produce their own films, they do 80-90 takes... I like imperfections." After her last big screen outing as former prime minister Indira Gandhi, Ranaut is returning to playing an ordinary woman in her new film, which will see her as a hospital nurse.

The 40-year-old said she thrilled to bring to life the bravery of the nurses and ward boys, who became the nation's quiet saviours during the 26/11 dastardly attacks in 2008, through her film, "Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata".

"The message of the film has resonated with me a lot. Especially because we always feel that some divine saviour (will come to save us). But when we look at the character sketch (of this film), it is very evident that the people, who do their job very well and take their work seriously and don't take themselves seriously, they are the people, who are living in reality. These people are the most spiritual, closest to God, the happiest, and most patriotic."

Ranaut said playing the role of a nurse in her new film, written and directed by Manoj Tapadia, was fun yet challenging.

"If you take a little liberty with that character, it will get disconnected. So, you can't take any liberty with this character. So, keeping that in mind, within that you have to be (the character) and it has its own fun. It has its own challenge. When a character is challenging, it has its own fun." Set largely within the charged confines of the Cama hospital, the film narrates the story of nurses and ward boys who became the nation's quiet saviours during the 26/11 dastardly attacks.

"Bharat Bhhagya Viddhaata" boasts of an ensemble cast including Girija Oak, Smita Tambe, Amrutha Namdev, Esha Dey, Priya Berde, Asha Shelar, Suhita Thatte, Rasika Aghase, Aditya Mishra and Zahid Khan.

The film is produced by PEN Studios, Manikarnika Films, and Paramhans Creations, in association with Eunoia Films LLP and Floating Rocks Entertainment Pvt. Ltd. It is slated to release in theatres on June 12. (PTI)

ACTOR UNNI MUKUNDAN PRAISES KERALA GOVT, POLICE FOR ANTI-DRUG CRACKDOWN

Actor Unni Mukundan on Monday lauded the Kerala government and police for their sustained crackdown on narcotics and organised drug networks under Operation Toofan.

UDF government, after coming to power, launched Operation Toofan to curtail the drug menace across the state, as arrests are being made across Kerala on a daily basis.

In a Facebook post, Mukundan expressed appreciation to Chief Minister VD Satheesan and Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala for what he described as "decisive action against the growing drug menace."

He also mentioned the crackdown that happened in the Perumbavoor area in Ernakulam district, where drug rackets target migrant workers.

"The ongoing operations carried out by the Kerala Police under Operation Toofan have resulted in significant arrests and have sent out a strong message that drug-related crimes will not be tolerated," he said.

The actor said the action reflected the commitment of the government and law enforcement agencies to safeguarding society and protecting future generations.

Mukundan also congratulated a group of young men who documented the situation on the ground and shared videos online, bringing the issue to public attention.

He said he became aware of the matter through their video and subsequently forwarded it to the Kerala police.

"I must commend the police department and its IT cell for their remarkably prompt response. What impressed me most was not merely the speed of the initial action, but the determination to sustain the momentum and continue the crackdown beyond the first arrests," he said.

According to the actor, such actions strengthen public faith in the legal system, the police force and the state's governance.

Mukundan urged citizens to take responsibility in addressing social issues rather than waiting for others to act. (PTI)

Rahman performs at Attari border in tribute to BSF ahead of 'Main Vaapas Aaunga' release

Oscar-winning composer A R Rahman on Sunday delivered his first-ever live performance at the Attari border post in Punjab where he paid a musical tribute to the Border Security Force.

Held during the Beating Retreat ceremony at JCP Stadium, the event was titled "Jai Ho — A Musical Salute to the Bravehearts" and came ahead of the release of filmmaker Imtiaz Ali's new film "Main Vaapas Aaunga", a cross border drama which features music by Rahman.

The musician opened the event, which drew thousands of visitors, with his composition "Chanda Suraj Lakhon Taare" before moving into songs from "Main Vaapas Aaunga".

"Maskara" was performed by Nilanjana Ghosh and Vedang Raina, who plays a young man in pre-Partition India in the film.

It was followed by "Ishq Mastana", rendered by Mohit Chauhan alongside singers Pooja Tiwari and Nargis.

The event concluded with Rahman's celebrated composition "Maa Tujhe Salaam".

Besides Ali, Rahman and Raina, the event was also attended by the film's producers -- Ananya Birla of Birla Studios and Mohit Choudhary of Window Seat Films. (PTI)

Ram Gopal Varma compares 'Obsession' with Urmila Matondkar's 'Kaun'

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma said a scene in the horror film "Obsession", featuring Inde Navarrette, reminded him of Urmila Matondkar's performance in his directorial "Kaun".

Varma shared a clip on his X handle on Sunday, which started with a scene from "Kaun" followed by a clip of "Obsession". "I remembered this shot of Urmila from 'KAUN' after watching 'OBSESSION'," he wrote in the caption.

The film is directed by Curry Barker and features Michael Johnston as Bear Bailey and Navarrette as Nikki Freeman. It revolves around a shy, insecure music store employee, Bailey, who is in love with his childhood friend and coworker, Freeman. The film, which released on May 29 has earned over USD 200 million at the global box office.

RGV says he is Obsessed with 'Obsession'

In another Tweet, RGV wrote, "Am OBSESSED with OBSESSION..Till even a few weeks before the whole industry believed that only Big starred , massive budgeted , Vfx spectacle films will pull audience into the theatres and now OBSESSION reset that BUTTONNo BIG STARS No GRAND LOCATIONS No LAVISH PRODUCTION DESIGN No FOREIGN SHOOTS No TOP TECHNICIANS and contrary to it's reported budget of 7 cr (Indian) it's easy to see , it's pure making cost cannot be more than 70 lakhs minus technical fees considering it's entirely shot in exactly 3 locations (two rooms in a modest house, interior of a car AND interior of a small storeThe directors style is visually simplistic but very unique (I was especially struck with his use of too much head space in many shots which strangely enhances the mood)"

He added, "He treats editing not just as a technical craft but as psychological weapon blending rapid cuts with especially lengthy stays (case in point is long stay on Nikki's face in interval shot) These kind of long takes build unbearable tension because the audience is trapped in the character's perspective with no escape.

