

6 WORLD

- Ukraine unleashes one of its heaviest drone bombardments of Russia
- EU unveils plan to help bloc's overlooked islands, coastal communities

8 NATION

- Ram temple donation row: Cong demands SC-monitored probe, dissolution of Trust
- SIR completes one year; nearly 6 crore names deleted so far

Collaboration likely in electronics, semiconductor and entrepreneurship: CM Japan assures to deepen ties with Assam

GUWAHATI, June 26: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said that Japan has affirmed to deepen its ongoing partnership with the northeastern state under India's Act East Policy.

Stating that he had a telephonic conversation with the Ambassador of Japan to India, Ono Keiichi, on Thursday evening, Sarma said the two sides will further strengthen collaboration across key sectors like electronics, semiconductor and entrepreneurship.

The reaffirmation from the envoy came after a proposed visit of Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi to Assam for the annual India-Japan summit was shifted to New Delhi due to her tight schedule and logistical issues.

"Delighted to have received a



phone call from H.E ONO Keiichi, the Ambassador of Japan to India last evening. He reaffirmed the

Japanese Government's commitment to deepen its ongoing partnership with Assam under India's

Act East Policy," Sarma said in a post on X. He said they agreed to further strengthen collaboration across key sectors, including electronics, semiconductor, infrastructure, manufacturing and entrepreneurship.

"In the coming days, Assam looks forward to engage with Japanese enterprises and institutions to enhance both investments and economic opportunities for our people," Sarma added.

The chief minister had said on Tuesday that though Takaichi's visit has been shelved, a business delegation from Japan will visit the state "at an appropriate time later". Takaichi is set to visit India from July 1 to 3, which will be her first trip to the country after becoming the prime minister. (PTI)

Zubeen Garg death case Court rejects Siddhartha Sarma's bail plea for 2nd time

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, June 26: The Gauhati High Court on Friday rejected the bail application of Siddhartha Sarma, one of the prime accused in the alleged murder conspiracy linked to the death of noted Assamese singer Zubeen Garg, dealing another setback to the former manager of the late artiste.

A senior lawyer said that Sarma's bail plea was dismissed by the court of Judicial Magistrate Mitali Thakuria. This is the second time that his plea for release on bail has been rejected in the case by the High Court.

Earlier, Sarma who was the manager of Zubeen Garg had unsuccessfully sought bail before a

Fast Track Court, which declined to grant him relief, citing the seriousness of the allegations and the stage of the investigation.

The latest rejection comes even as Sarma has moved the Gauhati High Court challenging certain orders passed during the proceedings. In a petition filed before the High Court earlier this month, he sought permission to reopen his firm, Mahabir Aqua, and requested the defreezing of bank accounts attached during the investigation. He also urged the court to consider the findings of the Singapore authorities regarding the death of the celebrated singer. The Gauhati High Court had earlier declined to entertain his (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam govt relentlessly cracking down on drugs: CM

GUWAHATI, June 26: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday asserted that his government was relentlessly cracking down on the trafficking and the abuse of drugs.

He said the government was working to safeguard the future of the youth and save them from the menace of drug abuse.

"Today, we mark the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, a subject which our govt is working on very closely with a relentless crackdown against drugs," Sarma said in a post on X. "We remain committed to preserving the future of our youth and saving them from this social destruction," he added. The Assam government had been focussing on (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam's maternal mortality rate drops to 84 from 480, now below national average: Himanta

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, June 26: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday said the state's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) has witnessed a dramatic decline from 480 deaths per one lakh live births to 84.

Referring to the latest Sample Registration System (SRS) Bulletin 2022-23 and findings of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS), Sarma said Assam has moved from being among the country's worst-performing states in maternal health to emerging as a significant contributor to India's healthcare progress.

"From 480 to 84 -- that is the steep fall in Assam's Maternal Mortality Ratio. Today, Assam's MMR is well below the national average. This is a

shining endorsement of our multifaceted approach, ranging from increased expenditure on healthcare to sustained behavioural change initiatives aimed at improving maternal health," the Chief Minister said.

Addressing a public programme, Sarma recalled that when he assumed charge as the state's Health Minister in 2006, Assam had one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the country. "At that time, Assam's maternal mortality ratio stood at around 480 per one lakh live births. We were at the bottom of almost every national health indicator and lagged nearly 300 points behind the national average.

Today, according to the latest SRS 2022-23 report, Assam has improved to an MMR of 84 and has climbed to

the 10th position among Indian states. We are now four points better than the national average of 88," he added.

The Chief Minister also attributed the turnaround to consistent policy interventions, expansion of healthcare infrastructure, institutional deliveries, improved maternal and child healthcare services, enhanced budgetary support, and greater awareness among expectant mothers. He also claimed that Assam's public healthcare system is now counted among the most efficient in the country.

"Today, Assam is no longer a laggard in healthcare. We have established our identity as a contributing state in India's health and development journey," Sarma said, adding that the (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC reshuffles EMs' portfolios after induction of two new EMs

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 26: Following the formal induction of two new Members of the Autonomous Council (MAC)—Kadom Terangpi and Headings Rongphar—into the Executive Committee, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, has officially reallocated departmental portfolios among the Executive Members (EMs).

In an official order issued on Friday, CEM Ronghang assigned the newly inducted EM, Headings Rongphar, the high-profile portfolios of Environment & Forest and Panchayat & Rural Development (P&RD).

Notably, the Forest Department was previously held directly by the CEM, while the P&RD portfolio was managed

by EM Lunsing Teron.

Meanwhile, newly inducted EM Kadom Terangpi has been given charge of the Social Welfare and Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) departments. These two departments were previously under the charge of EM Rina Terangpi.

CEM Tuliram Ronghang will continue to retain several key portfolios, including Finance, Personnel (covering both Council and transferred subjects), and all Centrally Sponsored Schemes and projects, including the 14th and 15th Finance Commission allocations. Additionally, any departments not specifically assigned to other EMs will remain under the direct supervision of the CEM. The reallocated and retained portfolios for the remaining (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Search for 4 Arunachal flood-hit missing people on

ITANAGAR, June 26: Search operations have been intensified for four people who remain missing following a flash flood in Keyi Panyor district of Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Friday.

Rescue teams launched raft operations from the dam side of the Panyor Lower Hydroelectric Project this morning to trace those who went missing from NEEPCO Colony during the flash flood triggered by incessant rainfall on Wednesday. The body of a 35-year-old woman was found that day, while 17 others sustained injuries.

The search operation, which began at 7.30 this morning, is being carried out jointly by personnel of the NDRF, SDRF, district police and local volunteers, state Disaster Management Secretary Dani Sulu said.

Meanwhile, a medical team from Papum Pare district and a National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rescue team were deployed to provide emergency treatment and, if required, evacuate four labourers injured in a landslide near a stone crusher plant close (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

LET THE VICTORY OVER POLIO CONTINUE WITH

TWO DROPS OF LIFE

Ensure every child under 5 years of age gets polio drops everytime

POLIO DAY

28 June 2026, Sunday

Every child deserves a healthy and secure future. I appeal to all parents and guardians to ensure timely polio vaccination and join us in maintaining India's proud polio-free status.

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

TO KNOW MORE, PLEASE CONTACT ASHA/ANM/ANGANWADI WORKER

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DIPR /D/HLT/13/27-Jun-26

ICAI to prepare report for improving accounting system at Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams

NEW DELHI, June 26: Chartered accountants' body ICAI will be preparing a report on ways to improve the accounting system at the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD), the richest Hindu temple body.

ICAI President Prasanna Kumar D on Friday said the institute would be developing an accounting manual for the TTD, keeping pace with the latest requirements.

"A preliminary study has been started by the Accounting Research Foundation... we expect to complete the study and submit a report in 100 days," he said.

Right from collections to payments to the balance sheet, all aspects would be covered in the study. TTD had approached the institute for the project.

TTD, the official custodian of the Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, is considered the richest Hindu shrine in the world. "Basically, the project is for improving the existing accounting system. They (TTD) have got a full-proof system and the entire thing is now run on ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) and they want to take it to the next level since the current one is an old system," the ICAI President said at a briefing in the national capital.

When asked whether the template prepared during the study would be suggested by the institute for other temple bodies, Kumar replied in the affirmative.

The Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), the apex body for CAs, has over five lakh members. (PTI)

Global giants commit over USD 90 billion investment in India amid geopolitical uncertainty



NEW DELHI, June 26: Global corporations and institutional investors have announced more than USD 90 billion in fresh investment commitments to India in recent months, betting on the country's long-term economic growth despite rising geopolitical tensions, trade disruptions and an uncertain global outlook.

The planned investments span artificial intelligence, cloud computing, digital infrastructure, manufacturing and industrial technology, reinforcing India's position as a key destination for global capital as companies diversify supply chains and expand in high-growth markets, sources said.

Among the biggest commitments, Amazon on Thursday said it would raise its total investment commitment in India to USD 48 billion by 2030, following a meeting between Chief Executive Andy

Jassy and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The investments will support the company's expansion in cloud infrastructure, artificial intelligence and digital services.

Earlier this month, Australian data centre operator AirTrunk announced plans to invest USD 30 billion to build 5 gigawatts of data centre capacity in India by 2030, one of the country's largest digital infrastructure investments to date.

French building materials company Saint-Gobain said on June 18 it would invest an additional 1 billion euros (USD 1.15 billion) in India over the next five years, citing the country as one of its fastest-growing global markets.

The Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB) also committed to ₹ 7,000 crore alongside CtrIS Datacenters to expand hyperscale data centre capacity, while industrial technology company ABB

announced a USD 75 million investment in March to expand its manufacturing and research footprint in India.

Google in February unveiled a five-year USD 15 billion plan to expand AI infrastructure in India, including data centres, subsea connectivity, cloud capacity and workforce skilling initiatives.

The announcements come as multinational companies navigate heightened geopolitical risks, including conflict in West Asia, shifting trade policies and slowing growth in several major economies, while increasingly viewing India as a strategic market for manufacturing, technology and digital infrastructure. Sources said the latest investment commitments underscore growing confidence among global boardrooms in India's long-term growth prospects, supported by its large domestic market, expanding digital economy, improving infrastructure and policy push to attract foreign investment.

The wave of investment announcements highlights India's growing appeal as a destination for global capital, with multinational corporations increasingly viewing the country as a key driver of future growth, digital transformation and manufacturing expansion.

Taken together, the commitments signal that global boardrooms are doubling down on India even as economic and geopolitical uncertainty clouds the outlook elsewhere, sources added. (PTI)

Tripura govt aims to increase area under pineapple by 25pc in 3 yrs to boost output: State agri min

NEW DELHI, June 26: The Tripura government plans to increase the area under pineapple by 3,000 hectares over the next three years to boost production, state agriculture minister Ratan Lal Nath said.

In an interview with PTI, Nath said pineapple production in Tripura is currently 1.78 lakh tonnes, with 12,000 hectares under cultivation.

The minister said the state has a surplus of 23,000 tonnes of pineapple and the same is being marketed in other parts of the country as well as overseas. To promote this fruit, Nath said the state government is hosting 'Tripura Global Pineapple Festival

2026' in the national capital during June 27-29. "We are targeting to increase the area under pineapple by 3,000 hectares in the next three years," he said. The minister said the aim is to enhance farmers' income by selling this fruit and pineapple-based value-added products, including jam and juice. Fibre extracted from pineapple leaves has found demand in luxury fashion, home décor, and sustainable packaging, he added.

The three-day international exhibition, being held at the Major Dhyani Chand National Stadium here, coincides with International Pineapple Day on 27 June.

Nath said the festival brings to-

gether farmers, policymakers, buyers, and delegates from India and abroad to spotlight Tripura's world-renowned 'Queen Pineapple' and the state's broader agricultural and cultural identity. Five pineapple farmers from Tripura will be felicitated during the festival, and 25 stalls from across the state will participate.

"Tripura's Queen Pineapple has always been special and our farmers have known this for generations. What we are doing now is simply making sure the rest of the world knows it too. This festival is our way of building real, lasting connections between our farmers and the global market," the minister said. (PTI)

Topcem distributes 15,000 water bottles to Ambubachi pilgrims

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 26: Topcem Cement, in collaboration with Nilachal Sewa Samiti, Ganesh Pathar Sarbojanik Durga Puja Committee and Odalbakra Yuva Manch, distributed 15,000 bottles of drinking water among pilgrims attending the Ambubachi Mela 2026 as part of its community service initiative.

The four-day distribution drive was conducted from June 22 to June 25 to provide safe drinking water to thousands of devotees visiting the Kamakhya Temple during one of the region's largest annual religious gatherings.

According to the company, the initiative forms part of its annual social outreach programme during the Am-

ambuchi Mela and reflects its commitment to community welfare and public service. Representatives of Topcem Cement and the partner organisations actively participated in the distribution campaign, ensuring that pilgrims had access to drinking water throughout the festival.

A spokesperson for Topcem Cement said the company was privileged to contribute to the comfort and well-being of devotees visiting the shrine and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting initiatives that benefit society.

The company also acknowledged the support extended by Nilachal Sewa Samiti, Ganesh Pathar Sarbojanik Durga Puja Committee and Odalbakra Yuva Manch in successfully carrying out the humanitarian initiative.

Stayfree launches Xpert XL sanitary pads with 3-in-1 protection

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, June 26: Stayfree has expanded its menstrual hygiene portfolio with the launch of Stayfree Xpert XL, a new sanitary pad designed to provide enhanced protection, comfort and convenience for women during menstruation. The company said the new product has been developed to address the evolving needs of women by offering a combination of improved absorbency, comfort and ease of carrying and disposal.

According to Stayfree, the Xpert XL features a three-in-one protection system comprising Gel Lock Pockets for deep and rapid absorption, an Air Soft Cover designed to provide a breathable and gentle feel against the skin, and

individually wrapped compact pads that can be easily carried in a pocket and disposed of conveniently after use.

Commenting on the launch, Supriya Srinivasa, Marketing Director, Stayfree, said the company continues to develop products that cater to the diverse menstrual hygiene needs of women.

She said the new Stayfree Xpert XL combines quick absorption, enhanced comfort and portability to help women manage their periods more confidently while on the move. To promote the new product, the company has launched a digital influencer campaign featuring actors and content creators, including Aditi Bhatia and Ashnoor Kaur, targeting younger con-

sumers through social media platforms. As part of the campaign, a digital film featuring actor Aditi Bhatia portrays the everyday challenges women face during menstruation, including concerns about leakage, skin discomfort and carrying sanitary products while travelling.

The campaign highlights the role of Stayfree Xpert XL in addressing these concerns.

The company said the product is now available across general trade outlets, modern retail stores, pharmacies, e-commerce platforms and quick commerce channels nationwide. Stayfree Xpert XL is priced at ₹48 for a pack of six units and is also available in packs of 18 and 40 units.

Contd. from Page 1...

Court rejects Siddhartha

bail plea after the Fast Track Court rejected his application.

The case relates to the death of Assamese music icon Zubeen Garg, who died on September 19 last year while swimming near Lazarus Island in Singapore, a day before he was scheduled to perform at an event organised under the North East International Festival (NEIF). While the Singapore Police concluded that there was no evidence of foul play in the singer's death, the Assam CID constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the matter following allegations raised by members of the singer's family and others. The SIT subsequently registered a criminal case and filed a chargesheet naming seven accused persons, including Siddhartha Sharma, alleging a criminal conspiracy linked to the incident.

With the latest order rejecting his bail application, Sharma will continue to remain in judicial custody as the trial in the high-profile case progresses. The investigation and subsequent legal proceedings have drawn significant public attention across Assam due to the immense popularity of the late singer.

