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● Trump goes after Netanyahu as he pursues deal with Iran

● Nepal govt wants stronger ties with India, China: Khanal

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● Raut alleges MPs are being offered ₹ 50 crore to defect

● Drop theatrics; strike at paper leak mafia, not students: Rahul

Sale of Iran's oil to be allowed without restrictions: Leaked interim agreement Iran to reopen Strait of Hormuz after signing of deal

DUBAI, June 17: Iran will immediately take steps to reopen the Strait of Hormuz once a tentative deal with the US to end the war is signed and will be allowed to sell its oil without restrictions, according to leaked copies of an interim agreement that officials say broadly matches the document.

The accord, due to be signed in Switzerland on Friday, also envisions Iran receiving at least USD 300 billion to rebuild after the war and says the US would work to end all American and United Nations sanctions imposed on Tehran -- if a final agreement addressing Iran's nuclear program is reached.

The US and Israel went to war on February 28 in part to prevent Iran from ever getting a nuclear weapon -- although US President Donald Trump's goals in the conflict have repeatedly shifted. The interim deal stops the war before that aim is secured -- instead opening a two-month period for nuclear negotiations -- and appears to offer Iran several benefits up front while extracting little in return.

The US agreement to immediately allow Iran to sell its oil freely and the offer to eventually lift all sanctions, for instance, represent major concessions that outstrip the terms of Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that Trump withdrew America from in his first term, declaring it the "worst deal ever." The accord likely will draw intense criticism in Washington -- and appears to be a major setback for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is coming under intense



criticism at home as the details emerge.

Much of the agreement would restore the status quo before the war, including ending hostilities, restarting negotiations between the US and Iran over Tehran's nuclear program, and reopening the strait, which is a crucial passage for the world's oil and natural gas and whose closure created a historic energy crisis. The deal includes an end to the fighting in Lebanon between Israel and the Iranian-backed militia Hezbollah. That is one of the most delicate parts of the agreement because Israel has maintained it will continue to defend itself and to occupy vast swaths of Lebanon. Iran has said Israel must withdraw under the deal, although the leaked versions make no mention of withdrawal.

A person who was briefed on the memo-

andum of understanding after it was signed and another who viewed a copy beforehand said it largely matched the text of what was published by the Saudi-owned broadcaster Al Arabiya, which reported details of the deal Tuesday. The two people spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

Another two officials in the Mideast, who spoke on condition of anonymity for the same reason, also said the versions published by Al Arabiya and Bloomberg broadly matched the final agreement.

The White House and other American officials have not published the terms and did not immediately respond to questions. However, White House communications director Steven Cheung wrote online Wednesday

after CNN published a leaked version of the deal that it "does not reflect the language of the actual" agreement, without elaborating.

Iran also has not published an official version of the deal. Iran's semi-official Tasnim news agency, close to its paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, claimed Wednesday that Bloomberg's version had missing portions, without offering a full accounting.

Trump has cited various goals for the war, including at times vowing it would end Iran's nuclear and missile programs and its support for Hezbollah and other proxy groups in the region. He also suggested it could lead to toppling the Iranian government.

The interim deal falls short of all of these goals, but Trump hailed it Wednesday.

"Nobody knows what it is but it's very strong," Trump said in France, where he is attending a Group of Seven summit.

But he also opened the door to abandoning it: "It's a memorandum of understanding and if I don't like it, we'll go back to shooting at them, dropping bombs."

Some concessions to Iran -- including the full lifting of sanctions and the release of frozen assets -- would happen gradually and be linked to progress in the nuclear talks, according to officials from Pakistan, a key mediator. They outlined some of the deal's major points on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

But in the meantime, the US will issue waivers to sanctions that allow Iran to sell oil freely. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NEET re-exam: CM reviews preparedness



GUWAHATI, June 17: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday reviewed preparations for the rescheduled medical entrance exam NEET-UG, to be held on June 21, and directed officials to ensure a free, fair and secure conduct of the test.

Chairing a meeting, Sarma said stringent measures have been put in place to prevent any irregularities during the examination process.

"Assam has always taken strict measures to ensure there are no loopholes in the entire process," the chief minister said in a social media post after the meeting.

He said military officials would transport question papers to exam-

ination centres, while CCTV surveillance would be installed at all venues. The centres will also be provided with round-the-clock police protection.

As part of the security arrangements, prohibitory orders under Section 144 will be enforced within a 100-metre radius of examination centres. Candidates will undergo double-layer frisking, and mobile signal jammers will be installed at all venues.

The review meeting was held via video conference with District Commissioners, Senior Superintendents of Police (SSPs) and other senior district officials. The chief minister directed the District Commissioners (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KA Police seize morphine worth ₹ 3 crore, one held



HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, June 17: In a major breakthrough against interstate narcotics trafficking, Karbi Anglong Police seized a huge consignment of suspected morphine valued at approximately ₹ 3 crore during a routine naka checking operation on the four-lane highway at 6th Mile under the jurisdiction of Dilai Police Station on Tuesday evening.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team set up a strategic checkpoint under the supervision of Bokajan Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Rustum Raj Brahma. During the operation, the team intercepted an Assam-registered Hyundai Creta (AS01DH1666) travelling from Manipur.

A thorough search of the vehicle led to the recovery of six plastic packets concealed inside the spare tyre. The seized contraband weighed 3.49 kg and is suspected to be high-grade morphine.

The driver of the vehicle, identified as TH Jacob, a resident of Senapati district in Manipur, was caught red-handed and taken into custody.

Police have registered a case under the relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, and a detailed investigation is underway to trace the broader supply network linked to the consignment.

Bodies of 2 Indian seafarers killed in US attack on vessel last week repatriated

DUBAI, June 17: Bodies of two of the three Indian seafarers who were killed in a US strike on a vessel off the Oman coast were repatriated to the country on Wednesday, according to an official statement.

This comes a day after 21 rescued Indian seafarers from the same Palau-flagged vessel MT Settebello were repatriated to India. "The mortal remains of Mr Aditya Sharma and Mr Shivanand Chaurasiya, who tragically lost their lives in the attack on MT Settebello, have been repatriated to India," the Indian Embassy in Muscat said on X.

The mission, however, did not provide any details regarding the body of the third deceased Indian

seafarer, Patnala Suresh. "Our heartfelt condolences remain with their families during this difficult time," the Indian mission added.

Last week, three merchant ships with Indian crew came under US attack off the Oman coast. One of them was MT Settebello, which led to three deaths, while the others were rescued. Following the attacks, the Ministry of External Affairs summoned US Charge d'Affaires Jason Meeks twice in a week and registered strong protest.

On Tuesday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, while addressing an outreach session of the G7 summit, said that all countries must ensure that maritime routes remain secure and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Arunachal, Assam discuss excise administration, curbing illicit trade



ITANAGAR, June 17: Arunachal Pradesh and Assam on Wednesday agreed to strengthen cooperation in excise administration, prevention of illicit trade and revenue mobilisation, during a ministerial-level meeting, officials said. Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein, who chaired the meeting here, stressed the need for coordinated efforts, technological innovation

and regular inter-state engagement to address emerging challenges in the sector, an official statement said.

Assam was represented by its Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, Excise, Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora, along with senior officials from the finance and excise departments of both the states. Mein, who also (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Manipur unrest making it difficult to focus on development: Manipur CM

IMPHAL, June 17: Continued violence in Manipur has made it hard to focus on development activities, Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh said on Wednesday, and alleged that many people do not want peace in the state.

Singh said he became chief minister to address the hardships of the people and bring peace among communities.

"However, after I became chief minister, there has been a series of unrest. We are occupied in resolving those, making it hard to focus on development activities. Nevertheless, we can't run away from our duties," he said.

Addressing a programme in Imphal West district, Singh also said that after becoming chief minister, he visited Jiribam and met with Kukis, Meiteis and Paiteis, and has been working on bringing peace.

"A day after I came from Jiribam, a bomb attack at Tronglaobi in Bishnupur killed two children and injured their mother, leading to protests and unrest for a month," he said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Karbi Anglong to hold Jan Kalyan Shivirs across blocks from today

DIPHU, June 17: As part of the nationwide observance of "12 Years of Trust, Development & Public Welfare", the District Administration, Karbi Anglong, will organise Jan Kalyan Shivirs in all development blocks of the district from June 18 to June 20, 2026, commencing at 10:30 am onwards.

The initiative aims to create awareness among the public about various flagship schemes of the Central and State governments, facilitate on-the-spot delivery of eligible services, and address public grievances through the convergence of

concerned departments.

The block-level Jan Kalyan Shivirs will include the screening of a documentary showcasing the achievements of the Government of India and the Government of Assam towards Viksit Bharat @ 2047 and Viksit Assam, distribution of benefit sanction letters/cards to selected beneficiaries, and felicitation of exemplary citizens and scheme champions.

On June 18, 2026, the Jan Kalyan Shivirs will be held from 10:30 am onwards at the Sarsing Teron Langkung Habe Memorial Town Hall, Diphu, under the Lumbajong Development Block. The

programme will be attended by Dr Tuliram Ronghang, CEM, KAAC, and MLA of 111-Rongkhang (ST) LAC, as the chief guest.

Amarsing Tisso, MP from the 6-Diphu (ST) Parliamentary Constituency, will attend as the guest of honour, while Niso Terangpi, MLA of 110-Diphu LAC, and Tillutoma Hasnu, EM, KAAC, will attend as special guests.

At the Samelango Indoor Stadium near the Block Campus under the Same-lango Development Block, Raju Tisso, Chairman, KAAC, will attend as the chief guest and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Furnishing false information during census punishable: Official

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, June 17: With the self-enumeration exercise for Census 2027 having begun on Tuesday, Director of Census Operations, Nagaland, Dr Kenie Miachieo, on Wednesday said furnishing false information during the census is punishable under the provisions of the Census Act, 1948.

Addressing a press conference at the Kohima Press Club, Miachieo called for public cooperation to ensure accurate Census 2027 data for Nagaland.

He expressed confidence that extensive awareness campaigns and cooperation from the public, community organisations, village

authorities and other stakeholders would contribute to the collection of accurate and reliable data during Census 2027.

Highlighting the digital initiatives being introduced for Census 2027, he said data would be collected through a mobile application, while an option for self-enumeration has also been made available to the public.

He further informed that a web-based portal would be used for monitoring and managing census activities, while house-listing blocks would be created through a web-mapping application. Miachieo said that in Nagaland, the self-enumeration period is scheduled from (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Ambubachi Mela to kickstart at Kamakhya Temple from June 22

'We are fully prepared to welcome the devotees for the Ambubachi Mahayog atop the sacred Nilachal Hills'

GUWAHATI, June 17: The local administration is setting up camps for pilgrims, making arrangements for medical treatment and sufficient ferries on the Brahmaputra for the June 22 to 26 Ambubachi fair at the Kamakhya temple here.

The doors of the temple will remain closed on the intervening night of June 21 and 22. During the Ambubachi Mela period, no VIP movement would be allowed at the temple.

Tourism Minister Ajanta Neog on Wednesday said, "We are fully prepared to welcome the devotees for the Ambubachi Mahayog atop the sacred Nilachal Hills. Multiple government agencies are leaving no stone unturned to make the event a grand success." The state government is working in coordination with 24 different departments to ensure the smooth conduct of the fair. Neog said three huge camps are being set up to accommodate thousands of devotees attending the Ambubachi Mela, and there will be separate camps for police personnel.

The administration is also setting up medical camps, while there will also be sufficient ferries on the Brahmaputra that flows just below the Nilachal Hill, the state tourism minister said.



"In 2024, a total of 7,46,066 devotees came for the Ambubachi Mela, while 7,72,019 people attended the event last year," Neog said. She asserted that the Ambubachi Mela has

become a landmark religious event in India, and the state government's aim is to arrange a hassle-free and comfortable stay for the devotees with proper security here. (PTI)

Five suspects linked to ISI-backed terror module held

NEW DELHI, June 17: Five more persons associated with an alleged interstate terror module linked to Pakistan-based gangster Shahzad Bhatti have been arrested for allegedly plotting attacks on police personnel and disseminating propaganda for an ISI-backed outfit, a Delhi Police official said on Wednesday.

The latest arrests come a month after three members of the alleged module were apprehended during Operation Gang Bust 2.0 on May 7, taking the total number of arrests in the case to eight.

"The accused were tasked with targeting police personnel in Delhi and neighbouring states, conducting reconnaissance of police stations and security establishments, and promoting an alleged terror outfit, Tehreek-e-Taliban Hindustan (TTH), through graffiti and posters in Delhi-NCR," a senior police officer said in a statement.

The arrestees have been identified as Sohail (26), resident of Faridabad, Sonu Meena (30) from Ghitori in Delhi, Sachin Kumar Meena (20) from Rajasthan's Dausa district, Mohammad Kaif (21) of Haryana's Nuh and Mohammad Rihan (20) from Meerut in Uttar Pradesh.

Police said the module was being operated by Pakistan-based handler Shahzad Bhatti -- backed by the



Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) -- through associates including Hassan Gujjar, Rana Hunain, Abid Jutt and Mohsin -- all based in Pakistan.

During the operation, police recovered five firearms, 10 live cartridges, posters and digital material including videos allegedly revealing threats to police personnel and containing surveillance details of potential targets.

"The Special Cell had been monitoring the activities of Bhatti and his network and developed intelligence through human sources and technical surveillance, leading to the arrests." (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Sensex, Nifty rally for 4th straight day as easing crude oil prices fuel buying

MUMBAI, June 17: Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended higher on Wednesday, taking their winning run to the fourth straight session, buoyed by softening crude oil prices following a peace deal between the US and Iran.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 347.14 points, or 0.45 per cent, to settle at 77,155.62. During the day, it jumped 410.51 points, or 0.53 per cent, to 77,218.99.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rallied 96.55 points, or 0.40 per cent, to end at 24,085.70. Intraday, the benchmark advanced 119.05 points, or 0.49 per cent, to 24,108.20.

Among the 30 Sensex firms, Trent jumped the most, by 7.06 per cent. Bharat Electronics, Eternal, Tata Steel, Infosys, Titan and Bharti Airtel were also among the winners.

Bajaj Finserv, Axis Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the laggards.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded at around USD 79.10 per barrel.

"Continued weakness in crude oil prices, driven by easing geopolitical tensions around the Strait of Hormuz, has kept investor sentiment buoyant," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit



Investments Limited, said. In four days, the BSE benchmark has jumped 3,323.07 points, or 4.50 per cent, and the Nifty surged 924.1 points, or 3.98 per cent. "Markets extended their winning streak for the fourth consecutive session on Wednesday, supported by favourable global cues and sustained buying across sectors. The continued easing in crude oil prices and expectations of a status quo

from the US Federal Reserve in its upcoming policy meeting supported overall risk sentiment," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

The BSE MidCap Select index jumped 1.20 per cent and SmallCap Select index went up by 0.31 per cent.

Sectorally, Capital Goods surged 2.76 per cent, Industrials (1.83 per cent), PSU Bank (1.80 per cent), Consumer Durables (1.39 per cent), Power (1.19 per cent) and Metal (1.15 per cent).

Utilities, Auto, Realty were the laggards.

A total of 2,404 stocks advanced while 1,876 declined and 163 remained unchanged on the BSE. In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index ended higher, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index settled lower. Markets in Europe were trading on a mixed note.

US markets ended mostly lower on Tuesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 749.18 crore on Tuesday after a day's breather, according to exchange data.

On Tuesday, the Sensex jumped 544.15 points, or 0.71 per cent, to settle at 76,808.48. The Nifty climbed 135.25 points, or 0.57 per cent, to end at 23,989.15. (PTI)

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Iran to reopen Strait of Hormuz

Iran's main buyer of oil, China, is believed to have bought at below-market prices because of its willingness to ignore the sanctions.

Granting oil waivers at the start of the 60-day talks strips the US of a major point of leverage. Only at the conclusion of the overall deal in 2015 were sanctions on Iran's oil lifted. The interim deal also opens the door to ending all sanctions Iran faces from the US and at the UN -- though it says the schedule for that will be worked out later. Still, that is far beyond the 2015 deal, which only lifted some sanctions in exchange for Iran drastically reducing its enrichment and stockpile of uranium.

The accord would also provide Iran with at least USD 300 billion to rebuild after an intense US and Israeli bombing campaign -- an extraordinary figure and another major benefit for Iran. That also appears dependent on the progress of further negotiations. US Vice President JD Vance has said Gulf Arab nations would invest that amount. Trump reiterated Wednesday that the US would not contribute and said it was up to other countries if they wanted to invest.

The deal provides a major win for the global economy -- the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded once passed before the war began. Since then, Iranian attacks on shipping and the threat to vessels effectively shut the strait.

The strait's closure drove up energy prices around the world and made many basics, including food, more expensive. Iran let out some vessels that paid tolls, something never done before in the strait, which has long been considered an international waterway. The US later provided military support to get other tankers out, but traffic was nowhere near levels before the war.

The deal also says the US will lift a blockade imposed on Iranian ports and that the strait will return to its prewar traffic levels in 30 days, while acknowledging Iranian mines may need to be destroyed.

The interim deal sets a 60-day window, which can be extended, to negotiate over limiting Iran's nuclear program, which has been discussed at multiple rounds of talks during Trump's second administration without success. The US promises not to make threats of military action under the current deal after two rounds of talks were interrupted by attacks.

Iran maintains its nuclear program is peaceful, though it has enough highly enriched uranium to build multiple atomic bombs, should it choose to do so, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency. In the interim deal, Iran reiterates that it will never build a nuclear weapon -- a promise it also made in the 2015 nuclear accord. (AP)

NEET re-exam: CM reviews

and SSPs to jointly inspect all examination centres to assess security arrangements, infrastructure preparedness and examination-day logistics. He also instructed that a mandatory technical audit and dry run of CCTV systems, biometric devices and signal jammers be carried out at all centres well before the examination. Adequate publicity should be undertaken to create public awareness of the restrictions, and ensure that no person other than candidates approach the examination centres, Sarma said. Sarma also said that there should be adequate deployment of women police personnel at all examination centres.

The CM stressed the importance of strict adherence to National Testing Agency (NTA) guidelines regarding candidate frisking. He said that double-layer frisking should be conducted firmly, professionally and courteously, ensuring candidates do not face inconvenience or discomfort while maintaining the highest vigilance against malpractice. Sarma also directed that a nodal officer be designated in each district for CCTV monitoring, and that random checks of its footage be carried out regularly.

Regarding the security of question papers, he instructed that access to bank lockers where these are stored be strictly regulated. Visits by individuals should be permitted only under exceptional circumstances and with the prior approval of the district magistrate, he said.

A senior police officer not below the rank of DSP will also be designated in each district to oversee the security and monitoring of such lockers. A control room will be established in the office of the Director of Medical Education, which will become operational from June 19, he said.

The examination will be conducted across 87 centres located in 17 districts of the state.

Sarma said candidates carrying valid admit cards would be allowed to travel free of cost on Assam State Transport buses on the examination day. "In today's meeting, we have taken several measures to uphold the integrity of the NEET re-examination. There will be no compromise with the future of our students," he asserted. A total of 43,319 candidates in the state have registered for the examination.

The NEET-UG examination, conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) for admission into MBBS courses, was held on May 3 but was subsequently cancelled following allegations of irregularities. The nationwide re-examination is scheduled for June 21. (PTI)

Bodies of 2 Indian seafarers

that seafarers can perform their duties without fear. Modi raised the issue a day ahead of his bilateral talks with US President Donald Trump. (PTI)

Karbi Anglong to hold Jan

Bilimohan Khaklary, EM, KAAC, as the guest of honour. At the Mini Stadium, Bakalia, under the Langsompri Development Block, Madhuram Lekthe, EM, KAAC, will attend as the chief guest, while Kangbura Killing, MAC, KAAC, will attend as the guest of honour.

The programme at the Okereng Mini Stadium under the Howraghat Development Block will be attended by Lunsing Teron, MLA of 109-Howraghat (ST) LAC, as the chief guest and Ritesh Enghi, EM, KAAC, as the guest of honour. At the Dillai Sports Complex under the Bokajan Development Block, Suriya Rongphar, MLA of 108-Bokajan (ST) LAC, will attend as the chief guest. Madhurjya Dhekial Phukan, EM, KAAC, will attend as the invited guest.

At the Romgong Development Block headquarters, Kache Rongpi, EM, KAAC, will attend as the chief guest and Richard Tokbi, EM, KAAC, as the guest of honour. The Jan Kalyan Shivir at the Multi Utility Building in the Block Office campus under the Nilip Development Block will be attended by Pabitra Rongpi, MAC, KAAC, as the chief guest.

Furnishing false information

June 16 to June 30, while the house-listing and housing census will be conducted from July 1 to July 30. Providing an overview of Census 2027 and its significance, he said individual information collected during the census is kept confidential under Section 15 of the Census Act and that the exercise is conducted in collaboration with state governments and Union Territories. A total of 6,134 census personnel, including enumerators and supervisors, have been deployed for the census exercise in Nagaland.

Five suspects linked to

the police officer said. He said Sohail, who has a criminal record, painted TTH graffiti at several locations in Delhi and Faridabad at Bhatti's direction and shared videos of the activity through encrypted messaging platforms. He was allegedly paid ₹ 5,000 for the task.

Three pistols and ammunition were recovered from Sonu Meena, who was allegedly responsible for arranging weapons and providing financial support to other members of the module. Police said he transferred ₹ 5,000 to Sohail for carrying out propaganda activities.

Sachin Kumar Meena, an associate of Sonu, was found in possession of two pistols and live rounds, police said. "Kaif was allegedly in contact with Bhatti's associates Rana Hunain and Abid Jutt, who instructed him to conduct reconnaissance of police establishments, recruit youths for attacks and plan targeted killings of police personnel," the officer said. Police said Rihan was in direct contact with Pakistan-based handlers Abid Jutt and Mohsin. He allegedly pasted posters of Abid Jutt in Meerut and was offered ₹ 3 lakh to open fire on police personnel. He was also tasked with conducting reconnaissance of security establishments and promoting TTH through graffiti. Police said TTH had recently claimed responsibility for the killing of an assistant sub-inspector in Amritsar's Majitha.

The three accused arrested earlier in the case -- Soyab and Ravi Kashyap of Uttar Pradesh's Amroha, and Anmol Rai alias Annu from Madhya Pradesh -- were allegedly involved in plans to attack police personnel and had recorded videos threatening officers at the behest of their handlers, they added. (PTI)

Arunachal, Assam discuss excise

holds the Finance, Tax, Excise and Narcotics portfolio, highlighted the longstanding relationship between Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, built on mutual trust, cooperation and shared aspirations for regional development. He said close coordination between neighbouring states is vital for addressing governance challenges and ensuring effective implementation of laws and policies.

The two sides held detailed discussions on strengthening collaboration in excise management, curbing illicit trade, improving enforcement mechanisms, enhancing revenue generation and building institutional capacity, the statement said.

The deputy chief minister said the challenges facing excise administration require sustained cooperation between states, and expressed confidence that regular dialogue and joint initiatives would help strengthen governance systems while safeguarding public interest. During the meeting, officials from both states made presentations on ongoing initiatives, operational challenges and potential areas for future collaboration. The discussions also focused on preparing a roadmap for continued engagement through periodic review meetings and coordinated action on issues of common concern. (PTI)

Manipur unrest making it

President's rule was imposed in Manipur on February 13, 2025, after the BJP-led government headed by Biren Singh resigned on February 9 of that year, following months of ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities. Singh was sworn in as the chief minister of Manipur on February 4 of this year. "I also visited the Ukhrul district and met with Kuki and Tangkhul Naga villagers in the district, calling for peace. However, on the same day, an ambush occurred during which two Tangkhul civilians were killed."

Singh said, "I think there are some people who don't want peace in our land. I think some people presume that earning money would not be possible if peace prevailed. "There are elements that want to obstruct the free movement of people across the state. Those persons should be identified." Singh remarked that in his political career, he was the happiest when he was the Speaker.

"In a year, there would be just 15 days for two sessions each. I would be free the rest of the time, allowing me to visit my assembly constituency on a bicycle to interact with people," he said. Singh served as the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly from March 2017 to March 2022.

At least 260 people were killed, and thousands became homeless in the conflict between the Meitei and Kuki people since May 3, 2023. On June 10 of this year, security forces recovered the bodies of six Naga men, believed to be among those held hostage for around a month following the killing of three church leaders in Kangpokpi district. Their mortal remains were found a day after 14 Kuki individuals who were abducted at the same time by armed groups in the Senapati district were released. (PTI)

Flipkart brings Glam Up Fest to Guwahati as Northeast emerges as key beauty market

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: Northeast India is emerging as one of the country's fastest-growing beauty and personal care markets, driven by increasing demand for Korean beauty products, ingredient-led skincare, premium fragrances and male grooming solutions, according to e-commerce platform Flipkart.

Recognising the region's growing influence on national beauty trends, Flipkart hosted its flagship beauty and lifestyle event, Glam Up Fest 2026, in Guwahati for the first time.

The company said the event reflects its efforts to expand trend-driven beauty experiences beyond metropolitan cities and cater to consumers in emerging markets across the country.