His cutting on sharp sound effects (a door slam, a sudden laugh, a heartbeat) to create rhythmic punctuation is awe inspiring Barker's editing philosophy seems to be: "Make the audience feel what the character feels, which is being unstable" He throws out traditional editing rules (smooth continuity, clear emotional beats) in favor of something extremely anarchic The result is a film that feels unpredictable and alive, like the editing itself is also a part of the horror. He mostly used single source lighting and lit up spaces rather than individual shots very much like David fincher but much more effectively More than the 179 million dollars collection so far with a less than 1 million dollar budget , what needs to be even more studied are the path breaking edit and sound design techniques not to forget CHARACTER DESIGN."Varma's "Kaun" released in 1999 and revolved around Matondkar's character, stranded alone at home on a stormy night, who sees a news report on a dangerous serial killer on television. It also starred Manoj Bajpayee and Sushant Singh in pivotal roles. (PTI)

DIMPLE HAYATHI LASHES OUT AT TROLLS CRITICISING HER SUPPORT TO JANHVI KAPOOR

Actor Dimple Hayathi slammed trolls criticising her for supporting Janhvi Kapoor amid "Peddi" backlash and said several female actors don't receive roles that fully showcase their abilities.

Hayathi shared a note for Kapoor on her X handle on Sunday after a section of the audience criticised the film for objectifying women through its camera work, dialogues, and romantic scenes between Ram Charan and Kapoor.

Hayathi said if characters are underwritten, the responsibility lies more with writing and filmmaking choices and not the actor essaying the role. The actor herself was later trolled for extending her support to Kapoor.

In another series of posts on Monday, Hayathi lashed out at trolls and said her thoughts shaped from her experience and are not supposed to align with others.

"Guys relax take a chill pill please concentrate on your lives .. I have got mine my opinion or my experiences doesn't have to go with you or i come and answer each of you," she wrote.

The actor said some female actors have to spend years working within the limitations of the characters they are offered or written for them. "But one thing to remember not every female actor is fortunate enough to receive roles that fully showcase their abilities…It's not about who have come from where and who's who big or small or who is less over who it's only spoken and unfair to place entire burden on a female lead actors when the shortcomings clears stem from the writing," she wrote.

The backlash on the film was also addressed by the director, Buchi Sana, who shared a statement on social media on Saturday and said the film will have required changes. The film released on June 4 and has earned over Rs 200 crore at the global box office. (PTI)

INDEPENDENT TALENT POWERHOUSE PRARTHANA AJMANI REAFFIRMS COMMITMENT TO CINEMATIC TALENT THROUGH STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

Armour Entertainment, a leading celebrity talent management company, today announced a strategic initiative to broaden its engagement with industry partners. Spearheaded by seasoned industry expert Prarthana Ajmani who is the Founder & CEO, the move reaffirms the company's deep-rooted dedication to the craft of film making and sustained growth of the artists it represents. Operating independently at the forefront of the film industry, Ajmani has been instrumental in leading and shaping the acting careers of some of Indian cinema's most acclaimed names. Through a meticulous & validated hands-on approach, Armour Entertainment has built an elite roster of powerhouse performers, including the likes of Shefali Shah, Sidhant Gupta, and Ronit Roy, among others.

The company operates with the highest standards enabling secure partnerships with artists. Their expertise in navigating the complexities of the entertainment business, backed by principles and proven processes, has cemented Armour Entertainment as a trusted, formidable force in talent representation. Building on this legacy, Armour Entertainment is now taking a progressive step to fortify the broader entertainment landscape.

"The entertainment landscape is rapidly evolving, and I have always believed that a collaborative ecosystem can unlock exponentially larger opportunities for artists," said Prarthana. "Our commitment has always been, and remains, steadfastly dedicated to the craft and to our talent. By strengthening our relationships with industry peers, we are not only looking out for the artists but also hope to contribute to the collective growth and expand possibilities for the industry as a whole."

Recognizing that the modern entertainment sector thrives on synergy, these forward-looking associations would be designed to align seamlessly with the best interests of acting talent, fostering an environment where shared expertise, resources, and expansive networks translate into unprecedented avenues for artists.

About The Company: Armour Entertainment is a leading celebrity talent management agency dedicated to shaping acting careers. Founded by Prarthana Ajmani, the company provides comprehensive representation, focusing on the long-term growth, creative integrity, and business success of its artists while championing a collaborative approach to growth.

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Ayush leads men's challenge at Australian Open

Sindhu eyes title breakthrough

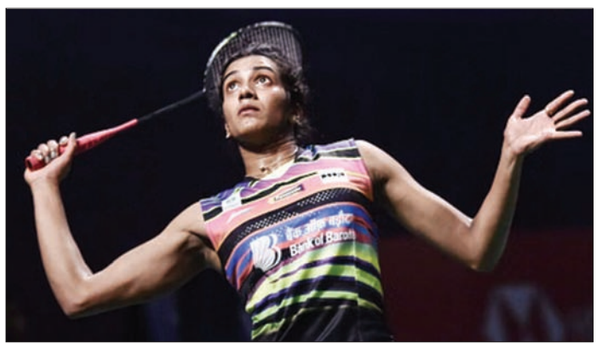
SYDNEY, June 8: Two-time Olympic-medallist PV Sindhu will look to end a prolonged title drought, while rising star Ayush Shetty will spearhead India's men's singles campaign at the Australian Open Super 500 badminton tournament beginning here on Tuesday.

Sindhu, seeded third, enters the tournament with a favourable draw as she searches for her first BWF World Tour title since winning the Syed Modi International in 2024.

The former world champion's best result this season remains a semifinal finish at the Malaysia Open in January.

The 30-year-old will open against Peru's Ines Lucia Castillo and is likely to face the winner of the first-round clash between fellow Indian Isharani Barua and China's Han Qian Xi.

Sindhu comes into the event after a round-of-16 finish at the Indonesia Open, where she lost to Paris Olympics champion and old nemesis and world No.1 An Se-



young of South Korea.