Assam govt relentlessly

checking drug abuse, with intensified drives launched since Sarma became the chief minister for the first time in 2021.

In the first five years of Sarma's government, Assam has made over 24,000 drug-related arrests and seized drugs worth more than Rs 3,001 crore, over seven times the recoveries made between 2011 and 2015, the then finance minister Ajanta Neog had said in her Budget speech in February this year. (PTI)

Assam's maternal mortality

government would continue strengthening the health sector to sustain the gains achieved over the past two decades.

KAAC reshuffles EMs'

Executive Members are as follows: Amarsing Tisso - Agriculture, Land Revenue and Land Reforms; Mongolsing Timung - Public Health Engineering (PHE), Archaeology & Museum; Lunsing Teron - Irrigation and Excise; Richard Tokbi - Education; D. Uphing Maslai - Animal Husbandry & Veterinary and Dairy Development; Surya Rongphar - Health & Family Welfare, Art & Culture; Ritesh Engli - Water Resources and Tourism; Prabhat Chondro Taro - Soil Conservation, Industries & Commerce; Bili Mohan Khaklary - Transport, Food & Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs; Madhuram Lekhe - Fisheries, Information & Public Relations (IPR); Madhuriya Dhekal Phukan - Co-operation, Town & Country Planning, and Town Committee Affairs; and Kache Rongpippi - Sericulture, Library, and Printing & Stationery.

The minor reshuffle aims to improve administrative efficiency and integrate the newly appointed Executive Members into the council's ongoing developmental agenda across the district.

Search for 4 Arunachal flood

to the Keyi Panyor welcome gate on Thursday evening. The labourers were injured after a landslide struck their campsite while they were asleep. Some of them were partially buried under the debris and were rescued by their co-workers before emergency responders reached the site.

According to preliminary reports, the injured sustained multiple fractures and head injuries, while one worker remains in a critical condition after complaining of severe chest pain.

Officials said rescue efforts have been hampered by the absence of mobile network connectivity in the area, with information from the site reaching authorities only intermittently through people travelling to locations with network coverage. An assessment by the district administration found that approaching the site from the Keyi Panyor side was not feasible as the nearest motorable point is around 12 km away, requiring a trek through landslide-affected terrain. The Hoj side in Papum Pare district, involving an approximately 5 km trek, was found to be the more accessible route.

Accordingly, the Papum Pare district administration dispatched a medical team with essential medicines and emergency medical equipment, officials said. With the condition of one of the injured labourers deteriorating, the services of the 12th Battalion of the NDRF were also requisitioned.

Both teams departed from Itanagar and were scheduled to converge at Hoj before undertaking a foot march from the last motorable point to the incident site. They will provide on-site medical care and, if necessary, evacuate the critically injured worker to the nearest motorable location, the officials said.

Meanwhile, restoration of road connectivity is underway in Keyi Panyor and Papum Pare districts. The Potin-Kimin road has been reopened for light vehicles, while the Hoj-Sagalee section has also been restored, the officials said. The Yachuli-Pistana-Ambam-Selsango-Parang-Sagalee-Hoj-Itanagar route has been opened for light vehicular traffic. The flash flood struck the NEEPCO Colony area at Poosa in Keyi Panyor district on Wednesday morning, damaging houses, disrupting road connectivity and triggering landslides at several locations. An Indian Air Force helicopter and a helicopter of the state civil aviation department had been pressed into service to airlift additional SDRF personnel and rescue equipment to strengthen the ongoing operation.

According to preliminary assessment, around 30 houses were completely damaged or washed away due to the flood. As many as 128 households have been affected in the district.

A relief camp has been set up on the NEEPCO campus where 60 persons are currently taking shelter. Chief Minister Pema Khandu expressed deep anguish over the tragedy and assured affected families of the government's full support. He said all agencies have been fully mobilised and are actively engaged in rescue, relief and restoration efforts, while the state government is closely monitoring the situation to ensure timely rescue, medical assistance and relief to those affected. (PTI)

Apple hikes MacBook, iPad prices by 20-42 pc

NEW DELHI, June 26: Apple has increased the starting prices of MacBook and iPad models by 20-42 per cent compared to their launch prices across the globe, including India, mainly due to higher memory chip costs.

The new price list on Apple India's website shows that the company has increased the price of the MacBook Pro built on the M5 series chip by about 20 per cent.

The price of the 14-inch MacBook Pro with the M5 Pro chip has been increased to ₹ 2,99,900 apiece from the launch price of ₹ 2,49,900 a unit.

There has been a sharp rise in the price of the iPad Air. The basic model in the 13-inch iPad Air has been increased by 41.22 per cent to ₹ 1,19,900 apiece from ₹ 84,900 a unit.

Counterpoint Research Co-founder and VP for Research, Neil Shah, said Apple's price hikes for the MacBook Neo, MacBook Air, MacBook Pro, iPad Air, and iPad Pro Wi-Fi follow the biggest change in the cost structure of the consumer and enterprise PC and tablet market, being shaped by the rising semiconductor chip pricing from memory to processors.

Apple, in a statement, said that the consumer electronics industry is facing an unprecedented challenge.

"The rapid expansion of AI data centres has created an extraordinary surge in demand for memory and storage. We have never seen a component price increase this much, this quickly.

"We have shielded our customers from these increases so far, but we have now reached a point where we need to begin raising prices on a number of products, including today's increases for iPad and Mac. We know this is not welcome news, and we are working tirelessly to find solutions," the statement said.

Price increases for consumer electronics are already widespread across the industry, with many products rising by 40 per cent or more.

Memory companies have been allocating an increasing share of their production to AI data cen-

tres, leaving the consumer electronics segment with constrained availability and rising costs.

Memory suppliers are reporting margins at historic highs.

Memory chip leader Micron reported 86 per cent gross margins, up from 15 per cent in just the past year.

"Apple, long regarded as the industry's benchmark for supply chain resilience, has begun passing higher component costs on to consumers. That is a strong signal that pricing pressures have reached a level that even the most sophisticated absorption strategies cannot fully offset," CyberMedia Research, VP - Industry Research Group, Prabhu Ram said.

Shah said Apple held the price increase for at least two quarters, protecting its user base from any price inflation, but it has reached a point beyond which Apple could absorb the cost increase.

"The unprecedented AI infrastructure growth has changed the semiconductor supply chain, driving insatiable demand for DRAM, NAND and Compute chips, not matching up to the capacity to produce and supply to other markets as AI infrastructure is prioritised. We believe the situation is not going to be better at least for the next two years," he said.

Shah said that the timing of the price increase is not ideal as Apple looks to push its revamped on-device Apple Intelligence later this year across devices demanding considerable memory and compute capabilities uplift.

"This could likely affect overall demand for Apple products in the coming months. However, this could also be a positive for Apple, especially for customers who are due for an update and want to buy a new Mac or iPad and can't delay the purchase, they will not compromise by paying extra for a lower configuration, instead buy a more premium version of Apple's portfolio. So, the market could shift towards the premium market as users look to get maximum value for the dollar spent," Shah said. (PTI)

ITC bets on FMCG, digital agriculture, sustainable businesses for next growth phase

KOLKATA, June 26: ITC Ltd has outlined an aggressive medium-term growth strategy centred on expanding its FMCG business, scaling digital agriculture, growing its fresh food and sustainable packaging businesses, while targeting net zero operations by 2050, according to its FY26 annual report.

The diversified conglomerate said it continues to aspire to become India's No. 1 FMCG company by strengthening its core brands, expanding into value-added adjacencies and developing new portfolios focused on health, nutrition, convenience and premium products.

ITC is the second-largest FMCG major in the country after Hindustan Unilever Limited.

According to the annual report, Chairman and Managing Director Sanjiv Puri has spearheaded the "ITC Next" strategy to reshape growth and profitability, with a focus on digital acceleration, innovation, sustainability and new growth vectors such as the Fresh Food Business, ITCMAARS and sustainable packaging.

As part of its growth strategy, ITC said its ITCMAARS digital agriculture platform aims to onboard 4,000 Farmer Producer Organisations and reach one crore farmers by 2030.

The company said initial estimates indicate the platform could help improve crop yields by 15-20 per cent and increase farmers' net returns by 25-30 per cent through personalised

advisories, market linkages and credit access.

The company also identified its Fresh Food Business as a new growth vector. Operating through more than 70 cloud kitchens across Bengaluru, Chennai, Hyderabad, Mumbai and Pune, the business leverages ITC's food brands, hotel cuisine expertise and digital capabilities.

ITC said it would continue investing in sustainable packaging solutions, including recyclable and fibre-based alternatives to single-use plastic, while integrating the recently announced acquisition of the pulp and paper undertaking of Aditya Birla Real Estate Ltd as a strategic fit for expanding its paperboards business.

The company said artificial intelligence and digital technologies would play an increasingly important role across sourcing, manufacturing, logistics and product development. The next phase of the ITCMAARS platform will incorporate IoT-based advisory, remote sensing and soil sensors to improve farm productivity.

On sustainability, ITC reaffirmed its target of achieving net zero operations by 2050 while scaling renewable energy, climate-smart agriculture and water stewardship initiatives.

In the hospitality business, the company said ITC Hotels has set a target of expanding its portfolio to 250 properties with more than 22,000 keys by 2031. (PTI)

AFFIDAVIT

My son's correct name is "Chow Mintu Singhpho" and was incorrectly recorded as "Mintu Singhpho" in his Aadhaar Card and his correct date of birth is "05/04/2009" which is wrongly recorded as "05/04/2007". Therefore, for all intent and purposes my son's actual name is "Chow Mintu Singhpho" and not "Mintu Singhpho", and actual Date of Birth is "05/04/2009" and not "05/04/2007".

Pngchiwa Singhpho,
M/o- Chow Mintu Singhpho, W/o- Lt. Chow Ashok Singhpho,
Vill.- Jona 1, PO- Lathao, PS- Namsai,
Dist.- Namsai, Arunachal Pradesh

ASSOCIATE SIGNALLING WORKS AT LUMDING DIVISION

Tender No. SNT-15-LMG-2026-27
Dated: 24-06-2026. Works tenders through "E" Tendering system for and on behalf of the president of India are invited for the works as detailed below: **Name of work & its location:** Associate signalling works in connection with provision of Track Machine Siding at Digaru, Kalkalighat, Aujari, Chaparmukh Jn., Jugijan, Kampur, Bar Longfer, Senchoa Jn., of Lumding Division.
Tender Value: ₹ 3,47,52,878.59/-
Earnest Money: ₹ 6,95,100/-
Date & time of Closing of tender: At 15.00 hrs. & opening at 15.30 hrs. on 16-07-2026. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

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PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE
As per the provision of the EIA Notification dtd. 14.09.2006, the Public Hearing for the "Proposed Assam/PSP-04 Open Loop Pumped Storage Project (1200 MW) in area of 372 Ha located across the following villages (i) Moti Hojai, P.O: Mahur-788830; (ii) Moti Lampu, P.O: Mahur-788830; (iii) Moti Longmailai, P.O: Mahur-788830; (iv) Relai, P.O: Maibong-788831, (v) Dijambra, PO Maibong-788831, District: Dima Hasao, Assam, (Sector 1(c); Cat "A") by Assam Power Distribution Company Limited." to be held as per following schedule:

Date & Time	Venue
30-07-2026 at 11:00 A.M.	At Proposed Project Site, VIII: Moti Lampu, P.O.: & P.S.: Mahur, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788830

Interested persons of the locality including bonafide residents, NGOs, etc., are hereby requested to attend the aforesaid Public Hearing for getting their statements recorded, if any. Stakeholders may also send their views before the date of Public Hearing to the Member Secretary, APCCB.

To know details of the proposed Project, interested person may collect the Executive Summary of Draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Report for the project, available at the following offices:

- The District Commissioner, Dima Hasao District, Haflong Assam
- The Principal Secretary, NCHAC, Haflong, Dima Hasao District
- The Addl. Director, District Industries & Commerce Centre, Dima Hasao District
- Regional Office, MoEF & CC, 4th Floor, Housefed Building, G.S. Road, Rukminigaon, Guwahati - 781022, Assam
- The Gaonburah's of following Villages (i) Moti Hojai, P.O: Mahur-788830; (ii) Moti Lampu, P.O: Mahur-788830; (iii) Moti Longmailai, P.O: Mahur-788830; (iv) Relai, P.O: Maibong-788831, (v) Dijambra, PO Maibong-788831, District: Dima Hasao, Assam
- Head Office, APCCB, Bamunimaimam, Guwahati-21
- Regional Laboratory cum Office, Silchar, District: Cachar, Assam
- APCCB's website at <http://www.pcbassam.org>

Date: 26-06-2026 Sd/- Member Secretary

Kaushik Rai reviews urban projects, inaugurates MRI facility in Silchar

Minister assesses civic infrastructure across Barak Valley, directs timely completion of development works

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, June 26: Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Kaushik Rai on Friday reviewed the progress of urban development projects across the Barak Valley, inaugurated a new MRI facility at Silchar Medical College and Hospital and inspected key civic infrastructure projects in Silchar.

The Minister chaired a comprehensive review meeting with representatives of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) from Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi districts at the Silchar Convention Centre, Silchar, to assess the implementation of urban infrastructure projects and discuss issues relating to drinking water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, drainage and civic amenities.

Addressing elected representatives and officials, Rai called for closer coordination among Urban Local Bodies to improve the quality of civic services and develop cleaner, better-planned and citizen-friendly towns across the Barak Valley. He stressed the importance of completing projects within stipulated timelines while ensuring public convenience remained the foremost priority.



The meeting was attended by Borkhola MLA Kishore Nath, while Silchar MLA Dr. Rajdeep Roy joined through video conference. Commissioner and Secretary of the Housing and Urban Affairs Department Kavita Padmanabhan, Secretary Richard Ahmed, Sribhumi District Commissioner Pradeep Dwivedi and senior officials from various departments also participated.

Earlier in the day, the Minister inaugurated a state-of-the-art MRI machine at Silchar Medical Col-

lege and Hospital. He said the new diagnostic facility would strengthen specialised healthcare services in the Barak Valley by improving access to advanced medical imaging and reducing waiting time for patients.

During his visit to the hospital, Rai inspected various departments, reviewed medical services, cleanliness, availability of medicines and patient amenities, and interacted with patients and their attendants to gather feedback. He directed the hospital authorities to

address deficiencies promptly and ensure efficient healthcare delivery. The Minister also reiterated the State Government's commitment to expanding quality healthcare infrastructure so that people can access modern medical facilities closer to their homes.

Later, Rai inspected the AMRUT water supply project at Ghungoor along with Commissioner and Secretary Kavita Padmanabhan and AMRUT Managing Director Sampri Goswami. He reviewed the functioning of the project and directed officials to streamline operations to ensure a safe and uninterrupted supply of potable drinking water to residents of Silchar.

The Minister also visited the ongoing drainage improvement works at Singirkhal, Rangirkhal and Longaikhal in the city, accompanied by former MLA Dipayan Chakraborty and officials of the Silchar Municipal Corporation.

He instructed the executing agencies and contractors to expedite the works without compromising quality so that residents receive timely relief from recurring waterlogging during the monsoon season.

Nagaon clears highway encroachments to improve road safety

Joint drive removes over 20 illegal roadside structures along 20-km NH stretch following High Court directives

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 26: The Nagaon district administration, in coordination with the police, transport department and the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), carried out a joint inspection and eviction drive on Friday to remove encroachments from a 20-km stretch of the National Highway between Thekeraguri and Barghat.

The operation formed part of the District Road Safety Committee's long-term initiative to improve road safety by clearing accident-prone areas of illegal roadside structures.

Officials said the drive was conducted in compliance with directives issued by the Gauhati High Court to ensure that the highway's Right of Way (ROW) remains free from encroachments.