According to Flipkart, consumers in the Northeast have been among the earliest adopters of Korean beauty products, active-ingredient skincare solutions, in-

novative makeup formats and male grooming products. The company also noted a growing role of regional content creators in shaping beauty trends and product discovery among younger consumers. Male consumers have emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments in the region, with increasing interest in skincare, grooming and personal care products.

The event featured participation from more than 600 content creators, influencers and consumers from across the Northeast, along with leading beauty and personal care brands such as The Derma Co, Mamaearth and Plum.

International Korean beauty brands, including Beauty of Joseon, TirTir and d'Alba, were also showcased at the event, reflecting the strong demand for K-beauty products in the region.

Speaking on the occasion, Kartheek Kanumuru, Head of Beauty and Personal Care at Flipkart, described the Northeast as

one of India's most dynamic beauty markets, noting that consumers in the region are often early adopters of emerging trends.

The programme included product launches, creator-led discussions, interactive sessions and themed experiences focused on skincare, sun care and Korean beauty trends. Several regional creators and influencers participated in the event, sharing insights on beauty preferences and digital content creation.

Flipkart also showcased technology-driven shopping tools, including AI-powered skin diagnostics, virtual try-on features and live video commerce solutions aimed at enhancing online beauty shopping experiences.

The company announced that the event would be followed by the Glam Up Sale on its platform from June 19 to 27, featuring special offers, curated collections and new launches across beauty and personal care categories.

Airtel provides mobile connectivity in remote Army locations in Arunachal

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: Leading telecom operator Bharti Airtel on Wednesday said it has set up infrastructure across 30 Indian Army stations in difficult terrain in Arunachal Pradesh to make available uninterrupted connectivity.

The Indian Army had joined hands with Airtel for last-mile connectivity in border and difficult-to-reach locations of the Himalayan state, the company said in a statement.

"As part of the initiative, Airtel deployed network infrastructure across 30 Army stations located in challenging mountainous terrain," it added.

The deployment significantly enhanced voice and data connectivity in areas where access has historically remained limited due to geographical and infrastructure constraints, Airtel said.

"This achievement was made possible through strong collaboration between Airtel and the Indian Army. The Army extended extensive logistical support throughout the project, including assistance for fiber deployment and power infrastructure," it added.

The company further said that in several locations where road access was not possible, the Indian Army provided the necessary assistance and logistics support to move Airtel technical teams and telecommunication equipment deep into the mountains.

"The successful completion of Phase 1 has now paved the way for the next chapter. Encouraged by the impact of the project, the Indian Army and Airtel have agreed to undertake Phase 2, under which network sites will be built across 15 additional locations in Arunachal Pradesh," it added.

The first phase of the strategic initiative was completed in partnership with the 4 Corps of the Indian Army, headquartered at Assam's Tezpur, Airtel said.

Commenting on the development, Bharti Airtel CEO (North East and Assam) Balaji R said: "This initiative reflects Airtel's continued commitment to extending connectivity to some of the country's most difficult terrains.

"The rollout required extensive coordination between Airtel teams and local support units to overcome immense terrain and weather-related challenges."

The company teams operated under demanding high-altitude conditions and adverse weather to ensure timely and secure network activation, Balaji said.

"We are deeply grateful to the Indian Army for their unparalleled logistical support, which made it possible to bring digital connectivity to these frontier regions," he added. (PTI)

Mindmine Summit 2026 focuses on India's growth and innovation agenda

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: The 16th edition of the Mindmine Summit, the flagship thought leadership platform of Hero Enterprise, concluded in New Delhi recently with

discussions centred on India's economic growth, innovation ecosystem and development priorities amid a changing global landscape.

Held at the Taj Palace under the theme "Uncertain Times, Confident Choices: India Recalibrates", the summit brought together policymakers, industry leaders, economists, diplomats, investors, healthcare experts and public intellectuals to deliberate on issues shaping the country's future.

The event opened with a conversation featuring Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Hero Enterprise Chairman Sunil Kant Munjal and Motilal Oswal Securities Chairman Raamdeo Agrawal. During the discussion, Sitharaman highlighted the role of strong domestic consumption in supporting economic resilience amid global uncertainties.

She noted that while dependence on imported raw materials and intermediates remains a challenge, the government is working to strengthen frameworks for attracting foreign capital and expanding investment opportunities.

The Finance Minister also observed that states are increasingly

competing to attract global capability centres, data centres and technology investments, contributing to India's broader economic competitiveness.

Addressing the summit, Sunil Kant Munjal said the discussions reflected both the scale of opportunities before India and the confidence with which the country is embracing change. He emphasised that innovation, institutional strength, entrepreneurship and collaborative leadership would be central to India's next phase of growth. The summit featured sessions on a wide range of subjects, including geopolitics, investment trends, energy transition, healthcare innovation, insurance penetration, institutional reforms and long-term economic development.

Among the speakers and panelists were Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister member Dr Shamika Ravi, Member of Parliament Bansuri Swaraj, former Union Minister Suresh Prabhu, PwC India Chairperson Sanjeev Krishan, Tata Power CEO and Managing Director Dr Praveer Sinha, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Managing Director Nilesh Shah.

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Muhammad Sams Uddin to Sams Uddin by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hajoai (Assam) Sams Uddin S/o-Abdul Matin Vill-Ruhini Pathar, PO-Murajhar, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

AFFIDAVIT

I, INDRAJIT HESSA, son of Late Krishna Chandra Hessa, Flat No. V-704, Subham Heights, Kahlipara, Guwahati-781019, Dist: Kamrup (M), Assam, do hereby declare vide an affidavit before the Notary, Kamrup (M) at Guwahati on 08-04-2026 that in my Passport bearing No. K0155060 my name has been inadvertently recorded as INDRAJIT JAGRAI HESSA instead of the correct name INDRAJIT HESSA. So, INDRAJIT HESSA and INDRAJIT JAGRAI HESSA is one and same person having single identity i.e. me.

IN THE COURT OF DISTRICT AND SESSIONS JUDGE, DARRANG
MANGALDAI
T.S. (D) Case No :- 90/2025
Plaintiff :- Sri. Keshab Boro
Vs
Defendant :- Smti. Rimpi Khongiya @ Rimpri Boro
Summon to Defendants
To,
Smti. Rimpi Khongiya @ Rimpri Boro, Aged 49 Years
D/O Late Duregeswar Khongiya
W/O Sri. Keshab Boro
Village :- Da Pathar Majgaon
P.O. & P.S. Kako Pathar
Dist. Tinsukia (Assam)
Whereas the above named plaintiff / petitioner has filed suit for divorce along with a decree for permanent injunction and whereas the aforesaid suit is having been admitted for hearing. You being the defendants do hereby asked to appear before this Court on 16/06/2025 at 10.30 am either personally or through an advocate duly engaged by you to file Written Statement if any. On your failure to do so the matter will be heard and decided ex parte.
Given under hand and my seal of this court on this 16/06/2025 day of September of 2026.

Mittal Honda opens new Honda two-wheeler dealership in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: SBM Group has expanded its automotive footprint with the inauguration of Mittal Honda, an authorised Honda Motorcycle & Scooter India (HMSI) dealership, at Lokhra in Guwahati.

The new facility was formally inaugurated by HMSI Regional Manager Sachin W Pawar and SBM Group founder Mahendra Kumar Mittal in the presence of company representatives, guests and industry stakeholders.

Developed as a 4S facility—covering Sales, Service, Spares and Safety—the dealership is expected to provide customers with a comprehensive ownership experience under one roof.

The dealership will be led by entrepreneurs Vinit Mittal and Lokesh Mittal, who have more than 15 years of experience in the automobile sector.

SBM Group already operates businesses including Mittal Autozone, Mittal Eicher and TAJ Roofing. The new outlet offers Honda's range of motorcycles and scooters, including popular models such as the Activa, Dio, Shine 100, Shine 125, SP125, Unicorn, Hor-



net 2.0, CB200X and NX500.

Speaking at the inauguration, Vinit Mittal described the launch as a significant milestone for the group and said the dealership aims to bring Honda's products and services closer to customers across Guwahati and Assam through quality sales and after-sales support.

Lokesh Mittal said the facility has been designed to ensure convenience, transparency and service excellence, while fostering long-term relationships with customers.

HMSI Regional Manager Sachin W Pawar expressed confidence that the dealership would strengthen Honda's presence in Assam and contribute to enhancing customer satisfaction in the region. (PTI)

Traders' body raises concern over illegal trade in Karbi Anglong

Association seeks action against unlicensed traders to curb revenue loss and regulate agricultural trade in Karbi Anglong

HT Correspondent

BOKAJAN, June 17: The Karbi Anglong Ginger & Green Vegetables Traders Association (KAG-GVTA) has resolved to intensify monitoring of trading activities in the district amid concerns over the operation of unlicensed traders and the resulting loss of revenue to the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC).

The decision was taken during a meeting held at the association's office in the Bokajan Super Market complex on Wednesday.

The meeting was attended by local traders, wholesalers and members of the association.

Participants expressed concern that several traders from outside the district were allegedly conducting business without obtaining valid trade licences.



The meeting noted that agricultural and forest-based products, including ginger, chillies, broomsticks, bamboo shoots and other seasonal vegetables, were being transported out of the district without compliance with prescribed regulations and tax requirements.

The association observed that such activities were adversely affecting local businesses and leading to revenue losses for the KAAC.

To address the issue, KAG-GVTA resolved to verify the credentials of traders operating in the district and ensure that business

activities are carried out in accordance with existing rules and regulations.

The association stated that it would work towards promoting legal and transparent trade practices while supporting revenue generation for the autonomous council.

Association president Mohen Tokbi and secretary Longsar Bongrum, along with prominent wholesalers and traders, participated in detailed discussions on measures to regulate the trade sector and ensure smooth business operations.

The meeting concluded with a consensus on undertaking coordinated efforts to strengthen compliance with licensing requirements and safeguard the interests of local traders and producers.

Karbi Anglong DC reviews Rongbong Terang's treatment, orders crackdown on illegal mining

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 17: Karbi Anglong District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia on Wednesday reviewed the treatment of noted litterateur and Padma Shri awardee Rongbong Terang at Diphu Medical College and Hospital (DMCH) and later directed officials to intensify action against illegal mining across the district.

Saikia visited DMCH to assess the health condition of Terang, who was admitted to the hospital following a sudden health setback.

During the visit, the District Commissioner interacted with the veteran writer and conveyed his best wishes for a speedy recovery.

He also held discussions with the Principal-cum-Chief Superintendent of the hospital and directed the authorities to provide all necessary medical assistance, specialised care and support to ensure the author's recovery.

Later in the day, the District Commissioner chaired a meeting of the District Mining Control Committee to review the status of illegal mining activities in various



parts of Karbi Anglong.

During the meeting, Saikia reiterated the administration's commitment to protecting natural resources and maintaining strict enforcement against unlawful extraction activities.

He directed all concerned departments to strengthen surveillance and intensify monitoring in vulnerable areas.

The District Commissioner instructed enforcement agencies to take immediate legal action against individuals or groups found in-

involved in illegal mining and emphasised the need for strict implementation of existing laws and regulations.

He also called for enhanced inter-departmental coordination to curb illegal mining activities and safeguard the district's ecological resources.

Officials from various departments attended the meeting and reviewed ongoing measures aimed at preventing illegal extraction and ensuring environmental protection across the district.

Adhyasradha of UPPL leader Phanin Boro held at Bijni

Community leaders pay tribute to veteran social worker and UPPL leader, recalling his lifelong commitment to the Bodo community

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 17: The Adhyasradha ceremony of late Phanin Boro, noted social worker and senior leader of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), was held at his native village Borlechiagaon near Bijni in Chirang district on Wednesday.

Phanin Boro, a former speaker of the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU) and president of the Bijni district committee of the UPPL, passed away on June 1 after a prolonged illness at a private hospital in Chirang district.

A memorial meeting and open discussion on his life and contributions to society were organised as part of the observance.

Speakers recalled his dedicated service to the Bodo community and his efforts towards social welfare and development.

A commemorative souvenir was

also released on the occasion in the presence of community leaders, well-wishers and local residents.

Among those who attended the programme were Rajya Sabha MP and former Chief Executive Member of the Bodoland Territorial Region, Pramod Boro, Rajya Sabha MP Rungwra Narzary, Lok Sabha MP Joyanta Basumatary, former minister Urkhao Gwra Brahma, ABSU president Khwrwmdao Wary and ABSU general secretary Khanindra Basumatary, among others. The event was organised by a committee headed by former MLA Kamalsingh Narzary.

Addressing the gathering, Pramod Boro described the late leader as a dedicated and selfless individual who worked tirelessly for the welfare and upliftment of the Bodo community.

He said Phanin Boro consistently championed social causes and re-

mained committed to promoting unity and development in the region.

"His dedication and contribution to the welfare of our people will continue to inspire future generations. With his passing, society has lost a respected and committed personality," Boro said.

ABSU president Khwrwmdao Wary also paid tribute to the departed leader, recalling his role as a former speaker of the student body and his active involvement in various social and community initiatives. He said the contributions and sacrifices made by Phanin Boro would be remembered by the organisation and the community for years to come.

Leaders, well-wishers and members of the public from different organisations and political parties paid floral tributes and offered condolences to the bereaved family during the programme.

Interactive session explores use of AI, sensors and digital technologies to strengthen railway safety, efficiency and infrastructure management

NFR hosts session on AI-driven railway infrastructure and track monitoring



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) organised an interactive session on the application of emerging technologies in railway infrastructure management, with a focus on improving safety, reliability and sustainability through artificial intelligence and advanced digital solutions.

The programme featured a virtual presentation by noted scientist, technology expert and IIT Guwahati professor Ashwini K Nanda, who addressed senior railway officials from New Delhi.

The session was attended by NFR General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava, the Additional General Manager, principal heads of departments, departmental heads and senior officers from the headquarters and divisions through video conferencing.

During his presentation, Prof. Nanda discussed an advanced concept titled "Autonomous, Unitary System for Inspection and Monitoring of Permanent Way using Multiple Sensors, Artificial Intelligence and Digital Twins."

The proposed system envisages continuous monitoring of railway tracks through intelligent sensor networks, predictive analytics and digital modelling tools to assess track health and support proactive maintenance.

He highlighted how the integration of artificial intelligence, advanced sensing technologies and digital platforms could help improve asset management, optimise maintenance planning and enhance operational reliability across railway networks.

Addressing the gathering, Shrivastava emphasised the impor-

tant of embracing technological innovation to build a safer, smarter and more sustainable railway system.

He noted that future railway development would require a balanced approach that combines technological advancement with environmental responsibility.

The event also marked the observance of World Environment Day 2026.

A short film showcasing NFR's environmental initiatives was screened during the programme.

The presentation highlighted measures such as railway electrification, promotion of solar energy, energy conservation, water management, waste reduction programmes, plantation drives and the adoption of eco-friendly practices across railway divisions and establishments.

Officials said these initiatives form part of NFR's efforts to reduce carbon emissions and promote environmentally sustainable transportation in the Northeast.

NFR stated that it remains committed to adopting innovative technologies and sustainable practices aimed at enhancing railway safety, operational efficiency and environmental stewardship while providing reliable transportation services across the region.

KKHSOU launches three-day yoga and meditation programme for employees

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) on Wednesday launched a three-day meditation and yoga programme at its Khanapara City Campus to promote physical, mental and emotional well-being among employees.

The programme, being organised by the Mother Teresa Social Welfare Mission of the university, will continue from June 17 to 19.

The inaugural session was opened by senior-most professor of the university, Dr Nripendra Narayan Sarma.

The first day's programme focused on the theme "Yoga for Stress Management and Workplace Well-

ness". The session began with a prayer and introductory remarks, followed by discussions on the role of yoga in maintaining health and enhancing workplace productivity.

Participants were introduced to Sukshma Vyayama (joint-loosening exercises) and practised yoga postures such as Tadasana, Vrikshasana, Ardha Chakrasana and Kati Chakrasana.

The programme also featured deep-breathing exercises, Anulom Vilom pranayama and guided meditation techniques aimed at reducing stress, improving concentration and promoting overall well-being.

An interactive feedback session was held at the end of the programme, allowing participants to

share their experiences and observations.

According to the organisers, the initiative seeks to encourage healthy lifestyles, improve workplace wellness, promote postural awareness and help employees incorporate simple yoga practices into their daily routines.

University employees actively participated in the session and appreciated the opportunity to learn practical techniques for stress management and personal well-being.

The remaining sessions will focus on advanced yoga and meditation practices with the objective of fostering a healthier, more balanced and productive work environment.

Certified HYV paddy seeds distributed to farmers

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 17: The District Agriculture Office, Kokrajhar, under the Department of Agriculture of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), on Wednesday organised a ceremonial distribution of certified High Yielding Variety (HYV) paddy seeds under the National Food Security Mission (NFSM) for the 2026-27 financial year. The initiative has been undertaken to provide quality seeds to farmers with the objective of enhancing paddy production, increasing farm income and strengthening food security across the district.

Officials attending the programme highlighted the vital role of agriculture in the rural economy and stressed the need for adopting scientific and modern farming practices to improve productivity.

They noted that the use of certified HYV paddy seeds is expected to increase crop yields, improve resilience to adverse weather conditions and contribute to the overall development of the farming sector.

National seminar on Indo-Myanmar frontier issues begins in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 17: A two-day national seminar on "Indo-Myanmar Frontier Issues and the Way Forward" commenced on Wednesday at the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRDPR), Khanapara, bringing together policymakers, security experts, academicians and researchers from across the country.

The seminar is being jointly organised by Seemanta Chetana Manch Purvottar and the Assam Rifles on June 17 and 18 in collaboration with the North Eastern Regional Centre of NIRDPR, Dibrugarh University, the University Development Council of Manipur University and Rajiv Gandhi University, Arunachal Pradesh.

The inaugural session began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp and was attended by several distinguished personalities, including RSS Akhil Bharatiya Sah Prachar Pramukh Pradeep Joshi, RSS Akhil Bharatiya Karyakarini member Ullas Kulkarni, former General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Eastern Command Lt Gen Rana Pratap Kalita, Nagaland Education and Tourism Minister Temjen Imna Along, Seemanta Chetana Manch Purvottar president Pratima Neog, Assam Rifles Director General Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera, National Institute of Border Studies chairman Pradeep Kumar, IPS, and RSS Kshetra Pracharak Basishtha Bujarbaruah.

The first day of the seminar witnessed participation from professors, researchers, scholars and representatives of various educational institutions and social organisations from different parts of the country.

Panel discussions and presentations of research papers formed the key components of the inaugural day's proceedings, focusing on various issues related to the India-Myanmar border region, including security, development, border management, connectivity and socio-cultural linkages. Organisers said the seminar aims to facilitate informed discussions on emerging challenges and opportunities along the Indo-Myanmar frontier and explore policy recommendations for sustainable development and regional cooperation. The day's proceedings concluded with the National Anthem, while Prof. Sunil Prasad delivered the vote of thanks.

Dr Hiren Gohain conferred Swahid Kushal Konwar Award by TAYPA

HT Correspondent

GOLAGHAT, June 17: Eminent critic, educationist, social scientist and Sahitya Akademi award-winning writer Hiren Gohain was honoured with the Swahid Kushal Konwar Award by the Golaghat district committee of Tai Ahom Yuva Parishad, Assam (TAYPA) at a function held at the Amateur Theatre Hall recently. The programme was organised by TAYPA in collaboration with its women's wing and was attended by a large gathering of literary enthusiasts, students and members of the public. Owing to health-related reasons, Dr Gohain was unable to attend the event in person. However, a written message sent by him was read out before the gathering by Pikumoni Dutta.

In his message, Dr Gohain expressed gratitude to the organisers for conferring the honour and said the recognition was particularly meaningful as it came from Golaghat, a place closely associated with his childhood memories. He also remarked that the award highlighted the enduring legacy of the Ahom community beyond the era of the Swargadeos and appreciated the efforts of TAYPA and the people of Golaghat in preserving and promoting Assam's cultural heritage. On the occasion, a commemorative souvenir titled Kushal was formally released by Purnima Das, president of the Golaghat Zila Parishad.

The programme also featured the felicitation of more than 40 meritorious students in recognition of their academic achievements. Speakers at the event highlighted Dr Gohain's immense contributions to literature, education and public discourse and described the award as a fitting tribute to one of Assam's most respected intellectuals.

Abandoned government building transformed into Apsara Wedding Hall and Guest House in Morigaon

The structure was originally constructed around ten years ago at a cost of ₹75 lakh

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, June 17: A government building that remained unused for nearly a decade in Morigaon town has been transformed into the Apsara Wedding Hall and Guest House, emerging as a model of public asset revitalisation and sustainable resource utilisation.

The structure was originally constructed around ten years ago at a cost of ₹75 lakh as a single-storeyed building with four rooms.

However, the absence of essential infrastructure such as water supply, electricity and furnishings prevented it from becoming operational, leaving the facility abandoned for several years. In April 2025, the Morigaon district administration initiated a redevelopment project to convert the unused structure into a

modern wedding hall and guest house. The project began with an investment of ₹25 lakh and was later expanded with an additional allocation of ₹36 lakh from the Morigaon Zilla Parishad's own source revenue fund. As part of the redevelopment, the building was upgraded into a three-storeyed facility.

The first floor was designed to accommodate guest reception areas and three dedicated rooms, including a bridal preparation room, a VIP room and a resting space for senior citizens and family members.

The second floor houses a modern kitchen, store room, dining hall, washrooms and an open-sky dining area. The complex also includes seven guest rooms, including two suites, which function as part of the guest house facility.

Construction was completed in October 2025, and the facility was inaugurated on October 22, 2025, by then Water Resources Minister Pijush Hazarika. Environmental sustainability was incorporated into the project through plantation drives and the development of landscaped gardens within the premises.

Officials said the facility also has a social welfare component, with provisions to make the wedding hall available for five days each month to brides from Below Poverty Line (BPL) families. From a financial perspective, the wedding hall has been leased out for five years at an annual lease value of ₹10.50 lakh, while the guest house is expected to generate additional recurring revenue for the local administration.

Officials associated with the proj-

ect said the concept of converting the abandoned structure into a wedding hall was conceived by former Morigaon Deputy Commissioner Debasish Sarma, with the implementation entrusted to Morigaon Zilla Parishad under the leadership of its Chief Executive Officer.

Assistant Engineer and Technical Member of the Construction Committee Hitesh Deka attributed the project's success to the collective efforts of the engineering team and support from the district administration. The Apsara Wedding Hall and Guest House is now being viewed as a successful example of how neglected public infrastructure can be transformed into a socially beneficial and financially sustainable community asset through effective planning and execution.

EXTENSION & RAISING OF PLATFORM AT ARUNACHAL STATION

Tender Notice No.: SCL/ENGG/49 of 2026. **Dated:** 15-06-2026. E-Tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN.1: Brief Description of Item:** Arunachal - Extension & raising of platform including dismantling of line no.-4 and extension of line no.-5 at Arunachal Station. **Tender Value:** ₹6,43,73,847/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹12,87,500/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 08-07-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 09-07-2026.** Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 08-07-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in

DRM(W)/Luding, Silchar
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Nothing can have value without being an object of utility. - Karl Marx

Focus now on India-US trade talks

By the time President Donald Trump sits across the table to finalize what is being marketed as the first phase of an India-US trade agreement next month, New Delhi should have already absorbed the most important lesson from his administration's recent foreign-policy success. That lesson has nothing to do with trade. It comes from Iran. After four months of military confrontation that pushed oil prices above US\$100 per barrel, disrupted global shipping, rattled financial markets and threatened to drag the Middle East into a wider war, Washington did not secure peace because it had defeated Iran. Nor did it reach an agreement because of any sudden diplomatic awakening. It negotiated because the costs of continuing the conflict had become too high. Iran's ability to disrupt the Strait of Hormuz, through which roughly one-fifth of global oil and gas trade flows, imposed costs not only on its adversaries but on the global economy itself. Energy prices surged, inflation fears resurfaced, shipping costs climbed and political pressure mounted. The result was not capitulation by Tehran but negotiations. That reality should resonate in New Delhi as India faces mounting pressure from Washington to conclude a bilateral trade agreement before Trump's self-imposed July deadline. The timing is revealing.

On one hand, the Trump administration is publicly describing India as a critical strategic partner, indispensable to supply-chain diversification, Indo-Pacific stability and efforts to balance China's rise. On the other, the Office of the United States Trade Representative has proposed a fresh round of Section 301 tariffs of up to 12.5 percent on imports from India and 53 other economies. The contradiction is striking. The proposed tariffs are not even based on allegations that Indian exports are produced using forced labour. Instead, Washington is seeking to penalize India because it allegedly does not impose sufficiently restrictive controls on imports from third countries suspected of using forced labour. For months, Indian policymakers have portrayed the proposed deal as an economic opportunity that will deepen commercial ties with the world's largest economy.

Most importantly, the United States needs India almost as much as India needs the United States. Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy cannot succeed without Indian participation. Efforts to reduce dependence on China require Indian manufacturing capacity. Technology cooperation, semiconductor resilience and critical mineral partnerships all increasingly depend upon India. These realities should inform India's negotiating posture. Instead of rushing to meet an American political deadline, New Delhi should insist that trade negotiations proceed according to Indian economic interests and Indian timelines. If that means accepting temporary Section 301 tariffs while pursuing legal and diplomatic challenges, so be it.