If she progresses as expected, Sindhu could run into Japan's world No.3 Akane Yamaguchi in the semifinals.

The Indian enjoys a slender 15-13 head-to-head advantage over the Japanese star. A potential final could pit her against second seed and world No. 8 Pornpawee Chochuwong of Thailand, against whom Sindhu leads 7-5.

India will have a sizeable presence in the women's singles draw as Tanvi Sharma faces fifth-seeded Chiu Pin-Chian of Chinese Taipei, while Malvika Bansod takes on Malaysia's Goh Jin Wei.

Anmol Kharb has been handed a tough opener against former world champion and fourth seed Nozomi Okuhara of Japan.

Aakarshi Kashyap faces Malaysia's Wong Ling Ching, while Tanya Hemanth takes on USA's Ishika Jaiswal.

In men's singles, world No. 20 Ayush Shetty, seeded sixth, will begin against a qualifier as he seeks a good run after a pre-quarterfinal exit at the Indonesia Open last week.

Former world championships bronze-medallist HS Prannoy opens against Indonesia's Moh. Zaki Uba, while world No. 49 Kiran George will face Malaysia's Justin Hoh in the first round.

India's challenge in men's doubles will rest on two pairs.

Hariharan Amsakarunan and M.R. Arjun, who are fresh from a quarterfinal appearance at the Indonesia Open, face a stiff opening-round test against eighth-seeded Chinese Taipei duo Lee Fang-Chih and Lee Fang-Jen.

Achutaditya Rao Doddavarapu and Pochana Arjun Reddy will take on China's Huang Di and Liu Yang.

India have no representatives in the women's doubles main draw.

In mixed doubles, sixth-seeded Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto will open against Hong Kong's Chan Yin Chak and Ng Tsz Yau. *(PTI)*

PM Modi's backing fuels Yogasana's Olympic ambitions, says Jaideep Arya

AHMEDABAD, June 8: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's support for Yogasana has strengthened the discipline's push for Olympic recognition, World Yogasana and Yogasana Bharat Secretary General Dr Jaideep Arya has said. Expressing confidence about the discipline's future, he said Olympic inclusion at some point was an achievable goal.

"We have now received the support of the Prime Minister. The sport will grow very rapidly from here," he told PTI Videos.

"Whichever country representative you speak to, they say that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken about it, and that gives them confidence to participate," he said.

"A single statement from him has created confidence among Yogasana athletes and the entire ecosystem across the world. There is now a belief that this is going to become an Olympic sport, and we have to prepare for that," Arya added.

Arya said one of the biggest challenges in promoting Yogasana as a competitive sport was changing the perception of yoga as merely a spiritual or wellness practice.

"One of the biggest challenges was that people knew yoga only as a spiritual pathway and as a wellness practice," he said. To attract younger generations, organisers worked for years to reposition Yogasana as a sport that children could participate in and compete at the highest level.

"Swami Ramdev (World Yogasana President) told us that we needed to present it as a sport so that children as young as eight or ten years old could connect with it. Today, children from across the world are coming and competing.

"That is the biggest attraction, and we had to work continuously for six years to achieve it," Arya said.

Describing Yogasana as one of the most accessible

sports, he said it required minimal infrastructure and could be practised almost anywhere.

"Every child can play and prepare from home. The name of that game is Yogasana. It is the most cost-effective sport. All you need is a mat and you can start practising Yogasana," he said.

He also pointed to growing international recognition for Yogasana, citing support from governments and sporting bodies abroad.

"The Government of Uganda has come forward to support us, and the Olympic chapter in Uzbekistan has granted recognition to our Uzbekistan chapter. These are very significant steps," Arya said.

While ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia and health challenges like the Ebola virus restricted the turnout of certain nations this year, Arya expressed optimism for future editions.

"Had it not been for these crises, over 100 countries would have participated this year. By next year, we anticipate that nearly 90 per cent of the world, roughly 190 countries will actively participate in this movement," he concluded. *(PTI)*

Aaron Rai finishes inside top 20 at The Memorial

DUBLIN (OHIO), June 8: Indian-origin British golfer Aaron Rai shot a two-under 70 in the final round to sign off a creditable tied 19th at The Memorial Tournament here.

Rai logged a combined score of two-under par.

JT Poston took the final day into a playoff to clinch his first title in 18 months and secure a spot at the US Open and The Open Championship.

The Memorial Tournament saw weather interruptions on the third day that forced a majority of the field to leave their third round incomplete and come back on Sunday to finish it and then start the fourth and final round.

Rai finished his third round with a one-over 73 and then recorded a score of two-under 70 for his fourth round.

Sahith Theegala, supported by Hero, finished the week at tied 32nd with a four-day total of two-over par with rounds of 74-71-72-73 and Sudarshan Yellamaraju finished tied 4th0 with a final score of six-over par and cards of 73-75-74-72.

Ryan Gerard finished second after falling short in the play-off that he forced by overcoming a four shot deficit in the final round to finish 12-under par (67-69-72-68).

Wyndham Clark finished third with a score of 11-under par (67-75-68-67), while Tommy Fleetwood and Sam Burn were tied for fourth at 10-under par. *(PTI)*

Boys implemented 'specific' plans; handled pressure well: Sardar after U-18 Asia Cup gold

NEW DELHI, June 8: Sardar Singh, a former India captain and current coach of the U-18 Asia Cup gold medal winning national side, attributed team's success to hard work, handling pressure well and implementing "specific" plans made by the team management.

Sardar spoke to PTI after returning home from the successful campaign in Japan.

"This team really handled pressure well. In international tournaments high pressure situations come, and it has to be handled well, and they did so. We had told them to implement 110 per cent on our plans not 80 or 90 per cent.

"We focussed on team's strength and good quality game and that paid dividends. We mixed quality with traditional hockey. As a team work, we did very well in a short span of time," he said.

Sardar highlighted the performance of leading goal scorer Ashish Tani Purti and Ketan Kushawaha.

"All the players played well. Difficult to pick but yes, Ashish & Ketan Kushawaha are extraordinary players. If we continue the hard work like this, if we play more matches with good teams.