The drive was led by Senior Superintendent of Police Partha Pratim Das, Additional District Commissioner Gopal Sarma and District Transport Officer Simanta Bora.

Officials from the Superintendent of Police's office, NHAI, traffic police and other departments also participated.



During the operation, more than 20 illegal commercial establishments and temporary and permanent roadside structures were demolished and removed, clearing the entire 20-km stretch.

Officials said the encroachments had obstructed motorists' visibility and contributed to an increase in road accidents in the area over the past several months.

Reviewing the operation, District Commissioner Devashish

Sarma said ensuring the safety of commuters and the general public remains the administration's highest priority. He directed officials to continue conducting regular enforcement drives to make the district's major roads and highways safer and free from encroachments. The district administration has warned that similar eviction drives will be carried out in other accident-prone locations across the district in the coming days.

Sivasagar Police destroy drugs, contraband worth ₹13 cr

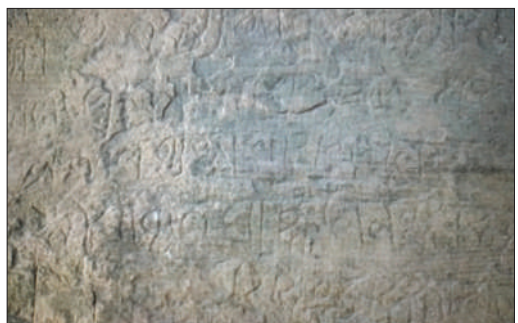
HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, June 26: Sivasagar Police on Friday destroyed narcotic substances and contraband worth nearly ₹13 crore as part of the observance of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking.

The destruction was carried out at the premises of Sukapha Multi Speciality Hospital under the supervision of Sivasagar Senior Superintendent of Police Papor Chetia in the presence of officials from the district administration and the Health Department.

According to the police, the destroyed contraband included 3.87 kg of narcotic drugs, 1.9 kg of cannabis, heroin and 2,960 packets of foreign cigarettes seized during anti-drug operations conducted across various parts of the district over the past several months.

Tezpur Sahitya Sabha seeks urgent preservation of ninth-century inscription



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 26: Tezpur Sahitya Sabha has urged the Sonitpur district administration to take immediate steps to preserve a ninth-century Sanskrit stone inscription of immense historical significance that is reportedly facing rapid deterioration along the banks of the Brahmaputra River.

In a memorandum submitted to Sonitpur District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das, the literary body expressed concern over the deteriorating condition of the nine-panel stone inscription issued by Harjara Varman, a ruler of the Salastambha dynasty, the second royal dynasty of ancient Assam.

The inscription, popularly known as the Tezpur Inscription, is located near the historic Bhairab Pada

tourist site and is reportedly submerged along the riverbank, raising fears of irreversible damage.

Dated to 510 of the Gupta Era, corresponding to 829 AD, the Sanskrit epigraph is regarded by historians as one of the most important primary sources for reconstructing the political and cultural history of ancient Assam.

Scholars have long relied on it as a key chronological reference for determining the reigns of rulers belonging to the Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasties.

Describing the monument as an invaluable historical record, the memorandum warned that the inscription was in danger of being permanently lost if immediate conservation measures were not undertaken.

The memorandum was signed by Tezpur Sahitya Sabha president Dhruva Jyoti Das and secretary Dr Palab Bhattacharya.

They were accompanied by former president Dr Bhupen Saikia, vice-president Dwijen Nath and executive member Dulal Goswami during their meeting with the District Commissioner.

According to the Sabha, the delegation urged the administration to initiate urgent protective measures to safeguard the inscription from further deterioration.

District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das assured the delegation that the administration would pursue appropriate steps for the preservation of the historic monument at the earliest.

Tezpur toddler earns India Book of Records recognition

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, June 26: A 21-month-old child from Tezpur has earned recognition from the India Book of Records after demonstrating an exceptional memory by correctly identifying 117 objects across multiple categories.

Advik Anubhab Saikia, son of businessman Anup Jyoti Saikia and teacher Bhairabi Tamuli of Da-Parbatia, received the India Book of Records 'Achiever' recognition for his remarkable cognitive ability at the age of one year and nine months.

According to the India Book of Records, Advik successfully identified 117 objects from various categories, including 10 fruits, 13 vegetables, 15 food

items, five pieces of furniture, seven types of vehicles, 12 animals, five birds, 16 body parts and 34 other everyday objects. He reportedly pronounced their names with clarity and accuracy within the stipulated time. The India Book of Records Committee conducted a formal evaluation of the child's performance and, after verifying the feat, officially recognised the achievement on June 1 this year.

The accomplishment has been widely welcomed in Tezpur, with residents expressing pride over the toddler's national recognition. Family members described the recognition as a memorable milestone and thanked everyone who encouraged and supported the child in his early learning journey.

Hojai revives Assam Science Society branch to promote scientific temper

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, June 26: The Hojai branch of the Assam Science Society has been revived with the objective of promoting scientific awareness and fostering a scientific temper among people, particularly the younger generation, in the district.

The revived branch was constituted at a meeting held on June 25 at the Department of Chemistry, Sir J C Bose Campus of Rabindranath Thakur Vishwavidyalaya.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Satyajee Kumar, Associate Professor of Chemistry at the university, and attended by academicians and science enthusiasts from the district.

During the meeting, Dr Sujit Ranjan Acharjee was elected President and Dr Jayanta Kumar Sarmah was elected Secretary of the Hojai branch.

Members resolved to strengthen science communication and public engagement through lectures,

exhibitions, awareness campaigns and various outreach programmes.

The meeting emphasised the need to popularise scientific knowledge, encourage critical thinking and inspire students to pursue scientific learning.

Dr Nirmal Sarkar, retired Associate Professor of Karinganj College and a member of the executive body of the Assam Science Society, attended the meeting as the special guest.

The gathering also unanimously accepted Vice-Chancellor of Rabindranath Thakur Vishwavidyalaya, Prof Manabendra Dutta Choudhury, as the Advisor to the revived branch.

The newly reconstituted Hojai branch aims to serve as a platform for connecting science with society by promoting curiosity, innovation and greater public appreciation of science through regular educational and awareness activities across the district.

Sootea TLNC resolves to intensify public awareness campaigns

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, June 26: The quarterly meeting of the Thana Level Nagarik Committee (TLNC) of Sootea Police Station was held at the Inspection Bungalow on Friday, with committee president Bhaba Saikia in the chair.

The meeting began with TLNC secretary and Officer-in-Charge of Sootea Police Station, Pranjal Kumar Nath, outlining the objectives of the quarterly review and highlighting the importance of community participation in maintaining public safety and awareness.

During the meeting, members unanimously adopted a series of resolutions to organise awareness pro-

grammes on traffic rules, HIV/AIDS and the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act during the next quarter.

The participants discussed the need for greater public awareness on road safety, health issues and child protection laws through community-based outreach programmes.

The meeting was attended by Circle Officer of Naduar Revenue Circle Debananda Nath, Sub-Divisional Medical Officer Dr Nirpen Saikia, Assistant Block Development Officer of Sootea Development Block Tara Prasad Newar, and committee members Prabin Sarma, Apurba Saikia and Anjan Baskota, among others.

Asam Sahitya Sabha to host 'Kavya Kakali' poets' meet in Jorhat

Twenty-five poets to recite original works as poetry anthology set for release tomorrow

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, June 26: The Asam Sahitya Sabha will organise a special poets' meet titled Kavya Kakali at its central office in Jorhat on June 28, bringing together 25 selected poets from across Assam to celebrate contemporary Assamese poetry.

The programme is being organised under the aegis of the Asam Sahitya Sabha by the Poets' Meet Sub-Committee in collaboration with the Jorhat Central Office and hosted by the Tarajan Combined Branch Sahitya Sabha (Swarna).

The event will be held at the Danveer Radhakanta Handique Bhawan auditorium within the Chandrakanta Handique Bhawan premises in Jorhat.

Twenty-five invited poets will recite their self-composed poems during the event.

A poetry anthology titled Kavya Kakali, featuring the works presented at the meet, will also be released on the occasion.

The programme will begin with the traditional lighting of the ceremonial lamp followed by a memorial tribute.

Among those expected to attend are Asam Sahitya Sabha president Dr Basanta Kumar Goswami as the chief guest, vice-president Padum Rajkhowa, general secretary Deba-jit Bora, noted litterateur Pranoy Phukan, critic Rajeev Bora, poet and critic Dr Jyotirekha Hazarika, secretary of the Jorhat Central Office, and organising secretary Ram Sagar Nath.

The participating poets include Jonmoni Sahu, Bijoy Rabidas, Punya Devi, Punjan Baruah, Ganga Mohan Mili, Baidya Bright Buragohain, Ranjit Gogoi, Utpal Doley, Muhi Saikia, Dandiram Bora, Ankur Borgohain, Sushanta Bora, Satyajit Nath, Jayanta Dutta, Bablu Prasad Baruah, Pranjal Kumar Khaund, Deepa Thakuria, Ashanta Ratul Dutta, Abhijit Gogoi, Monalisa Saikia, Swapnali Kalita, Jatin Mili, Bandana Kaushik Bordoloi, Sameer Shankar Dutta and Lakshmi Prasad Regan.

The organisers said the event aims to provide a platform for poets from different parts of the state to share their creative works and promote contemporary Assamese literature.

NFR GM reviews station redevelopment, rail expansion projects in Sonitpur

Chetan Kumar Shrivastava inspects Rangapara North, Dekargaon and old Tezpur station; reviews proposed new railway lines

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 26: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava on Friday inspected Rangapara North and Dekargaon railway stations to review ongoing infrastructure development works and assess proposed rail connectivity projects in Sonitpur district.

During the visit, the General Manager also inspected the abandoned old Tezpur railway station and reviewed the condition of its building and other railway infrastructure.

At Rangapara North, Shrivastava reviewed the station redevelopment work being carried out under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

The project, being executed at an estimated cost of over ₹55 crore, aims to modernise passenger amenities and upgrade station infrastructure.

According to NFR, nearly 80 per



cent of the redevelopment work has been completed, while the remaining works are progressing steadily.

The General Manager later visited Dekargaon railway station and its yard, where he reviewed the status of the proposed Aghori-Dekargaon and Tezpur-Silghat railway line projects.

Railway officials informed him that survey work for both projects, including the proposed new bridge over the Brahmaputra River on the Tezpur-Silghat route, has been completed and is currently under consideration by the Central Government.

The proposed railway lines are

expected to strengthen regional connectivity, improve transportation infrastructure and contribute to the socio-economic development of the region.

As part of the inspection programme, Shrivastava also conducted a window trailing inspection from Kamakhya to Dekargaon to assess the condition of railway infrastructure and operational efficiency along the route.

He reviewed the maintenance of tracks, bridges, stations and other railway assets while examining ongoing development works and identifying areas requiring further improvement to enhance safety, operational efficiency and passenger services.

The inspection forms part of Northeast Frontier Railway's continuing efforts to modernise railway infrastructure, improve passenger amenities and expand rail connectivity across the North-east.

Cow falls into open drain in Morigaon

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, June 26: Residents of Buragaon in Morigaon have alleged negligence on the part of the Morigaon Municipal Board (MMB) after a cow fell into an open manhole of a drainage outlet near Delta Public School on Friday.

According to local residents, the animal remained trapped in the foul-smelling drain for nearly an hour before the incident came to public attention.

They blamed the poor condition of the municipal drainage system and the uncovered manhole for the mishap. The open manhole is located in front of Delta Public School and close to an Anganwadi Centre, raising serious concerns over the safety of schoolchildren and pedestrians using the area daily.

Residents alleged that the uncovered drain has remained a potential hazard for a long time and demanded that the Morigaon Municipal Board immediately repair the drainage system and cover the manhole to prevent similar incidents.

The incident has sparked concern among local residents, who urged the civic authorities to take prompt measures to ensure public safety and improve the town's drainage infrastructure.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Progress is man's ability to complicate simplicity.
- Thor Heyerdahl

Khamenei's funeral and India

An invitation from Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the funeral ceremonies of Iran's late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has placed New Delhi in a delicate diplomatic position at a time when West Asia is emerging from one of its most dangerous crises in decades. The ceremonies, scheduled across Tehran, Qom and Mashhad between July 4 and July 9, are expected to attract an extraordinary gathering of world leaders from the Arab world, Asia, Europe and beyond. For India, however, the decision is far more complicated than merely sending a representative to pay respects. At stake is India's carefully balanced relationship with Iran, Israel, the Arab Gulf states and the United States—a balancing act that has become one of the defining features of Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy. The question being asked in diplomatic circles is simple: Will Modi personally attend, or will India dispatch External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar or another senior envoy? Most foreign policy observers believe the latter is more likely. India today enjoys unprecedented strategic relations with both the United States and Israel. Defence cooperation with Israel has expanded significantly, while Washington has emerged as one of New Delhi's most important strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific.

The reported circumstances surrounding Khamenei's death complicate matters further. If, as widely reported in this scenario, Khamenei was killed in a joint US-Israeli military operation during the recent Iran conflict, Modi's attendance could be interpreted in Washington and Tel Aviv as an implicit political statement, even if New Delhi insists it is merely paying respects to a departed leader. Diplomats are therefore expected to weigh every symbolic detail carefully. So Modi could stay away from the ceremonies in Iran personally. Indian foreign policy has traditionally distinguished between respect for a nation's leadership and endorsement of its policies. A personal appearance by Modi would undoubtedly generate headlines across the Middle East and South Asia. It would also place him in the same gathering as leaders who have sharply criticised American and Israeli military actions. Such optics may be uncomfortable for New Delhi at a time when India is simultaneously negotiating major trade and technology agreements with Washington. Relations between Modi and US President Donald Trump remain strategically important despite occasional disagreements over trade tariffs and market access.

The funeral invitation arrives against the backdrop of a fragile peace accord that reportedly ended the 107-day conflict involving Iran, Israel and the United States. Like many international agreements, the accord has already generated competing narratives. For India, a few unresolved tensions reinforce the importance of caution.

The public Dilemma over Assam's proposed 70% bus fare hike

The recent decision by the All Assam Motor Transport Association (AAMTA) to propose a steep 70% increase in bus fares for routes connecting Lower Assam to Guwahati has triggered widespread concern and debate across the state. While the transporters cite rising fuel prices and escalating operational costs as the driving factors behind this move, the proposal has exposed a deeper and more complex crisis—one that sits at the intersection of economic survival for operators and basic affordability for the public.

For the ordinary citizen, public transport is not merely a service; it is an essential lifeline. In a state like Assam, where rail connectivity is limited in many areas and private vehicle ownership remains beyond the reach of a large section of the population, buses serve as the backbone of daily mobility. From students traveling to educational institutions in Guwahati to daily wage earners seeking employment, from patients visiting hospitals to small traders transporting goods—countless lives are intricately tied to the accessibility and affordability of bus services.

It is precisely this dependence that makes the proposed 70% fare hike so alarming. A jump from Rs 100 to Rs 170 for a route such as Pathsala to Guwahati is not a marginal adjustment; it is a significant financial shock. For a daily commuter, this translates into an additional monthly burden of several thousand rupees—an amount that many households simply cannot absorb. In an already strained economic environment marked by inflation, rising food prices, and stagnant wages, such an increase risks pushing vulnerable families further towards financial insecurity.

From the public's perspective, the central question is not whether fares should be revised at all, but whether such a steep and sudden increase is justified and equitable. There is little disagreement that transport operators are facing genuine hardships. Fuel prices have seen periodic hikes, maintenance costs have

risen, spare parts have become more expensive, and loan repayment obligations continue to loom large. Additionally, the cost of essential commodities has increased, affecting not just passengers but also the workforce within the transport sector.