G7 Summit: An opportunity for reflection, reform and renewal

The world's attention is currently focused on the being held in France. Leaders of the seven major advanced economies have gathered to deliberate on a wide range of critical issues, including the global economy, international politics, trade, climate change, artificial intelligence, energy security, and ongoing conflicts. At such a moment, a natural question arises: Is the G7 still as relevant and influential as it was at the time of its inception? Has it truly evolved into an effective platform for addressing global challenges, or has it largely become a mechanism for safeguarding the interests of a handful of powerful nations? Furthermore, are the actions and policies of U.S. President Donald Trump undermining the relevance and effectiveness of this forum in pursuit of narrow national interests?

The success of international organizations established to promote world peace, balanced economic development, and global cooperation is ultimately measured not by their declarations but by their outcomes. Unfortunately, in the case of the G7, questions continue to be raised about the actual impact of its decisions and commitments. In recent years, the organization has struggled to play a decisive role in resolving major global crises, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict, instability in the Middle East, global economic uncertainty, climate change, and growing trade rivalries.

The G7 comprises the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, and Japan. In practice, however, the direction and policy orientation of the group have often been heavily influenced by the United States. Under President Donald Trump in particular, American foreign policy has frequently appeared to prioritize pressure and dominance over cooperation and consensus. On several occasions, Trump has treated allied nations less as equal partners and more as followers expected to align with American priorities. Tariff wars, trade restrictions, pressure regarding defense spending, and a series of unilateral decisions have contributed to growing mistrust among member countries.

The Iran-Israel conflict has further intensified global economic uncertainty. In recent months, the violent confrontation created fears of a broader regional war. Iran, Israel, and several non-state actors appeared poised for direct confrontation, with the Strait of Hormuz emerging as a critical flashpoint. Nearly one-fifth of the world's oil supplies pass through this strategic waterway, making any disruption a matter of global concern. Even within the G7, countries appeared divided in their ap-



proach to the crisis. It is precisely for this reason that the unity once associated with the G7 is no longer as visible. France, Germany, Canada, and Japan have frequently adopted positions that differ from those of the United States on issues ranging from the Iran conflict and climate change to global trade rules

and the role of multilateral institutions. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to expect the organization to formulate universally acceptable and effective strategies for resolving the world's increasingly complex challenges.

India's participation in the summit carries special significance. Although India is not a member of the G7, its growing economic strength, expanding global influence, and role as a representative voice of the developing world have made it an important participant in such forums. This is not merely an opportunity for India to showcase its achievements; it is also a platform to articulate the aspirations of developing and underprivileged nations whose voices are often marginalized in global decision-making processes. Across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, numerous countries continue to grapple with economic crises, food insecurity, climate-related disasters, and unsustainable debt burdens. Their priorities often differ significantly from those of the G7 nations. India must therefore raise a fundamental question: Should the authority to shape the world's future remain concentrated in the hands of a few developed countries? Shouldn't global governance become more

democratic, inclusive, and representative? This is the time to strengthen the voice of the Global South and place its concerns at the center of international discourse.

The greatest challenge to the G7's relevance lies in its effectiveness. If an organization is unable to prevent or resolve the world's most pressing crises, its utility naturally comes under scrutiny. The Russia-Ukraine war continues without a lasting resolution. The Middle East remains deeply unstable. Terrorism and extremism continue to pose serious threats. Climate change is pushing humanity toward unprecedented environmental and humanitarian challenges. Yet the achievements of institutions that claim global leadership remain limited. Recent reports suggesting a reduction in tensions between the United States and Iran and a movement toward dialogue and reconciliation have brought a sense of relief across the world. Prolonged hostility had contributed significantly to instability in the Middle East, with adverse consequences for the global economy. As prospects for negotiations strengthened, financial markets responded positively. Investor confidence improved, energy markets showed signs of stabilization, and oil prices softened. This demonstrates that peace is not merely a political achievement; it is intrinsically linked to global economic stability and the well-being of ordinary citizens. However, an important question remains. If dialogue and compromise ultimately represented the path to resolution, why was the period of confrontation allowed to continue for so long? Why did President Trump eventually find it necessary to embrace negotiations and

consensus-building? Was it due to economic pressures? Concerns about global financial markets? Expectations from the American public? Or was it an acknowledgment that the politics of pressure and confrontation have inherent limitations? These are precisely the kinds of questions that deserve serious discussion within forums such as the G7. The international community cannot be satisfied with symbolic or temporary peace agreements. What is needed is peace that is durable, credible, and just. If agreements are driven primarily by political image-building, electoral considerations, or short-term strategic calculations, they are unlikely to endure. The G7 should take meaningful initiatives to ensure that peace efforts around the world are genuine and centered on the protection of humanity's collective interests. Today, the global order stands at a critical crossroads. The world is no longer unipolar. Emerging economies such as India, China, Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, and others are reshaping the global balance of power. In this changing environment, the G7 must also adapt its vision and functioning. If it continues to be perceived primarily as an instrument of American leadership and Western interests, its credibility, legitimacy, and influence are likely to diminish further. The need of the hour is for the G7 to become more inclusive, provide greater representation to developing nations in decision-making processes, take concrete initiatives toward economic and climate justice, and place global peace at the forefront of its agenda. The United States, too, must recognize the distinction between leadership and dominance. Leadership earns trust; dominance breeds resistance.

The summit in France should therefore be more than a forum for discussing economic and political issues. It should serve as an opportunity for genuine introspection. The G7 must reassess its role in a rapidly changing world and explore how it can become more relevant, effective, and credible. Only by overcoming internal divisions and embracing the principles of equality, cooperation, and mutual respect can it meet the expectations of the international community. India, on this occasion, should boldly convey that the future of humanity lies in balance, dialogue, cooperation, and inclusivity. Lasting peace, economic stability, and human welfare cannot be secured through the dominance of any single nation or group of nations. They can only emerge from a shared sense of responsibility and a collective commitment to common progress. That is the greatest need of our time, and it is the true test of forums such as the G7.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Lalit Garg

Modi as master of politics: India and abroad

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The Group of Seven, popularly known as the G7, has long been regarded as one of the most influential forums of advanced economies in the world. Though India is not a permanent member of this elite grouping comprising the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Japan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's repeated invitations to the summit have highlighted India's rising stature in global affairs. His participation in successive G7 meetings has often been viewed as a reflection of India's growing economic strength, strategic significance and diplomatic influence. For many observers, this phenomenon has come to symbolize what may be described as "Modi Magic" in international diplomacy. Narendra Modi's presence at G7 summits represents more than a ceremonial invitation. It signifies the recognition of India as an indispensable partner in addressing global challenges ranging from climate change and energy security to technological innovation and geopolitical stability. At a time when the international order is undergoing profound changes, India has emerged as a bridge between developed economies and the Global South. Modi's ability to articulate the aspirations of developing nations has enhanced India's profile on the world stage.

The rise of Narendra Modi from a humble background in Gujarat to becoming one of the twenty-first century has attracted attention not only in India but also across the world. His political journey reflects a remarkable combination of organizational ability, communication skills, ideological conviction, strategic planning, and a keen understanding of public aspirations. Since assuming office as the Prime Minister of India in 2014, Modi has transformed the nature of Indian politics and significantly expanded India's presence on the global stage. His supporters regard him as a visionary statesman, while critics often question certain aspects of his policies and leadership style. Nevertheless, few would deny that Narendra Modi has emerged as a master of political strategy both within India and abroad. Indian politics has witnessed numerous charismatic leaders, from Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi to Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Yet Modi represents a distinctive phenomenon. One of the remarkable aspects of Modi's diplomacy has been his emphasis on maintaining strategic autonomy while strengthening partnerships with major powers. India has deepened cooperation with the United States, Japan, France and other Western countries without abandoning its traditional policy of independent decision-making. This balanced approach has enabled India to earn the confidence of diverse international actors. Consequently, India's participation in G7 deliberations has become increasingly significant. Modi's personal rapport with world leaders has also contributed to India's enhanced diplomatic standing. Whether interacting with American presidents, British prime ministers, Japanese premiers or European leaders, he has demonstrated an ability to build relationships that transcend formal diplomacy. Such engagements have strengthened bilateral ties and expanded avenues for cooperation in trade, defence, technology and investment. Economic factors have further reinforced India's importance. As one of the world's fastest-growing major economies and home to the largest population, India represents both a strategic partner and an enormous market. Global leaders recognize that addressing international challenges requires India's active participa-



tion. From digital transformation and artificial intelligence to clean energy and supply chain resilience, India occupies a central position in contemporary discussions on the future of the global economy. Another important dimension of Modi's diplomatic outreach has been his advocacy of the Global South. During India's presidency of the G20, he emphasized the concerns of developing countries and called for a more inclusive international order. This approach resonated with many nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America. At G7 summits, Modi has consistently highlighted issues such as sustainable development, food security, healthcare and equitable access to technology, thereby projecting India as a voice for the wider developing world.

Climate change and renewable energy have emerged as important areas where India has played a proactive role. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance have demonstrated India's commitment to sustainable development. Modi's emphasis on environmental responsibility combined with developmental priorities has earned appreciation from many quarters. His advocacy of the concept of "One Earth, One Family, One Future" reflects an attempt to provide a civilizational and ethical framework for global cooperation. The geopolitical environment marked by conflicts, economic uncertainties and shifting alliances has further increased India's relevance. As tensions among major powers continue to reshape international relations, India is increasingly viewed as a stabilizing force capable of contributing to peace and dialogue. Modi's calls for diplomacy and peaceful resolution of disputes have strengthened India's image as a responsible global actor.

Unlike many earlier leaders who belonged to political dynasties or elite backgrounds, Modi projected himself as a self-made individual who rose through dedication and hard work. This narrative resonated strongly with millions of Indians, particularly among the middle classes, youth, and economically aspirational sections of society. His personal story became a political asset, allowing him to establish a direct emotional connection with ordinary citizens. One of the principal reasons behind Modi's political success lies in his ex-

ceptional communication skills. He understands the power of symbolism and mass outreach better than many contemporary politicians. Through election rallies, social media platforms, radio programmes such as "Mann Ki Baat," and digital campaigns, he has maintained constant communication with the people. His speeches often combine nationalism, development, cultural identity, and emotional appeal. This ability to shape narratives and influence public opinion has played a crucial role in strengthening his political position. The 2014 general election marked a turning point in Indian political history. The Bharatiya Janata Party under Modi's leadership secured a clear majority, ending decades of coalition politics. The campaign revolved around the promise of development, good governance, and economic growth. Modi's slogan "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" appealed to diverse sections of society. He successfully transformed the election into a presidential-style contest centred on his personality and leadership. This approach fundamentally altered the character of Indian electoral politics.

His political mastery became even more evident in the 2019 parliamentary elections. Despite criticism over issues such as unemployment and economic challenges, the BJP secured an even larger mandate. National security concerns following the Pulwama attack and the Balakot air strikes strengthened the image of Modi as a decisive leader. By effectively integrating nationalism with developmental aspirations, he consolidated support among various social groups. His electoral victories demonstrated not merely popularity but also an extraordinary understanding of political psychology. Modi's leadership style emphasizes strong central authority and efficient decision-making. Major policy initiatives such as the Goods and Services Tax, Digital India, Make in India, Startup India, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Jan Dhan Yojana, and Ayushman Bharat reflect his emphasis on governance and modernization. The expansion of digital infrastructure and financial inclusion programmes has brought millions of citizens into the formal economic system. Supporters view these initiatives as transformative steps aimed at creating a stronger and more self-reliant India.

Modi's emphasis on welfare schemes has also

contributed significantly to his political success. Programmes providing cooking gas connections, housing, sanitation facilities, health insurance, and direct benefit transfers have reached millions of citizens. These schemes have strengthened the connection between the government and beneficiaries, creating a new model of political mobilization based on welfare delivery and administrative efficiency. Political observers have noted that such programmes have contributed substantially to the BJP's electoral dominance. The use of technology has become another hallmark of Modi's political approach. He recognized early the importance of digital communication and social media. His presence on platforms such as X, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube has enabled him to reach diverse audiences. Modi has projected a more assertive and confident image of the country. His slogan "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" emphasizes India's ancient philosophy of viewing the world as one family, while simultaneously pursuing national interests with determination.

Relations with the United States have reached unprecedented levels during his tenure. Cooperation in defence, technology, trade, and strategic affairs has expanded significantly. Successive American administrations have viewed India as an important partner in maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Modi's meetings with American presidents and his popularity among sections of the Indian diaspora have strengthened bilateral ties. Large community events involving overseas Indians have further enhanced India's soft power. Modi has also cultivated close relations with countries such as Japan, Australia, France, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. His diplomacy reflects flexibility and balance. India has deepened cooperation with Western democracies while maintaining strategic autonomy. Even during periods of international tensions, Modi has sought to preserve India's independent foreign policy tradition. This balancing act has enabled India to enhance its global influence without becoming excessively dependent on any single power bloc. The strengthening of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue involving India, the United States, Japan, and Australia reflects the growing strategic importance of India in the Indo-Pacific region.

His outreach to the Middle East deserves special attention. Historically, India's relations with Gulf countries were largely confined to economic and energy concerns. Under Modi, these relationships acquired strategic dimensions. Stronger ties with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have resulted in greater cooperation in trade, investment, security, and infrastructure. Simultaneously, India has maintained friendly relations with Israel, demonstrating a pragmatic and balanced approach to diplomacy. Another significant dimension of Modi's international strategy involves the Indian diaspora. Recognizing the enormous influence of overseas Indians, he transformed diaspora engagement into an important component of foreign policy. Massive gatherings in countries such as the United States, Australia, and Britain showcased India's growing confidence and strengthened emotional bonds between expatriate communities and their homeland. Such events also enhanced India's global visibility.

The successful presidency of the G20 summit hosted by India further elevated Modi's international standing. The event projected India as a bridge between developed and developing nations. Emphasis on the concerns of the Global South reflected India's aspiration to represent emerging economies and developing societies. The inclusion of the African Union in the G20 represented a notable diplomatic achievement and strengthened India's reputation among countries of Africa and the Global South. Economic challenges have also tested his leadership. Issues such as unemployment, inflation, agrarian distress, and the impact of certain policy decisions have generated criticism. The implementation of demonetization in 2016 remains one of the most debated economic measures in contemporary India. Supporters argue that it aimed to curb corruption and promote digital transactions, while critics question its effectiveness and economic consequences. These debates illustrate the multifaceted nature of Modi's political legacy. Despite criticism and controversies, Narendra Modi's political resilience remains remarkable. Electoral setbacks at regional levels have not significantly diminished his national stature. His ability to reinvent political narratives, respond to changing circumstances, and maintain organizational cohesion within the BJP has contributed to his enduring influence. Political analysts frequently point out that his leadership has transformed the BJP from a major national party into a dominant political force.

Modi's appeal extends beyond conventional political categories. For many citizens, he symbolizes aspirations for national pride, economic development, and global recognition. His emphasis on cultural heritage and civilizational consciousness has resonated with sections of society seeking a renewed sense of identity. Simultaneously, his developmental agenda appeals to those prioritizing economic progress and modernization. This broad coalition of support has strengthened his political position. Internationally, Modi's image as a strong leader has enhanced India's visibility in global affairs. World leaders increasingly recognize India's importance in addressing issues such as climate change, energy security, technological innovation, and geopolitical stability. India's growing economy and demographic advantages have further amplified its strategic significance. Modi's diplomatic initiatives have contributed substantially to this enhanced global profile. Whatever the final verdict of history may be, Narendra Modi has undeniably emerged as one of the most influential political figures of contemporary times.

Environmental responsibility in daily life

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuvan

The environmental challenges facing the world today are no longer distant concerns discussed only by scientists, policymakers, and international organizations. They have become visible realities affecting everyday life across nations, communities, and households. Rising temperatures, irregular rainfall patterns, extreme weather events, shrinking biodiversity, air pollution, water scarcity, and growing mountains of waste have brought environmental questions into the center of public life. While governments and industries carry significant responsibility for addressing these issues, the role of ordinary citizens cannot be ignored. Environmental responsibility begins not in international conferences or corporate boardrooms but in daily decisions made by millions of individuals. The food people consume, the energy they use, the products they purchase, the waste they generate, and the habits they cultivate collectively influence the health of the planet. In contemporary society, where consumption has become deeply embedded in lifestyles and economic aspirations, environmental responsibility has acquired a new urgency. The challenge is not merely to recognize environmental problems but to understand how personal behavior contributes to them and how small, consistent actions can become powerful forces for change. Modern life often encourages convenience over sustainability. Disposable products, excessive packaging, fast fashion, and energy-intensive lifestyles have become common features of contemporary living. Many people remain unaware of the environmental cost hidden behind everyday conveniences. A plastic bottle used for a few minutes may remain in the environment for centuries. A food item transported across continents leaves a carbon footprint that most consumers never consider. Electronic devices are frequently replaced long before their useful life ends, contributing to an expanding global problem of electronic waste. Environmental responsibility requires a shift in perspective. It asks individuals to see connections between personal choices and

larger ecological outcomes. This awareness is not about abandoning modern comforts or returning to a simpler age. Rather, it involves making informed decisions that balance personal needs with environmental considerations. The importance of such awareness becomes even more significant in an era when environmental degradation increasingly affects public health, economic stability, agricultural productivity, and social well-being. Every household, regardless of its size or income level, possesses the capacity to contribute positively to environmental protection through conscious daily practices.

One of the most significant dimensions of environmental responsibility involves the way people consume resources. Contemporary societies are characterized by unprecedented levels of consumption. Economic growth has expanded access to goods and services, improving living standards for millions. However, this progress has often been accompanied by patterns of excessive consumption that place immense pressure on natural systems. The culture of constant purchasing, driven by advertising and rapidly changing trends, encourages individuals to acquire more than they actually need. As products become symbols of identity and status, consumption frequently exceeds practical necessity. Environmental responsibility calls for a more thoughtful approach to purchasing decisions. Before buying a product, individuals can consider questions regarding durability, necessity, environmental impact, and potential alternatives. Choosing quality over quantity reduces waste and promotes sustainable production practices. Supporting locally produced goods can reduce transportation-related emissions while strengthening local economies. Similarly, adopting habits of repair, reuse, and sharing can extend product lifespans and decrease demand for new resources. The contemporary movement toward sustainable consumption reflects a growing recognition that environmental problems cannot be separated from consumer behavior. This does not mean rejecting economic development or material progress. Instead, it involves redefining prosperity in

ways that prioritize long-term well-being over short-term accumulation. In many communities around the world, individuals are rediscovering traditional practices that emphasized resource conservation and minimal waste. These practices, once considered signs of economic necessity, are increasingly viewed as examples of environmental wisdom. As societies confront mounting ecological challenges, responsible consumption emerges as a practical and accessible pathway through which ordinary citizens can contribute to broader sustainability goals. The cumulative impact of millions of consumers making environmentally conscious choices can influence market behavior, encourage innovation, and create demand for sustainable alternatives.

Energy use represents another critical area where daily environmental responsibility can make a meaningful difference. Modern civilization depends heavily on energy. Homes, workplaces, transportation systems, and industrial operations all require substantial energy inputs. Yet much of the world's energy continues to come from fossil fuels, which contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions and climate change. Although large-scale transitions to renewable energy require government policies and infrastructure investments, individuals can still play an important role through their everyday energy practices. Simple actions such as turning off unused lights, choosing energy-efficient appliances, reducing unnecessary air-conditioning or heating, and improving household insulation can lower energy consumption considerably. These measures not only benefit the environment but also reduce household expenses, demonstrating that environmental responsibility often aligns with economic practicality. In contemporary urban societies, energy consumption frequently occurs without conscious awareness. Digital devices remain connected continuously, appliances operate unnecessarily, and excessive light-

ing is often regarded as normal. Developing a culture of energy mindfulness requires recognizing that every unit of energy consumed has environmental implications. Transportation choices further illustrate this principle. Private vehicles offer convenience and mobility, yet they contribute substantially to air pollution and carbon emissions. Whenever feasible, walking, cycling, public transportation, or carpooling can reduce environmental impacts while im-



proving public health. The growth of sustainable transportation initiatives in cities worldwide reflects increasing awareness of these connections. Environmental responsibility in energy use does not demand perfection. Rather, it involves gradual adjustments that collectively reduce ecological footprints. As renewable technologies become more accessible and affordable, individuals also have opportunities to adopt cleaner energy sources. Solar panels, energy-efficient buildings, and smart energy management systems are becoming increasingly common features of environmentally responsible living. In a century defined by climate concerns, responsible energy use stands as one of the most important contributions citizens can make toward environmental sustainability.

Waste management has emerged as one of the defining environmental issues of contemporary society. Rapid urbanization, population growth, and consumer culture have generated unprecedented quantities of waste. Landfills continue to expand, plastic pollution contaminates oceans and rivers, and im-

properly managed waste threatens ecosystems and public health. Environmental responsibility requires individuals to rethink their relationship with waste. The traditional model of "take, use, and discard" is increasingly unsustainable. Instead, greater emphasis must be placed on reducing waste generation at its source. Choosing products with minimal packaging, carrying reusable bags, avoiding single-use plastics, composting organic waste, and participating in recycling programs are practical actions available to most households. Yet effective waste management extends beyond technical solutions. It also involves cultural and behavioral change. Many contemporary societies have normalized disposability, treating products as temporary and easily replaceable. This mindset encourages wasteful habits and obscures the environmental consequences of discarded materials. Environmental responsibility challenges this culture by promoting values of stewardship, conservation, and accountability. Educational institutions, community organizations, and media platforms play important roles in fostering these values. At the same time, individual commitment remains essential. Every piece of waste that is prevented, reused, or properly managed reduces pressure on natural systems. The growing visibility of pollution crises around the world has highlighted the need for collective action, but collective action begins with individual participation. Waste management also raises broader questions about environmental justice, as disadvantaged communities often bear disproportionate burdens associated with landfills, pollution, and inadequate waste infrastructure. By adopting responsible waste practices, citizens contribute not only to environmental protection but also to social equity and public health. In this sense, waste reduction becomes both an environmental and ethical responsibility within contemporary society.

Environmental responsibility also extends to food choices and

lifestyle practices. Modern food systems are among the most resource-intensive sectors of the global economy. Agriculture consumes large amounts of land, water, and energy while contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity loss. Food waste further compounds these challenges, with significant quantities of edible food discarded every day. Individuals can contribute positively by making informed dietary choices, reducing food waste, and supporting sustainable agricultural practices. Planning meals carefully, purchasing only necessary quantities, storing food properly, and utilizing leftovers can significantly reduce waste. Supporting local farmers and seasonal produce may lower transportation impacts while strengthening community resilience. Contemporary society has witnessed growing interest in sustainable diets, reflecting increasing awareness of the connections between food systems and environmental health. Environmental responsibility in food consumption does not require rigid adherence to specific dietary ideologies.

Rather, it encourages thoughtful consideration of how food is produced, distributed, and consumed. Beyond food, lifestyle choices relating to water use, clothing, housing, and recreation also influence environmental outcomes. Water conservation, responsible purchasing, and support for environmentally responsible businesses represent additional ways individuals can align daily behavior with sustainability goals. Importantly, environmental responsibility should not be viewed as a burden imposed upon individuals. Instead, it can be understood as an opportunity to cultivate healthier, more meaningful relationships with resources, communities, and the natural world. Contemporary society often equates success with increased consumption and convenience, yet growing evidence suggests that sustainable living can enhance quality of life by promoting health, reducing waste, strengthening local connections, and fostering greater awareness of ecological interdependence.

The future of environmental sustainability will depend not only on technological innovation and governmental action but also on

the values and behaviors embraced by ordinary citizens. Environmental responsibility in daily life represents a practical expression of citizenship in an age of ecological uncertainty. Every generation faces defining challenges, and environmental stewardship is undoubtedly one of the defining responsibilities of the twenty-first century. The environmental crises confronting humanity are complex and interconnected, but complexity should not lead to helplessness. Individual actions may appear small when viewed in isolation, yet their collective impact can be profound. Social change frequently begins with shifts in everyday behavior that gradually influence cultural norms, market practices, and public policies. Contemporary society stands at a critical moment where environmental awareness is increasing, yet environmental degradation continues at an alarming pace. Bridging this gap requires translating awareness into action. Families, schools, workplaces, and communities all have roles to play in cultivating habits of environmental responsibility. Children who learn conservation values at home are more likely to carry those values into adulthood. Communities that prioritize sustainability create social environments that encourage responsible behavior. Businesses respond to consumer demand for environmentally responsible products and services. Governments gain public support for ambitious environmental policies when citizens recognize their importance. Thus, environmental responsibility is not merely a private matter; it is a foundation for broader societal transformation. The path toward a sustainable future will not be shaped solely by grand initiatives or technological breakthroughs. It will also be shaped by countless daily decisions made by ordinary people who recognize that protecting the environment is inseparable from protecting human well-being. In the end, environmental responsibility is about understanding that the health of the planet and the quality of human life are deeply connected. The choices made today, however small they may seem, will help determine the kind of world future generations inherit.