We must provide this age group player, good quality matches & exposure and pass on our knowledge to them," Sardar added.

Ashish, who scored 13 goals in U-18 Asia Cup, was pleased to contribute to the team's cause.

"This was my first tournament representing India at any level and I am extremely happy that I could contribute for the team by scoring most no of goals in the tournament and helped the team win the gold medal.

"The team had decided to beat Japan at any cost in the finals after having lost to them in the league match. They had the home advantage but we were resolute and determined to avenge our defeat," said Ashish. U-18 Asia Cup winning team captain Ketan Kushwaha said it was great to see what they trained for actually paid off.

"Sardar Sir's knowledge and efforts really helped us a lot. A lot of positives are coming out of the tournament for us. Winning against Pakistan was very important. We were under pressure. But we pulled it off. From here we plan to represent India one day in Olympics & World Championship," he said. *(PTI)*

TN CM Vijay honours chess champion Praggnanandhaa with ₹ 50 lakh

CHENNAI, June 8: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay on Monday honoured Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa with ₹ 50 lakh, and tried his hand at a game with the 20-year-old city player at the Secretariat here, only to be checkmated by the youngster.

The chief minister felicitated Praggnanandhaa, who became the first Indian to win the prestigious Norway Chess title with a final round victory over Germany's Vincent Keymer in Oslo. He also played a game of chess with the young Grandmaster at his chamber in the Secretariat.

The government released a video of the grandmaster meeting Vijay with his parents.

As Vijay, completely absorbed in the game stood up beside his huge office table to make a strategic move to defend his king, Praggnanandhaa, the latter's parents, state Public Works and Sports Development Minister Aadhav Arjuna, and member secretary of Sports Development Authority of Tamil Nadu J Meghanatha Reddy, stood around watching.

The final move by Praggnanadhaa showed Vijay's king being checkmated. The CM put up a smile and applauded his 'opponent'. Soon the onlookers too smiled and applauded as a beaming Praggnanandhaa looks at the CM, as seen in the video.

Later, Vijay presented a cheque for ₹ 50 lakh as cash incentive on behalf of SDAT to the young grandmaster for etching his name in history.

"I didn't expect the chief minister to play chess; he played well. We played for about 15 minutes and I won," Praggnanandhaa told reporters. He said he was asked to bring a chessboard and the game was arranged for them to play.

"The CM is very supportive and encouraging," he added.

Praggnanandhaa described his Norway Chess triumph as the biggest achievement of his career, emphasising that defeating some of the world's strongest players including Magnus Carlsen made the title particularly memorable. *(PTI)*

Bogey-free Kochhar bags year's third Top-10 in IGPL Bharath Classic

EL JADIDA (MOROCCO), June 8: Karandeep Kochhar fired a bogey-free four-under 68 on the final day to register his third Top-10 finish of the season, ending tied 9th at the USD 500,000 Am Green IGPL Bharath Classic here.

The lanky Chandigarh golfer has now risen to 12th on the Asian Tour Order of Merit.

Kochhar, who had rounds of 66-73-70-68 totalled 11-under while Sweden's Charlie Lindh (69-70-67-64) signed off 18-under for a comprehensive title win.

Lindh was second in his last outing at the Kolon Korea Open and this week he produced a very consistent performance, that saw him rise to third on the Order of Merit. Lindh closed his win in a commanding manner, landing an eagle on the 18th for a four-shot win.

The tournament was co-sanctioned by the Indian Golf Premier League (IGPL) and the Asian Tour.

Kochhar birdied the third, 10th, 11th and the 14th hole.

Among other Indian IGPL players, Gaganjeet Bhullar (75-70-69-68) and Yashas Chandra (75-68-71-68) were the next best at tied 27th at six-under. Bhullar had five birdies against one bogey, while Yashas was bogey-free in his 68.

Rashid Khan, with a final round of 71 and a total of three-under was tied 41st as were Kartik Singh (71) and Sachin Baisoya (67), whose final round had two eagles on the par-five third and seventh holes.

Winner of IGPL Dubai, Kochhar had an outstanding week in terms of hitting as he found a lot of fairways and greens in regulation. However, the putter could have been better as he needed 28 or more putts on each of the four days, including 34 on the second day when he shot 73.

Kochhar is now looking forward to the USD two million International Series Morocco, as he continues his search for a maiden Asian Tour win. *(PTI)*

JT Poston loses a 4-shot lead and comes up clutch to win Memorial in a playoff

DUBLIN (USA), June 8: JT Poston built a four-shot lead Sunday morning in the rain-delayed Memorial and won the biggest tournament of his career. It just turned out to be a lot more work than he would have imagined.

Poston, who lost his lead after 12 holes, made a 7-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole to salvage an even-par 72 and force a playoff with Ryan Gerard, and then won on the second extra hole when Gerard missed a 6-foot par putt.

Gerard made a 40-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole to briefly take the lead, closed with a 68 and didn't really make a mistake over the final four hours until the final putt.

So ended the longest day for both of them — 33 holes, including 13 in the morning to complete the third round and two playoff holes. But what a payoff for Poston in so many ways. He had not finished in the top 20 in his previous 13 tournaments this year. And then he delivered the goods and celebrated with a handshake with tournament host Jack Nicklaus.

"A lot of holes, a lot of grit," Poston said. "Obviously, didn't play my best first 12, 13 holes, but I told myself I knew I was going to shake Jack's hand walking off 18, and I wanted to be proud of that handshake regardless of how it turned out. So I'm thrilled it happened this way."

The perks went beyond the $4 million prize. Poston earned a spot in the next three majors with one great week — high enough in the world ranking to avoid a 36-hole qualifier Monday for the U.S. Open, the one British Open spot available this week, and a return to the Masters.

They finished at 12-under 276 after Poston and Gerard pulled away from what had been a five-way tie for the lead with an hour to go in the tournament. *(AP)*

Perez re-elected Real Madrid president to pave way for Mourinho's return

BARCELONA, June 8: Florentino Pérez has earned four more years as Real Madrid's president after winning club elections on Sunday.