However, the burden of adjustment cannot fall disproportionately on one side. A 70% hike in a single stroke appears excessive and insensitive to the economic realities faced by the majority of commuters. It raises important questions about proportionality and fairness. Why should passengers bear the full brunt of rising costs, especially when their own incomes have not seen a corresponding increase?

Another critical concern is the lack of a transparent and participatory process in arriving at such a decision. Public policy decisions that directly affect lakhs of people should ideally be preceded by consultations, data-sharing, and open dialogue among stakeholders. In this case, however, commuters have largely been informed through notices pasted on buses—an approach that creates a sense of imposition rather than inclusion. The absence of public hearings or structured discussions undermines trust and fuels resentment.

The issue also highlights a longstanding structural problem within Assam's transport sector—the absence of a robust, regulated fare revision mechanism. In many states, fare adjustments are carried out through periodic reviews by regulatory bodies that take into account fuel price indices, inflation rates, and passenger affordability. In the absence of such a mechanism, fare revisions in Assam often become reactive and abrupt, leading to conflict between operators and passengers.

It is also important to recognize that a steep fare hike could have unintended socio-economic consequences. Higher transport costs may discourage travel, leading to reduced mobility and economic activity. Students from rural or semi-urban areas may find it difficult to continue their education in Guwahati. Daily

wage earners might be forced to give up employment opportunities due to increased commuting costs. Small traders could see a decline in business as transportation expenses eat into their already thin margins. In the long run, such impacts could widen inequality and slow down regional economic integration.

At the same time, dismissing the concerns of transport operators would be neither fair nor practical. The sustainability of the transport sector is equally crucial. If operators are unable to cover their costs, it could lead to reduced services, poor maintenance of vehicles, and even withdrawal of buses from certain routes. This, in turn, would create a different kind of crisis—one of availability rather than affordability.

The challenge, therefore, lies in striking a delicate balance between these competing concerns. This is where the role of the government becomes pivotal. Rather than viewing the issue as a binary choice between approving or rejecting the fare hike, the government must act as a mediator and facilitator, working towards a solution that addresses the needs of both sides.

One possible approach could be the introduction of a phased fare revision. Instead of a one-time 70% increase, fares could be raised gradually over a period of time, allowing commuters to adjust to the changes while providing incremental relief to operators. Additionally, targeted subsidies could be considered for specific categories of passengers, such as students, senior citizens, and low-income workers, to cushion the impact of higher fares.

Another area that warrants attention is fuel pricing. Since fuel constitutes a major component of operational costs, rationalizing state taxes on fuel for public transport vehicles could provide significant relief to operators without directly burdening passengers. Similarly, financial assistance packages, soft loans, or tax incentives could be explored to support the transport sector during periods of economic stress.

In the longer term, Assam must invest in strengthening its public transport infrastructure. Expanding state-run bus services, promoting electric or fuel-efficient vehicles, and improving route planning and connectivity

can help create a more resilient and affordable transport system. The introduction of modern ticketing systems and better regulation could also enhance efficiency and transparency.

Equally important is the need for institutional reform. Establishing an independent regulatory authority for public transport fares could ensure that future revisions are based on objective criteria and carried out in a predictable and transparent manner. Such a body could serve as a platform for dialogue, reducing the likelihood of abrupt decisions and public discontent.

The current situation also calls for empathy and understanding from all stakeholders. Transport operators must recognize the hardships faced by passengers, just as commuters must acknowledge the challenges confronting the transport sector. A confrontational approach—marked by threats of protests or public backlash—will only exacerbate tensions and delay solutions.

Ultimately, the proposed fare hike is not just a question of economics; it is a test of governance and social responsibility. It forces us to confront a fundamental question: how do we ensure that essential services remain accessible to all while also being financially sustainable? The answer lies not in extreme measures, but in thoughtful, inclusive, and balanced policymaking.

As the government considers the memorandum submitted by the AAMTA, it must keep the larger public interest at the forefront. Decisions taken today will have far-reaching implications for mobility, livelihoods, and social equity in Assam. A calibrated and compassionate approach—one that combines fiscal prudence with social sensitivity—is the need of the hour.

For the people of Assam, the hope is not for a complete rejection of fare revisions, but for a fair and reasonable solution—one that acknowledges their struggles and respects their dependence on public transport. In a state where buses connect not just places but lives, the importance of getting this decision right cannot be overstated.

The road ahead demands dialogue, innovation, and above all, a commitment to the collective good. Only then can Assam navigate this challenge without leaving its people behind.



AUTHOR

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The increasing risk of climate change

By: Dr Satyawan Saurabh

India, the monsoon is not just a season, but the fulcrum of the country's economy, agriculture, water resources, and livelihoods. For centuries, the monsoon has been considered life-giving because its rains nourish fields, fill rivers and reservoirs, and provide relief from the scorching heat. However, in recent years, the nature of the monsoon has been rapidly changing. Now, it brings not only relief but also numerous risks. In some places, sudden cloudbursts occur, strong winds and thunderstorms disrupt life, and in others, lightning strikes claim lives. In an era of changing weather and climate change, the risks associated with the monsoon have become more serious and widespread than ever before. This is why weather-related risks have become not only a subject of scientific study but also a matter of social, economic, and humanitarian concern.

Currently, it is clearly visible that the traditional nature of weather is changing. While rainfall used to be relatively regular and balanced, now prolonged droughts are followed by sudden bursts of excessive rainfall. Similarly, the incidence of thunderstorms and lightning is also increasing. Meteorologists believe that the Earth's rising temperatures have affected the structure and behavior of the atmosphere. With more energy and moisture available in the atmosphere, weather events are becoming more intense and unpredictable. This is directly impacting human life, agriculture, infrastructure, and natural resources.

Lightning is one of the natural phenomena that affects thousands of people every year. In India, the number of deaths due to lightning strikes is higher than that of many other natural disasters. Of particular concern is that most of the victims are from rural areas, where a large number of people work in the open. Farmers, agricultural laborers, livestock herders, and construction workers are more vulnerable to these weather hazards. When clouds suddenly gather and thunderstorms begin, many people do not understand the severity of the danger and remain in open spaces. As a result, many people lose their lives due to lightning strikes.

Scientifically, lightning is the result of complex processes occurring in the atmosphere. When the surface becomes extremely hot and the air above it is relatively cold, the warm, moist air begins to rise rapidly. This process is called convection. The rising air cools, condenses, and forms clouds. If the atmosphere is sufficiently humid and energetic, these clouds form large cumulonimbus clouds. Collisions between water droplets, ice particles, and hailstones within these clouds generate electrical charges. When the imbalance of charges becomes too great, lightning strikes, resulting in an electrical discharge between the ground and the clouds.

During the monsoon, moist winds from the oceans reach much of the In-

dian subcontinent. These winds carry large amounts of water vapor, essential for cloud formation and rainfall. But this moisture, when combined with an extremely warm atmosphere, can also create powerful storms. This combination of moisture and temperature increases weather instability. This is why thunderstorms and lightning are more frequent during the monsoon months. Weather experts believe that as global temperatures rise, the atmosphere will hold more moisture, increasing the likelihood of such events.

Climate change is the most important aspect of this entire scenario. Industrialization, excessive use of fossil fuels, deforestation, and uncontrolled urbanization have increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. As a result, the Earth's average temperature is continuously increasing. This increase in temperature is not limited to increasing heat, but is affecting the entire weather system. A warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, which increases the likelihood of intense rainfall and thunderstorms. This is why today's weather appears more unpredictable and extreme than before.

Urbanization is also playing a significant role in increasing weather risks. The abundance of concrete, asphalt, and buildings in large cities creates a heat island effect. This causes temperatures in cities to be higher than surrounding rural areas. Hotter surfaces cause air to rise faster, which can increase the likelihood of local cloud formation and storms. Additionally, inadequate drainage systems in urban areas can lead to waterlogging and flooding during heavy rainfall.

India's geographical diversity also influences weather events. In the Himalayan region, mountains cause air to rise rapidly, leading to increased cloud formation. In Northeast India, high humidity and mountainous terrain combine to create conditions for intense rainfall. In Central India and the Gangetic Plain, the combination of heat and humidity gives rise to thunderstorms. In coastal areas, the interaction between sea breezes and land heat influences weather patterns. Thus, each region of India faces different risks due to its geographical and climatic factors.

Weather hazards have the greatest impact on vulnerable sections of society. People living in rural areas often lack safe shelter and timely information. Even when warnings are issued for lightning or severe storms, the information doesn't reach the last person. Furthermore, economic limitations also force people to take risks. Farmers and laborers often continue working despite bad weather because their livelihoods depend on it. In such circumstances, natural hazards transform into social and economic risks.

Technical solutions alone are not enough to reduce the damage caused by weather-related disasters. Increasing public awareness and weather literacy is also essential. People need to be made aware of the importance of moving away

from open spaces when they hear thunder, the dangers of standing under tall trees, and the precautions to take during lightning. Schools, municipal councils, NGOs, and the media all have a crucial role to play in this regard. If society understands weather risks, many lives can be saved.

Meteorology has made remarkable progress today. Satellites, Doppler radar, automated weather stations, and advanced computer models are making weather forecasts more accurate. In many cases, the likelihood of thunderstorms and lightning can now be predicted in advance.

The India Meteorological Department and other agencies regularly issue warnings. But the challenge is to effectively communicate these warnings to the public and motivate them to take action. Merely providing information is not enough; it is also essential to ensure that people understand and act on that information.

Governments must integrate weather risk management into their development plans. Special safety measures can be implemented by identifying areas prone to lightning strikes. Safe community shelters can be built in rural areas. Weather-based advisory systems for agricultural operations can be strengthened. Disaster management training can be made mandatory in schools and public institutions. Additionally, timely warning messages can be sent using mobile technology and digital communications.

Long-term efforts are also essential to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Forest conservation, the expansion of green energy, carbon emissions reduction, and sustainable development policies can help mitigate future risks. If global warming is not controlled, both the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events could increase. Therefore, addressing climate change is not only an environmental imperative, but also a human security and sustainable development imperative.

In this era of changing climate, it is crucial to understand that natural events are no longer the same. Events like monsoon rains, thunderstorms, storms, and lightning are becoming more complex and risky. The most effective means of protection against them are scientific understanding, timely warnings, public awareness, and community preparedness. If we simply leave the weather to fate or natural destiny, the risks will continue to grow. But if we combine science, policy, and social participation, the impact of these hazards can be significantly reduced.

The monsoon is India's lifeline and will continue to be so. We need to understand its changing nature and adapt our policies, systems, and behavior accordingly. Only a society aware of weather risks can meet future challenges. In this era of changing climate, preparedness is the key to safety, and understanding is the best defense. (Dr Satyawan Saurabh, PhD (Political Science) is a poet and social thinker.)

The collapse of trust: A silent threat to family and social harmony

By: Lalit Garg

The arrest of Siya Goyal for allegedly pushing her fiancé, Ketan Agrawal, to death from the lofty heights of Lohagad Fort near Pune has sent shockwaves across the country. Earlier, the alleged murder of Indore resident Raja Raghuvanshi during his honeymoon in Meghalaya, reportedly orchestrated by his wife Sonam Raghuvanshi in collusion with her lover, had also stunned society. These incidents cannot simply be categorized as crimes and forgotten. They represent a deep assault on the very foundation of values, trust, and relationships upon which Indian society has stood for centuries. In Indian culture, marriage is not merely a union between two individuals; it is considered a sacred bond uniting two families, two cultures, and two worldviews. Marriage is traditionally regarded as a bond extending across seven lifetimes. Therefore, when a husband, wife, fiancé, or lover begins to perceive the other not as a life partner but as an obstacle or a burden, it signifies not merely a personal tragedy but a profound crisis in social consciousness.

The most disturbing aspect of cases such as those involving Raja Raghuvanshi and Ketan Agrawal is that the murders were allegedly committed by those in whom the victims had placed their deepest trust. It is this betrayal of trust that terrifies society. The strength of any civilization lies not in its military or economic power, but in the trust embedded within its relationships. When that trust begins to erode, society weakens from within. A natural question arises: if a young man or woman is dissatisfied with a relationship, was there no option to simply say "no"? Modern society has accorded considerable space to individual freedom. Breaking an engagement, refusing marriage, or separating by mutual consent are all legally and socially accepted options. Why, then, is such a horrifying mentality culminating in murder emerging with increasing frequency?

The answer to this question cannot be provided by law enforcement agencies alone. Sociologists, psychologists, educators, religious leaders, and family institutions must collectively deliberate upon it. Today's youth are passing through a transitional phase marked by a deep conflict between traditional values and modern lifestyles. On one hand are familial expectations; on the other, personal aspirations. In the absence of meaningful dialogue, this conflict often manifests itself in the form of psychological stress, rebellion, and violence. Over the past few years, India has witnessed several gruesome crimes linked to intimate relationships, including the Shradha Walkar murder case, the Nikki Yadav case, and numerous similar incidents in Bengaluru, Delhi, and other metropolitan cities. These events clearly indicate a growing instability and distrust regarding love, marriage, and relationships. This instability is not confined to either women or men alone; violent tendencies are

increasingly visible on both sides.

The culture of mobile phones and the digital world has further complicated this crisis. Mobile phones, once intended to bridge distances, are increasingly becoming instruments of conspiracy, deception, and crime in many instances. Social media has promoted comparison, consumerism, instant gratification, and virtual relationships. Relationships formed in the digital sphere often remain disconnected from the responsibilities and moral boundaries of real life. Consequently, qualities essential to family life—such as patience, tolerance, sacrifice, and commitment—are gradually weakening. Another serious dimension emerges in the context of communal distrust and controversies surrounding the so-called "Love Jihad." When love, marriage, or relationships are used as instruments of deception, concealment of identity, religious conversion, economic exploitation, or emotional abuse, it damages not only individuals but also trust between communities. It is imperative that all relationships be founded upon transparency, free will, equality, and honesty. Relationships established through concealed identities, deceit, or ideological agendas inevitably undermine social harmony.

However, it is equally important to maintain a balanced perspective. Holding an entire community responsible on the basis of isolated incidents is not only unjust but also detrimental to social harmony. India's strength lies in its diversity and communal coexistence. For centuries, people belonging to different religions, castes, and cultures have lived together on the basis of mutual respect and trust. Therefore, every crime must be viewed as the responsibility of the individual offender rather than as a reflection of an entire community. While deception in the name of love must be opposed, social harmony and human unity must also remain inviolate. The greatest challenge before us today is to strengthen the institution of the family once again. The disintegration of joint families, urban lifestyles, loneliness, and excessive professional engagements have significantly reduced communication within families. The gap between parents and children is widening. While children are being provided with material comforts, they are often deprived of emotional security and value-based upbringing.

Educational institutions, including schools and universities, cannot remain confined to imparting employment-oriented education alone. They must also seriously engage with life skills, moral education, emotional balance, relationship management, and family values. The younger generation must be taught that love signifies responsibility rather than possession; relationships imply commitment rather than consumption; and disagreements are to be resolved through dialogue rather than violence. Religious and spiritual institutions also have a vital role to play. All religions advocate love, compassion, truth, non-violence, and coexistence. If religious institutions can con-

nect the youth with human values, self-discipline, and a culture of dialogue, many social distortions can be prevented. Thinkers such as Acharya Tulsi, Acharya Mahapragya, Mahatma Gandhi, and Swami Vivekananda consistently emphasized character, morality, and self-discipline as the foundation of society.