Ground-level ozone pollution: An emerging public health crisis in Delhi

By: S K Chhabra

Delhi's air pollution problem has traditionally been related to particulate matter (PM_{2.5} and PM₁₀), but recent evidence suggests that additionally, ground-level ozone (O₃) is rapidly emerging as an equally important environmental and public health concern. Unlike particulate matter, ozone is not emitted directly from any source. It is a secondary pollutant formed through photochemical reactions involving nitrogen oxides (NOx) and volatile organic compounds (VOCs) generated mostly from automobile exhausts that, in the presence of sunlight, generate ozone. Consequently, ozone pollution is most severe during hot, sunny weather, during the daytime and is expected to worsen with rising temperatures associated with climate change.

Recent analyses from Delhi-NCR indicate that ozone pollution has become both widespread and persistent. The Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), using data from the Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring System (CAAQMS), reported that in many areas in Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) the national eight-hour ozone standard of 100 µg/m³ exceeded on every day between March 1 and May 31, 2025. The number of monitoring stations exceeding the standard each day has increased in the past five years. Exceedances persisted for an average of 14.2 hours daily, indicating prolonged population exposure.

The spatial pattern of ozone pollution differs markedly from that of particulate matter. Areas such as Nehru Nagar, Najafgarh, Okhla Phase II, Ashok Vihar, and Aya Nagar experienced the highest number of ozone exceedance days, despite not being among Delhi's most polluted locations for PM_{2.5} or NO₂. This reflects the unique atmospheric chemistry of ozone. Fresh nitric oxide (NO) emissions from vehicles can destroy ozone locally, resulting in lower concentrations in areas with high-density traffic. Instead, ozone often accumulates in residential and peri-urban areas where these scavenging reactions are less intense.

Several stations recorded extraordinarily high ozone concentrations during the summer of 2025. The highest reported daily maximum eight-hour average was 472 µg/m³ at Central Road Research Institute (CRRRI)-Mathura Road in Okhla, while other stations recorded values exceeding 300-400 µg/m³. Although these extreme values require independent validation, they indicate the potential for severe short-term exposure events across the city.

Acute respiratory effects
Ozone is a highly reactive oxidant gas that directly injures airway epithelium. Controlled human exposure studies and

epidemiological investigations have consistently demonstrated that even short-term exposure can produce cough, throat irritation, chest tightness, wheezing, dyspnea and pain during deep inspiration. Ozone causes airway inflammation, increases airway permeability and impairs mucociliary clearance. These acute effects may produce symptoms even in persons not having any prior respiratory disease.

One of the best-established effects of ozone is its adverse impact on lung function. Exposure to elevated ozone concentrations can cause measurable reductions in FEV₁-FVC (a standard test to measure lung function) and peak expiratory flow rates even in healthy individuals. These effects are particularly pronounced during physical activity because increased ventilation delivers larger quantities of ozone to the distal airways. Children, older adults and individuals with pre-existing respiratory disease are especially vulnerable.

Ozone exposure is strongly associated with asthma exacerbations. Higher daily ozone concentrations are linked to increased asthma symptoms, increased use of rescue medication, emergency department visits and hospitalisations. Ozone also increases bronchial hyperresponsiveness, making asthmatic individuals more sensitive to allergens and other environmental triggers.

Similarly, short-term ozone exposure increases the risk of COPD exacerbations and hospital admissions. Meta-analyses have demonstrated significant associations between ozone levels and COPD-related morbidity, particularly during peaks of ozone formation.

Chronic respiratory effects

While the acute effects of ozone are well established, increasing evidence indicates that chronic exposure also has important long-term consequences. Longitudinal cohort studies have shown associations between long-term ozone exposure and accelerated decline in lung function, increased incidence of asthma, progression of emphysema and increased respiratory mortality. Chronic ozone exposure may contribute to airway remodeling and persistent inflammatory changes within the lungs. For a city such as Delhi, where ozone exceedances are now occurring throughout much of the summer, repeated seasonal exposure may contribute to cumulative respiratory injury and reduced lung function over time, particularly among children and individuals with pre-existing respiratory disease.

Cardiovascular effects

Historically, ozone was regarded primarily as a respiratory pollutant, but contemporary research demonstrates significant cardiovascular effects as well. Short-term increases in ozone concentration have been

associated with higher risks of cardiovascular mortality, myocardial infarction, stroke, arrhythmias and hospital admissions for cardiovascular disease. Ozone-induced systemic oxidative stress and inflammation are believed to play key mechanistic roles.

Long-term exposure has also been linked to increased cardiovascular mortality in several large cohort studies. Recent evidence suggests that chronic ozone exposure contributes independently to cardiovascular disease risk, even after accounting for other air pollutants.

Mortality and public health burden

A growing body of evidence links both short-term and long-term ozone exposure to increased mortality. Meta-analyses of multiple studies have demonstrated increased risks of total, respiratory and cardiovascular mortality with rising ambient ozone concentrations. Importantly, adverse effects have been observed even at concentrations below many existing regulatory standards. The persistence of ozone pollution across Delhi-NCR is therefore not merely an environmental concern but a major public health challenge. The combination of prolonged seasonal exposure, increasing geographic spread and high peak concentrations raises concerns regarding future burdens of asthma, COPD, cardiovascular disease, hospital admissions and premature mortality.

Implications for Delhi

The emerging ozone problem signals a transition from a predominantly particulate pollution crisis to a broader multi-pollutant crisis. Traditional air quality interventions focused exclusively on particulate matter are unlikely to adequately address ozone pollution. Effective control will require reduction of NOx and VOC emissions from transport, industry, power generation, waste burning and solvent use. Because ozone is a regional pollutant that can travel considerable distances from its source, mitigation strategies must extend beyond Delhi itself and involve coordinated action across the entire NCR.

There is a dearth of data on health effects of ozone in Indian population. So far, the health studies have remained focused on the effects of particulate pollution and there is a need to widen the scope of such studies to include the potential adverse health effects of ozone.

The current evidence suggests that ozone is becoming one of the most important warm-season air pollutants in Delhi. Given its documented effects on lung function, respiratory symptoms, asthma, COPD, cardiovascular disease and mortality, ozone deserves recognition as a major public health threat and should become an integral component of future air quality management and health surveillance strategies.

Vehicle taxation can be an effective policy lever to control pollution

By Kushan Mitra

India's auto policy debate has a familiar flaw: it loves grand objectives and then settles for blunt instruments. If the goal is cleaner air, lower emissions and a faster transition to better mobility, then a graded GST structure on vehicles is far more sensible than pretending every technology deserves the same treatment. The tax system should reward the vehicles that pollute less in the real world, not the ones that merely look cleaner on a certification sheet.

That is the core problem with the current debate. We keep talking about electric vehicles as though they are the only answer, hybrids as though they are a compromise, and conventional vehicles as though they are the enemy. Reality is messier. India is not going to jump from a fossil-fuel-dependent fleet to a fully electric one overnight. Nor should policy pretend otherwise. What the country needs is a tax framework that recognises the transition, accelerates the cleanest options, and stops rewarding the dirtiest. The key, though, is that emissions cannot be measured on carbon alone. CO₂ matters for climate, and there is no point pretending otherwise. But urban air quality is shaped just as much by nitrogen oxides, particulates, carbon monoxide and unburnt hydrocarbons. A car that looks respectable on a CO₂ metric can still be quite damaging in the conditions in which Indian vehicles actually operate. That is why the tax conversation has to broaden beyond carbon.

This is also why real-world testing must be central. Laboratory certification is useful, but it is not enough. Vehicles behave differently in congestion, in hot weather, on poor roads, during repeated accelerations and braking, and across mixed driving cycles. If India wants a credible graded tax system, it cannot rely only on a test cycle that manufacturers can optimise around. It needs a metric that reflects actual use. Indian roads are not European roads. A policy that works on paper but fails in traffic is not policy; it is theatre. If the government is going to link GST rates to emissions, then those emissions should be measured in a way that captures real-world performance, not merely laboratory compliance.

The beauty of a graded GST framework is that it would create a clear market signal without needing constant administrative improvisation. Buyers would know exactly what they are being rewarded for. Manufacturers would know exactly what they need to improve. And the state would stop pretending that all "clean" vehicles are



equally clean. A plug-in hybrid that is regularly charged and driven mostly on electricity is one thing. A large hybrid that quietly relies on its petrol engine most of the time is another. A battery EV or hydrogen vehicle with no tailpipe emissions is in a different category altogether. Tax policy should reflect those distinctions, not flatten them.

It would also avoid one of India's recurring policy mistakes: treating technology labels as moral categories. The problem with that approach is that it ignores usage. An EV charged on a coal-heavy grid still needs a careful policy framework, even if its tailpipe is clean. A hybrid may be far better than a conventional petrol car in the near term. A plug-in hybrid may be a sensible bridge technology. None of these realities fit neatly into the simplistic language of winners and losers. A graded tax structure is much better suited to the real transition India is undergoing. There is also fiscal logic here. India cannot afford to give away revenue without a rationale, especially when road transport imposes huge public costs through pollution, congestion and health damage. If the tax system is going to forgo revenue on one class of vehicles, it should do so because those vehicles are delivering demonstrably cleaner outcomes. That is why the baseline for zero-emission vehicles should be the lowest, but not because they are fashionable. It should be low because they impose far less local pollution. The same logic should apply, in descending order, to hydrogen, plug-in hybrids, strong hybrids and efficient combustion vehicles.

The temptation in Delhi is always to believe that the next policy announcement will solve everything. It will not. But a graded GST system, tied to real-world emissions and not just carbon, would at least be a serious attempt to align tax policy with environmental reality. It would acknowledge that climate and air quality are related but not identical problems. It would recognise that the transition to cleaner mobility has stages. And it would reward the vehicles that actually help, rather than those that merely sound progressive. If India wants to clean its air without distorting its market, it should stop thinking about vehicle taxation as a blunt revenue tool. Tax the polluter more. Tax the cleaner vehicle less. Measure emissions honestly. Include NOx and particulates, not just CO₂. And build the structure so that the cleanest vehicles begin with the lowest GST rate and the dirtier ones climb progressively higher. That is not radical. It is simply the minimum standard of common sense.

Trump goes after Netanyahu as he pursues deal with Iran

WASHINGTON, June 17: Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told President Donald Trump last year that he was the "greatest friend Israel ever had in the White House."

Now, as Trump tries to finalise a deal to end the war with Iran, he's unloading on Netanyahu with rhetoric that no other American leader has dared to use publicly.

He claimed credit for Israel's existence — "without me, there would be no Israel" — and cursed his judgment in interviews. He even described him as "crazy."

Netanyahu's tenure as prime minister spans four US presidents, and he's frustrated all of them at one point or another. But none has voiced that as openly as Trump, who started the conflict in tandem with Netanyahu.

The tension comes as Trump criticises recent Israeli attacks in Lebanon, which threatened to jeopardise negotiations between Washington and Tehran. Trump has been pushing for a deal as he faces political blowback at home, where the war is unpopular and has driven up gasoline prices.

"If Netanyahu gets in between something Trump really wants, and that's out of this war, he's prepared to use the leverage that he has," said Aaron David Miller, who served as an adviser on Middle East issues to Democratic and Republican administrations over two decades.

An agreement is scheduled to be signed on Friday in the Burgenstock resort near the



city of Luzern. Speaking on Tuesday at the annual G7 summit in France, Trump said he told Netanyahu that he's been unhappy with his recent moves.

"Without the US, there would be no Israel. Without me, there would be no Israel because no other president was willing to do what I did," Trump said. "I have had a great relationship with Bibi. Now Bibi has to be more responsible with respect to Lebanon."

There has long been a bipartisan consensus around supporting Israel in Washington, but that has frayed in recent years. Liberals

have been increasingly outraged by Israel's treatment of Palestinians, especially during the war in Gaza, and conservatives have questioned the importance of longstanding American support for Israel. There are concerns about antisemitism on the left and the right.

Trump's latest comments drew swift criticism from left-leaning groups.

"He is framing Israel's mere existence as contingent on him," said Halie Soifer, who leads the Jewish Democratic Council of America. "It's deeply offensive to the vast

majority of Jews who care about Israel's future."

President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris often disagreed with Netanyahu during the war in Gaza, and sometimes they criticised him publicly. But they were more circumspect to avoid facing accusations of being anti-Israel.

Conservative, pro-Israel groups were divided on the seriousness of Trump's public condemnation of Netanyahu.

Republican Jewish Coalition President Matt Brooks described Trump's criticism as little more than the inevitable disagreement among family members.

Brooks dismissed that any muted criticism of Trump's comments from his party represented a mixed political message because Trump has been reliably supportive of Israel as president.

"If Biden or Harris said something critical, it came from the position of someone who was hostile toward or didn't have the same level of support for Israel that President Trump has," Brooks said.

He noted the first Trump administration's role in moving the US embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the return of Israeli hostages from Gaza during the president's second term, among other acts.

Biden had criticised Netanyahu's handling of the war in Gaza, though Trump's criticism of Netanyahu comes with a "tremendous reservoir of goodwill on this issue that neither Biden nor Harris ever had." (AP)

Taiwan's foreign minister says Chinese pressure on countries over island is 'new normal'



TAIPEI, June 17: Attempts by China to exert pressure or influence on other countries to limit Taiwan's access to international events has become "the new normal," the island's foreign minister said on Wednesday.

Lin Chia-Lung was speaking after Taiwanese delegates were detained in Kenya and denied access to an ocean conference, reportedly due to Chinese pressure on the organisers, according to Taiwan's Foreign Ministry.

China regards Taiwan, a self-ruled democracy, as a breakaway province and has not renounced the use of force to annex it. In recent months, Beijing has ramped up a campaign of pressuring other countries to limit the access of Taiwanese officials or delegates to various events.

In April, Taiwan's president postponed a planned visit to the African nation of Eswatini after three countries withdrew permission for him to fly over their territories after pressure from China, his office said. He eventually arrived in the African nation days later, on a plane chartered by Eswatini's king.

In the latest incident, two Taiwanese delegates to the international Our Ocean Conference being held in Mombasa were denied access on the grounds that their Taiwanese passports were not recognised, the Foreign Ministry in Taipei said on Tuesday.

Their passports and mobile phones were confiscated and they were detained for more than 20 hours before being allowed to leave the country, the ministry said.

The rest of the Taiwanese delegation withdrew from the conference after the incident.

Kenya defended its decision to deny access to the Taiwanese nationals. Foreign Ministry Principal Secretary Korir Sing'oi said his country's foreign policy "recognises only one China."

Lin criticised Kenya for its "unilateral distortion and unwarranted expansion of their so-called One China" interpretation, referring to Beijing's claims over Taiwan.

Kenya's "obstruction of our delegates from attending the meeting is absolutely wrong, and we strongly condemn and protest against it," Lin said at an event hosted by the Taiwan Foreign Correspondents' Club.

China has not commented on the accusations.

China has long tried to limit Taiwan's representation in international bodies, including the World Health Organisation and its governing body, the World Health Assembly. At the Olympic Games, Taiwan is forced to participate under the name "Chinese Taipei" due to Beijing's pressure.

Lin said China is increasingly pressuring other countries to exclude Taiwan, especially when it comes to developing and emerging economies that are under Beijing's economic sway.

"Some Global South countries are manipulated by the Chinese government in every way," Lin said. "Some democratic countries are trying to fight against it."

Kenya is hosting the annual oceans conference, which focuses on addressing critical ocean issues, including climate change, biodiversity and pollution.

Hundreds of delegates from Africa, the US, the European Union and climate-vulnerable Caribbean and Pacific island nations are taking part in the conference. Organisers have sought to position Africa — which is hosting the event for the first time — as a driving force in global ocean governance.

"Any person purporting to hold a Taiwanese passport would ordinarily not be allowed through our borders for lacking proper documentation and would not in any event be part of a formal state meeting convened by Kenya government," Sing'oi said.

China and Taiwan have been governed separately since 1949, when the Communist Party rose to power in Beijing following a civil war. Defeated Nationalist Party forces fled to Taiwan, which later transitioned from martial law to multi-party democracy. (AP)

Germany, Poland to sign new defence deal as balance of power in Europe shifts

WARSAW, June 17: Germany and Poland are set to sign a new defence agreement on Wednesday, putting aside their complicated past to strengthen European military cooperation amid heightened tensions with Russia and growing uncertainty over US engagement in Europe.

Relations between the two neighbours in recent years have become more pragmatic in the wake of Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022 and the coming to power of a liberal government in Poland in 2023.

As the US weighs a partial draw-down of its military presence in Europe, Poland is keen to ensure that major European allies take a greater role in defending the continent's eastern flank.

Germany seeks partners as it moves to revitalise its military, the Bundeswehr, after decades of neglect, with ambitions to build the strongest conventional army on NATO's European side — an effort that will make it a central pillar of European defence in the years ahead.

Poland's importance as a logistics hub for Ukraine, alongside its growing economy and heavy defence investment, has made it a compelling partner for Germany and other core European countries.

"Poland started building a strong army much earlier than other countries in Western Europe," Cezary Tomczyk, the Polish deputy defence minister, told The Associated Press. "So we are ahead when it comes to capabilities." "We definitely don't accept that any agreements about this part of Europe are made without Poland," he said.

"We Germans need a strong Poland as an equal partner," German Chancellor Friedrich Merz said in Berlin after meeting with liberal Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in December. "This is in our fundamental interest."

Germany has a key role in securing Europe's eastern borders

The defence agreement is to include plans for protecting the Baltic Sea region and details about cooperation on military mobility and infrastructure, cyber defence and new technologies.

The two countries are irreversibly tied by NATO's defence plans, which give Germany a key

role in the defence of the Baltic region, together with Poland and other countries in the central and eastern European region, said Justyna Gotkowska, deputy director of the Warsaw-based think tank Centre for Eastern Studies.

"Germany is largely responsible for the defence of the Baltic states and without cooperation with Poland, that will not happen," Gotkowska said.

The Baltic countries are often referred to as the most likely target for Russia if it were to attack NATO territory in the future.

Tomczyk, the deputy defence minister, said German soldiers, among others, would help further develop Poland's Eastern Shield, a system of enhanced fortifications the country has been building on its borders with Belarus and Russia since 2024.

Historical wounds still cause problems

The agreement is expected to reaffirm the mutual defence obligations set out in NATO and European Union treaties, to which both countries are parties.

However, unlike bilateral treaties each has signed with France and the United Kingdom in recent years, the Polish-German agreement is inter-ministerial, focused on the practical aspects of military cooperation and does not include political mutual defence declarations that the bilateral treaties do.

When asked in June by Polish Radio Trojka why Poland is not signing a similar treaty with Germany, Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski said that President Karol Nawrocki, who came to power with the support of the national-conservative Law and Justice party, would never agree to that.

"Hell would break loose here" if a German-Polish treaty was signed, Sikorski said. When Law and Justice was in power, the government demanded USD 1.3 trillion in reparations from Germany because of its World War II occupation of Poland — a demand Berlin has rejected. The topic is likely to resurface ahead of next year's general election, and Tusk will seek to avoid appearing soft or serving Berlin's interests. Tusk himself has demanded that Germany move faster to compensate surviving victims of the occupation. (AP)

Nepal govt wants stronger ties with India, China: Khanal

BEIJING, June 17: The Nepal government wants to have "stronger ties" with India and China, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal said as he wrapped up his four-day visit to Beijing on Wednesday.

During the visit, Khanal held comprehensive and in-depth talks with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and senior political leaders, Wang Huning, the chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and Liu Haixing, Minister of the International Department of the ruling Communist Party of China.

Khanal's visit to Beijing followed closely on his trip to India during which he said his government would accord "highest priority" to relations with New Delhi.

Asked whether the visits to New Delhi and Beijing were aimed at striking a balance between Nepal's two big neighbours, Khanal said both India and China are vital partners to the Himalayan country.

The Balendra Shah-led Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) replaced the prolonged rule of pro-China Communist Parties after a landslide victory in the general election in March.

"My visit was to indicate the importance that we give to both countries and we want to build on our existing relationship and also make it stronger and better and deeper than what has been in the past," he told state-run the Global Times here.

The fall of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML) government headed by pro-Beijing leader K P Sharma Oli following the massive Gen Z movement and massive victory of the little known RSP has caused apprehension here about the future course of ties between Nepal and China.

After talks with Wang, Khanal said he held a "comprehensive discussion" with his Chinese counterpart

"on the entire gamut of bilateral relations, including in the areas of connectivity, border management, trade, technology transfer and multilateral cooperation".

He also assured Wang that Nepal remains firmly committed to the one-China policy, supports China's efforts to achieve complete reunification, and will never allow any forces to use Nepal's territory to undermine China's interests.

Reports in the Nepalese media said during the talks with Khanal, Chinese officials had raised concerns over Western influence in Nepal, mostly about the USD 500 million American Millennium Challenge Corporation and State Partnership Programme, MCC-Compact.

When asked for its reaction to the report, the Chinese Foreign Ministry told PTI that international development cooperation should adhere to the principles of mutual respect and equality.

"It should not interfere in the internal affairs of other countries, impose any political conditions, engage in 'coercive diplomacy', or undermine the sovereignty and interests of other countries for one's own selfish gain," it said.

Khanal told Global Times that Nepal is grateful for assistance from the Chinese government and hopes to build a strong relationship with China, identifying connectivity and infrastructure as top priorities for bilateral cooperation with China.

He also discussed the Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network between Nepal and China which includes the cross-border transmission line and cross-border rail as core projects.

A feasibility study for the railway project has been completed by the Chinese side, and Nepal expects to receive it by the end of this month. (PTI)

India-EU free trade deal to be inked by year-end: Ursula von der Leyen

EVIAN-LES-BAINS (FRANCE), June 17: India and the European Union will sign the ambitious free trade agreement by the end of this year, top EU leader Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday after holding talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In the meeting, held on the sidelines of the G7 summit in this French commune, the two sides also resolved to step up security and defence cooperation.

Besides von der Leyen, the President of the EU Commission, the meeting was joined by European Council President Antonio Costa.

"Since we have concluded the mother of all trade deals, we have been moving fast to deliver on our commitments. We will sign the Free Trade Agreement by the end of the year. And accelerate work on an investment agreement," von der Leyen said on social media.

"We will also step up security & defence cooperation. And join forces for better connectivity by advancing IMEC, the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor," she said.

India and the EU announced concluding negotiations for the mega trade deal at their summit meeting in January in New Delhi. (PTI)

UK PM calls actions of Russian warship reckless but not sinister

LONDON, June 17: UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Wednesday accused the crew of a Russian warship of acting recklessly when they fired warning shots near a British yacht in the English Channel, though he downplayed the seriousness of the incident.

The owners of the 40-foot (12-metre) sailboat Bright Future say the shots were fired early Tuesday morning when they encountered a Russian warship while crossing the English Channel to Cherbourg in France. Russia says the crew of the frigate Admiral Grigorovich fired shots into the air after the sailboat failed to respond to warnings to change course.

No one was injured, but the incident underscored heightened tensions between the UK and Russia. Speaking at the G7 summit in France, Starmer said the incident was "deeply concerning," even though British defence officials have concluded the shots weren't "anything more sinister" than an effort to avoid a collision.

"That doesn't take away from the fact that clearly Russia is aggressive across Europe," Starmer said.

The incident occurred two days after Britain seized a tanker from Russia's so-called shadow fleet, which Western powers say is used to skirt sanctions on Russian oil exports imposed after the invasion of Ukraine. Britain has also accused Russia of mounting a campaign of sabotage and misinformation designed to destabilise European nations that support Ukraine.

The British couple aboard the Bright Future, Jane Kelvey, 68, and her husband Alan, 70, reported that the shots were fired about 20 nautical miles (23 miles, 37 kilometres) south of the Isle of Wight, outside UK territorial waters.

"It was a bit scary," Jane Kelvey told the i Paper. "I crouched down. I didn't think our safety was in danger. But it was certainly unusual. As we sailed away, we said to each other, what the hell just happened?"

Russia's Defence Ministry said the crew of the frigate tried to contact the yacht when it was seen sailing on a "dangerous course in close proximity to the warship." It said the ship's crew launched flares and issued sound signals when the yacht did not respond. (AP)

Sri Lanka anti graft commission arrests ex-president's son

COLOMBO, June 17: Sri Lanka's former president Mahinda Rajapaksa's son Yoshitha Rajapaksa was arrested by the country's anti-graft commission on Wednesday on corruption charges.

Yoshitha arrived at the Commission to Investigate Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) in response to a summons issued by the Commission to appear before investigators regarding the matter.

Yoshitha is the second among Mahinda Rajapaksa's three sons.

The CIABOC has outlined the reasons behind the arrest of former Sri Lanka Navy officer Yoshitha, saying the case relates to alleged irregularities in his recruitment and training process.

In a press statement, CIABOC stated that Yoshitha, who had been a naval cadet, was allegedly engaged as an officer in the executive branch of the Sri Lanka Navy in 2006 without fulfilling the prescribed qualifications.

The Commission further alleged that he was later provided the opportunity to follow a training



course at the British Royal Naval College using government funds, outside the established recruitment and training procedures.

CIABOC said its investigating officers arrested him in connection with these alleged corruption-related offences.

In 2025, he was arrested and bailed for buying a property in his grand aunt's name. The case is still proceeding. He faces a money laundering charge in the said case.