"We are going to keep working so that Real Madrid keeps winning more titles," he told his supporters at a late night victory party soon after Real Madrid's club television channel reported Pérez had beaten challenger Enrique Riquelme.

The club is yet to make the vote count public.

Pérez's victory will pave the way for him to bring back Portuguese coach José Mourinho for a second stint at Madrid. Mourinho, who coached Madrid from 2010-2013, was featured in promotional material for Pérez during the campaign. Pérez said he was "proud that José Mourinho, one of the best coaches in the world, is set to return."

Pérez has also said he wants to sign Liverpool center back Ibrahima Konaté and Inter Milan right back Denzel Dumfries, in addition to a pledge to bring in another major signing to be disclosed this week worth more than 150 million euros ($173 million).

The 79-year-old Pérez ran Madrid from 2000-2006 and from 2009 until now. Under his leadership, Madrid has won seven of its record 15 European Cups. Madrid has also been the most valuable club in the world for the last five years, according to Forbes.

Pérez, who also runs an international construction company, hadn't been challenged for Madrid's presidency by a rival candidate in over 20 years. He ran unchallenged when elections were scheduled in 2009, 2013, 2017, 2021 and 2025.

That said, Pérez has had a frustrating run of late. His Super League scheme to launch a rival competition to UEFA's Champions League fell through, and Madrid has gone two seasons without winning a title despite recruiting star striker Kylian Mbappé.

Pérez has also been criticized for last year floating the idea of selling 10% of the club to private investors, a move that would break with 124 years of the member ownership model. Riquelme congratulated Pérez and accepted the result. But he signaled that he will consider running again. Pérez's term will run through 2030.

"For us, this is not the end, this is the beginning," Riquelme said. "Real Madrid won't spend another 20 years without holding elections."

Riquelme, a renewable energy executive, launched his candidacy after an agitated Pérez announced elections last month during a news conference when he dared anyone to challenge him and denounced what he called a media campaign to topple him. *(AP)*

Don't know if Rohit and Hardik have been cleared: Sitanshu Kotak

MULLANPUR, June 8: India's assistant coach, Sitanshu Kotak, is not aware if veterans Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya have cleared their fitness tests ahead of the three-match ODI series against Afghanistan, but he has heard that the duo is doing fine.

Pandya has been suffering from back spasm while Rohit sustained a hamstring injury during the IPL. Both missed multiple games during the course of IPL and have been selected in the ODI team subject to fitness test clearance at the Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Bengaluru.

"I have honestly not got the news whether they have been cleared or not. But I'm sure they will be there. Whatever I heard, they are fine, but they, they have to go and do that fitness test or whatever the rule is," Kotak said when asked about the status of the duo's fitness test.

It is understood that Rohit has reported to CoE in Bengaluru for the fitness test.

Kotak informed that the ODI squad will assemble on Monday and Tuesday. On Wednesday, the team will train under lights before departing for Dharamsala on Thursday. *(PTI)*

From circus dreams to world stage, mother-daughter duo flying Yogasana's flag for USA

AHMEDABAD, June 8: When Kemi Blake first took up yoga nearly a decade ago, she was not looking for medals. She wanted to become a contortionist.

On Saturday, that journey came full circle when Kemi won gold for the United States in the Back Bend Senior B category at the inaugural World Yogasana Championships at the EKA Arena here.

Sharing the experience was her daughter, Kimani Blake, who also competed for Team USA. "I actually started practicing yoga maybe about 10 years ago because I wanted to be a contortionist," Kemi told PTI Videos.

"I wanted to be a performer. Yoga was the closest thing that I understood."

Kemi discovered competitive Yogasana through social media about a year-and-a-half ago and travelled to India for training. When she returned home and spoke about an upcoming championship, Kimani insisted on joining her.

"When I came back and I was told that there was this competition happening, she was like, 'You're not going to leave me. You have to take me with you'," Kemi recalled.

"So I was like, 'Okay, well, you have to train Yogasana.' And so we started training and here we are today, doing it together."

The mother-daughter duo believes Yogasana's competitive format does not contradict the discipline's traditional values, despite reservations from some sections of the yoga community.

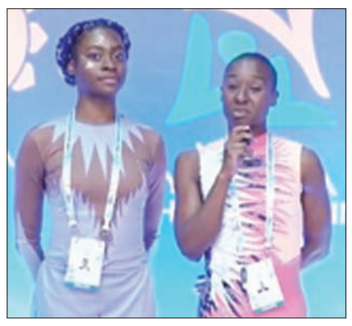
"There are a lot of people in the US who know yoga as a practice of calming the mind, but not very many people know Yogasana as a sport," Kemi said.

"Some people think yoga cannot be a competitive sport because it's supposed to be all about peace. I think that is a misunderstanding because you can be peaceful and competitive at the same time."

The road to Ahmedabad was not without challenges.

The duo said their journey from the United States took three days as some members of the American contingent had to be rerouted because of disruptions linked to the ongoing Gulf war.

"They arrived the day of their event," Kemi said.



"It shows that there are going to be challenges and difficulties, but if you stay focused on your goal, you will ultimately reach it."

According to Kemi, competition in Yogasana is about pushing personal limits while respecting fellow competitors.

"The competition itself is about going beyond your current capacity and doing that in a way that encourages sportsmanship amongst people from all around the world," she said.

For Kimani, the experience has been less about results and more about personal fulfilment.

"I'm not really too worried about going for gold. I just like the vibe here. I like to do my asanas and go home feeling fulfilled," she said.

Competing alongside her mother has made the experience even more special.

"With my mother, I feel very happy being a duo. We can both do the arts and the acrobatic sort of things."

Kimani said Yogasana has helped her remain calm during stressful situations.

"I definitely think it has helped me in my flexibility and my ability to keep calm in stressful situations. It's been very testing, but I think it's good to test one's patience," she said.

Having met athletes from countries including India, Mauritius, Nepal, Nigeria and Singapore, Kemi believes the sport has the potential to unite people across cultures.