The incidents in Pune and Meghalaya serve as a warning. If we fail to act now, the crisis of relationships may deepen further. There is an urgent need to launch a campaign for restoring trust at the levels of family, society, and the nation. Families must encourage greater dialogue; young people should be granted freedom of choice alongside a sense of responsibility; digital culture must be exercised with restraint; and social and communal harmony must be strengthened. The identity of a civilization is not determined by towering buildings, technological advancement, or economic prosperity. It is determined by the extent to which people trust one another. If trust collapses, the very soul of society will be wounded. Therefore, the foremost national responsibility today is to preserve trust in relationships, revive human sensitivities, and reinforce the traditions of love, trust, and harmony that have sustained Indian society for centuries.

In the transitional phase through which Indian society is currently passing, the crisis of relationships is no longer confined merely to marriages or romantic associations. While incidents such as those in Pune and Meghalaya are destroying trust within personal relationships, administrative negligence leading to fires and accidents in hospitals, schools, and public places—resulting in the deaths of innocent people—is simultaneously eroding public confidence in institutions and governance. Communal tensions, religious extremism, relationships built on concealed identities, and exploitation or deception in the name of love are also weakening the foundations of social harmony. The forces of materialism, consumerism, and relentless competition have pushed life values such as restraint, simplicity, sacrifice, and familial dignity to the margins. Simultaneously, the growing prevalence of alcohol and narcotic addiction is alienating the younger generation from family and society, driving them towards violence, crime, and emotional insensitivity.

When individuals begin to regard self-interest, lust, and immediate gratification as supreme, relationships cease to be a form of spiritual discipline and instead become transactions. In such circumstances, it becomes imperative for families, educational institutions, religious organizations, media, and governments to collectively revive a culture rooted in human values, transparency, dialogue, morality, and mutual respect. For if the very foundation of human relationships is shaken, not only will families disintegrate, but social harmony, national unity, and the entire edifice of civilization itself will stand endangered.

Give priority to youth employment, Skill Development and Self-Employment in the Assam government budget 2026-27

By: Dr Buljit Buragohain

The Assam Government should give special priority to youth employment, career guidance, skill development, entrepreneurship and self-employment in its Budget for the year 2026-27. Many educated young people in Assam are still facing unemployment and underemployment. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that government recruitment processes are transparent, speedy and completed on time. At the same time, more employment opportunities should be created through the expansion of industries, micro, small and medium enterprises, the private sector and the service sector. To encourage start-ups and self-employment, young people should be provided with accessible loans, seed funding, training, mentorship, market linkages and technical support. Skill development programmes focused on employment should be strengthened, particularly in areas such as information technology, artificial intelligence, digital marketing, tourism, healthcare, agricultural technology, logistics and entrepreneurship.

Since 2005, I have been providing free career counselling over the telephone every Saturday from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. to students and parents from different parts of Assam. During this period, I have had the opportunity to participate in more than 200 career-related workshops and discussion sessions, where I interacted directly with students on various career-related issues. In addition, I have participated as a resource person in

more than 150 career-related webinars. It has been observed that many students and young people in several parts of Assam still do not have access to proper career counselling and guidance. As a result, they face difficulties in choosing suitable educational or professional pathways that match their interests, abilities, skills and potential.

It is highly necessary for the Assam Government to make special provisions in the Budget 2026-27 for establishing one active Career Guidance and Skill Development Centre in every Legislative Assembly Constituency. Through these centres, students and young people can be provided with scientific, timely and reliable guidance regarding higher education, scholarships, competitive examinations, vocational training, employment opportunities, self-employment and entrepreneurship. In addition, these centres can help connect young people with local industries, agriculture-based enterprises, digital skills, emerging technologies and entrepreneurial opportunities. Depending on the need, services such as psychological assessment, aptitude tests, personality assessment, job-interview preparation, communication-skills training, resume preparation and digital job-search training may also be included.

Dedicated, well-planned and effective budgetary investment in these areas will play a significant role in building a skilled, confident, self-reliant and employable youth population for a stronger Assam. Providing the right direction, skills and opportunities to the youth is an important need of the time for the development of Assam.



NEEPCO Recruitment 2026 – 38 Executive Posts, Online Apply

North Eastern Electric Power Corporation Limited (NEEPCO) has released an employment notification for the recruitment of 38 Executive Posts in ERP, Corporate Communication, Civil, Security, Law, Safety, Finance, Medical and CSR, on Fixed Term Basis. Interested and eligible candidates may check this article for detailed official notification, educational qualification, age limit, salary details, and application procedure to be followed.

Last date submission of online application is 13th July 2026.

1. Executive (ERP)

Post Code: FTB/5/HR/49

No of posts: 2 posts (UR-2)

Age Limit: 37 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Full-time B.E. / B.Tech / B.Sc Engineering from a recognized university. Mandatory SAP certification in HCM module (SAP Certified Application Associate - SAP HCM or SAP Success Factors Employee Central). Additional qualifications in HR/Personnel Management (MBA/PG Diploma) are advantageous. Experience: Minimum 7 years of post-qualification experience in SAP ERP HCM implementation, support, or rollout, covering PA, OM, TM, Payroll, and ESS/MSS.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,66,000/- consolidated.

2. Executive (HR) (Corporate Communication)

Post Code: FTB/5/HR/173

No of posts: 1 post (UR-1)

Age Limit: 37 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Graduate with a 2-year full-time PG Degree or Diploma in Mass Communication / Journalism recognized by the Government of India. Experience: Minimum 7 years of experience in managing public relations/corporate communication function, media planning, content creation, branding, and knowledge management systems, etc.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,66,000/- consolidated.

3. Executive (Civil) - Grade 5

Post Code: FTB/5/HR/12

No of posts: 3 posts (UR-3)

Age Limit: 37 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Full-time Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from a recognized University or Institute.

Experience: 7 years of post-qualification experience in planning, survey & investigation, or civil construction works for Hydropower/PSP projects. Knowledge of CEA Guidelines for DPR preparation is mandatory along with SAP (S/4 HANA) proficiency, etc.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,66,000/- consolidated.

4. Executive (Civil) - Grade 4

Post Code: FTB/4/HR/13

No of posts: 3 posts (UR-2, OBC-NCL-1)

Age Limit: 34 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Full-time Bachelor's Degree in Civil Engineering from a recognized University or Institute.

Experience: 4 years of post-qualification experience in Hydropower/PSP projects, preferably in survey, investigation, and DPR preparation, etc. SAP (S/4 HANA) proficiency is required.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,45,000/- consolidated.

5. Executive (Civil) - Grade 1

Post Code: FTB/1/HR/21

No of posts: 3 posts (UR-1, SC-1, OBC-NCL-1)

Age Limit: 30 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Full-time Bachelor's Degree or a 3-year Diploma in Civil Engineering from a recognized University or Institute.

Experience: 1 year of post-qualification experience for Degree holders, or 5 years for Diploma holders in Survey & Investigation works of hydropower/PSP projects. SAP (S/4 HANA) proficiency is mandatory.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 71,000/- consolidated.

6. Executive (Security)

Post Code: FTB/4/HR/291

No of posts: 4 posts (UR-2, SC-1, OBC-NCL-1)

Age Limit: 34 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Graduate in any discipline recognized by the Government of India.

Experience: Minimum 9 years of security system experience in the Armed Forces (Rank of Captain / Major / Lieutenant Colonel) or Central/State Police Organizations (Rank of DSP / SP or equivalent).

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,45,000/- consolidated.

7. Executive (Law)

Post Code: FTB/4/HR/183

No of posts: 1 post (UR-1)

Age Limit: 34 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Full-time Bachelor's Degree in Law (LLB or equivalent) from a recognized Indian University or Institute.

Experience: 6 years of practice as an Advocate/Judicial Service, or within a CPSU representing legal matters. Alternatively, 9 years of experience in the next lower grade in a CPSU/Central/State Government department.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,45,000/- consolidated.

8. Executive (Safety)

Post Code: FTB/4/HR/83

No of posts: 2 posts (UR-2)

Age Limit: 34 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Engineering Degree in Mechanical, Electrical, or Production with a full-time Diploma in Industrial Safety. Alternatively, an Engineering Degree in Industrial Safety / Fire & Safety recognized under the Factories Act/Rules.

Experience: Minimum 04 years working experience in compliance with safety regulations under the Factories Act. Developing, auditing and improving safety systems. Promotion of safety consciousness amongst employees and examination of machinery, equipment and building from the safety angle. Experience in organizing safety training and firefighting would be an added advantage.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,45,000/- consolidated.

9. Executive (Finance) - Grade 4

Post Code: FTB/4/HR/257

No of posts: 6 posts (UR-5, OBC-NCL-1)

Age Limit: 34 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Graduate with CA/CMA, or a full-time MBA/equivalent degree with a specialization in Finance (minimum 2 years duration) recognized by the Government of India.

Experience: Minimum 4 years of post-qualification experience in the relevant financial domain.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,45,000/- consolidated.

10. Executive (Finance) - Grade 2

Post Code: FTB/2/HR/256

No of posts: 6 posts (UR-2, SC-1, OBC-NCL-2, EWS-1)

Age Limit: 30 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Graduate with CA/CMA, or a full-time MBA/equivalent degree with a specialization in Finance (minimum 2 years duration) recognized by the Government of India.

Experience: No separate post-qualification experience duration is specified.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 90,000/- consolidated.

11. Executive (Medical)

Post Code: FTB/3/HR/280

No of posts: 5 posts (UR-4, OBC-NCL-1)

Age Limit: 31 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: MBBS degree, preferably with a post Graduate Degree or Diploma in any branch of Medical Science, registered with the Indian Medical Council.

Experience: Preferably 1 year of experience in a large industry or reputed hospital after completing the internship.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 1,35,000/- consolidated.

12. Executive (HR) (CSR)

Post Code: FTB/2/HR/159

No of posts: 2 posts (UR-2)

Age Limit: 30 years (as on 01-01-2026)

Educational Qualification: Master's Degree in Social Work (MSW) or Community Organisation and Development Practice recognized by the Government of India.

Experience: Preferably 1 year of experience in CSR/Social Welfare works in any government or private organization, with experience working in an ERP environment.

Monthly Remuneration: Rs. 90,000/- consolidated.

Candidate belonging to General, EWS & OBC (NCL) category is required to pay a non-refundable Application fee of Rs 500/- (Rupees five hundred only). The SC/ ST/ PwBD/ ESM category and female candidates need not pay the application fee.

Interested and eligible candidates may apply for this exam through online mode by visiting official portal of NEEPCO. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for NEEPCO Recruitment 2026.

- Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
- Click on the "Online Application Form" .
- Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
- At the end, pay the application fee and submit the form.
- Don't forget to take a print out of the application form .
- Starting date of online application submission: 23rd June 2026
- Last date of online application submission: 13th July 2026

CSIR Recruitment 2026 – 100 Assistant Section Officer (ASO) Posts

Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR) has released the official notification for the recruitment of 100 Assistant Section Officer (ASO) posts in different categories. Non-recommended candidates of Civil Services Examination-2024 (CSE-2024) conducted by Union Public Service Commission are eligible to apply for these posts.

Interested and eligible candidates may check this article for detailed official notification, educational qualification, age limit, salary details, and application procedure to be followed.

Name of post: Assistant Section Officer

No of posts: 100 posts

Vacancy break-up:

- General: 61 posts
- Finance & Accounts: 18 posts
- Stores & Purchase: 21 posts
- Name of organization: Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR)
- Pay Matrix: Group B (Non-Gazetted) Pay Level - 7, Cell - 1 (Rs. 44,900 -Rs. 1,42,400)
- Citizenship: The applicant must be a citizen of India.
- Age Limit: Candidate age should not exceed 33 years as on the closing date of online application.
- Age Relaxation: Category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.
- SC: 5 years
- ST: 5 years
- OBC/NCL: 3 years
- PWBD: 10 years
- PWBD + OBC(NCL): 13 years
- PWBD + SC/ST: 15 years

Essential Qualification: Only those Candidates who are possessing a University degree and who are non-recommended candidates of Civil Services Examination 2024 (CSE-2024) conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, as per list/ details available on UPSC Pratibha Setu Portal; are only eligible to apply for the above advertised posts.

Application Fee: The category-wise application fee for various categories are as mentioned below.

Category	Fee
UR, OBC (NCL) & EWS	Rs 500/-
Women/SC/ST/PwBD/Ex-Servicemen/CSIR Dept. Candidates	Nil

Applications received in response to the advertisement shall be screened to shortlist the candidates to be called for Computer Proficiency Test (CPT) minimum in the ratio 1:5 (i.e. 5 times of total vacancies of ASO in each category, subject to minimum five), tentatively. The shortlisting will be made on the basis of total marks (i.e. Mains plus Personality Test) obtained by the candidate in UPSC's CSE-2024 (as mentioned in their Mark Sheet). The shortlisted candidates will be required to appear in CPT. Qualifying in the CPT is mandatory for further consideration.

Final selection will be made on the basis of total marks (i.e. Mains plus Personality Test) obtained in the UPSC's CSE-2024 subject to qualifying/securing minimum threshold marks in the Computer Proficiency Test (CPT), to be conducted by CSIR . Interested and eligible candidates may apply online for these vacancy through online mode by visiting official Recruitment Portal. Candidates may follow below mentioned steps to apply for CSIR Recruitment.

- Scroll down, go to Important Web-Links section .
- Click on the "Online Application Form" and a new webpage will be opened.
- Fill your all personal and educational details and upload necessary documents.
- Next, pay the application fee and submit the form.
- At the end, take a print out of the application form .
- Starting date of online application submission: 23rd June 2026
- Last date of online application submission: 13th July 2026

AIIMS CRE Recruitment 2026 – 1484 Group B & C Posts, Online Apply

All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) has released an advertisement for the recruitment of regular Non-Faculty 1484 Group-B & C posts at 32 various Participating AIIMS and Central Government Hospitals under Ministry of Health and Family Welfare through Common Recruitment Examination for AIIMS (CRE-AIIMS) 2026. Interested and eligible candidates may apply online here .

Candidates looking for a career in hospitality sector; i.e., regular jobs in AIIMS GUWAHATI, AIIMS New Delhi, Hospitality Jobs in Assam may apply for these posts. Last date for submission of online application is 3rd July 2026.