His arrest came a day after his uncle, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who

was president between 2019 and 2023, filed a petition in a court to prevent his arrest in connection with the Easter Sunday attacks that killed 270 people.

Since the formation of a new government led by President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, Mahinda Rajapaksa's eldest son and legislator, Namal Rajapaksa, was also quizzed by the police over a property case alongside an employee of Mahinda Rajapaksa.

The new government in the run-up to elections had vowed to arrest everyone accused of wrongdoing during Mahinda Rajapaksa's presidency between 2005 and 2015.

His other uncle, Basil Rajapaksa, who was the powerful economic and finance minister under the Rajapaksa presidency, was ordered to be arrested by the Colombo Fort Magistrate for alleged misappropriation of Tourism Promotion Bureau funds for electioneering in 2014.

He is accused of using 7.8 million rupees from Tourism for election propaganda work. (PTI)

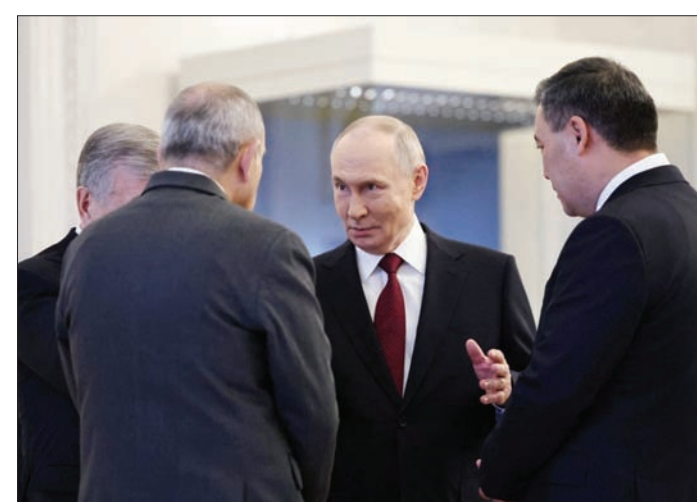
Putin hosts leaders of Southeast Asian nations

MOSCOW, June 17: Russia's President Vladimir Putin is hosting leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations at a meeting Wednesday that seeks to bolster business and other ties with members of the regional bloc.

The two-day meeting, being held in Kazan, is set to consider ways to expand Russia's "strategic partnership" with ASEAN nations that include Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, East Timor and Vietnam, according to Kremlin foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov.

The regional bloc has maintained relations with Moscow as a "dialogue partner" and engaged Russian officials in annual top-level meetings, he said. The summit in Kazan, on the Volga River, marks the 35th anniversary of Russia-ASEAN relations.

In a message greeting participants in a business forum held on the side-



lines of the summit, Putin said he was confident that it will "create new opportunities for expanding mutually beneficial trade, investment, and industrial cooperation, while also strengthening direct dialogue between our business communities."

Ushakov said the agenda includes exchanging views on global and regional issues and reviewing efforts to develop Russia-ASEAN ties. He emphasised that the participants are set to underline their adherence to "forming a just and democratic mul-

tipolar world order based on the principles of international law and the United Nations Charter."

Ushakov praised what he described as "fruitful, equal and constructive dialogue" between Russia and ASEAN.

He told reporters that Putin would have bilateral meetings with ASEAN leaders during the summit, which he will co-chair with Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, whose country currently holds the association's yearly rotating presidency.

Some of ASEAN's diverse member countries, including the Philippines, are seen to be aligned with the United States, while others have heavy trade and security engagements with China and Russia.

Several ASEAN members, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam, have either imported Russian crude oil or expressed interest in purchasing it after global fuel prices soared in the wake of the war in Iran. (AP)

Nagaland college students' body calls for 'Black Friday' over delay in girls' hostel project

KOHHIMA, June 17: The All Nagaland College Students' Union (ANCSU) has announced a statewide "Black Friday" protest on June 19 over the delay in the construction of the 100-bedded Girls' Hostel at Kohima Science College (Autonomous), Jotsoma.

Black flags will be hoisted in colleges by the Union members on that day as a mark of protest.

Addressing a press conference here, ANCSU Assistant General Secretary Imnawabang Longkumer said the union's 20-day ultimatum to the government regarding the project had expired.

Longkumer, however, said ANCSU had received information from the department concerned that the funds earmarked for the hostel would not lapse and would be utilised solely for the construction of the facility.

Describing it as a "significant victory" for the student community, he said the department had informed the union that it was ready to proceed but required a written directive and approval



from the Office of the Chief Minister, who also holds the Finance portfolio.

According to Longkumer, the department has sought an additional week to secure the necessary approval.

Expressing frustration over the delay, ANCSU lamented that the absence of a written directive from

the Chief Minister's Office had stalled the process.

"The department is ready, but the approval is yet to come. We demand transparency and a written resolution," he said.

In this, as a mark of protest, ANCSU has called upon its members in colleges across the state to observe "Black Friday" on June

19 by hoisting black flags.

Longkumer said that if the required approval is not received, the union would launch the second phase of agitation, including a larger student movement across the state.

"The ANCSU cannot be satisfied with verbal assurances. We have given sufficient time for the necessary paperwork, but our patience is not unlimited," he stated. ANCSU General Secretary Sotilo Tep said the issue goes beyond the construction of a hostel building and concerns the future of students and the dignity of education in Nagaland.

"When education is delayed, dreams are delayed. When girls are neglected, society is weakened," he said.

Tep reiterated the union's demands for transparency, accountability and protection of students' interests, adding that ANCSU would continue its campaign until the government fulfils its responsibility towards the student community. (PTI)

Union min hails Sikkim's tree plantation scheme, calls it model for India

GANGTOK, June 17: Union minister Shobha Karandlaje on Wednesday praised Sikkim's community-led environmental initiatives and described the state's flagship 'Mero Rukh, Mero Santati' (My Tree, My Legacy) programme as a model worthy of replication across the country.

Karandlaje, the MoS for MSME and Labour, made the remarks while participating in the nationwide 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign at Smriti Ban in Bulbuley, where she planted a sapling under the initiative aimed at promoting environmental conservation through tree plantation in honour of

mothers. Addressing the gathering, the minister commended the Sikkim Forest and Environment Department for its innovative afforestation programmes and singled out the 'Mero Rukh, Mero Santati' scheme for special praise.

The initiative commemorates the birth of a child by planting 100 to 108 trees, symbolically linking the child's future with environmental stewardship.

Describing the programme as "visionary", Karandlaje said it creates a meaningful connection between child welfare and environmental protection.

"The initiative beautifully links the growth of children with the growth of trees, fostering environmental responsibility from an early age," she said.

Highlighting the scheme's achievements, the minister said nearly 10,000 children have been enrolled and more than one million trees planted across the state since its launch in 2023.

She congratulated the Sikkim government and the Forest and Environment Department for the successful implementation of the programme and expressed hope that similar initiatives would be adopted elsewhere in the country. (PTI)

India emerged stronger, more secure under Modi: Arunachal Dy CM

ITANAGAR, June 17: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chovna Mein on Wednesday said India has witnessed remarkable progress in its defence capabilities and safeguarding national interests under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the past 12 years.

In a social media post, Mein said India has emerged as a stronger and more secure nation through sustained efforts to modernise its armed forces, enhance operational preparedness and promote indigenous defence manufacturing under the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

"Over the past 12 years, India has made remarkable strides in strengthening its defence capabilities and safeguarding national

interests," the deputy chief minister said in a post on X.

He noted that the country's defence ecosystem has undergone a transformational change, marked by significant advances across the air, land and maritime domains.

"From modernising the armed forces and enhancing operational readiness to advancing indigenous defence manufacturing under the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, the nation has emerged stronger across air, land and maritime domains," Mein said.

Sharing a graphic highlighting the achievements of the Modi government in the defence sector, he pointed out that India's defence exports have increased 56 times during the period, while

the defence budget has witnessed an over three-fold rise.

The Arunachal deputy CM also observed that India-made defence equipment is now being exported to more than 80 countries. He further cited key milestones, including the successful testing of Agni-V missile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) capability and the commissioning of INS Vikrant, India's first indigenous aircraft carrier.

Referring to recent security achievements, Mein said Operation Sindoor neutralised 100 terrorists, and the country has also made substantial progress in tackling left-wing extremism. (PTI)

Global Association of MSMEs, Meghalaya Rural Bank sign MoU

SHILLONG, June 17: The Global Association of MSMEs (GAMSME) and the Meghalaya Rural Bank on Wednesday signed an MoU to help self-help groups, artisans and agricultural processors become bankable enterprises, officials said.

The agreement aims to create a structured financial inclusion framework for expanding access to formal credit for unorganised micro-units and family-run businesses across Meghalaya, they said.

Under the partnership, MRB's banking network will be integrated with GAMSME's grassroots outreach to facilitate easier access to

institutional finance for rural entrepreneurs, reducing reliance on informal and high-interest sources of borrowing.

The collaboration will also focus on livelihood formalisation through financial literacy programmes designed to help self-help groups and micro-enterprises maintain separate business finances, build verifiable credit histories and transition into registered micro and small enterprises, the officials said.

As part of the initiative, GAMSME will deploy its digital measurement, reporting and verification field toolkit to assess the financial preparedness and

compliance readiness of entrepreneurs before they approach the bank for loans.

Speaking on the occasion, GAMSME Founder and Chairman Abhijit Sharma said the partnership seeks to unlock the potential of rural entrepreneurs, who often remain outside the formal financial system despite having viable businesses.

"In rural India, ambition has never been in short supply. Access has. A weaver, a beekeeper, a small food processor are businesses waiting to happen, held back only by a system that could never quite see them," he said. (PTI)

Elusive Mishmi Takin caught on camera in North Sikkim for first time

GANGTOK, June 17: The first-ever video footage of a herd of the elusive Mishmi Takin has been recorded in the Tingda Reserve Forest of North Sikkim, marking one of the most significant confirmed sightings of the vulnerable species in the state in over two decades.

According to a statement issued by the Forest and Environment Department on Wednesday, the rare sighting was made during a routine patrol in the Bakuchen area of the reserve forest, where officials documented a herd of eight Mishmi Takins (Budorcas taxicolor).

"The footage documents a herd of eight individuals, representing the largest group of Takins ever recorded from this locality," the department said.

Often described as a "goat-antelope", the Mishmi Takin is a large high-altitude ungulate native to the eastern Himalayas. The species is listed as Vulnerable on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List and is regarded as an important indicator of



the health of alpine ecosystems.

Known for their stocky build, shaggy coats and ability to survive in harsh mountain environments, Takins inhabit rugged terrain ranging from forested valleys to alpine meadows at elevations of up to 4,500 metres. Their skin secretes a natural oily substance that helps protect them from rain and extreme weather conditions.

The department noted that

over two decades," the statement said.

Wildlife experts believe the presence of a healthy herd reflects the ecological integrity of the region's mountain habitats and highlights the importance of preserving habitat connectivity across the Eastern Himalayas.

Such transboundary ecological corridors are vital for the movement, genetic diversity and long-term survival of wide-ranging species, they said.

The Forest and Environment Department attributed the sighting to sustained conservation efforts and habitat protection measures undertaken across the state's fragile mountain ecosystems.

"This remarkable sighting underscores the success of the department's sustained conservation initiatives in protecting Sikkim's mountain landscapes through integrated habitat management and protection," the statement added.

Officials said the footage is expected to provide valuable insights into the species' distribution and population status in Sikkim. (PTI)

Nagaland Gov honours exam toppers; urges students to pursue excellence with integrity



KOHHIMA, June 17: Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav on Wednesday called upon the state's young achievers to pursue excellence with integrity, humility and a spirit of service, while felicitating rank holders in the HSLC and HSSLC Examinations this year.

Addressing them during the programme at the Lok Bhavan, Yadav said the recognition was instituted not merely to confer awards but to celebrate academic excellence among the youth of Nagaland.

"The Governor's Award for Meritorious Students honours hard work, discipline, perseverance and dedication, while encouraging students to strive for greater achievements," he said.

The initiative, he added, reaffirms the commitment to nurturing talent, rewarding merit and inspiring future generations to contribute meaningfully to the progress of the State and the nation.

Congratulating the award recipients, the Governor said the occasion celebrated not only the students' achievements but also the effort, devotion and sacrifices that made those accomplishments possible.

"Your firm resolve, courage and relentless pursuit of excellence are truly praiseworthy and will remain the foundation of your future accomplishments," he said.

Yadav also acknowledged the crucial role played by parents, teachers and educational institutions in shaping the students' success.

"This achievement is a testament to their guidance, sacrifices and steadfast belief in your potential," he said.

Highlighting the transformative power of education, the governor urged students to uphold values of integrity, humility and service as they pursue higher studies and future careers.

"Continue to dream big, work hard and use your talents for the greater good," he advised them, wishing the awardees success in their future endeavours and expressing confidence that they would continue to bring pride to their families, institutions, Nagaland and the nation.

A total of 63 students, including HSLC and HSSLC toppers across Arts, Science and Commerce streams, subject toppers and recipients of various Governor's Awards, were honoured with cash and citations during the programme.

Speaking at the event, Advisor for School Education and SCERT, Dr Kekriehoulie Yhome, highlighted the performance of students in the 2026 board examinations.

He said that 22,765 students appeared for the HSLC examination, of whom 16,400 passed, while 15,468 students appeared for the HSSLC examination and 13,290 qualified. Yhome, however, drew attention to the significant gap between the number of students appearing for Class 10 and those reaching Class 12, noting that over 7,000 students were missing from

the educational pipeline.

He pointed out that Nagaland continues to face one of the highest school dropout rates in the country and stressed the need to address the challenge.

Referring to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047, he underscored the importance of investing in human capital for Nagaland's future development and nation-building efforts. NBSE Chairperson Rangumbing Nsarangbe said the awards marked the beginning of a larger journey for the students and encouraged them to continue striving for greater heights.

Delivering an inspirational address, Joint Secretary Furhesie Nyuwi shared his personal journey from a remote village background to joining the Nagaland Civil Service at the age of 23.

He encouraged students not to allow their social or economic circumstances to limit their aspirations.

"Success is not determined by where we come from, where we study, or the opportunities we may lack. What truly matters is determination, hard work and the courage to dream beyond our circumstances," he said.

Nyuwi reminded the awardees that academic excellence opens doors, but lasting success depends on character, integrity and continuous learning. He urged them to become role models and worthy ambassadors of Nagaland wherever their lives take them. (PTI)

100 per cent distribution of enumeration forms (EFs) in Sikkim: CEO

GANGTOK, June 17: Sikkim has achieved 100 per cent distribution of enumeration forms (EF) to eligible voters during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Raj Singh Yadav said on Wednesday.

"We have achieved 100 per cent distribution of EFs in Sikkim, way ahead of the deadline," he told reporters here.

Yadav urged all eligible voters to make timely submission of filled EFs for the preparation of the draft electoral roll in Sikkim.

Yadav, however, said that distribution alone does not guarantee inclusion in the draft electoral roll as the electors who have received the forms must ensure that they are duly filled and submitted to their respective Booth Level Officers (BLOs) on or before June 28, the prescribed deadline for submission.

He said that electors who fail to submit their forms by the deadline would not be included in the draft electoral roll, as no submissions would be entertained thereafter.

The CEO said that once forms are submitted, BLOs will record their receipt through the BLO App, following which the forms will be digitised and processed. He urged all electors

to cooperate with the election machinery and complete the process within the prescribed timeline.

Referring to grievances received regarding BLOs not visiting certain voters, Yadav clarified that BLOs can visit only within their designated polling areas and voter addresses.

He said that in cases where a voter's present residence differs from the address recorded in the electoral roll, it becomes the responsibility of the elector to contact the concerned BLO and submit the form in the constituency where he or she is registered.

Addressing the issue of floating population, the CEO reiterated that voters must coordinate with their respective BLOs in their registered constituencies to obtain and submit the forms.

While distribution has reached full completion, Yadav expressed concern over the pace of digitisation, which remains below expectations in several areas.

The district-wise digitisation progress currently stands at 48 per cent in Mangan, 38 per cent in Gangtok, 37 per cent in Namchi, 35 per cent in Gyalshing, 34 per cent in Soreng and 31 per cent in Pakyong, the lowest among all districts. (PTI)

NEEPCO issues monsoon water release advisory in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, June 17: The North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) on Wednesday issued a public advisory warning residents and stakeholders of potential controlled water releases from the Pare Hydro Electric Project reservoir during the ongoing monsoon and post-monsoon season.

In an advisory, DGM (Tech) of the Hydro Structure Maintenance & Infrastructure Division, Taba Gung, said that relentless rainfall in the catchment areas of the Pare River could cause the reservoir water level to rise to an elevation of 245.15 meters. To maintain structural safety and ensure uninterrupted power generation, excess water may be released gradually through the dam's radial gates in a regulated manner.

The official further cautioned that in the event of sudden flash floods or an abrupt rise in inflows, all radial gates of the dam could be opened at any mo-

ment to facilitate emergency discharge and avert downstream disasters.

The corporation has asked local administrative authorities, Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) members, and residents to widely share this warning with villagers around the reservoir area, as well as those living along the downstream banks of the Pare River and near the power house.

The advisory strictly urged the public to refrain from venturing near the reservoir or riverbanks during the monsoon period. Livestock owners have also been advised to keep their animals, including mithun, cattle, goats, and pigs, away from the river to prevent any accidents or loss of property.

NEEPCO cautioned that any activity undertaken in violation of this public safety warning could lead to fatal accidents, for which the individuals concerned would be solely responsible. (PTI)

3 injured Kuki youths shifted from RIMS in Manipur amid tight security

IMPHAL, June 17: Three injured youths whose admission to the Regional Institute of Medical Sciences here had triggered widespread protests were shifted out of the hospital shortly after midnight under tight security, officials said on Wednesday.

The three youths, all belonging to the Kuki community, were injured in an exchange of fire with rival armed tribal groups in Kanpokpi district on Monday.

At around 12:15 am, the injured youths were moved out of the hospital amid elaborate security arrangements to ensure their safety, officials said.

They are being taken to another healthcare facility, though authorities have not disclosed the destination.

Ambulances carrying the three were escorted by security forces and were seen travelling towards the road leading to the Churachandpur district.

On Tuesday night, security forces foiled attempts made by protesters to storm the hospital premises. The demonstrators were demanding that the three youths be handed over to them.

Protesters also pelted stones at security personnel deployed at the RIMS gate, prompting the forces to fire several rounds of tear gas shells to disperse the crowd.

Earlier on Monday, protesters alleged that the three youths were "militants" injured in firing near Leilon Vaiphei village around 6 am.

Leilon Vaiphei is the village from where six members of the Naga tribal community were abducted on May 13. The bodies of the six men were recovered on June 10.

The injured youths -- Genlenmang Vaiphei (18), Lunliandaw Vaiphei (20) and Paogou Lal (18) -- were brought to RIMS by security forces.

One of them is reportedly a footballer who has played for Mohun Bagan.

Following their admission to the hospital, a group of protesters gathered outside the RIMS premises, objecting to the treatment of the injured youths there.

Security personnel fired tear gas shells and resorted to a baton charge after protesters allegedly attempted to enter the hospital building, officials said. (PTI)

Raut alleges MPs are being offered ₹ 50 crore to defect

MUMBAI, June 17: Amid heightened speculation about an imminent split in the Shiv Sena (UBT), party leader Sanjay Raut on Wednesday alleged that some MPs from Maharashtra were being offered ₹ 50 crore to switch sides, and challenged dissidents to quit.

Holding a press conference in New Delhi, Raut said the people of Maharashtra and Shiv Sena (UBT) workers would not remain quiet if there was another split in the Uddhav Thackeray-led party which saw a major rebellion led by Eknath Shinde in 2022.

Even as Raut adopted an aggressive tone, the fact that only three out of the nine Sena (UBT) Lok Sabha members -- Arvind Sawant, Anil Desai and Rajabhai Waje -- attended the press conference suggested that the party was facing a grave crisis.

An "important person" informed him late Tuesday night that efforts were underway to "buy" MPs from Maharashtra, said Raut, a Rajya Sabha member.

"I was told that the rate is ₹ 50 crore, and ₹ 15 crore each would be delivered by tonight. They (dissident MPs) were allegedly unwilling to board the aircraft (for Delhi) without receiving the money," he said.

The party, however, had no official information about any split, and the reports about some MPs being on the verge of breaking



away were appearing only in the media, Raut said.

"If parties are being broken in this manner, fighting elections is meaningless," he said.

All Sena (UBT) MPs were elected on the party's "mashal" (torch) symbol under Uddhav Thackeray's leadership, and "nobody has the right to betray that mandate", Raut said.

Warning of a strong response, he said Maharashtra and the Sena (UBT) workers would not remain silent if there was a repeat of the events of 2022 when the undivided Shiv Sena split.

"If anybody wants to leave, they should first resign. They have entered Parliament on our party's ticket," he added.

Raut, who has been camping in Delhi since getting indications of

an imminent defection, further said the party had initiated legal measures and issued a whip ahead of a meeting of its parliamentary party scheduled for Thursday.

It had also written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, urging him to act strictly in accordance with the constitutional provisions, he said.

During the press conference, Raut also lost his cool and used expletives against rebel MPs twice without naming anyone. He asked the media "not to cut" or mute that part.

Notably, this is not the first time that Raut has used expletives at a press conference or in media interactions. He had asked mediapersons not to cut his expletives or mute them during the broadcast on such occasions.

Arvind Sawant, who represents

Mumbai (South) in the Lok Sabha, said none of the MPs had officially informed the party about any decision to leave, and all reports were emerging from the media and social media.

MP Anil Desai said the party's faith in its MPs remained intact, but legal safeguards were being put in place as a precaution.

The Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders alleged that the practice of "buying and breaking" elected representatives posed a threat to democracy and the Constitution.

On Sunday, only four of the nine Sena (UBT) MPs physically attended a meeting called by Uddhav Thackeray in Mumbai. Four others attended it online, while another MP spoke to Thackeray over phone, according to the party. The physical absence of five MPs despite express directives to the attend the meeting gave indications that trouble was brewing for the Thackeray-led party.

During the meeting, Raut said, one of the MPs swore by Sai Baba, another swore by the Goddess Bhavani, and some others swore on their children and mothers, saying they would remain with Uddhav Thackeray.

"We spent our blood and sweat for these MPs. We gave them tickets and whatever financial help we could. If such reports (about defection) are true, they should deny them," he said.

These MPs were elected because of Uddhav Thackeray and late (Shiv Sena founder) Bal Thackeray, not because of Prime Minister Narendra Modi or Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, said Raut.

"We have issued a whip and convened our parliamentary party meeting. We have also written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. Buying and breaking elected representatives is against democracy and the Constitution. A legal battle will follow. It is not so easy. Anyone who thinks that a few people can gather and settle matters through money is mistaken," he said.

Alleging pressure on Dharashiv MP Omprakash Rajee Nimbalkar, Raut noted that the verdict in the 20-year-old murder case of the MP's father was earlier scheduled to be delivered on Wednesday.

"He (Nimbalkar) was allegedly told that if he wanted a favourable verdict in the murder case of his father, he should join their group," Raut claimed, noting that the verdict was now likely to be pronounced on Saturday.

"If such things are happening, what remains of the (sanctity of) Constitution, the courts and democracy? Tomorrow's parliamentary party meeting will reveal the situation. Everyone has been invited and everyone should attend," Raut said. (PTI)

Bihar facing crimes, corruption, inflation since Nitish 'pushed out of power' by BJP: RJD



PATNA, June 17: The opposition RJD on Wednesday alleged that Bihar had been reeling under crimes, corruption and inflation ever since JD(U) president Nitish Kumar was "pushed out of power" by the BJP.

Remarks to this effect were made by Manoj Kumar Jha, the RJD's national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP, who also dubbed Samrat Choudhary as a chief minister who "did not have the mandate" of the people.

Jha was addressing party workers in Patna, where a dharna was organised as part of the RJD's state-wide agitation against the NDA government.

"There is no such thing as government in Bihar. People gave a mandate to Nitish Kumar in the 2025 assembly elections, but he was pushed out of power by the BJP, which is following the Maharashtra model to weaken the regional party," Jha said.

The term 'Maharashtra model' entered India's political lexicon after the 2022 split in the Shiv Sena, when a faction led by Eknath Shinde broke away from the parent party and, with the support of the BJP, formed the government in the state. Jha alleged that crime, unemployment, corruption and inflation increased under the rule of "non-mandated CM" Samrat Choudhary. RJD workers held demonstrations across all districts of Bihar to protest against the alleged failure of the NDA government's policies, "deteriorating" law and order, "growing" unemployment and inflation in the state.

Party activists gathered in the districts' headquarters, raised slogans against the Samrat Choudhary government, alleging that crimes against women were on the rise and no one was safe in the state. They demanded the CM's resignation.

The protesters also accused the BJP-led NDA government of in-

dulging in corruption.

"We are holding sit-ins across Bihar, and these protests will not stop here. If the government doesn't change the way it functions, these demonstrations will take the form of a widespread movement like 1975," the RJD MP told reporters here.

In 1975, Jayaprakash Narayan spearheaded 'Sampurna Kranti Andolan' against the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. His anti-corruption movement had spread to several states from Bihar. On the night of June 25 that year, Gandhi declared a National Emergency.