"My ultimate goal is to be in the Olympics,I want to continue to practice personally, but also inform as many people as possible about this amazing sport around the world so that we can participate in the Olympics," she said.

Despite some logistical challenges associated with hosting the first edition of a global event, the American duo praised the arrangements made by organisers.

Kimani described the hotel accommodations as "very nice", while Kemi said the hosts had done "an amazing job" considering the scale of the championship and the number of countries involved.

"They've done a really good job of hosting, making sure that we're provided for, that we have food, proper accommodations and that if we're facing any challenges, there are enough volunteers," Kemi said.

She acknowledged there had been some issues related to the timing of events but said such concerns were natural for an inaugural championship.

"That will get better with time. This is the first one, so we give grace," she said, adding that volunteers stationed across the venue had been readily available to assist athletes and delegations. *(PTI)*

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India thrash Afghanistan as Manav Suthar shines to put Jadeja under pressure

MULLANPUR, June 8: Left-armer Manav Suthar's emergence as the flag-bearer of India's spin attack in the foreseeable future was the biggest gain for the hosts in their expectedly dominant innings and 300 runs victory over Afghanistan in the one-off Test here on Monday.

After being bowled out for 152 in the first innings, courtesy a 6/33 from Suthar, Afghanistan fared much worse in the second essay getting bundled out for 112 in 35.5 overs midway into the third day to hand India their biggest innings win.

Washington Sundar (4/36) did the star turn in the second innings while Kuldeep Yadav (3/30) also helped himself to some easy pickings.

In 2018, India had thrashed the Afghans by an innings and 260 runs but the visitors would take solace that they could stretch this Test into the third day.

The match belonged to Suthar, a left-arm orthodox spinner from Rajasthan's Sri Ganganagar.

He became the 10th Indian bowler to take a five-for on debut with his overall haul of seven wickets (6/33 and 1/29) but more importantly, he answered the lingering question in country's cricketing ecosystem: "Who will take over the baton from Ravindra Jadeja as and when he calls time?"

After the match against Afghanistan, Suthar showed all the requisite attributes to succeed at the highest level. The biggest among them being the consistency of landing the ball in the same spot.

Add the speed at which he bowls and the number of revolutions that he imparts while putting his whole body behind each delivery, Suthar is a complete package.

India have had bowlers who were wicket-takers on turners but the 23-year-old has shown that he can be a match-winner on placid surfaces by extracting both turn and bounce.

With Ravichandran Ashwin already retired and Jadeja in the twilight of his Test career, Suthar's emergence couldn't have happened at a better time.

He will face a far bigger Test in Sri Lanka where the quality of batting will be way better but the Indian team management can think of slowly phasing Jadeja out by the end of this World Test Championship cycle.

There isn't not much to write about Afghanistan's batting which lacked skill as well as experience.

Indian spinners benefitted from some atrocious shot selection by the visiting batters throughout the second innings.

After being shot out for 152, they played too many strokes that brought about their downfall in the second innings.

Left-handed opener Sediqullah Atal (42), who was signed by Delhi Capitals in this year, was dismissed off the last ball before tea as he tried to hit Washington against the turn and offered a simple catch to Mohammed Siraj at backward point.

Rahmanullah Gurbaz (24) wanted to hit his way out of the trouble before Shubman Gill placed Siraj at the long-on boundary asking Kuldeep to lure him for an aerial shot.

The move paid off immediately as Gurbaz was holed out at long-on.

A similar thing happened with first innings half centurion Rahmat Shah (13), who wanted to loft Washington over mid-off but couldn't clear the man of the moment, Suthar.

It was a pity that barely 500 odd people were present in the stands on Monday morning when the country's newest spin bowling star completed a rare milestone, becoming the 10th Indian to take five wicket-haul on debut.

He was also the seventh spinner to reach the landmark in his maiden Test.

His final first innings figures read 22-10-33-6 which also showed the kind of relentless pressure he put on inexperienced Afghan batters, none of whom looked comfortable while trying to defend him. *(PTI)*

New-look Indian team begins Asian Games build-up at Archery World Cup

ANTALYA (TURKEY), June 8: India will begin their preparations for the upcoming Asian Games with a completely revamped squad taking the field at the Archery World Cup Stage 3 beginning here on Tuesday.

The biggest talking point is the absence of star archer Deepika Kumari from the recurve women's team event, barely a month after she spearheaded India's stunning World Cup gold medal triumph in Shanghai, where the team upset Olympic champions South Korea and hosts China enroute to the title.

Following the Shanghai World Cup, the Archery Association of India (AAI) conducted selection trials for World Cup Stages 3 and 4 as well as the Asian Games.

The trials produced several surprises, with Deepika, her Olympian husband Atanu Das and reigning Asian Games compound champion Ojas Deotale all missing out the top-three spots.

With only three archers allowed per category at the Asian Games, Deepika and Atanu finished fourth in their respective trials.

While they remain part of the World Cup squads as fourth members, they will not be eligible to compete in team events.

Strategic shift

In a significant change, the AAI has decided that the fourth-ranked archer will not be considered for team events during the World Cup season, irrespective of the qualification scores. Earlier, the top three archers after qualification rounds formed the team.

But with only three athletes permitted at the Asian Games, the federation wants the designated trio to "build combinations and chemistry well in advance".

"This is a new rule that will be in place in this World Cup so that there is team bonding and chemistry among the three members who will compete at the Asian Games," an AAI official told PTI.

As a result, Deepika and Atanu will only compete in individual events in Antalya, even if they top the trials.

For Deepika, it is another setback in an otherwise illustrious career.

The four-time Olympian lost a shoot-off to her Jharkhand teammate Ankita Bhakat for the third and final Asian Games spot behind teenagers Kirti Sharma and Kumkum Mohod.

One of India's most decorated archers with multiple World Cup and Commonwealth Games medals, Deepika has endured heartbreak at both the Olympics and Asian Games.

She is yet to win an Olympic medal despite four appearances and has only one Asian Games medal -- a team bronze from Guangzhou way back in 2010. Her absence from the team event will be keenly felt.