Name of posts: Group-B & Group-C

No of posts: 1484 posts

Name of exam: Common Recruitment Examination 2026

Advertisement No: 93/2026

Mode of application: Online

1. Assistant Dietician / Dietician / Junior Dietician / Warden
 2. Jr Administrative Officer / Assist Administrative Officer / Office Assistant / Assistant
 3. Data Entry Operator Grade A / Junior Administrative Assistant / Lower Division Clerk / Upper Division Clerk
 4. Junior Engineer (Civil)
 5. Junior Engineer (Electrical) / Assistant Engineer (Electrical)
 6. Junior Engineer (AC&R) / Assistant Engineer (AC&R) / Mechanic (AC&R)
 7. Technical Assistant (ENT) / Audiometer Technician
 8. Electrician / Wireman / Lineman (Electrical)
 9. Manifold Technician (Gas Steward) / Gas/Pump Mechanic / Supervisor (Maintenance)
 10. Assistant Laundry Supervisor
 11. Technical Officer / Technical Assistant / Technician (OT/Anaesthesia) / Operation Theatre Assistant / Technologist (OT) / Technician CCU
 12. Dispensing Attendants / Pharmacists / Pharmacist Grade II
 13. Cashier / Junior Accounts Officer / Junior Accounts Officer (Accountant)
 14. Junior Store Officer / Store Keeper / Store Keeper-cum-Clerk
 15. CSSD Assistant / CSSD Technician
 16. Dissection Hall Attendant / Hospital Attendant Grade III / Office/Stores Attendant (MTS) / OT Attendant / Cook / Dresser / Mortuary Attendant
 17. Junior Medical Laboratory Technologist / Lab Attendant Gr. II / Technician (Lab) / Technical Officer (Medical Lab Technology)
 18. Library and Information Assistant / Library Attendant Grade II / Librarian Grade III / Librarian Grade I (Documentalist)
 19. Coding Clerks / Junior Medical Record Officer / Medical Record Technician
 20. Personal Assistant / Stenographer / Private Secretary
 21. Counsellor / Medical Social Worker / Medical Social Service Officer / Psychiatric Social Worker
 22. Technical Officer (Dental) / Dental Technician / Dental Mechanic
 23. Technical Officer (Ophthalmic) / Refractionist
 24. Radiotherapy Technician
 25. Dark Room Assistant / Technician (Radiology) / Radiographic Technician / Sr. Radiographer
 26. Junior Perfusionist / Perfusionist
 27. Embryologist
 28. Assistant Security Officer
 29. Assistant Research Officer / Research Assistant
 30. Multi Rehabilitation Worker (Physiotherapist) / Junior Physiotherapist / Physiotherapist
 31. Driver (Ordinary Grade) / Driver
 32. Junior Medical Record Officer (Receptionist) / Receptionist
 33. Junior Warden / Warden (Hostel) / Warden
 34. Senior Nursing Officer (Staff Nurse Grade I) / Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANM)
 35. Caretaker / Sanitary Inspector Grade II
 36. Junior Physiotherapist / Occupational Therapist
 37. Junior Hindi Translator / Junior Translation Officer (Hindi)
 38. Nuclear Medicine Technologist / Nuclear Medicine Technician / Junior Physicist
 39. Bariatric Coordinator
 40. Yoga Instructor
 41. Programmer
 42. Plumber
 43. Operator (E&M) / Lift Operator / Mechanic (E&M)
 44. Modellar (Artist) / Artist (Modellar)
 45. Workshop Technician Grade II (R&AL) - Prosthetics & Orthotics
 46. Legal Assistant
 47. Junior Cardiac Technician / EEG Technician / ECG Technician
 48. Telephone Operator
 49. Hemodialysis Technician
 50. Statistical Assistant
 51. Deputy General Manager (Cafeteria)
 52. Junior Photographer
 53. Fire Technician / Security cum Fire Assistant
 54. Workshop Assistant (CWS) - Carpenter/Upholster
 55. Workshop Assistant (CWS) - Electronic
 56. Workshop Technician Gd. II (R&AL) - Upholster
 57. Workshop Technician Gd. II (R&AL) - Leather Worker
- Educational Qualification: Pl check official notification .
Age Limit: Pl check official notification .
Age Relaxation: The category-wise age relaxation is as mentioned below.
SC/ST: 5 years; OBC: 3 years; PwBD: 10 years
Application fee is to be charged group-wise. Candidates applying in more than one group have to apply separately for each group by paying the examination fee separately for each group.
- | Category | Fee |
|-----------|-----------|
| General | Rs.3000/- |
| OBC | Rs.3000/- |
| SC/ST/EWS | Rs.2400/- |
| PwBD | Nil |
- The candidate can pay the prescribed application fee through DEBIT CARD/CREDIT CARD/ NET BANKING. Transaction / Processing fee, if any, as applicable, will be payable to the bank by the candidate.
The selection process consists following stages:
Computer Based Test (CBT)
Skill Test (For Applicable Posts)
Document Verification
- Starting date to apply online: 13th June 2026
 - Last date to apply online: 03rd July 2026
 - Schedule of Computer Based Examination: 25th to 27th July 2026 (Tentative)

Ukraine unleashes one of its heaviest drone bombardments of Russia

KYIV, June 26: Ukraine launched a major nighttime attack on a dozen Russian regions, Russian-held Crimea and the surrounding seas, Moscow's Defence Ministry said on Friday, in what appeared to be one of Kyiv's biggest drone assaults since the Kremlin's full-scale invasion more than four years ago.

Russian air defences intercepted 660 Ukrainian drones, Russia's Defence Ministry said. The previous biggest Ukrainian attack over the past year, as Ukraine has accelerated its drone development, involved 556 drones on May 17.

In an effort to turn the tables on Russia's grinding war of attrition, Ukrainian long-range drones have been battering oil production and energy facilities behind the front line and deep inside Russia.

The campaign has choked Russian fuel supplies and military deliveries, stalling Moscow's efforts on the battlefield, Western officials and analysts say, and has heaped pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin.

A Russian chemical plant is reportedly hit

Initial damage reports from Russia after the overnight attack provided scant information. Russia's Defence Ministry usually doesn't say what was targeted in Ukraine's drone attacks, nor does it detail any damage.

Russian independent outlet Astra reported that a chemical plant and a hydroelectric plant in Novomoskovsk were attacked and caught fire. The Associated Press couldn't independently verify the report, and there was no official confirmation.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin reported that 47 Ukrainian drones were downed as they flew toward the Russian capital. He did



not report any casualties or damage.

Ukraine's Security Service said it used drones to strike Russian navy ships and air defence radars in Kerch, an important port city in Crimea.

The targets were two reconnaissance and minelaying ships, the Volga and the Vyatka, and the cargo-passenger ferry Petropavlovsk, the agency said, claiming that the strikes started a large fire. The claim could not be independently verified.

Zelenskyy hints at a 40-day blitz of Russia

The major attack came hours after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on X that he had ordered "a 40-day influence operation," believed to mean an escalation of attacks, aimed at "compelling (Russia) to end the war" after U.S. peace efforts over the past year yielded no breakthrough.

Ukraine has racked up a list of successful strikes, including hitting targets in Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Zelenskyy said he got further promises of foreign support when he attended a recent summit of G7 leaders, including from U.S. President Donald Trump, and that the promised aid will help Ukraine step up its effort to force Putin to the negotiating table.

A NATO summit next month could be another key moment in beefing up Ukraine's military.

Ukraine says 3 civilians killed and 20 wounded in Russian attacks

Two people were killed and seven others injured in Russian attacks on the northeastern Kharkiv region over the previous 24 hours, regional head Oleh Syniehubov said Friday.

Russian forces struck the city of Kharkiv

and 16 other settlements across the region using guided aerial bombs and drones of various types, Syniehubov said.

On Friday morning, another Russian drone attack on downtown Izium, a city in the Kharkiv region, killed a woman and wounded three other people, emergency services said.

Other wounded people and damage were logged in attacks in the capital, Kyiv, the southern Odesa and Zaporizhzhia regions, and Sumy in the northeast, with some of the Russian assaults using powerful glide bombs.

Ukraine's defences overnight stopped 174 of 189 Russian drones, the Ukrainian air force said. However, four of seven Iskander-M ballistic missiles that were fired got through air defences and struck various locations, it said.

No Russian military buildup seen on border with Belarus, Ukraine says

Russia is expanding several of its military sites deep inside Belarus, but there is no buildup of forces near the Ukrainian border, a State Border Guard Service spokesman said Friday.

Russia launched its 2022 invasion of Ukraine from Belarus, which borders both countries, and Kyiv has kept a close watch on developments there during the war.

Ukrainian intelligence units have detected no grouping or reinforcement of Russian units, equipment or personnel close to the border, spokesman Andrii Demchenko said in remarks to Ukrainian television.

However, Russia has a growing number of training grounds, bases, and other sites deeper inside the country, according to intelligence units. (AP)

Xi backs B'desh in upholding sovereignty, 'rejecting foreign interference' in talks with PM Rahman



BEIJING, June 26: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday expressed Beijing's backing for Bangladesh in upholding its sovereignty and "rejecting foreign interference", as he met visiting Prime Minister Tarique Rahman here.

Xi also voiced Beijing's backing for Rahman's government, which took charge in February, and that it stands ready to work with Bangladesh to carry out high-quality Belt and Road cooperation and further align development strategies, a press release by the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative aims to connect Asia, Africa and Europe through a vast network of railways, ports, highways and energy pipelines, essentially reviving an ancient trade route.

"China supports Bangladesh in upholding national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and rejecting foreign interference," Xi told Rahman, who wrapped up his five-day China visit on Friday.

"No matter how the world changes, China will not waver in its commitment to the overall direction of China-Bangladesh friendly relations", he said.

Xi also proposed the establishment of an economic corridor linking Bangladesh, Myanmar and China, aimed at further deepening regional connectivity and trade.

China supports the China-Myanmar-Bangladesh Economic Corridor for greater regional connectivity, Xi said.

The new corridor is a condensed version of the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor, proposed by Beijing in 2013, which failed to take off.

Rahman chose to visit Malaysia for his first trip abroad after assuming office. From Kuala Lumpur, he went to the Chinese city of Dalian on Jun 22. In the port city, he took part in a World Economic Forum event, where he made a strong pitch for Chinese investments.

He arrived in Beijing - the last leg of this tour - on Wednesday.

In Beijing, he held a series of meetings with senior Chinese officials, including Premier Li Qiang, over two days.

Rahman on Thursday was accorded a ceremonial welcome at the Great Hall of the People by Premier Li, after which the two sides held delegation-level talks and signed 13 memoranda of understanding - covering a range of areas including trade, investment and education.

Rahman also held talks with Chinese Water Resources Minister Li Guoying, earlier on Thursday, during which the two countries agreed to strengthen cooperation on the Teesta river management and other river projects.

China's involvement in the Teesta river management can potentially complicate Dhaka-New Delhi ties for its strategic significance.

The Teesta river flows from the eastern Himalayas through Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh, where it is a key source of irrigation and livelihoods

for millions of people. The Teesta river basin is located near India's sensitive Siliguri Corridor, a 22-km narrow strip of land that connects the mainland with the northeastern states.

However, Beijing on Friday chose to play down such concerns.

"The comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation of the Teesta River is a livelihood project the Bangladeshi side attaches high importance to", Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing here, responding to a question on New Delhi's potential concerns.

"China is ready to do what it can to support this project. I would like to stress that China-Bangladesh cooperation does not target any third party and should be free from third party influence", he said, without naming any country.

Elaborating on Rahman's talks with Chinese leaders, Guo said the two sides exchanged views on bilateral relations and international and regional issues of mutual interest.

Broad-based common understandings and a series of practical cooperation results have been achieved, which forms the new strategic planning for the development of China-Bangladesh relations, he said.

On his part, PM Rahman told Xi that China holds a significant place in Bangladesh's foreign policy, and is a valued and trusted partner of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh is firmly committed to the one-China principle, recognises Taiwan as an integral part of China's territory and opposes any form of "Taiwan independence", he said.

Bangladesh fully supports Xi's global initiatives and is ready to strengthen coordination and collaboration with China on international and regional affairs, according to the Chinese press release.

Mahdi Amin, the spokesperson of the Bangladesh prime minister's office, who briefed the media separately on the talks between the two top leaders, said they discussed Chinese support for modernising Chittagong and Mongla sea ports.

"We want to work on how this port can be developed into a regional hub that will serve not only Bangladesh but also other countries," Amin said, without identifying any country.

Amin also said, for the first time, Bangladesh and China have reached an understanding on a "2+2 dialogue" mechanism covering foreign affairs and defence, the state-run Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) news agency reported.

Representatives from the foreign and defence ministries of both countries will hold regular dialogues in future, and the details of the instrument are being worked out, he said.

However, there was no reference to a tripartite dialogue involving Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, which was initiated by the three countries during the previous Muhammad Yunus-led interim regime. (PTI)

Rubio hails US-Gulf Arab unity despite that region's persistent concerns about Iran agreement

MANAMA, June 25: US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said Thursday that relations between the United States and its Gulf Arab partners are rock solid, despite fears by some of them that they might be left out of discussions aimed at ending the war with Iran.

Rubio used a three-day, three-nation trip to the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Bahrain this week to try to convince all the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council that the Trump administration does indeed have their backs in negotiations to end the war President Donald Trump and Israel launched on Feb. 28.

That conflict sharply curtailed the region's oil exports and saw several Gulf countries take direct retaliatory Iranian missile and drone hits.

"They've shared with us some very concrete concerns, ideas," Rubio said in Bahrain, the last stop on the trip. "And when I say concern, the biggest concern is that they really just want to be informed every step along the way as we enter these negotiations at both the technical and political levels."

"We want them to be involved and we want the views of all these countries to be reflected," he said. "We don't want to and will not be making any decisions or commitments that in any way undermines the prosperity, stability or security of our Gulf partners."

While the U.S. and the Gulf council members — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates — eventually released a joint statement after the meeting that extolled areas of agreement about the end goals



of the Iran agreement, there were small signs of potential discontent.

The joint statement said the two sides "stressed the need to maintain momentum and unity as negotiations proceed toward a more permanent end to hostilities and the shared objective of preventing Iran from ever developing or otherwise acquiring a nuclear weapon."

They also expressed opposition to any attempt by Iran to impose tolls, fees, or assert control over the Strait of Hormuz. They welcomed an Omani initiative to create a safe lane to evacuate stranded sailors from the waterway and stressed that any economic benefit Iran might realize "is conditional and reversible,

contingent on Iran's compliance" with the temporary agreement and a final deal.

The joint statement painted a rosy picture, yet the council secretary, General Jaseem Mohamed Albudaiwi, suggested in a statement that doubts remain.

He said it was emphasized during the meeting that any future understandings or arrangements must incorporate the requirements of the Gulf council countries to safeguard their interests and ensure "their security and stability." His statement, released by the group, hinted that the Gulf council members felt snubbed in the earlier talks.

"Such arrangements must be based on the principles of international law, respect for state sovereignty, good neighborliness, and non-interference in internal affairs, thereby contributing to the consolidation of regional security and stability," he said.

Before Rubio spoke to the group, the meeting host, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani, said that while the memorandum of understanding is welcome, many questions remain outstanding.

"While this progress is encouraging, it is critically important that Iran fully adheres to its obligations," including under the memorandum, he said. He said that means preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon, preserving freedom of navigation, ending all missile and drone attacks, halting support for proxy groups and abandoning attempts to interfere with Iran's neighbors. (AP)

EU unveils plan to help bloc's overlooked islands, coastal communities

PAPHOS (CYPRUS), June 26: Improving transportation links, ending energy isolation and building more homes are some of the key initiatives the European Union's executive arm is looking to enact under a pair of first-ever strategies designed to help the bloc's islands and coastal communities flourish, EU officials said Friday.

Some 17 million people live in more than 4,000 islands across the EU, including three island members — Ireland, Malta and Cyprus. Another 95 million live along the coasts of 22 member states.

"Islands have been overlooked in the past, but now that comes to an end," European Parliament Vice President Younous Omarjee told a conference on strengthening EU islands and coastal communities.

The strategies aim to do away with piecemeal approaches to overcoming the unique challenges that islands and coastal communities face, offering a comprehensive approach, said Raffaele Fitto, European Commission executive vice president for cohesion and reforms.

Given their distance from mainland markets and dependence on air and maritime connections, the costs for transport, housing and public services are much higher on islands than on the mainland.

"This is what we call the cost of insularity — a cost that millions of EU citizens and businesses pay every day, simply because of where they live and work," Fitto said.

The strategy on islands is built around four pillars that aim to improve transportation links and digital infrastructure, tackle the effects of climate change and energy needs, address shrinking populations and housing shortages, and bolster security and crisis preparedness.

"From the Baltic to the Mediterranean, islands are on the front line of geopolitical challenges," said Fitto.

There are currently no details on specific projects that will receive funding. That will come from member states themselves, who will forward proposals once the bloc's new budget is unveiled. Fitto said projects such as desalination plants and housing will be among the priorities. (AP)

North Korea's Kim calls for 'destructive' military posture as South vows to boost drones

SEOUL, June 26: North Korean leader Kim Jong Un observed major weapons tests and called for the military's "deadly and destructive offensive posture" to be bolstered, state media reported Friday, as South Korea announced it would drastically boost its drone warfare capabilities.