On the controversy over former chief minister and RJD leader Rabri Devi's official residence, he said that there are "predetermined entitlements" to bungalows based on a leader's position.

Rabri Devi sought time from the state government to vacate the bungalow, which was allotted to a minister. "It is unprecedented in the state's history. There are specific types of bungalows for leaders serving in different positions. The occupant of the seat of power keeps changing, but protocol should not be tinkered with. No one will stay in power forever, not even the one roaming around in France right now," the MP said, alluding to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. RJD state president Mangni Lal Mandal alleged that the law-and-order situation in the state is in "absolute turmoil".

"An incident came to light recently wherein a man in Bihar's Bhojpur district brandished a revolver in front of police personnel, who, in turn, ran away. Later, the SP tried to cover up the police's failure and said the man was mentally un-sound. The Bihar CM says criminals won't be spared in the state, but criminals are chasing the police away," the RJD leader claimed. Mandal alleged that the government has "failed" to check inflation, which is rising persistently. (PTI)

Drop theatrics; strike at paper leak mafia, not students: Rahul

NEW DELHI, June 17: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday slammed the government after it temporarily restricted access to Telegram, saying the "new trick" was akin to putting a lock on the victim's house instead of catching the thief.

Telegram has stopped working for existing users in India after the Centre temporarily restricted access to the messaging app ahead of the June 21 NEET-UG re-examination, but it continues to remain operational through the Virtual Protocol Network (VPN).

Google delisted the app on Tuesday, and Apple's Appstore has also removed it now in compliance with the government order to block access to the app.

In a post in Hindi on X, Gandhi said, "'Telegram Ban' - Modi government's new trick to stop paper leaks. Meaning, instead of catching the thief, just put a lock on the victim's door."

"Lakhs of students have been studying on Telegram for years -- notes, test series, discussions, preparation. How does snatching that facility become the solution to paper leaks? And it's not even foolproof -- every student in the country knows this, and so does the paper leak mafia. So, who will the next ban be on? WhatsApp?" he said.

"On exam day, students will be frisked. Pockets will be cut open with scissors. Question papers will be sent via the Air Force. There won't be any shortage of theatrics. But not a single strike at the root of the disease -- because the paper leak mafia is thriving under this very government's watch, and making the youth weep tears of blood. Modi Ji -- drop the theatrics. Strike at the mafia, not the students," he said. Listen to the "Chhatron ki goonj" (echo of students) -- or else the youth of the country knows how to claim their rights, Gandhi said.

In another post in Hindi, the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha said he has set out for Kota, but two names are echoing in his heart -- Umesh and Riya.

"Yesterday, Umesh in Sikar and Riya in Dehradun -- both ended their lives under the pressure of Re-NEET. 22- and 23-year-old kids -- who were meant to soar in the open skies of their dreams -- lost to this unjust system. These deaths are the result of a broken, corrupt system," he said.

"And the ones responsible are the Modi government and Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, who, instead of protecting students, have repeatedly shielded paper leaks, exam mismanagement, and the destroyers of futures," he alleged. "Today, from Kota, we will begin that fight with just one goal -- that no child's dreams shatter like this again, that no parent ever has to lose their child in this way again. Every family's pain will now echo across the country as the 'chhatron ki goonj'," Gandhi said.

Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said Rahul Gandhi has rightly stated that there is a need to strike not against students, but against mafias.

"Today, there are many such things in the country's education system and the entire examination system will need to be reformed," she told reporters here. The government on Tuesday temporarily restricted access to the Telegram ahead of the NEET-UG 2026 re-examination, with the National Testing Agency (NTA) saying the measure is aimed at tackling cheating rackets and misinformation. (PTI)

CPI(M) alleges Cong-BJP understanding over PM SHRI scheme

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 17: The CPI(M) on Wednesday strongly criticised the UDF government's decision not to withdraw from the Centre's PM SHRI scheme, alleging that the move was part of a "Congress-BJP deal" and accusing the ruling dispensation of misleading the public about the initiative.

The BJP, meanwhile, accused both the CPI(M)-led LDF and the Congress-headed UDF of delaying the PM SHRI scheme for political reasons.

It claimed that the delay deprived Kerala's students of educational benefits and accused the government of taking contradictory positions on the scheme's implementation.

The reactions came after Chief Minister V D Sathesan indicated that the government would not withdraw from the PM SHRI scheme and would instead seek to implement it with conditions that preserve the state's authority over its curriculum.

Following a Cabinet meeting, Sathesan said that the government would constitute a four-member sub-committee to examine all aspects of the scheme.

He asserted that the previous LDF government had already signed an

agreement with the Centre and received around Rs 99 crore in connection with the initiative.

In a statement, the CPI(M) state secretary said that the CM's announcement regarding the implementation of the PM SHRI scheme reflected an "understanding between the Congress and the BJP."

The party alleged that Kerala's secular society would not permit the implementation of the National Education Policy, which it described as an agenda of the Sangh Parivar, in the state. The CPI(M) also accused UDF leaders of taking contradictory positions on the scheme.

According to the statement, leaders including Sathesan, K C Venugopal, and P K Kunhalikutty had earlier assured the public that they would not implement the PM SHRI scheme if voted to power, but were now supporting its rollout. The CPI(M) alleged that the UDF had previously used the PM SHRI issue to create resentment against the LDF among religious minorities through misinformation during the recent Assembly elections.

The party demanded that the UDF apologise to the public for allegedly misleading them. The Left party also

reiterated its opposition to the NEP, alleging that it sought to "saffronise" textbooks and curricula.

It maintained that Kerala had preserved a secular curriculum and questioned whether the UDF intended to follow what it claimed was the model adopted in some Congress-ruled states.

Echoing the party's criticism, former Finance Minister and senior CPI(M) leader K N Balagopal, in a Facebook post, rejected the CM's assertion that the previous LDF government had remained part of the PM SHRI scheme and had accepted funds under it.

Balagopal said that the LDF government had signed the Memorandum of Understanding for the scheme on October 23, 2025, only after the Centre withheld education-related grants, including those under the Samagra Shiksha programme, because the agreement had not been signed.

He claimed that the MoU had been signed with the condition that no changes would be made to the state's curriculum or textbooks.

According to Balagopal, the LDF later decided, as a matter of policy, to withdraw from the agreement and submitted a letter to that effect on November 12. (PTI)

Oppn parties sharpen attack on Punjab CM Mann over 'Guru Dokhi' case

CHANDIGARH, June 17: Leaders of opposition parties in Punjab sharpened their attack on Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann after he was declared 'Guru Dokhi' (anti-Guru) by a Sikh clergy over an alleged objectionable video, with BJP leader Jagmohan Singh Raju on Wednesday demanding registration of an FIR in the matter.

The matter stems from the summoning of Mann by the Akal Takht, the highest temporal seat of Sikhs, in January this year for allegedly making comments on 'Guru ki Golak' (gurdwara donation box) and indulging in "objectionable activities" with the pictures of the Sikh Gurus and slain militant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale in a purported video clip.

The opposition parties have been pressing for the resignation of Mann after Akal Takht Jathedar Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj pronounced the edict against the chief minister from the 'fasesl' (podium of the Akal Takht) on Monday in Amritsar.

The jathedar also directed the Sikh community "not to associate with him" as Mann was accused of lying about a purported objectionable video that hurt Sikh sentiments.

The edict came after Gargaj claimed that the video circulating on social media, purportedly showing a man resembling Bhagwant Mann, was found to be "authentic" by two forensic laboratories.

The video was neither tinkered with nor AI-generated, Gargaj said.

However, Mann on Tuesday rejected the video, saying the person in it was not him. The chief minister expressed surprise over people occupying the highest positions of religious bodies "indulging in false propaganda at the behest of their political bosses" to defame him.

Punjab BJP leader Raju wrote to Punjab Governor Gulab Chand Kataria, seeking registration of an FIR, and said the Akal Takht has found the objectionable video to be "authentic". (PTI)

HM Shah launching 'onslaught' on Oppn, will not succeed in his ultimate objective: Cong

NEW DELHI, June 17: The Congress on Wednesday accused Home Minister Amit Shah of launching an "onslaught" on the Opposition and "wrecking" Indian democracy to compensate for his "humiliation" in the Lok Sabha on April 17 this year when he failed to get the Constitution amendment bill passed.

The opposition party said Shah's alluresments are enticing a number of those who were elected just two years ago on a strong anti-BJP agenda to now join the BJP. The Congress asserted that Shah will not succeed in his ultimate objective.

The Congress' attack came after Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Sanjay Raut on late Tuesday night claimed that an "advance of Rs 15 crore" is being given to "buy MPs from Maharashtra", adding fuel to the intense buzz that a section of party's Lok Sabha members could switch sides.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the Union Home Minister is continuing his onslaught on the Opposition and his wrecking of Indian democracy to compensate for his humiliation in the Lok Sabha when he failed to have the Delimitation Bills passed.

"His alluresments are enticing a number of those who were elected just two years ago on a strong anti-

BJP agenda to now join the BJP. The incentives reportedly being extended to them are mind-boggling," Ramesh charged on X.

The Home Minister is running a wholly cynical campaign that is well lubricated and, like in the mutual funds industry, offers various schemes and products suited to individual needs, the Congress general secretary in-charge communications alleged. "There are absolutely no limits to his depravity. But he will not succeed in his ultimate objective," Ramesh asserted.

The speculation about an imminent rebellion by MPs of Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT), tentatively on a Trinamool Congress (TMC) template, strengthened with ruling Shiv Sena leader Pratap Sar-naik hinting at welcoming dissidents and giving them priority should they jump ship. Eyebrows were raised when Raut, Sena (UBT) MP and Uddhav's confidant, travelled to Delhi, sparking a buzz that he might meet Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla to preempt any bid by nine MPs of the party to form a separate group.

In a late night post on X, Raut said, "Apna sapna money...money! There is information that an advance of Rs 15 crore will be given tonight to buy MPs from Maharashtra. This is shocking and disgusting!" (PTI)

The fading green: Central Delhi lost 74 pc of its healthiest ecosystems in 3 decades, study says

NEW DELHI, June 17: Three decades ago, large parts of Central Delhi contained some of the healthiest ecosystems in the capital, featuring green spaces that supported biodiversity and regulated temperatures. However, by 2023, 73.8 per cent of these ecologically robust areas had disappeared.

A study analysing 32 years of satellite imagery found that the area in Central Delhi classified as having "excellent" ecosystem health at one point, shrank from 13.88 square kilometres in 1991 to just 3.63 square kilometres in 2023.

During the same period, land classified as having "poor" ecosystem health increased from 38.57 square kilometres to 54.90 square kilometres.

The study, titled 'Crossing the ecological threshold: Spatio-temporal dynamics of blue-green space ecosystem health in Delhi using a WORR framework' was carried out by a team from Jamia Millia Islamia comprising Priyanka Jha, Pawan Kumar Yadav, Md Saharik Joy and Taruna Bansal of the Department of Geography, Faculty of Natural Sciences, and Ajit Narayan Jha of the Department of Environmental Science, Faculty of Engineering and Technology.

For the study, researchers analysed Landsat satellite images from 1991, 2001, 2011 and 2023 and mapped six land-use categories -- dense vegetation, open green spaces, cropland, water bodies, wastelands and built-up areas. The land-use classification achieved an overall accuracy ranging from 92.2 per cent to 94.8 per cent, and the find-

ings were validated using bird species richness data.

The findings point to a broader ecological decline across Delhi, where forests, wetlands, water bodies and green spaces have come under increasing pressure from urban expansion, shrinking natural cover and growing habitat fragmentation.

Across the city, the area classified as having poor ecosystem health increased by 50.8 per cent, from 541.47 sq km in 1991 to 816.36 sq km in 2023. The study also found that Delhi's median Ecosystem Health Index declined by 53 per cent during the period, indicating a widespread weakening of ecosystem functions.

The assessment measured ecosystem health using indicators such as vegetation productivity, ecological connectivity, resilience to environmental disturbances and the ability of landscapes to recover after stress.

Areas classified as "excellent" generally contain dense vegetation, healthier water systems and strong ecological connections, while "poor" areas are marked by extensive urbanisation, habitat fragmentation and limited recovery potential.

Researchers found that the decline was visible across most districts, although the pace and extent varied.

North Delhi recorded one of the sharpest deteriorations, with the area under poor ecosystem health more than doubling from 62.16 sq km in 1991 to 131.18 sq km in 2023.

Southwest Delhi witnessed a 132 per cent in-



crease in poor ecosystem health areas during the period, while West Delhi recorded a rise of around 60 per cent.

East Delhi, Shahdara and Northeast Delhi emerged among the weakest-performing districts, with very little land remaining in the good or excellent ecosystem health categories. The researchers linked this to intense urbanisation, industrial activity, degradation of the Yamuna floodplain and shrinking green cover. South Delhi remained relatively better off because of the Delhi Ridge and protected forest areas that continue to support biodiversity and ecological functions despite increasing development pressures.

The New Delhi district showed signs of partial recovery, with the area classified as having excellent ecosystem health declining sharply from

38.62 sq km in 1991 to 11.35 sq km in 2001 before increasing to 23.39 sq km in 2023, suggesting that conservation and restoration efforts may have improved conditions in some areas.

The study also indicated that the deterioration was not confined to the expansion of poor-quality ecosystems.

Citywide, the area under the "excellent" ecosystem health category declined by 51.5 per cent during the study period, while areas in the "good" category fell by 36.4 per cent and those in the "fair" category by 48.3 per cent.

Although the area categorised as "moderate" increased by 48.7 per cent, the researchers noted that this reflected landscapes under ecological stress rather than genuine ecological improvement.

The city's most stable natural landscapes also shrank steadily. Areas retaining continuous natural cover, including forests, wetlands, open green spaces and water bodies, declined from 49 per cent of Delhi's area in 1991 to 39 per cent in 2001, 34 per cent in 2011 and 30 per cent in 2023.

According to the study, this illustrates the gradual replacement of natural land by residential, commercial, and infrastructure development, as well as the fragmentation of remaining green spaces.

The researchers also documented a sharp decline in ecological resilience, the ability of ecosystems to withstand disturbances such as pollution, heat stress and land-use change while continuing to function.

Delhi's ecological resilience index fell from 0.61 in 1991 to 0.52 in 2001, 0.40 in 2011 and 0.36 in 2023.

The city's ability to recover from ecological disturbances also weakened. Areas with high recovery potential, which were once spread across South, East, Southwest, New Delhi, West, and Northwest Delhi, significantly shrank over the study period.

By 2023, landscapes capable of supporting strong ecological recovery were largely confined to Delhi Ridge, protected forests and parts of the Yamuna floodplain. Environmental activists said that the city is replacing living, breathing ecosystems with concrete.

"What is particularly alarming is the finding that this trajectory reflects governance failure rather than an inevitable consequence of urban growth. Delhi cannot continue treating forests, wetlands, floodplains and urban green spaces as vacant land spaces. The land-grabbing model has to change if we want a future for the city," activist Bhavreen Kandhari told PTI.

The study found that healthy, high-vigour ecosystems that were once distributed across larger parts of the capital have increasingly been pushed towards the city's edges.

At the same time, built-up areas continued to expand across the city. Roads, buildings and paved areas spread steadily over the study period, replacing natural landscapes and weakening ecological connectivity. (PTI)

'Different identities exist, but unity does not require sameness. Unity requires harmony and mutual respect'

False narratives being created to stop India's rise: Bhagwat

UDAIPUR (RAJ), June 17: RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Wednesday that attempts were being made both within and outside India to spread false narratives and reports to weaken the country's rise.

Those opposing India's progress have greater resources but the people of the country must stay united on the strength of traditional values, he said at a programme here on Maharana Pratap Jayanti.

"Today, the people who will no longer be able to serve their selfish ends are conspiring to ensure India does not rise. False narratives are being created, false reports are being spread, and many tactics are being used to mislead," he said, without elaborating.

"Those doing so have population, power, financial strength and organisational capacity, yet we must stand firm on the foundation of our values," he said.

Urging the people to remain united by rising above narrow identities, he stressed that unity does not require sameness but harmony and mutual respect.

Bhagwat asserted that India's rise was important not only for itself but for global welfare.

"A strong India is necessary for

the world as well," he said.

Referring to the legacy of Maharana Pratap and the historic Battle of Haldighati, the RSS chief said it was a symbol of India's civilisational resistance.

"Our history is not a history of slavery. It is a history of struggle against those who tried to enslave us," Bhagwat said, adding Maharana Pratap's struggle represented resistance in defence of "dharma, culture and self-respect".

"Maharana Pratap fought not for personal gain but for the protection of society and culture. He was fighting against atrocities, for dharma and culture, and for the freedom of his land," he said on the eve of the 450th anniversary of the battle of Haldighati.

The Battle of Haldighati was fought on June 18, 1576, between the forces of Maharana Pratap of Mewar and the Mughal army led by Raja Man Singh of Amber on behalf of Emperor Akbar.

While many historians describe the battle as a tactical Mughal victory, others regard it as inconclusive because the Mughals failed to capture Maharana Pratap or bring Mewar fully under their control.

Maharana Pratap continued to resist Mughal authority through



guerrilla warfare and remains a symbol of Rajput valour, independence and resilience.

Bhagwat said there was a need for deeper study and wider understanding of Maharana Pratap's life and ideals.

He said present-day challenges required learning from historical figures who stood firm despite adversity.

"To establish good governance and ensure the welfare of people, we need to draw from such examples," he said. Bhagwat said India's strength lay not only in numbers or material resources but in its civilisational values.

"How do we stand strong in such a situation? Maharana Pratap showed us -- on the basis of self-respect, culture and pride," he said. He urged people to remain united and rise above narrow identities.

"We should stay united like the people of Mewar stood with Maharana Pratap. We must work together for India's progress," he said. "Different identities exist, but unity does not require sameness. Unity requires harmony and mutual respect," he added.

He said the Battle of Haldighati should be understood as more than a military confrontation.

It was not just a war. It was a symbol of the long struggle of Indian society against foreign aggression, he said.

He said historical accounts, including those written by Mughal chroniclers, themselves indicated that the battle was fiercely contested.

"Even their own records show they had to retreat several miles after the first attack," he said.

Bhagwat said India's civilisational history shows repeated resistance to foreign rule.

"Different invaders came, some gained power, but India never accepted slavery at the level of society and culture," he said.

He said even during difficult historical phases, India retained its cultural identity.

"We have seen good times and bad times, but our dharma and culture remained intact," he said, urging people to think of India as one.

He said national strength depended on moral character, discipline and social harmony.

"If India has to rise, then Indians must rise in character and values," he said.

He said Maharana Pratap's life demonstrated courage, sacrifice and commitment to society. (PTI)

RG Kar case: CBI team visits Panihati crematorium, questions staff

KOLKATA, June 17: As part of its investigation into the rape-murder of an on-duty doctor in the RG Kar hospital two years ago, a CBI team on Wednesday visited a crematorium in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district where the last rites of the woman medic were performed, an official said.

The special investigation team of the central agency went to the Panihati burning ghat and spoke to the workers there, he said. "The CBI team took note of the proceedings at the burning ghat on the night when the deceased doctor was cremated. These will help our investigating officers to tie up loose ends," the CBI official told PTI.

The CBI sleuths moved around the burning ghat and took details from the register book about the entries made on the night when the deceased was cremated, he said. "CBI officers noted down the time when the doctor's body was brought to the burning ghat, how many bodies were there at that moment and when the cremation was completed," he said.

The rape and murder of the 31-year-old woman doctor at the state-run RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on August 9, 2024, sparked nationwide outrage. Workers at the crematorium were also asked whether there was "any political pressure on them to hurriedly cremate the doctor's body", the official said. The CBI team had also gone to the RG Kar Medical College and Hospital on Monday and spoke to doctors, the principal and the staff, as part of its investigation.

There have been allegations that evidence was destroyed and attempts were made to downplay the incident in its immediate aftermath.

The Calcutta High Court had last month ordered a fresh investigation into the alleged destruction of evidence and the specific allegations raised by the family regarding the rape and murder of the trainee doctor at RG Kar Hospital in Kolkata in August 2024.

The court had also ordered the setting up of a special investigation team of the CBI to probe the developments from the time the trainee doctor had dinner on the ill-fated night of August 9 in 2024 to her cremation the next evening.

The probe agency is authorised to interrogate anyone it deems necessary. Also, the SIT will thoroughly examine the specific allegations levelled by the victim's family. The court has asked the team to submit its report within the next hearing on June 25. (PTI)

L-G Saxena approves constitution of Ladakh Pashmina Development Board

LEH, June 17: In a boost to the Pashmina wool sector, Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena on Wednesday approved the creation of the Ladakh Pashmina Development Board to transform the Union territory into a global centre for authentic Pashmina products.

The Ladakh Pashmina Development Board (LPDB) will be the country's first dedicated body to promote Ladakhi Pashmina globally, thereby transforming the Pashmina value chain and empowering the pastoral communities, a Lok Bhavan spokesperson said.

"The constitution of the Ladakh Pashmina Development Board is a historic step towards ensuring that our nomadic communities receive the benefits they rightfully deserve, and that Ladakh emerges as the global hub of authentic and premium Pashmina products. "Our goal is to create an integrated, sustainable and globally competitive Pashmina ecosystem that safeguards livelihoods while preserving Ladakh's unique identity," Saxena said. The Board will comprise two principal bodies -- a governing body chaired by the lieutenant governor, and an executive committee chaired by the chief secretary, the spokesperson said.

The governing body will provide overall strategic

direction for the development of the Pashmina sector, approve long-term vision documents, policies, major projects and infrastructure initiatives, and facilitate convergence among government departments, financial institutions and industry stakeholders.

It will also guide global branding, certification, export promotion and sustainability initiatives for the sector, the spokesperson said. As part of its programme architecture, he said the Board will implement the Ladakh Pashmina Mission with a focus on improving the productivity and genetic quality of Changthangi goats. It will also work for strengthening high-altitude rangelands through climate adaptation strategies, establishing local processing infrastructure, promoting artisan clusters and positioning Ladakh Pashmina as a premium luxury fibre in global markets through certification systems, digital traceability mechanisms and participation in international trade fairs, he said. The spokesperson added that the establishment of the Board will mark a significant milestone in the UT administration's efforts to build a robust and sustainable ecosystem around Ladakh Pashmina, renowned globally as one of the world's finest and most luxurious natural fibres. (PTI)

Par panel moots higher education spending, says NEP's 6% GDP target unmet

NEW DELHI, June 17: A parliamentary committee has said that the current allocation for higher education is "underwhelmed", and recommended that spending on education be increased to 6 per cent of GDP as envisaged under the National Education Policy-2020.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, headed by Rajya Sabha MP Digvijaya Singh, on Tuesday presented its 381st action taken report on the recommendations contained in the 364th report on Demands for Grants (2025-26) pertaining to the department of higher education to Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan. The Committee noted that the percentage increase in the Department of Higher Education's budget estimates (BE) for 2025-26 vis-à-vis the BE for 2024-25 was lower than the previous year.

"The Committee feels that in view of the inflationary trends in the country, the allocation should increase at least 8 per cent to 10 per cent to accommodate inflation, to maintain the existing standards for expenditure by the Department of Higher Education, and to avoid decline in actual allocation/expenditure for the higher education sector. "The current allocations are,



therefore, underwhelmed -- especially in the context of the need for adequate resources to implement the National Education Policy (NEP)," the report said.

The committee also noted that the gross enrolment ratio of males and females during 2018-2023 "has not registered any significant growth for the purpose of employment and optimal development of human resources".

"The Committee, therefore, recommends that the percentage of expenditure should be enhanced further in consonance with the NEP-2020's targets for the year 2035," it said.

Taking note of NEP-2020, which "unequivocally endorses and envisions a substantial increase in public investment in education by

both the Centre and all the state governments to reach 6 per cent of GDP", the panel expressed concern that total expenditure on education stood at 4.12 per cent of GDP in 2021-22.

"The Committee is constrained to note that the total expenditure on education (including all Central ministries and all states/UTs) as percentage of GDP stands at 4.12 per cent for 2021-22, which is far lower than the recommendations of NEP-2020," it said.

The Committee also noted that "SAARC countries such as Bhutan and Maldives spent 7.47 per cent and 4.67 per cent of their GDP, respectively, in 2022, as against 4.12 per cent spending on education by India". "The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Ministry of Education make sincere efforts to increase the spending on education to 6 per cent of the GDP, as endorsed and recommended by the NEP-2020," the report said. "The Ministry of Education should sincerely seek additional funds from the Ministry of Finance to make spending on education at 6 per cent of GDP feasible, thereby strengthening and augmenting the public education system from school education to higher education truly world class and accessible to all sections of society," it added. (PTI)

Fadnavis proposes creation of special rail freight corridor to link key ports in Maha



PUNE, June 17: Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Wednesday suggested creating a dedicated rail freight corridor to link ports like the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority and upcoming Vadhvan Port with the Mumbai-Nagpur Samruddhi Expressway to significantly cut logistics cost.

He maintained port-led development in Maharashtra has so far benefited only 15 per cent of the state, but his suggestion, if implemented, would extend that to nearly 75 per cent.

Describing Mumbai and Pune as India's emerging "Quantum Valley", Fadnavis noted that improved connectivity between the two big cities, including a proposed high-speed rail link (bullet train), would create the country's biggest economic corridor for technology and innovation.