In Shanghai, Deepika's experience proved invaluable as she guided and mentored younger teammates Kumkum and Ankita during India's first World Cup gold medal in women's recurve team competition since 2021.

With India currently without a permanent national coach, Deepika played a key role in strategy making and on-field guidance during that memorable campaign.

Kirti, Kumkum in focus

Attention will now shift to 19-year-old Kirti Sharma, who topped the Asian Games trials, as she faces her biggest test yet on the international stage.

Kirti made her India debut in the Asia Cup circuit last year and won a team bronze medal alongside Ridhi Phor and Ruma Biswas earlier this season.

While expectations will be high from the women's recurve team following their Shanghai success, the men's side will be eager to make a statement of their own.

Olympian Dhiraj Bommadevara will lead the challenge alongside experienced campaigners Neeraj Chauhan and Yashdeep Bhoge.

Compound challenge

The compound section, however, faces perhaps its toughest test in the build-up to the Asian Games, which are a little over three months away.

India dominated the discipline at the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, sweeping all five gold medals under Italian coach Sergio Pagni. Since then, however, results have dipped.

Pagni left to join South Korea as technical head, and India struggled to secure a replacement before appointing American coach Dave Cousins through the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics cycle.

Cousins was expected to join before this World Cup but visa-related delays have pushed his arrival to later this month, according to the federation.

India's compound archers endured a disappointing outing in Shanghai, with both the men's and women's teams returning empty-handed.

The lone bright spot was reigning World University Games champion Sahil Jadhav, who claimed his maiden World Cup medal -- a bronze -- in only his second appearance on the global circuit.

Sahil will team up with Kushal Dalal and Thirumuru Ganesh Mani Ratnam in the men's compound event.

The women's compound team will be led by experienced campaigner Jyothi Surekha Vennam alongside Chikitha Taniparthi and 17-year-old Prithika Pradeep.

Parneet Kaur is the fourth member of the squad and, like Deepika, will not feature in the team event.

Her omission from the Asian Games-bound trio means India will miss one of the members of the gold medal-winning team from Hangzhou.

Former world champion Aditi Swami, who was also a member of the gold medal winning team, is another notable exclusion.

Squad

Recurve men: Dhiraj Bommadevara (SSCB), Neeraj Chauhan (AIPSCB), Yashdeep Bhoge (RSPB), Atanu Das (PSPB); coach: Sonam Tshering Bhutia.

Recurve women: Kirti Sharma (Haryana), Kumkum Mohod (Maharashtra), Ankita Bhakat (Jharkhand), Deepika Kumari (PSPB); coach: Udham Singh.

Compound men: Sahil Jadhav (RSPB), Kushal Dalal (Haryana), Thirumuru Ganesh Mani Ratnam (Andhra Pradesh), Rishabh Yadav (Haryana); coach: Haresh Kumar.

Compound women: Jyothi Surekha Vennam (AAI), Chikitha Taniparthi (Telangana), Prithika Pradeep (Maharashtra), Parneet Kaur (Punjab); coach: Jiwanjyot Singh. *(PTI)*

India sign off Ulaanbaatar Open with three freestyle golds, finish with 17 medals

ULAANBAATAR, June 8: India capped a successful campaign at the Ulaanbaatar Open Senior Ranking Series wrestling tournament with Deepak (61kg), Sagar Jaglan (74kg) and Dinesh (125kg) winning gold medals in the men's freestyle event on the final day of the competition here.

Their stellar performances on Sunday helped India collect seven medals in men's freestyle and take their overall tally to 17 medals across freestyle, Greco-Roman and women's wrestling, ensuring a top-three finish in the team standings.

Deepak clinched the 61kg title with a commanding 6-0 victory over Kazakhstan's Assyl Aitakyn, while heavyweight Dinesh edged Kazakhstan's Yedige Kassimbek 2-0 in the 125kg final.

Sagar produced a gritty effort to beat Russia's Tamir Eshinimaev 3-2 and secure the 74kg gold medal.

India's freestyle wrestlers also added four bronze medals through Sumit (57kg), Kumar Mohit (65kg), Jaideep (74kg) and Vicky (97kg) and finished runner-up in team championship behind Russia.

"The phenomenal success of our freestyle squad in securing the runner-up position, coupled with our Greco-Roman team clinching the overall championship, is a historic milestone for Indian wrestling," Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) president Sanjay Singh said.

"Winning 17 medals against world-class competition highlights the competitive depth of our athletes in the continental space," he added.

Earlier in the tournament, India's Greco-Roman wrestlers had finished their campaign with two gold medals through Sunil (87kg) and Nitesh (97kg), while Sahil secured a bronze in the 60kg category. The Greco-Roman team went on to claim the overall team title with 119 points. *(PTI)*

Don't expect too much too soon: Kapil Dev on Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's India call-up

NEW DELHI, June 8: Cricket legend Kapil Dev has urged fans and experts to be patient with Vaibhav Sooryavanshi following his maiden India call-up, saying placing excessive expectations on the youngster at such an early stage of his career would be unfair.

The 15-year-old sensation broke Sachin Tendulkar's record to become the youngest player selected for India's senior men's team. He was named in the squad for the T20I series against England and Ireland and has also been included in the contingent for the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, later this year.

The 1983 World Cup winning captain described the 15-year-old as a "special talent" but stressed that the transition to international cricket would require time and adjustment.

"He is a special talent, give him time, but he definitely showed the talent that he has. I think he is unbelievable, but again, he will have to conduct himself (in the Indian team), have to keep himself fit, and a lot of other things are going to happen when you are part of the national team.

"How much he is focused, only he can answer, but to me, he is a special talent," Kapil told PTI Videos on Monday.

Kapil believes Sooryavanshi will soon learn the difference between playing for club and country.

"There's nothing wrong with giving respect to the young kid, but expecting too much at this stage would be wrong; he has just been included in the team. He will understand that club cricket is totally different from playing for your country, it's a different thought process so give him time, don't start expecting too much, just give him time," he stressed.

His former teammate and pacer Madan Lal has no doubt about the boy wonder emulating his Indian Premier League success on the international stage.