The development comes as tensions remain high on the Korean Peninsula, with Kim pushing to strengthen both nuclear and conventional military capabilities while refusing to return to talks with South Korea and the United States.

The tests watched by Kim on Thursday were meant to evaluate the power of a "special mission" warhead for a tactical ballistic mis-

sile, an upgraded multiple rocket launch system and the hit accuracy of shells with an extended firing range of a self-propelled gun-howitzer, the official Korean Central News Agency said.

KCNA cited Kim as saying results of the tests proved the technological progress achieved in a push to bring about a change in the fire posture on southern border areas, implying the tested weapons systems target sites in South Korea including US military bases there.

Kim said North Korea's self-defence policy includes an objective to strengthen "the deadly and destructive offensive posture to make no enemy dare to confront," KCNA said. "To make the enemies

feel constant uneasiness and fear is just an important aspect of the exercise of war deterrent."

KCNA said the special mission warhead tested is aimed at "inflicting fatal damage on major targets including airfields, ports and power facilities of the enemy."

Later Friday, South Korea's Defense Ministry announced plans to beef up its drone forces, citing growing military threats by North Korea which allegedly received technology assistance from Russia.

The plans include developing long-range exploding drones, acquiring more than 20,000 low-cost reconnaissance and attack drones and training the country's entire 500,000 troops as "drone warriors." (AP)

Australia plans to strengthen laws banning children from social media

MELBOURNE(AUSTRALIA), June 26: The Australian government plans to strengthen laws that ban children younger than 16 from social media platforms, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

Observers said on Friday the government was responding to evidence that the ban on young children holding accounts on platforms including Facebook, Instagram and YouTube had failed since it came into force on December 10 last year. Australia was the first country in the world to pass legislation keeping youth off social media, but others have since followed.

Albanese told Parliament on Thursday this government was considering options to strengthen the ban.

"We're working on that as a priority because this is something that other generations didn't have to deal with, which is why it's com-

plex," Albanese told Parliament.

He told the Australian Broadcasting Corp on Friday the government was asking "are the laws as strong as possible?" and did eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant, Australia's online safety watchdog, "have every power at her disposal?"

Britain announced last week plans to ban children under 16 from a range of platforms to protect them from harmful content and excessive screen time.

Canada, Brazil and Indonesia have introduced legislation or announced age-based restrictions or requirements for children's access to social media. France, Spain, Denmark, Thailand and South Korea are among others studying or developing similar approaches.

Inman Grant said in April she was considering court action against Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube,



alleging they were not doing enough to keep young Australian children off their platforms.

These platforms, as well as X, Kick, Reddit, Threads and Twitch, face fines of up to 49.5 million Australian dollars (USD 34 mil-

lion) if they fail to take reasonable steps to remove the accounts of young children.

Melbourne's RMIT University expert on information sciences Lisa Given said the government's proposed reform was a response to

evidence that the ban was failing. The evidence included eSafety's own data released in March that showed seven in 10 underage children continued to hold accounts on Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok since December.

Given also pointed to a study published in the British Medical Journal on Wednesday that found 85 per cent of a group of Australian 12 to 17-year-olds were using restricted platforms.

"I do think it's failing," Given said. "Many kids in the media have reported that they also think that this is really a failed exercise."

The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper reported Inman Grant saying in an interview in early June: "I don't have potent powers."

"What I would say is a regulator is only as good as the tools and the resources that they're given," she is quoted as saying.

The Associated Press asked Inman Grant's office on Friday to comment on the accuracy of that reporting, but her office did not immediately reply.

Given said Inman Grant faced a challenge in enforcing legislation that platforms were resisting.

"Either the eSafety Commissioner needs more powers or we've got to have some other approach to enforcement," Given said.

Given expected the courts would need to decide what constituted "reasonable steps" required by the law to be taken to keep children off platforms.

Albanese said as part of increased efforts to enforce the social media ban, his government would proceed with digital duty of care legislation which would hold platforms accountable for foreseeable harms caused by content and algorithms. (AP)

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DGP expresses optimism that joint strategy would yield better results once operational

Northeastern states finalising joint strategy to crack down on drug trafficking: Nagaland DGP

KOHIMA, June 26: Nagaland DGP Rupin Sharma on Friday said police forces across the northeastern states are finalising a coordinated strategy to tackle drug trafficking...

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme on International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking here, Sharma said all DGPs and heads of anti-narcotics task forces from the northeastern states had recently come together to formulate a common approach against drug trafficking networks operating across state borders.

"In the past two weeks, all the DGPs of North East states and the anti-narcotics task force heads have come together. We are trying to develop a common concerted strategy for checking drug trafficking," he said.

According to the Nagaland director general of police, the coordinated mechanism will ensure that traffickers transporting narcotic substances across the states will find it increasingly difficult to

evade law enforcement agencies. "Anyone bringing drugs from Mizoram or Manipur to Nagaland will not be able to escape anywhere in the state or in Assam or other states. Similarly, those trying to procure drugs from Assam, Nagaland or from traffickers in Manipur will be under a better scanner of the police and law enforcement agencies," he said.

The DGP expressed optimism that the joint strategy would yield better results once operational.

"The strategy is already being made, but it will take concrete shape in the next 10 days or so, and we will see better results in future," he said.

Asked whether Nagaland won the battle against drug abuse, Sharma said progress had been made, but he stressed that the fight could not be left to the police alone.

"I think in parts of the state, we are winning the war against drugs. But it is not a war only for the police to fight. It is for everyone to fight," he said, urging citizens to actively support anti-drug ef-



orts. On measures to improve women's safety, Sharma said the Nagaland Police have plans to install facial recognition and surveillance cameras and CCTV systems in major towns to deter crimes in public places. He said cases of sexual assault are

often difficult to prevent when they occur within families or inside homes.

Sharma urged victims and their family members to come forward and report such incidents, adding that increased reporting reflects growing public confidence in law enforcement agencies. "It is an encouraging sign that people

are reposing their trust in the police and reporting such cases," he said.

Sharma warned that the state remains "highly vulnerable to drug trafficking because of its proximity to Myanmar and the Golden Triangle consisting of Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos in the east", urging citizens to work with law enforcement agencies to curb the menace.

Addressing a gathering after a 5-km anti-drug run organised by the Nagaland Police to mark the occasion, he said most narcotic substances enter Nagaland and other parts of the country through Manipur.

"We are very, very vulnerable to drugs," he said, adding that around 5.5-6 per cent of Nagaland's population is affected by drug addiction.

Calling drug abuse a growing social crisis, Sharma said addiction destroys lives and families and appealed to young people not to experiment with narcotics, warning that even a single use could lead to dependency. He assured drug users seeking help

that the police would prioritise action against traffickers rather than addicts.

"If you or your family member is a drug addict and you must come to us, we will not arrest you. We will use the information to catch those who are selling drugs. The users need treatment; the sellers are the criminals," the DGP said.

Sharma also urged the public to share information on drug trafficking, assuring complete confidentiality of informants' identities, and stressed the need to strengthen professional counselling and rehabilitation services in the state.

Earlier, the DGP administered an anti-drug pledge in which participants resolved to stay away from drugs, cooperate with the police in preventing drug abuse, spread awareness about its ill effects - particularly among the youth - and promote a drug-free, healthy society.

The anti-drug run, held under the theme "One Run, One Voice, A Drug-Free Nagaland - Choose Life, Not Drugs," began at High School Junction and concluded at the Police Headquarters in Kohima. (PTI)

Naga students' group expresses anger at Kuki-Zo apology issued for killing six community men

IMPHAL, June 26: An influential Naga students' organisation in Manipur on Friday expressed anger at the apology issued by the Kuki Zo Council over the killing of six Naga hostages in the state.

The reaction comes after Kuki Zo Council (KZC) chairman Henliethang Thanglet on Thursday apologised for the incident and called for an impartial investigation into all acts of violence linked to the ongoing ethnic strife in the state.

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

The Kuki Zo Council admitted the role of the community in killing the six Naga civilians who

were abducted on May 13 from Leilon Vaiphei village in Kangpokpi district. Their bodies were recovered on June 10 from the vicinity of a Kuki Zo village.

The recovery took place a day after 14 Kuki individuals, who were abducted by armed groups in Manipur's Senapati district nearly a month ago, were released.

ANSAM, the apex body of Naga students and youths in the state, also said, "The statement issued by KZC neither constitutes an apology nor an admission of the unlawful and inhumane crime."

It also asserted that "no apology can be deemed credible, sincere and acceptable until the perpetrators responsible for the abduction, torture, mutilation and brutal killing of the six innocent Naga hostages are identified, apprehended and punished in accordance with the rule of law." (PTI)

Nagaland govt calls for united fight against drug abuse, urges churches to lead rehabilitation

KOHIMA, June 26: Nagaland Social Welfare department Advisor Wangpang Konyak on Friday called for a whole-of-society approach to combat drug abuse, urging churches, community organisations and educational institutions to play a proactive role in prevention, counselling and rehabilitation, saying the fight against substance abuse cannot be won by law enforcement alone.

Addressing the observance of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking here, MLA Konyak expressed concern over the growing threat posed by drug abuse in the state and stressed that addiction should be treated as a public health issue rather than merely a criminal problem.

Referring to this year's global theme, "World Drug Problem: Persisting Issues, New Challenges, Innovative Responses," Konyak said traditional narcotics have been replaced by highly addictive synthetic drugs and technology-driven trafficking networks that increasingly target young people through smartphones and digital platforms.

He noted that Nagaland's proximity to international border routes has made the state vulnerable to illicit drug trafficking, with generations of youth falling victim to substance dependency.

Highlighting government initiatives, Konyak said the Centre's Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan (NMBR) has shifted the focus from punitive measures to demand reduction, counselling, rehabilitation and data-driven interventions.

He said the state government has intensified awareness campaigns through district-level NMBR committees, strengthened enforcement of the NDPS Act, tightened border surveillance and is working to expand de-addiction centres.



While reiterating the state's "War on Drugs" campaign, Konyak said government agencies alone cannot eliminate the menace.

Appealing directly to church leaders, he said churches possess unmatched moral influence within communities and should establish counselling units, remove the stigma surrounding addiction, support recovery groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, and strengthen youth mentorship programmes focusing on mental health and peer support.

He also urged mothers' associations, youth organisations, student unions and village communities to create drug-free localities through awareness, sports, music and skill development initiatives, while calling on teachers to identify early signs of substance abuse and mental health challenges among students.

Stating that "addiction thrives in isolation, but dies in the light of community," Konyak said the government, churches, civil society and families must work together to

build an effective support system for those struggling with addiction.

The Advisor also voiced concern over the recent cases of child abuse and sexual harassment in Nagaland, urging investigating agencies to ensure justice without delay.

Delivering the keynote address, Social Welfare department Secretary Limawabang Jamir said substance abuse is not merely a law enforcement challenge but also a public health, social development and family issue.

He said achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat requires a drug-free India under the Nasha Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan, adding that Nagaland's location near the Golden Triangle has made it particularly vulnerable to drug trafficking over the decades.

Jamir pointed to the growing challenges posed by synthetic drugs, digital trafficking through social media and encrypted messaging platforms, and the increasing link between substance abuse and mental health issues such as

anxiety, depression and unemployment.

Calling for innovative and evidence-based responses, he advocated early prevention in schools, digital awareness campaigns, tele-counselling, integration of mental health services into rehabilitation, and stronger community participation through churches, village councils, Hohos, mothers' associations and student bodies.

He also stressed the need to strengthen rehabilitation by providing vocational training, employment opportunities and social reintegration for recovering addicts, saying recovery is achievable through sustained community support and collective action.

Meanwhile, Mima village council of Kohima district was awarded the Suposhit Gram Panchayat Abhiyaan award, which is a ₹ 1 lakh incentive grant awarded to the top 1,000 performing Gram Panchayats across India that demonstrate sustained improvements in local nutrition and infrastructure metrics. (PTI)

Average income of farmers in Tripura doubled in last 10 years: CM

AGARTALA, June 26: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Friday claimed that the average monthly income of farmers in the state has doubled to ₹ 13,590 from ₹ 6,580 in 2015-16.

Speaking at a programme in West Tripura's Bamutia, he said the current dispensation takes proactive measures for the benefit of farmers.

"A farmer's income in Tripura has doubled from ₹ 6,580 in 2015-16 to ₹ 13,590 at present due to several measures taken by our government," he said.

The northeastern state produces 12 lakh tonnes of rice, 364 tonnes of wheat and over 17,000 tonnes of pulses annually, the CM said.

"Several initiatives have been taken to ensure the welfare of farmers who are feeding us round the year. Our government has started producing paddy directly from the farmers at an MSP of ₹ 23.69 per kg. It ends the role of middlemen," he said.

Saha said since 2018, the government has procured 2,61,227 tonnes of paddy from 2,35,356 farmers at ₹ 529.81 crore.

"A negative campaign was run when Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched 'Jana Dhan' accounts, but now the farmers and marginalised people are receiving money through direct benefit transfer," he said, adding that under the PM KISAN scheme, 2.13 lakh farmers of the state have received ₹ 46.35 crore in the latest instalment on June 20.

Saha appealed the farmers to register their names with the Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Department and procure unique identity cards to get the benefits of the double-engine government. (PTI)

Doctors' forum opposes ban on private practice in Tripura

AGARTALA, June 26: A forum of doctors has written to the Agartala hospital authorities, opposing the state government's "unilateral" move to ban private practice by the faculty members and medical officers of the health facility.

The Superspecialty Doctors' Forum, in a letter to Agartala Government Medical College & GB Pant Hospital medical superintendent Dr Bidhan Goswami, said banning private practice will "not improve healthcare standards" unless the underlying issues, such as manpower shortages and infrastructure gaps, are addressed.

The development came after Chief Minister Manik Saha justified the move that barred the faculty members and medical officers of the state's premier healthcare institution from private practice.

"We, the superspecialist doctors of AGMC & GBPH, strongly oppose this reform/order, in its present form as stated by a government representative in the media, formulated and brought forward without

adequate consultation with the stakeholders directly involved in patient care," the doctors' forum said.

The association also said that many of its members joined the service when no such restriction on private practice existed.

"We chose our positions with that understanding in good faith. Changing these terms unilaterally, without consultation, undermines the basis on which we committed to this service and also our ongoing enhancement of super-specialty services in AGMC," the letter signed by 14 doctors said.

"Banning private practice will not improve healthcare standards unless the underlying issues are addressed, such as manpower shortages, infrastructure gaps, ICU and OT limitations, support staff deficiencies, the lack of promotions and incentives," it said.