Speaking at the inauguration of electronics manufacturing company Jabil's new facility in Pune, he said a dedicated rail freight corridor would connect ports with inland dry ports and industrial hubs across Maharashtra, ultimately integrating a larger part of the state into global supply chains.

"Maharashtra has the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA), which handles around 60 per cent of India's container traffic. With the blessings of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are also building Vadhvan Port near Mumbai, which will be three times bigger than the JNPA and among the world's top 10 biggest ports," he said. The CM said he discussed the proposal with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, who was also present at the event.

"We want to create a dedicated rail freight corridor linking JNPA and Vadhvan Port (in Palghar district). The corridor will move along the Samruddhi Highway, where right-of-way for Railway has already been kept aside over

nearly 701 km," Fadnavis emphasised. He maintained the proposed network would connect Jalna (Marathwada) and Wardha (Vidarbha) dry ports before extending to Gadchiroli in eastern Maharashtra, which he described as "the new steel city of India".

"This will actually bring down the cost of logistics to 8 or 7 per cent, which we really want to achieve, and it will make us part of the new global supply chain," the CM stated.

According to Fadnavis, port-led development in Maharashtra has so far largely benefited only 15 per cent of the state, but the proposed connectivity would extend that advantage to nearly 75 per cent.

"Put up industry anywhere and you have a dedicated port connectivity -- that is our dream," he said.

Highlighting Maharashtra's economic significance, Fadnavis noted the state contributes 14 per cent to the national GDP and accounts for nearly 20 per cent of exports. He stressed Maharashtra has emerged as a leading hub for electronics manufacturing and data centres, with nearly 60 per cent of India's data centre capacity being created in the state. Praising Jabil's expansion in Maharashtra, he assured the company of government support and ease of doing business.

"We consider industries as our partners. We are here to partner with you and handhold you. Whatever problems you encounter, just let us know," the CM asserted.

Fadnavis said the proposed Mumbai-Pune bullet train project will reduce travel time between the two cities to just 48 minutes (from around 4 hours now), helping transform them into an integrated economic region and creating India's largest technology and industrial corridor. He noted enhanced connectivity between Mumbai and Pune, located around 200km apart, would create a new economic ecosystem. (PTI)

'Theft' of Ram temple donation money: SIT questions top trust officials

AYODHYA (UP), June 17: The SIT formed by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe allegations of theft of donation money at the Ram temple and financial mismanagement at the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust questioned trust general secretary Champat Rai and administrator Gopal Rao here on Wednesday, official sources said.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) also quizzed those involved in money counting and keeping the records of the trust.

Both Rai and Rao were questioned about the donation money, the arrangements inside the temple and the people associated with it, the sources said.

Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, Inspector General (IG) Kiran S and Special Secretary, Finance, Neel Ratan, who are part of the SIT, conducted separate questioning with Rai and Rao, the sources said, adding that during this time, officials associated with security agencies were kept away.

Besides CCTV footage, the team examined several records. It inspected the donation boxes, counted the number of boxes and took the records of the entire process into its possession.

Pant, who is heading the SIT, inspected the room on the ground floor in front of the sanctum sanctorum of Ramlala, where the jewellery and other metals received in donation are kept, and questioned trust worker Krishnadev Tiwari, who handles its responsibility.

The SIT members were present on the Ram Janmabhoomi premises until evening. Officials said the SIT was told that about 40 personnel associated with the trust, the State Bank of India and the collection agency are involved in counting the cash, who work in two shifts. Three persons have got complaints lodged at different police stations, demanding the registration of an FIR over the matter, but no case has so far been registered by police so far.

Meanwhile, the temple trust has also maintained silence over the issue.

On Tuesday, Dharm Sena leader Santosh Dubey and Uttar Pradesh Youth Congress vice-president Sharad Shukla got a complaint lodged in the matter at the Ram Janmabhoomi police station.

Karni Sena national president Surajpal Ammu, holding a press conference here, questioned why an FIR has not been registered in the matter and when will bulldozers run over the houses of those who allegedly stole the donation money.

Former Samajwadi Party (SP) MLA from Ayodhya Tej Narain Pandey demanded an inquiry into the alleged embezzlement of Ram temple funds, to be carried out under the Supreme Court's supervision.

Pandey said since the temple trust was formed by the apex court, it should step in and oversee the matter. He argued that a probe into the matter by an SIT set up by the state government is not appropriate. (PTI)

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IAS officers used to suppress IPS officers in UP: CM

LUCKNOW, June 17: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said his government has ensured transparent police recruitment and that the introduction of the police commissionerate system is part of reforms aimed at strengthening policing in the state.

Proposals for implementing the police commissionerate system had been pending since 1972, but were not acted on, the chief minister said at a programme in the state capital, where he distributed appointment letters to 930 computer operators (Grade-A) recruited by the Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board.

"Earlier in Uttar Pradesh, IPS officers were suppressed by IAS officers, who used to keep files buried. Once a file was closed, it was almost impossible to get it reopened. Even if Yamraj came, it was difficult to get that file opened by an IAS officer," he said.

The chief minister said the commissionerate system has now been

implemented in seven districts of the state and described it as a part of police reforms.

The Uttar Pradesh government established the commissionerate system of policing in January 2020, beginning with Gautam Budh Nagar and Lucknow. The system was eventually rolled out in five more districts -- Varanasi, Prayagraj, Ghaziabad, Kanpur and Agra. Under the commissionerate system, the Commissioner of Police (an IPS officer) heads policing with enhanced executive powers, replacing the earlier arrangement where the district magistrate and superintendent of police shared several law and order responsibilities.

Adityanath said transparent recruitment is essential for establishing the rule of law and good governance. "Today, we are distributing appointment letters to 930 computer operators. Recently, the examination for nearly 35,000 police constable posts was conducted, in which around 28 lakh youths applied." (PTI)

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Study highlights need to boost healthcare access, awareness for climate-resilient ageing

NEW DELHI, June 17: Strengthening healthcare access and improving awareness of support services for older persons will be critical to building resilience in the face of increasing climate-related challenges, according to the latest report "Climate Resilient Ageing - Ensuring Care, Dignity and Agency".

The national study by HelpAge India, based on responses from 2,224 older persons across 20 districts in 10 states, examined how health, care, livelihoods, social support and climate risks intersect in the lives of older persons living in rural India.

The study found that while healthcare services are available to many older persons, regular and reliable access remains an important area of focus. Although 88 per cent reported at least some access to healthcare, 35 per cent said they can always access healthcare when needed. Nearly two-thirds experience inconsistent access, creating challenges for managing chronic health conditions.

For many older persons, particu-

larly those living in rural areas, practical barriers often make healthcare access difficult. Nearly half (49 per cent) reported difficulty travelling to healthcare facilities, 41 per cent cited treatment costs as a challenge while 38 per cent said health facilities were located far away.

At the same time, government healthcare infrastructure continues to play an important role, with Primary Health Centres (51 per cent) and government hospitals (49 per cent) emerging as the most accessed healthcare services.

"Older persons are among those most at risk from rising climate shocks, particularly those living alone or with impairments, and yet they remain largely invisible in climate response efforts. While government schemes provide a critical safety net, a more multi-pronged approach is needed with targeted interventions at household, community and institutional levels, alongside improving access to welfare schemes.

"Integrating ageing into climate adaptation, climate financing,



elder-centric disaster risk reduction and social protection policies is essential," said Rohit Prasad, CEO, HelpAge India. The report also highlighted the importance of awareness in helping older persons access available support.

Awareness of government schemes is highest for the Public Distribution System (93 per cent), followed by old-age pensions or financial support (71 per cent), free or subsidised healthcare (67 per

cent) and housing support schemes (62 per cent). Awareness is much lower for National Programme for the Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE) (20 per cent), digital training for older persons (17 per cent) and elder helplines (11 per cent).

According to the study, strengthening awareness of such age-specific services, especially elder helplines, can complement existing welfare initiatives and help older persons access timely sup-

port, particularly during emergencies and periods of vulnerability.

"This report highlights the intersection of ageing and climate change. Repeated climate hazards disproportionately impact older persons, especially women, widows, those living alone, the impaired, and the oldest old. A large segment, already disadvantaged by low education, savings, and poor health, relies heavily on welfare and family support. Older women shoulder multiple burdens, from caregiving to securing water and income. In such contexts, accessible essential services are not just critical - they are vital for survival," says Anupama Datta, Head - Policy Research & Advocacy, HelpAge India.

The findings gain added significance against the backdrop of increasing climate-related risks. The report found that 78 per cent of respondents experienced at least one climate-related hazard in the last three years. Heatwaves (45 per cent), floods (27 per cent) and droughts (20 per cent) were the most commonly reported hazards. (PTI)

'Kachaudi Gali' is going back to roots, our oral history: Rekha Bhardwaj on her new hit



“ Kachaudi Gali”, the Bhojpuri folk hit from Coke Studio Bharat, has connected people to their roots and childhood, says singer Rekha Bhardwaj, who is happy that the song is becoming popular among all age groups.

Composed by Khwaab, “Kachaudi Gali” explores themes of “longing, love, and separation” through the story of a woman whose husband has been drafted by the Britishers to fight in the Anglo-Burmese war.

Bhardwaj has sung the song with Utpal Udit. Many from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were recruited in the British army to fight in the Anglo-Burmese wars and also in the second World War. It is also about the many labourers who were transported from UP and Bihar to work in British colonies around the globe.

Bhardwaj, who earlier lent her voice to chartbusters such as “Namak Ishq Ka”, “Mileya Mileya”, “Phir Le Aaya Ishq”, “Kabira” and “Judaii”, said the beauty of folk music is that it preserves history.

“It’s so wonderful to know all those stories behind the song, and this helps you connect with your roots through folk music. Folk music has a natural oral tradition of preserving history. Now, because of this song, everyone’s talking about the Anglo-Burmese War, how the Britishers took these husbands away from their women. This is one such story,” Bhardwaj told PTI in a virtual interview.

“The beauty of folk music is that people had such a simple life that they would celebrate and talk about it through songs while doing their

daily chores. I think that’s why it’s resonating with youth. They’re talking about how, as children, they used to listen to this song from their ‘dadi’ or ‘nani’ (grandmothers), or somebody would be singing it in the house,” she added.

Praising Coke Studio Bharat for keeping the spirit of the song alive by not fusing it with modern dance, Bhardwaj said the Kachaudi Gali, a popular street in Varanasi, comes alive through this song while highlighting a forgotten chapter in the history of the region.

“...We came across another story about Gauhar Jaan (a courtesan in Varanasi). (It is said) that this is her song because she had a lover who went to war. He didn’t come back, and he was kind of hanged to death by the Britishers, and that’s how this song came about,” the singer said.

Bhardwaj praised Udit for choosing to highlight the music of his region.

“Utpal Udit, being Gen Z, decided to go with the kind of music that he’s grown up listening to... His determination to do Bhojpuri folk music and folk music in general is remarkable. He also talks about some poets from Bihar whose songs he wants to bring out, songs that are classical folk compositions. So it’s wonderful to have that dignity in the music...”

“And the reaction is just extraordinarily heartwarming. That’s the thing — when you’re working on it, you never think that it would become so trendy or go viral... It’s just that everyone followed their heart, and that’s what happened with me.”

Bhardwaj said songs like “Kachaudi Gali” will help change the perception of Bhojpuri

songs, many of which attract criticism for their lyrics.

“Khwaab has followed the soul of the song, and whatever interaction I’ve had with him, I know he’s very well-rooted and grounded. He is not somebody who would do something to shock or create something titillating just to get attention, which happens not only with folk music but even in film music so many times,” Bhardwaj said.

According to the singer, there is a way to portray mischievous songs without being vulgar.

She gave the example of “Namak Ishq Ka” and “Beedi Jalaile” from her husband, filmmaker Vishal Bhardwaj’s 2006 hit “Omkaara”. The songs were composed by Vishal Bhardwaj and penned by Gulzar.

“Fine arts are all about aesthetics. The moment aesthetics are there, you will not be able to do anything vulgar. There are people who also write vulgar poetry, and those songs do very well too. But it’s about what you want to present from within. And when you do the right thing, it is bound to reach more and more people... And this perception will change,” Bhardwaj said.

Referring to “Sasural Genda Phool”, the popular “delhi 6” folk track that she voiced, Bhardwaj said she had previously sung the song in Bundelkhandi and people would often come to her to know the meaning behind “Karar Genda Phool”.

“But when we explained it in Hindi, people started asking me why ‘Sasural Genda Phool’. So we had to come up with all sorts of explanations. People started going back to memories of their marriages and family weddings, and they started using genda phool (marigold) again. Like how we celebrate with genda phool, and even when there’s a death, the ‘genda phool mala’ is there,” she said. Bhardwaj is happy to see different creative iterations that people have come up with in reels for “Kachaudi Gali”.

“So many reels are now coming up where women are singing in the gali, sitting on a porch or veranda. So many youngsters are playing guitar and singing on the ghats of Banaras. And I’m sure so much is happening in Bihar as well because Bhojpuri is a very widely spoken language.

“We have such great cultural heritage, only if we start bringing it out... There are these songs that everyone can relate to... It’s not just Bihar. You have Varanasi, you have UP, so we’ve covered, I think, at least 60 percent of India through this song.” (PTI)

FAHADH FAASIL TO STAR IN TWO MALAYALAM FILMS BACKED BY PANORAMA STUDIOS, PRODUCER JACOB BABU



Actor-producer Fahadh Faasil is set to headline two upcoming Malayalam films to be jointly produced by Panorama Studios and filmmaker-producer Jacob Babu.

The projects, currently in development, are slated for theatrical release next year, the makers said in a statement on Wednesday.

While details about the directors, supporting cast and technical crew are yet to be revealed, the producers said both films will be mounted as ambitious Malayalam-language ventures.

Fahadh, known for acclaimed films such as “Maheshinte Prathikaaram”, “Kumbalangi Nights”, “Joji”, “Malik”, and “Aavesham”, said the strength of the stories drew him to the projects.

“What attracted me to these films was the strength of the stories and the vision behind them. I have always enjoyed being part of projects that challenge me as an actor and offer something fresh to audiences.

“My conversations with Jacob and the team at Panorama Studios have been incredibly inspiring, and I am excited about the journey ahead,” the National Award-winning actor said.

He added that while it was still early days, both films had “immense potential” and would be shared with audiences next year.

Producer Kumar Mangat Pathak of Panorama Studios said the success of banner’s Malayalam ventures had reinforced the studio’s belief in the storytelling talent within the industry.

“We are delighted to collaborate with Jacob Babu, whose passion for cinema and deep understanding of the Malayalam market make him an ideal partner for these projects. Having Fahadh Faasil headline both films is especially exciting,” Pathak said.

Jacob Babu, who heads Maxlab Cinemas & Entertainments and has been associated with several Malayalam productions as a producer, distributor and exhibitor, said the collaboration was built on a shared belief in meaningful and commercially viable cinema.

“Having Fahadh Faasil on board elevates the excitement even further. He is an actor who constantly pushes creative boundaries, and I am confident audiences will be thrilled by what we are creating together,” Babu said. Panorama Studios has previously backed films such as “Omkaara”, the “Drishyam” franchise, “Raid” and “Shaiteaan”. (PTI)

Christopher Nolan and ‘Odyssey’ stars Matt Damon and Tom Holland to visit India for film’s premiere

“ The Odyssey” will be the first ever Christopher Nolan film to have a premiere in India with the Oscar-winning director and Hollywood stars Matt Damon and Tom Holland slated to make a stop in the city this July as part of their global tour.

Nolan, his producer wife Emma Thomas will accompany lead stars Damon and Holland, who play Odysseus and son Telemachus in the epic saga. The filmmakers and Universal Pictures International have designated Mumbai as an official stop on “The Odyssey’s” global premiere tour, placing Mumbai alongside London, Paris and New York. “The Odyssey” arrives in theaters worldwide July 17, as per a release.

Shot across the world using brand new IMAX film technology, “The Odyssey” is the first feature film shot entirely with IMAX cameras. The India premiere will be held at PVR Icon IMAX: Phoenix Palladium in Mumbai.

Other than Damon and Holland, the film also features Anne Hathaway, Robert Pattinson, Lupita Nyong’o, Samantha Morton, Zendaya and Charlize Theron. It is produced by Nolan and Emma for their company, Syncopy.

Written for the screen and directed by Nolan, “The Odyssey” brings Homer’s foundational saga of Odysseus’s decade-long voyage home after the fall of Troy to IMAX screens worldwide. (PTI)



Tom Holland confirms marriage to Zendaya, says family ‘were all there’ at wedding



Hollywood actor Tom Holland has confirmed his marriage to “Spider-Man” co-star Zendaya.

Speculation over whether the “Spider-Man” co-stars had officially tied the knot has been swirling since January, when Zendaya’s stylist Law Roach said on the Golden Globes red carpet that their wedding “already happened” and was “very true.”

Roach’s comments sent social media into a frenzy and sparked a wave of AI-generated images purporting to show Zendaya in a wedding dress at the alleged ceremony.

Holland confirmed their marriage during an interview with Esquire for a new cover story. The 30-year-old actor told the outlet that his grandmother saw the photos and thought she hadn’t been invited to the wedding.

When asked whether he had to reassure family members about the AI photos, Holland replied: “No, because they were all there.”

Asked for a further comment, Holland simply replied, “That’s all

you’ll get on that.”

Zendaya, 29, has not yet opened up about the marriage but during her press tour earlier this year for “The Drama”, the actor addressed the fake photos on “Jimmy Kimmel Live.”

The actor revealed that she has been approached by people complimenting her on wedding pictures she had never taken.

“They’re AI. They’re not real,” she said, adding that several people in her personal life were also fooled and upset they had not received an invitation.

During the interview with Esquire, Holland praised Zendaya as a partner.

“I found my person. She’s my best friend, and I’m the happiest I ever have been when I’m with her, but I also have never felt so supported and safe, ever. Period,” the actor said.

“Our business can present very stressful situations and it’s really nice to have a bedrock of a relationship that will stand the test of time,” he added.

Holland and Zendaya have appeared together in three “Spider-Man” films, with a fourth, “Brand New Day”, set for release this July.

They are also both part of the cast of Christopher Nolan’s upcoming epic film “The Odyssey”, which will also come out in theatres in July. (PTI)

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Kylian Mbappe sparks France with two goals

3-1 win over Senegal at World Cup

EAST RUTHERFORD (US), June 17: After a flat first half, Kylian Mbappé got France back in tune.

Mbappé scored twice to move past Pelé with 14 World Cup goals, celebrating by mimicking a flautist as he had promised, and Les Bleus beat Senegal 3-1 Tuesday in their World Cup opener.

"He could have scored four or five goals, OK, theoretically, but we're happy with two goals," France coach Didier Deschamps said.

Mbappé had 14 touches in the scoreless first half, the fewest of any player, then put France ahead in the 66th minute. He burst past Senegal captain Kalidou Koulibaly, turned onto a diagonal pass from Michael Olise and slid the ball past goalkeeper Édouard Mendy from just outside the 6-yard box.

In a segment with Mbappé taped May 20 and aired Friday by US broadcaster Fox, award-winning actor and television host James Corden suggested the 27-year-old star striker celebrate his next World Cup goal by imitating a flute player. Mbappé practiced the instrument for a year or two as a child at the behest of his parents.

"I'll do it for your first game," Mbappé said.



Mbappé ran toward a corner, brought both hands to his lips and air-tooted for a few seconds.

"If he wants to miss the first half again and score two goals in the second half in another match, that's OK with me," Deschamps said.

Bradley Barcola doubled the

lead in the 82nd, two minutes after entering, and Ibrahim Mbaye cut the deficit in the fifth minute of stoppage time. Mbappé scored just 68 seconds later on a spectacular right-footed shot from 30 yards.

The ball dipped perfectly between Mendy's outstretched left arm and

the crossbar.

"A crazy goal," French defender William Saliba said.

Mbappé, who led the 2022 tournament with eight goals, moved one ahead of Lionel Messi and fellow Frenchman Just Fontaine on the World Cup career scoring list before Messi scored his 14th later Tuesday. Mbappé and Messi are tied with Germany's Gerd Müller, trailing only Brazil's Ronaldo (15) and Germany's Miroslav Klose (16).

"I'm sure that he will do it," Saliba said of Mbappé setting the record.

Mbappé also became France's career scoring leader with 58 goals, one more than Olivier Giroud.

"He can from time to time miss a game or two but on one action he really is able to tip the scales and bring his team to victory," Deschamps said. "People say he doesn't defend enough. Well, he's not here to defend."

Mbappé brushed off critics.

"It's not about revenge," he said. "If I started playing for all the people who criticize me just to silence them, I'd have to play until I was 80."

Trying to reach its third straight World Cup final, France plays Iraq on Monday in Philadelphia, then closes Group 1 on June 26 against

Norway at Foxborough, Massachusetts. Senegal meets Norway on Monday at MetLife Stadium and finishes the first round against Iraq at Toronto.

With fans in Senegal denied visas by the US government, supporters of the Lions of Teranga appeared limited to a few sections in MetLife's southwest corner on a sunny 77-degree Fahrenheit (25-degree Celsius) afternoon.

While most of the stadium was filled with a just-under sellout crowd of 80,545, there were empty seats in a mezzanine club level, which has air-conditioned suites behind the outdoor chairs.

Two hours before kickoff, tickets dropped to as low as \$69 on FIFA's resale site. FIFA sold tickets at \$220-\$620 in December.

France was outshot 5-1 in the first half. Senegal striker Nicolas Jackson's 25th-minute shot hit a post, rebounded off the heel of goalkeeper Mike Maignan and bounced into touch.

Les Bleus then outshot their opponents 10-1 in the second half, when Olise shifted centrally from the right flank.

"If we had been more efficient, by halftime, we would have been able to lead 1- or 2-nil," Senegal coach Pape Thiaw said. (AP)

Norway tops Iraq 4-1 in Group 1

Erling Haaland scores twice, adds assist in World Cup debut

FOXBOROUGH (US), June 17: Erling Haaland scored his first two World Cup goals, including one off a defensive blunder, and added an assist in his tournament debut Tuesday to propel Norway to a 4-1 victory over Iraq in Group 1.

It was the 56th and 57th international goals for the Manchester City striker and came in Norway's first appearance in the tournament since reaching the round of 16 at the 1998 World Cup in France — two years before Haaland was born.

Leo Ostgard added the third goal in the 76th minute off a corner kick from Martin Odegaard. Kristian Thorstvedt scored the final goal just before the final whistle off Haaland's assist. Iraq briefly equalized just nine minutes after Haaland's first strike on a goal by Ayman Hussein.

But Haaland put the Norwegians in front for good just before halftime when he snuck in front of a poor back pass to Iraq goalkeeper



Jalal Hassan. Haaland beat him to the ball, preempting his attempted clearance, and then used his shin to put the ball in the back of the net.

Haaland's first goal, which came in the 29th minute, came off a cross into the box from David Moller Wolfe. Haaland slid and used his right heel

to finish it off. It ignited waves of cheers from the Norway supporters, who dominated the stands clad in red as they broke out in synchronized Viking row chants.

Iraq, playing in the World Cup for just the second time after debuting in 1986, held its own with a sizeable contingent of supporters that was mostly concentrated behind one of the goals.

That energy helped Iraq briefly get back into the game.

It came in the 38th minute when Amir Alammari corralled a ball on the baseline halfway between the left corner and the goal and fired a cross in front of the net. It eluded Norway's defenders, allowing Hussein to punch a clean header that bounced under the hand of diving goalkeeper Orjan Nyland to even the score at 1-1. It was Hussein's 34th international goal for Iraq. That includes his winning goal against Bolivia in Iraq's final World Cup qualifying match in April that gave the country the final spot in the 48-team tournament field. (AP)

Semifinal spot assured, India look to continue winning run against Uruguay in FIH Nations Cup

AUCKLAND, June 17: A semifinal spot already sealed, a relaxed Indian women's hockey team would look to end the pool engagements undefeated to bolster its confidence against a lower-ranked Uruguay in the FIH Nations Cup here on Thursday.

Unbeaten India are atop Pool A with six points from two games and have already qualified for the last four, having defeated USA 3-2 and Japan 2-1 in their first two matches.

India are determined to win the FIH Nations Cup to get their place back in next season's elite FIH Pro League, from which they got relegated last year.

The Indian women's team was relegated from the elite FIH Pro League to the second-tier FIH Hockey Nations Cup, following its last-place finish in the 2024-25 season, after managing only 10 points from 16 matches.

The winner of the eight-nation FIH Nations Cup will progress to next year's FIH Pro League.

Going into their final pool game against a relatively easy opponent, India would take heart from their fighting wins in the opening two games.

Ranked ninth in the world, the Salima Tete-led India will definitely start as favourites against world no. 17 Uruguay, who have lost both their opening two matches.

India scored all their five goals in the two matches through penalty corners. Deepika is joint second in

the goal scorers list with two strikes, while Navneet Kaurn Salima and Lalremsiami found the net once each.

But going into the business end of the tournament, India's chief coach Sjoerd Marjine would expect heavy effort from his strikers and would want them to find the net from field efforts and Uruguay provides them the best opportunity to do that.