"This is a very big moment for him because he is a 15-year-old player who has forced his selection. He has got this chance because of his good performance." "I think he will definitely be able to do it because he has the talent and in abundance. Why won't he be able to do it? He is also in good form."

"He has played throughout the tournament and performed consistently. He is only 15 years old and has already shown what he is capable of," Lal said.

Sooryavanshi has hammered the likes of Pat Cummins and Kagiso Rabada with gay abandon during the IPL this year.

"I think if a player is talented, he will definitely be able to perform well. I don't think he will take much time. He has played so well. His nature of the game suits him. "I am 100% sure that he will perform well in international cricket. He is an amazing talent," Lal explained.

Hope from golfers

Moving away from cricket, Kapil, who is also the president of the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI), hoped the six-member Indian golf squad bound for Aichi-Nagoya could improve on the country's return from the Hangzhou Asian Games, where Aditi Ashok's creditable silver medal was India's lone podium finish.

"If you are playing well, then anyone can beat any opponent. Our boys and girls are good enough; they just need a little bit more confidence because how they play on that particular week is very important," Kapil said.

The former India captain believes the growing popularity of golf in the country, aided by landmark achievements of people like Aditi Ashok, can inspire the next generation of players.

"I hope so, let's put it positively, the awareness (about golf) has increased, people have come to know about the sport and the kids also feel very happy that if this girl (Aditi Ashok) can win a medal, then why not me," he added.

Kapil, however, stressed that medals were not the only measure of success for the PGTI as their bigger picture focuses on displaying competitive spirit.

"I think winning a medal is important, but more importantly, it is about how they play and conduct themselves. In these games, the number of medals you win matters, but at the end of the day it is about how they played, and whether they competed well enough or they are ready for that stage. That's very important as part of PGTI," he signed off. *(PTI)*

Form of openers, bowling main areas of concern as India head into T20 WC

NEW DELHI, June 8: For the second time in eight months, the Indian women's cricket team may well have to depend on individual brilliance to win an ICC title considering their shortcomings in all departments.

The road to the pathbreaking ODI World Cup triumph in November was full of bumps, but Jemimah Rodrigues carried the team on her shoulders to get their hands on the elusive trophy.

Not so long ago, India seemed to have most bases covered in the shortest format but the back to back series loss in South Africa and England in the lead up to the T20 showpiece have exposed the obvious chinks in the armour.

The form of openers Shafali Verma and Smriti Mandhana have been tepid of late with the lower-order also not performing as per expectations. The team's designated power hitter, Richa Ghosh, doesn't have runs under her belt going into the World Cup opener against Pakistan on June 14.

The performance of veteran all-rounder Deepti Sharma too have left a lot be desired both with bat and ball.

As per former India captain Shantha Rangaswamy, India's mains problems lie with the ball and not so much in the batting and fielding department.

Her concerns are valid as England gunned down a competitive target of 181 comfortably against India to win the three-match series in the UK.

The absence of injured all-rounders Kashvee Gautam and Amanjot Kaur have negatively impacted the balance of the squad. Traditionally, India have been spin heavy with not many options in the pace department. *(PTI)*

I learnt that consistency is everything in Test cricket: Manav Suthar

MULLANPUR, June 8: Debutant left-arm spinner Manav Suthar said on Monday that his maiden Test appearance taught him that consistency and patience are the biggest virtues in the longest format, after starring in India's comprehensive innings-and-300-run victory over Afghanistan in the one-off match in Mullanpur.

Named Player of the Match for his seven-wicket match haul, Suthar said repeatedly hitting the same areas was the secret behind his success on a surface that offered plenty of assistance to the spinners.

"The biggest lesson is that consistency is everything. You have to keep bowling in the same area over and over again. I think that's the most important thing in Test cricket. It's a format that demands a lot of patience," Suthar said at the presentation ceremony.

"That's what I've learned, keep being patient, stick to your plans and keep hitting the right areas consistently," he said.

The 23-year-old left-arm spinner said that representing India in Test cricket felt surreal.

"It was a very unreal feeling. It has been my dream from the very beginning to play for India and to play Test cricket. So it was an incredible moment for me and honestly felt quite unreal."

Suthar said batting before bowling helped him understand the nature of the wicket, which in turn aided his bowling plans.

"Even when I went out to bat, I felt quite comfortable. As I settled in and faced a few deliveries, I realised there was a bit of assistance for the spinners on the wicket."

"Then, when I came on to bowl and delivered my first over, I got the same feeling. After that, my only focus was to keep using the right line, length and pace."

The spinner said he consciously relied on his stock ball in the initial phase before introducing subtle variations.

"Initially, my focus was on understanding how the wicket was playing. That's why I wanted to rely on my stock delivery as much as possible."

"Once I understood that the wicket was a little slow and required some variation in pace, I started making those adjustments. But the main idea was always to make my stock ball as effective as possible."

Suthar also expressed pride at being entrusted with the second new ball during the match.

"It's a matter of great pride. Being trusted with that responsibility means a lot."

Complete win

India captain Shubman Gill described the result as a complete team effort.

"A complete win, ticked all the boxes, so very happy. It was very hot. We decided that if we bowl them out by lunch or around the first drinks break in the second innings we will ask them to bat again.

"For the spinners it was more about getting the experience of how to set up the batters. When you are batting first try to post 350+ no matter where you are batting," Gill said, adding that India's first-innings objective was always to post a score in excess of 350," he said.

We lack experience in Test format

Afghanistan captain Hashmatullah Shahidi acknowledged that his side was outplayed and credited Suthar for maintaining relentless discipline.

"It was a tough day, a tough game for us, and right from the start, from the beginning, our discipline in the bowling was not that good.

"The reality is that we don't have that experience in this format. We learned a lot from this game because we don't get enough opportunities to play Test cricket. but everybody knows that India is a tough team playing in their own conditions.

"But a lot of lessons to us and hopefully that we learn from this and hopefully that we play and we learn to play under pressure as we win the things get tougher," he added.

Talking about Suthar, Shahidi said, "He bowled really well. He bowled stump to stump and was really disciplined in his bowling. That's why we struggled against him." *(PTI)*

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