With two important tournaments lined up this year -- World Cup and the Asian Games -- Marjine would also be tempted to try out new combinations in the remaining matches of the FIH Nations Cup, which is part of the team's preparations for the big ticket events.

Having considered three goals in two matches, the Indian defence, though, needs to tighten up a bit.

India's chief coach knows the significance of it. "In tournaments like this, small moments often make the biggest difference. We need to remain disciplined, stay united as a team and make the most of our opportunities." (PTI)

'We will be there one day with right set of partners'

BARCELONA, June 17: Formula 1 is looking for the right set of promoters and collaborators for a sustainable return to India, its CEO Stefano Domenicali said without committing to a timeline for the marquee event's comeback to the country.

India hosted Formula 1 from 2011 to 2013 before the round was dropped from the calendar due to taxation and financial reasons.

"There is a big interest from us to return to your country. There are the right things that we need to do, to find back again the right promoters, the right collaboration, and the right timing, which will not be in the very short term," Domenicali told F1 India, which broadcasts F1 in India.

"But when we talk about five years in Formula 1, it seems to be very far away, but it's not. There is not yet a fixed date on which we can really say something, but we see the interest that is growing at all levels."

It is the first time in a long while that a key figure in F1 has spoken about the Indian market. (PTI)

Iran and Egypt will meet, uncomfortably, in Seattle's World Cup 'Pride Match'

SEATTLE (USA), Jun 17: Egypt and Iran are two of the most repressive places in the world for gays and lesbians. But by sheer coincidence they will square off in a World Cup "Pride Match" in Seattle coinciding with the city's annual celebration of the LGBTQ+ community.

It has already gotten awkward, with both countries asking for the celebrations to be canceled.

Iran, where same-sex relations are illegal and gay men have been executed on sodomy charges, had separately asked that its games be moved out of the United States because of the war in the Middle East, a request denied by FIFA.

Egypt has arrested and prosecuted gays and lesbians on the basis of vague indecency laws, and has cracked down on any outward expressions of Pride, especially the waving of rainbow flags. Those will be out in abundance during the June 26 match and the typically boisterous parades just outside the stadium.

Activists are optimistic Both countries complained to FIFA in December. Egypt's football association said it "categorically rejects holding any activities related to supporting (homosexuality) during the match." FIFA, whose authority is limited to the stadiums themselves, appears to have brushed off their protests.

Leaders in the LGBTQ+ community are hopeful that the match will contribute to posi-

tive change.

State Senator Jamie Pedersen, one of several openly gay members of the Washington State Legislature, said it's "highly appropriate" that the match will feature countries where LGBTQ+ people are unwelcome, and will convey "positive images of folks from the community."

"If you tried to import a pride celebration into Egypt or Iran, obviously that could be a disaster," he said. "But in a community like Seattle that prides itself on welcoming people from all over, I just can't imagine that it's going to be a significant problem."

FIFA is no stranger to the issue

It's not the first time that organizers of the world's biggest sporting event have had to navigate sensitivities over the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community.

The Gulf nation of Qatar, which hosted the 2022 FIFA World Cup, has vague laws criminalizing "immoral actions," including sodomy. It said all were welcome at the tournament, including visiting LGBTQ+ fans, while asking visitors to respect the country's conservative culture.

After reports that some Wales fans had been stopped from bringing rainbow bucket hats and flags into a stadium, the Welsh football association said it had been informed by FIFA that they would be allowed at a game against Iran, which had asked that Pride flags be banned.

FIFA treats the rainbow flag as a statement of human rights and will allow fans to wave them inside the Seattle stadium, according to Hana Tadesse, a spokesperson for Seattle FIFA World Cup 2026.

A message' to Iran and Egypt

Seattle Pride, the nonprofit that organizes the city's annual parade, is encouraging people to celebrate however they choose.

The proximity of the World Cup events offers visitors the opportunity "to experience Pride in Seattle and the values that define our community — visibility, resilience, and joy," it said in a statement.

Andrew Ashiofu, a member of the Seattle LGBTQ+ Commission, said the flag would be a "message" to Iran and Egypt, that "we are a free city, we are a welcoming city who celebrates everyone, every race, every sexual orientation, every gender identity."

Local authorities say they are determined to deliver a safe and secure tournament, and have not identified any specific security issues.

Pedersen said LGBTQ+ fans will be able to safely celebrate their identity on an international stage.

"I don't know how many people are going to be watching from Iran and Egypt," he said. "They're probably going to be exposed to some images of happy LGBTQ+ people celebrating their holiday. And (that's) great from my perspective. That's the whole point of pride." (AP)

Five Indian-origin golf players in pursuit of US Open glory Azharuddin questions Gill's absence in T20 format, Sarfaraz and Nabi's non-selection

SHINNECOCK HILLS (USA), June 17: Five Indian origin players will feature in a star-studded field as the golfing world turns its attention to the U.S. Open, the year's third major championship, which tees off at the challenging Shinnecock Hills on Thursday. While there are no Indian passport holders in the field, five players of Indian heritage -- Sahithi Theegala, Akshay Bhatia, Aaron Rai, Sudarshan Yellamaraju and Manav Shah -- will be in the spotlight, underlining the increasing influence of the Indian diaspora in global golf.

The star-studded field includes the game's biggest names such as Scottie Scheffler and Rory McIlroy, who between them have won 10 Majors, and emerging talents who are eager to make their mark on one of golf's toughest stages. World No. 1 Scheffler arrives with history on his mind while McIlroy seeks another major triumph. Bryson DeChambeau, the defending champion, will play to ensure his relevance at a time when his chosen league, the LIV League, is facing existential issues.

Scheffler heads into the championship as one of the strong favorites, as he always does, after another dominant season. Already a multiple major winner, the American is chasing a career Grand Slam, with the U.S. Open remaining one of the few pieces missing from his collection that has two Green Jackets. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, June 17: Former India captain Mohammed Azharuddin has questioned the absence of Shubman Gill in the T20 format along with the non-selection of Sarfaraz Khan and Auqib Nabi in the Test team.

Azharuddin said Gill, who has been leading India in Tests and ODIs, has handled the captaincy role "very well" and should not have been dropped from any format.

Gill, who was India's vice-captain in T20s, was dropped from the squad before the T20 World Cup earlier this year.

"Gill is handling (the captaincy job) very well. His individual per-

formance has also improved a lot. He is one of the finest players; I don't know why they don't select him for T20s," Azharuddin told PTI in an exclusive interview on Wednesday.

"He is a good player for all formats and should never have been dropped from any format," he added.

Azharuddin said both Sarfaraz and Nabi have not been rewarded for their performances in domestic cricket.

"Auqib Nabi is a great red-ball bowler. He is a very good exponent of swing bowling. I feel very sad for him. Nabi, after taking wickets in almost the last two

If I deliver my best, I know I can be right at the top: Rifle shooter Aishwary Tomar

NEW DELHI, June 17: The first thing that stands out about rifle shooter Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar is his unwavering self-belief. A strong contender for a medal at the Asian Games in Japan later this year, Tomar remains unfazed by lean phases, and backed by his confidence he knows exactly how to rediscover his rhythm and return to the top.

One of India's most consistent rifle shooters, the two-time Olympian remains grounded despite the high expectations surrounding him in the lead-up to the continental showpiece in Aichi-Nagoya from September 19 to October 4.

His approach is simple -- to keep his focus on his own preparation and process rather than the stature of the event or strength of the opposition.

"I always try to focus on myself. I never stop training and putting in the effort. I also know how to bounce back after a lean phase. That feeling and confidence help a lot because I am always prepared to improve in the next competition," Tomar told PTI in an interaction.

"I ensure that my focus remains on my preparation rather than on how big the event is. My priority is to execute my technique perfectly in every match. If I am able to follow these things, I believe I can def-

initely win a medal for India," added the young 50m rifle three-positions shooter, who is the reigning Asian champion and a silver medalist at last year's World Championships.

Tomar says the lessons learnt from the two Olympics -- Tokyo 2020 and Paris 2024 -- along with his experiences at multiple World Championships and other events, have transformed him into a much more complete shooter and strengthened his belief that he belongs among the world's elite.

"When I look back at the Tokyo and Paris Olympics, I can clearly see how much I have improved. My performances are a testimony to that. There is consistency in my results, and many of the lessons I have learnt over the years are now being implemented, which has led to a significant improvement," Tomar said.

"My mindset is always the same; to deliver my best performance," he added.

For someone who has enjoyed remarkable consistency at the Asian Championships, winning five gold medals -- three of them individual titles -- since 2023, the 25-year-old admitted that even he is amazed by the extraordinary run.

"Fortunately, that has been the case at the Asian Championships, and I don't



know exactly how, but the technique and process I follow give me the belief that I belong among the best in the world. If I am able to deliver my best performance, I know I can be right at the top," said the world No. 12 marksman from Madhya Pradesh, who was guided in his formative years by his cousin Navdeep Rathore, a former Youth Olympics participant.

"Navdeep was firm that I should start with the 10m air rifle, and I trained in that event for a year. The following year, he introduced me to prone shooting and then, around 2017, I began competing in the 50m rifle three-positions event," Tomar

said. He believes the 50m rifle three-positions event is far more demanding than the 10m air rifle because it requires mastery across three distinct positions.

"I feel the 10m air rifle is still a relatively easier event compared to the 50m. In the 50m, you have to compete in three positions -- standing, kneeling and prone -- and each position requires different settings and adjustments. To become the best, you have to excel in all three positions."

"Secondly, wind has the biggest impact in this event. For example, a shooter might be capable of scoring 590 in normal conditions, but maintaining that score when the wind picks up requires tremendous experience," Tomar said.

"That is why you will often see many young shooters performing well at certain ranges but struggling at other places where the wind is a major factor. It is usually the more experienced shooters who are able to adapt and deliver strong performances," added Tomar, who hails from the Khargone district of MP and candidly admitted that he took up shooting as he had little interest in academics.

While the Khel Ratna Award remains the ultimate dream for every athlete and Tomar is widely regarded as one of the

strongest contenders for the honour, the 2023 Arjuna Awardee said the thought has never crossed his mind and that he only hopes merit prevails without any politics.

"I have won many medals, but I have never thought that I should get the Khel Ratna Award. I believe that if I truly deserve it, I will receive it. I just hope there is no politics involved," he said.

With the National Rifle Association of India (NRAI) maintaining its policy of selecting the Olympic team solely through domestic trials -- even if a shooter has earned an Olympic quota for the country -- the system has often sparked controversy, most notably ahead of the Paris Games when some quota winners failed to make the final squad due to a dip in form.

However, Tomar backed the policy, saying Olympic selection should be based on current form.

"I think they (NRAI) conduct the trials to assess who is delivering peak performances at that particular time, just before the Olympics. You have to perform in those three or four trials, and the pressure there is so intense that it almost feels like you are competing at the Olympics itself."

"If you are unable to perform in those situations, then you are not ready for the Olympics," he said. (PTI)

Arjun Singh, Veer Shah to lead Indian juniors at Pickleball World Cup

MUMBAI, June 17: Arjun Singh and Veer Shah were on Wednesday picked as Indian captains for the U-18 and U-14 categories respectively for the Pickleball World Cup later this year.

The squads were announced after official selection trials held in Ahmedabad from June 12 to 14. The World Cup is scheduled to be held in Da Nang, Vietnam, from August 30 to September 6.

"The Indian squad looks extremely strong and we are confident that we will be able to better our result from the last time," Arjun said.

"Da Nang will be a true proving ground, and we have full confidence that this team will play with immense passion, carry the tricolour with pride, and inspire countless young kids back home to pick up a paddle," Suryaveer Singh Bhullar, IPA president said.

Squads: U-18: Arjun Singh, Aditya Singh, Naomi Amalsadiwala, Dev Shah, Purvansh Patel, Vivaan Patel, Ashritha Raju and Diya Mattipati.

U-14: Veer Shah, Viransh Chopra, Aarin Ballani, Mahika Rathod, Maanshi Kartik and Aashritaa S. (PTI)

Gill's 154, Kishan's ton powers India to 402 against Afghanistan

LUCKNOW, June 17: Skipper Shubman Gill battled the oppressive heat and cramps to produce a magnificent 154 while Ishan Kishan ended a three-year wait for an ODI hundred as India piled up a formidable 402 all out against Afghanistan in the second match here on Wednesday.

Gill and Kishan (125) put the visiting bowlers to the sword with a blistering 224-run stand for the third wicket off 141 deliveries, laying the foundation for India's imposing total after being asked to bat.

Continuing with their experimentation ahead of next year's World Cup, India brought in Yashvini Jaiswal (4) to open alongside Rohit Sharma (48), with Gill dropping down to No. 3.

However, the young left-hander failed to make the most of the opportunity and departed in the second over.

Rohit, meanwhile, looked in fine touch and produced glimpses of his vintage best. The former



captain was timing the ball sweetly and appeared set for a big score before

being undone by a Rashid Khan googly that produced an in-

side-edge that clattered into his stumps.

Gill then took charge of the innings and rarely put a foot wrong. The elegant right-hander mixed precision with purity of strokeplay, making batting appear effortless despite the challenging conditions.

He batted tactfully, and was severe when the Afghan bowlers tried to innovate. He drove fluently cruising to his ninth ODI century. The milestone was especially sweet as it was also his first as ODI captain.

Kishan meanwhile provided the perfect support act before dramatically shifting gears after reaching his fifty. The wicketkeeper-batter, whose confidence has steadily grown in recent months, registered only his second ODI century and his first since the memorable double hundred against Bangladesh in December 2022.

The left-hander's knock was packed with power and innovation. His pulls routinely sent the ball crashing into the advertising

boards, while a pair of audacious one-handed sixes highlighted his growing confidence.

Kishan reached his second fifty in a mere 19 balls and eventually fell after a sparkling 79-ball innings.

The intense heat, however, began taking its toll on Gill as he approached his hundred. The Indian captain required treatment on his back after the 34th over and appeared visibly drained.

Even after reaching his century, Gill battled cramps and exhaustion but continued to anchor the innings with remarkable resolve.

Having carried India deep into the final overs, his outstanding knock ended in rather anti-climatic fashion when an attempted reverse sweep found deep cover.

Gill's dismissal triggered a batting collapse.

Left arm spinner Nangeyala Kharote (4/76) was the destroyer-in-chief, cleaning up India's middle order, while Rashid Khan picked three wickets. (PTI)

FIFA hydration breaks spark backlash, blamed for killing momentum at the WC

ATLANTA, June 17: Curaçao fans went wild. The Germans were in shock. Livano Comenencia had scored a goal for the smallest nation by population to ever qualify for the World Cup against four-time champion Germany. At 1-1 in Houston a famous upset looked possible. Then came the hydration break.

Curaçao lost the initiative, conceding two goals before halftime in what eventually became a 7-1 defeat to the Germans.

"I actually felt sorry for them," former England striker Alan Shearer told The Rest is Football podcast. "They scored and then it was maybe 30 seconds after that it stopped. So it's killed their momentum."



FIFA's new hydration breaks midway through each half — a novelty for this World Cup — were introduced to help players deal with the summer heat in the United States, Canada and Mexico. But critics say they're having unintended consequences, ruining the flow of the game and giving coaches a chance to tactically shift momentum in their team's favor. While player welfare

is a real concern with temperatures expected to exceed 90 F (32 C) in the hottest World Cup venues, some say the hydration breaks are just an excuse for broadcasters to go to commercials in the middle of the game.

"We're in America, right? So, it's like it is it's like it's a timeout," former Ireland international Roy Keane said on The Overlap, a podcast that he co-hosts with long-time Manchester United teammate Gary Neville. "We love football because of the pace of the game ... what it's doing is stopping the flow of the game, the momentum."

A chance for coaches to huddle with the players

Rather than players merely taking on fluids, coaches have been seizing the opportunity to pass on in-game tactical instructions that would normally not be possible. And early indications are that it is having an effect.

"You can use the break to tell the players what they need to improve or what is good or what they should do better," Netherlands coach Ronald Koeman said. "So you can use it in different ways to your advantage, and this is what we will be doing." (AP)

Sooryavanshi's outburst underlines importance of situation management training



BENGALURU, June 17: As Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's aura grows, sledging would be a routinely used tactic to unsettle him and the young Indian batting star will need "situation management" training to avoid losing composure like he did during a recent India A game in Sri Lanka, according to experts.

The 15-year-old is currently the most talked about teenager in international cricket and as his footprint on the game becomes bigger, opposition teams will try to touch some raw nerves to distract him. A prominent psychologist said the power-hitter needs to be prepared to tackle the situation.

"I have had the opportunity of working with Vaibhav at National Cricket Academy 2-3 years back, along with a group of under-16 boys and he is a calm boy. So, the BCCI and the NCA (now Centre of Excellence), headed by VVS Lax-

man, already understand the importance of it and that is why players are profiled in sports psychology services whenever there are camps," Dr Swaroop Savanur, a prominent sports psychologist in India, told PTI.

Apart from BCCI and the Centre of Excellence, Savanur has worked with Punjab Kings in the IPL, various domestic teams like Vidarbha and the India Under-17 football team.

Sooryavanshi grabbed headlines for reacting aggressively to sledging by the Sri Lanka A players in a close match that India A lost in Dambulla recently. Savanur said while talent is the major contributor to a player's growth, mind control too is crucial for big achievements.

"To help the players slowly understand their mindset and slowly develop a way to work on it, I have conducted 18-19 high performance

All-round India A crush Afghanistan A by 101 runs in tri-series clash

DAMBULLA, June 17: A compelling all-round performance helped India A thrash Afghanistan A by 101 runs here on Wednesday, bolstering their chances of making the tri-series final.

After amassing 319 for nine riding on fifties by skipper Tilak Varma, Priyansh Arya and Kumar Kushagra, India A bowlers produced a unified show to bundle out Afghanistan A for mere 218 in 36.5 overs.

Nishant Sinhu was the pick of the bowlers as he returned 4/31 from his 6.5 overs, while pacer Yash Thakur claimed 2/48 from his seven overs. Anshul Kamboj, Vipraj Nigam, Suryansh Shedge, and Anukul Roy claimed one wicket apiece.

For Afghanistan, Bahir Shah (57 off 52 balls; 4 fours, 1 six) and Faisal Shinozoda (46) provided some resistance but most of their batters failed to convert their starts.

The victory gave India A two crucial points to take their tally to four, but more importantly, helped them make it to the summit clash after losing each of their last two games.

It was Thakur who provided India A with the first breakthrough, dismissing Hassan Eisaikhil (14) in the third over when he had the Afghan A opener caught by Ruturaj Gaikwad.

The Indians did not have to wait



long for the second wicket, as No. 3 Khalid Taniwal fell to Kamboj for 13 in the sixth over and skipper Imran Mir's wicket came Sidhu's way in the 10th over.

Shinozoda and Bahir added 87 for the fourth wicket to stabilise the innings for Afghanistan, but they were both dismissed in quick succession which derailed their chase completely.

Earlier, Tilak (59), Kushagra (58) and Arya (58) helmed Indian innings after Afghanistan elected to bowl on a rather sluggish Dambulla pitch.

India were quick off the blocks with Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (38, 28b) and Arya adding 75 runs for

the opening wicket in just eight overs.

Sooryavanshi once again promised a lot, striking some trademark shots through covers and a couple of sixes.

But the left-hander fell in a familiar mode — trying to pull a bouncer outside the off-stump from pacer Faridood Dawoodzai, who cramped the 15-year-old for room.

But Arya looked comfortable in the middle, bringing up a fifty in just 29 balls. However, being ultra aggressive led to his dismissal as a square cut off Farmanullah was taken at point by Shams Ur Rahman. (PTI)

Lionel Messi ties Klose's World Cup goals record with his first hat trick as Argentina tops Algeria



KANSAS CITY (USA), June 17: Lionel Messi delivered his first World Cup hat trick while matching Miroslav Klose's career tournament scoring record, giving thousands of Argentina fans packed inside of Arrowhead Stadium for a match against Algeria a moment they will never forget.

Messi scored his first goal in the opening minutes off a nifty feed from Inter Miami teammate Rodrigo De Paul, the second early in the second half, and the third moments before subbing out to a standing ovation, helping La Albiceleste begin the defense of their World Cup crown with a dominant 3-0 victory over Les Fenecs.

The trio of goals came 20 years to the day that Messi made his World Cup debut in a match against Serbia and Montenegro — he scored in that one, too — and made the pride of Rosario into the second player to score in five editions of the tournament.

Messi has 16 goals in his six World Cup appearances, and it seems inevitable that Klose's record will fall in the coming weeks. The hat trick was the 61st of his career and his 11th while playing in the blue-and-white kit of the national team.

It also was the fifth straight World Cup game in which Messi has scored.

"At a loss for words about Leo. What can I say? He's incredible," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "Everyone in football wants to see him and enjoys it."

His hat trick also upstaged two of soccer's other big stars — Kylian Mbappé of France and Erling Haaland of Norway — who had big games of their own on Tuesday. Mbappé scored twice in France's 3-1 win over Senegal to

move into a tie for fourth on the World Cup goal list with 14, while Haaland scored twice for Norway in its 4-1 victory over Iraq.

"Messi is a madman," Haaland said in a post on Snapchat.

Messi, who turns 39 next week, had been dealing with a minor hamstring injury with Inter Miami that had slowed him in the lead-up to the World Cup. But the eight-time winner of the Ballon d'Or, which honors global soccer's best player, had no problems in a tuneup last week with Iceland, scoring on a penalty kick while playing 20 minutes in a sharp performance.

Messi's appearance against Algeria was the 200th of his international career, which began in 2005 at age of 18. The only players with more are Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, who will play his 229th on Wednesday, and Bader al-Mutawa, who played in 202 for Kuwait.

Messi and Ronaldo are the only players to have scored in five World Cups.

Argentina is among four national teams making their base camps in the Kansas City metro. And much as it has the rest of the world, Messi-mania has swept through the area ever since La Albiceleste's arrival in the Heartland about two weeks ago.

On match day, thousands of fans wearing his No. 10 jersey trekked into the home of the NFL's Chiefs on the outskirts of Kansas City, singing odds to their hero from Rosario. Meanwhile, during a watch party at the downtown Power & Light District, a goat accompanied by former NFL quarterback-turned Fox broadcaster Jameis Winston came on stage wearing an Argentina jersey. (AP)

Sri Lanka stuns New Zealand to dent Women's T20 World Cup defense and England unbeaten

SOUTHAMPTON, June 17: Sri Lanka crippled New Zealand's title defense at the Women's Twenty20 World Cup with a final-over comeback victory in Southampton.

Sri Lanka beat New Zealand for the first time in a World Cup after Nilakshika Silva and Kaushini Nuthyanga combined for an unbeaten 48 runs off 28 balls to reach the 151 target with two balls and five wickets remaining at the Rose Bowl.

New Zealand has lost its first two group matches. Only one team in tournament history has advanced to the semifinals with two defeats — South Africa at home in 2023.

In the second match of the doubleheader, England earned two wins from two games after comfortably handling a spirited Ireland by four wickets.

Ireland struggled to 118-9 and England calmly overhauled that in 17.3 overs at 119-6.

No catches win no matches New Zealand was tainted again by dropped catches; six in the opening loss to the West Indies and three more against Sri Lanka.

"The West Indies game and today's game, if we'd taken our chances we'd probably win both by 50 runs," New Zealand captain Melie Kerr said. "We've dropped a lot. There's no real excuse. Fielding is what won us the last World Cup."

Sri Lanka captain Chamari Athapaththu was put down on 6 and made 27 to start their charge in the powerplay, and Silva was dropped on 1 and made 54 not out. Sri Lanka ended up 153-5 in reply to New Zealand's 150-6.

"New Zealand is one of the best teams and the world champions, and the tournament favorites,"



Athapaththu said. "We beat them and it means we can beat anyone in the comp, we just need to execute our plans."

An unchanged New Zealand from the West Indies loss on Saturday chose to bat first on the same pitch but only Kerr and Sophie Devine got going with 45s. They were battering Sri Lanka together until they were caught on the boundary. The Kiwis collected only 11 runs off the last two overs.

New Zealand had already dropped two catches in Sri Lanka's chase when Georgia Plimmer took a brilliant grab running in from long-on. The ball slipped between her hands but she trapped it with her knees during a run of four Sri Lanka wickets in four overs.

It should have been five in five but Silva turned Bree Illing's drop on 1 into a player-of-the-match performance.

When Kavisha Dilhara ran herself out at 105-5 in the 15th over, New Zealand was still favored.

But, under pressure and in a rain shower, Silva's second T20 fifty in 13 years and Nuthyanga's career-best 24 rushed Sri Lanka to the win after its opening hiding from England.

England too strong for Ireland
Rain delayed the evening start for an hour and England didn't hesitate to bowl first. The spinners dominated until they were caught on the boundary. The Kiwis collected only 11 runs off the last two overs.

Orla Prendergast and Louise Little top-scored for Ireland with 26s. Ireland removed both England openers and Alice Capsey to shade the powerplay but the host's most experienced players, former captain Heather Knight and successor Nat Sciver-Brunst steered their team away from brief jeopardy.

Knight was pinned on 26 and Sciver-Brunst, returning from a calf tear, led with 48 from 37 balls when she felt the calf tighten and retired as a precaution just moments from the end. (AP)