Asking doctors to resign if they disagree is "demeaning and disrespectful to the profession", the doctors' forum said. (PTI)

Four militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 26: Security forces arrested four militants from three districts of Manipur for their alleged involvement in extortion activities and recruitment in various proscribed outfits, police said on Friday. A member of the banned Sorepa was apprehended from his locality of Khunou Umathel Mathak Leikai in Kachhing district on Thursday, a police statement said. One active cadre of the outlawed KYKL was arrested from Wangjing Sabal Leikai in Thoubal district on Thursday, it said. One recruiter of the proscribed Prepak (Pro) was picked up from his locality at

Top Makha in Imphal East on Wednesday, the police said. An active cadre of the banned NRFM was held from Yairpok in Thoubal district on Wednesday, the statement said, adding that a pistol and a magazine loaded with three rounds of bullets were recovered from his possession. Meanwhile, security forces recovered a cache of arms and ammunition from a stretch between Phayeng and Kharang Koireng Tairenpokpi under the Lamsang Police Station limits in Imphal West district on Thursday, it said. (PTI)

Press notice regarding bids for installation of drinking water supply at Katabari Kali Thakur Namghar. Includes details on the award of 15th FC (Tied Grant) for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26, for A/A amount of Rs. 20,00,000/- (Rupees twenty lakh) only from the registered contractors of Class-II (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads) / (Building), BTC. Details may be seen at website http://assamtenders.gov.in and also at the Office of the undersigned during office hours. Sd/- Director, Panchayat & Rural Development, BTC, Kokrajhar. IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/689

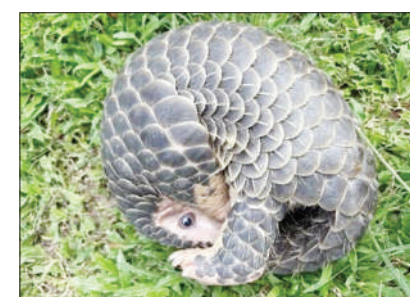
Rescued Chinese pangolin, civet cat released into wild in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, June 26: A rescued Chinese pangolin and an Asian palm civet have been returned to their natural habitat in Meghalaya's Nongkhyllam Wildlife Sanctuary following veterinary care and rehabilitation, officials said on Friday.

The two animals were released by the Meghalaya State Zoo in collaboration with the Khasi Hills Wildlife Division after being declared fit for the wild by veterinary experts, they said.

The Chinese pangolin (Manis pentadactyla), listed as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), was rescued near NH-6 at Nongpoh, while the Asian palm civet (Paradoxurus hermaphroditus) was brought to the zoo from Jaintia Hills after being found in a severely injured condition.

After undergoing treatment, care and continuous monitoring at the Meghalaya State Zoo, both animals were rehabilitated and successfully released into the Nongkhyllam Wildlife Sanctuary, according to a statement issued by the forest department.



Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and Chief Executive Officer of the Meghalaya Zoo Project Implementation Society, P K Agrahari, said rescue, rehabilitation and release programmes form a critical part of the state's conservation strategy.

"Wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and release are essential components of conservation efforts. The successful release reflects the department's continued commitment to wildlife conservation and animal welfare," Agrahari said.

He noted that the Chinese pangolin enjoys the highest degree of legal protection under the Wild Life (Protection)

Act, 1972, but continues to face severe threats from illegal wildlife trade and habitat loss.

"The species is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN and remains under immense pressure from poaching and trafficking," he said, appealing to the public to alert forest authorities whenever wild animals in distress are spotted so they can be rescued, treated and safely returned to the wild.

Pangolins serve as natural pest controllers by feeding extensively on ants and termites, helping maintain healthy forest and agricultural ecosystems, while Asian palm civets play a crucial role in forest regeneration by dispersing seeds over large areas.

The department also expressed concern over continuing pangolin trafficking, noting that the species accounts for a significant share of the global illegal wildlife trade.

In Meghalaya, around seven cases involving illegal smuggling of pangolins or pangolin scales have been detected over the past five years and booked under the Wild Life (Protection) Act. (PTI)

Short notice inviting tenders for construction of temporary structures for distribution of five guarantees of BTC Govt. Includes a table with 5 items: Construction of Temporary Structure for Distribution Ceremony of Five Guarantees of BTC Govt. at various locations. Estimated Amount: Rs. 9,95,300.00. Earnest Money: Rs. 19,906.00 (2%) and Rs. 9,953.00 (1%). Cost of Tender Document: Rs 500.00. Time of Completion: 1(One) Month. Details may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent upto 1.30 PM on all working days from 26/06/26 to 14/07/2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Bank Draft/ Demand Draft, duly pledged to the Principal Secretary, BTC. Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D. Kokrajhar Dist. & Chirang Dist. Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar. IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/650

'Horrific loot' of donations and offerings in the Ram Temple, says congress leader

Ram temple donation row: Cong demands SC-monitored probe, dissolution of Trust



NEW DELHI, June 26: Amid the row over alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple in Ayodhya, the Congress on Friday demanded a Supreme Court-monitored probe and the dissolution of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust.

Hitting out at the BJP-RSS, the opposition party said the "self-proclaimed protectors of Hinduism" have been completely exposed

with the revelations of the theft of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.

Congress general secretary K C Venugopal said that after using Ayodhya for their divisive politics, the BJP-RSS "looted" from donations of ordinary devotees and made a complete mockery of their sentiments.

On the one hand, the BJP wants to control registered trusts through

"draconian" FCRA rules, and on the other hand completely unregistered entities like the RSS are free to "loot and plunder" the temples of our country, he said.

"The Sangh Parivar's farce of being true Hindus is even further exposed because the FIR registered currently does not even name the trustees who were entrusted with temple funds. Instead, the UP Police SIT has only identified low-level office bearers without implicating those at the top of this mega racket," Venugopal said on X.

Only an independent investigation headed by a sitting Supreme Court judge will unearth the magnitude of this "temple loot", the Congress leader said.

Senior Congress leader Rajeev Shukla claimed there has been a "horrific loot" of donations and offerings in the Ram Temple.

Addressing a press conference here, Shukla alleged that donations collected from people with faith in

Lord Ram—particularly from villages and impoverished sections of society—were misappropriated, and that low-level employees are being targeted instead of the individuals truly responsible.

He said it is a matter requiring investigation whether a low-level employee could steal such a large sum by switching off CCTV cameras without the collusion of senior officials.

The Congress leader alleged that cash offerings at the temple were under-reported and that proper records were not maintained for jewellery offered by women. "This is a betrayal of people's religious faith," he said.

Shukla claimed that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) are attempting to take control of temple trusts and intend to use donations and offerings for political purposes.

He demanded a probe into the

entire matter under the supervision of the Supreme Court and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene and ensure strict action is taken.

Shukla also demanded the dissolution of Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust and its reconstitution to include seers, saints, and individuals associated with the religious sphere, replacing the political figures.

Eight persons named in an FIR over the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple in Ayodhya have been arrested, senior officials said on Friday.

The FIR, lodged at the instance of the Supreme Court and urged by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to intervene and ensure strict action is taken, was filed by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, following recommendations made in the preliminary report of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe the allegations. (PTI)

SIR completes one year; nearly 6 crore names deleted so far



NEW DELHI, June 26: The Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, which has so far led to the deletion of nearly six crore voters and triggered acrimony between the Opposition and the Election Commission, has completed one year as the poll roll cleanup exercise continues in 19 states and Union territories.

The pilot SIR exercise was commenced in Bihar on June 24 last year, ahead of the as-

sembly polls.

Post Bihar SIR, its voters' list was pruned by nearly 65 lakh amid allegations by opposition and activists that the poll authority was working at the behest of the BJP to disenfranchise citizens for want of documents.

In March, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the constitutional validity of the EC's move to carry out SIR. Individuals whose names

were deleted during SIR are being excluded from state welfare benefits in West Bengal and Bihar. Following recent state assembly elections, both governments announced that voter roll purification data is being linked to social security. SIR is now part of the NCERT's Social Science textbook, describing it as an exercise to ensure that no eligible citizen is left out and no ineligible person is included in the electoral roll.

In the second phase of the exercise -- announced on October 27, last year -- in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Puducherry, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Goa, the combined voters' list was pruned by 10.2 per cent.

The voter base before the

poll roll clean-up across these states and Union territories stood at more than 50.99 crore.

Post the exercise, the voters' list stands at 45.81 crore -- a decline of over 5.18 crore. In percentage terms, the electoral rolls have been reduced by 10.2 per cent.

As many as 66,88,636 deceased electors were removed from the rolls, with the maximum of 25.47 lakh from Uttar Pradesh, followed by 24.16 lakh from poll-going West Bengal.

Additionally, 63.16 lakh names were deleted following objections and adjudication during the SIR exercise.

The final rolls for the 12 states and Union territories were released on different dates, with Uttar Pradesh being the last to release the data. (PTI)

Japan PM Sanae Takaichi to visit India next week

NEW DELHI, June 26: Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi will undertake a three-day visit to India next week to explore ways to expand bilateral ties in a range of areas including trade, investment and defence.

At the invitation of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Takaichi will be on an official visit to New Delhi from July 1 to 3 for the 16th India-Japan annual summit, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday.

"The Summit will provide an opportunity for both sides to review and strengthen the full spectrum of bilateral cooperation as well as exchange views on regional and global issues of mutual interest," it said.

It would be the first official visit of Takaichi to India.

This visit follows Modi's visit to Tokyo in August 2025 for the 15th India-Japan annual summit and reflects the shared commitment of the two countries to further enhance India-Japan Special Strategic and Global partnership, the MEA said in a statement.

Following last year's summit, Japan set an investment target of 10 trillion yen (approx Rs 60,000 cr) in India over a decade. The two sides also sealed a raft of big-ticket pacts including a framework for defence ties and a 10-year roadmap to largely boost economic partnership. (PTI)

Gondia court sentences BJP councillor, aide to 5 years in jail

GONDIA, June 26: A court in Maharashtra's Gondia district has sentenced a BJP councillor and his aide to five years of imprisonment for manhandling a former MLA during a press conference in 2016.

District and Additional Sessions Judge A S Pratinidhi on Thursday found Shiv Sharma, a councillor in the Gondia Municipal Council, and his aide, Rahul Shrivastava, guilty of charges under section 325 (voluntarily causing grievous hurt) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The court sentenced the duo to five years' imprisonment and slapped a fine of ₹ 50,000 each. The court also acquitted four others in the case for want of sufficient evidence against them.

As per the details, on April 9, 2016, the then Congress MLA Gopaldas Agrawal was briefing reporters at a local hotel when Sharma, who was the former vice-president of the Gondia Municipal Council at the time, and Shrivastava entered the venue and slapped him.

Shrivastava also manhandled Agrawal and his son, who tried to shield his father during the altercation.

Based on a complaint, a case was registered against Sharma, Shrivastava and four others, who allegedly helped the duo flee. (PTI)

BJP targets Rahul Gandhi over foreign visits, says he is 'Leader of Paryatan'

NEW DELHI, June 26: The BJP on Friday alleged that Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is always in "constant vacation mode" and is frequently absent whenever Parliament, elections or his party needs him.

The ruling party claimed that Gandhi was away on "yet another foreign visit."

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla said for Gandhi, LOP does not mean Leader of Opposition but "Leader of Paryatan (tourism) and Partying."

"Rahul Gandhi should rename LOP as 'Leader of Paryatan and Partying' because that's what he always does -- partying, tourism and travel," he said in a video statement.

"He does not put people first, Parliament first or even the country first. He puts tourism first. During crucial periods, when the party requires organisational support, he runs away. During Parliament sessions, he runs away. Rahul Gandhi is on constant vacation mode," Poonawalla claimed.

The party spokesperson said the Congress leader may become the longest-serving opposition leader because he is "only on vacation."

"On the one hand, Prime Minister Modi has become the longest-serving elected PM of the country. For over 9,000 days, as chief minister and as prime minister, as head of government, he has not taken a single day off."

"This is called work mode, service (sewa) mode. On the other hand, Rahul Gandhi may well become the longest-serving opposition leader because he is only on vacation," Poonawalla said.

He alleged that Gandhi undertook "hundreds of foreign trips and tours" and questioned the funding of these visits. (PTI)

UCC to be implemented in Bengal by following all procedures: Suwendu

KOLKATA, June 26: West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Friday said his government would implement the Uniform Civil Code in the state by following due legal procedures, similar to the process adopted by Gujarat and Assam.

Speaking on the sidelines of a government programme to celebrate the 189th birth anniversary of literary icon Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay at College Street in north Kolkata, Adhikari said the state would adhere to the prescribed process for implementing the UCC.

"There is a procedure for UCC implementation, and we will adhere to that. This will be similar to Gujarat and Assam," he said, referring to the two states that have initiated legislative and administrative steps towards adopting a Uniform Civil Code, governing issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance.

The BJP government in West Bengal is likely to introduce the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the assembly on Monday during its ongoing budget session, much ahead of the party-stated six-month deadline, a source in the Suwendu



Adhikari-led cabinet said.

The matter was discussed and finalised in a Business Advisory Committee meeting held in the assembly on Thursday evening, he added.

The development could mark one of the most consequential legal and social policy shifts in Bengal in recent times, with the BJP holding the UCC as representing both a major governance promise and a politically significant reform.

Ahead of the 2026 assembly elections, the BJP had pledged in its manifesto that the UCC would be implemented within six months of coming to power in the state. The promise

was prominently highlighted by Union Home Minister Amit Shah while unveiling the party's election manifesto, or 'Sankalp Patra', in April.

"Several states, including Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Assam, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, have already implemented the UCC proposals. Bengal will now also implement it in line with other BJP-ruled states as we had promised ahead of the elections," a minister in the Adhikari cabinet said.

During the programme, Adhikari paid floral tributes to Chattopadhyay, the composer of the national song 'Vande Mataram'. (PTI)

Future of politics lies in 'we', not 'I': Pandian wife Sujata after joining BJD

BHUBANESWAR, June 26: A day after joining the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), Sujata Rout Karthikeyan, a former IAS officer and wife of ex-bureaucrat V K Pandian, on Friday said the future of politics lies in "we" and not "I", stressing the importance of teamwork and shared responsibility.

A 2000-batch Odisha cadre IAS officer, Sujata joined active politics on Thursday over a year after she resigned from the All India Services on March 13, 2025. She followed the path of her husband, who had resigned from the civil service in October 2023 and joined the BJD the following month.

Pandian, a close aide of former chief minister Naveen Patnaik, however, withdrew from active politics on June 9, 2024, after the BJD's defeat in the Lok Sabha and

Odisha Assembly elections that year.

While stepping away from politics, Pandian had said, "I will always keep Odisha in the core of my heart and my Guru Naveen Babu in my breath and pray to Lord Jagannath for their wellbeing and prosperity."

In a social media post on Friday, Sujata, whom Patnaik described as a "simple member" while inducting her into the party, outlined her political philosophy.

"The difference between 'I' and 'we' is not just a word, it's a philosophy of politics. 'I' builds personality cults, seeks personal credit, and concentrates power. 'We' values teamwork, shares responsibility, and puts people before politics. The future belongs to the politics of 'we', not the politics

Shah says amendments to NDPS Act in the works to plug gaps, seeks states' suggestions

NEW DELHI, June 26: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday said the Centre is "relooking" at the NDPS Act to plug loopholes exploited by narco syndicates and underlined the need for a ruthless approach towards drug peddlers and suppliers.

Addressing the 10th apex-level meeting of the Narco-Coordination Centre (NCORD) on Friday, Shah asked the states to share their suggestions with the Centre on amending the law.

The home minister also spoke about the success achieved by agencies in tackling the drug menace in the country.

"During 2004 to 2014, 26 lakh kilograms of synthetic drugs were seized. In contrast, from 2014 to 2026, we seized 1.18 crore kilograms of synthetic drugs. This shows that our campaign is steadily progressing towards success," he said.

Shah said the value of the drugs seized between 2004 and 2014 was approximately ₹ 40,000 crore, whereas the value of the drugs seized between 2014 and 2026 was approximately ₹ 1.84 lakh crore.

This reflects the remarkable increase in the effectiveness and scope of the government's actions, he said.

Shah said the Union Ministry of Finance is "relooking" at the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act to strengthen it and asked states to share their suggestions.

He said the directors general of police can send their suggestions to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the chief secretaries to the Department of Revenue under the Ministry of Finance.

During the event, Shah unveiled a three-pronged approach against drug trafficking -- detect, disrupt and destroy.

He said a ruthless approach should be adopted against traffickers and operatives and a sympathetic approach towards the victims.

The minister called for an approach based on four pillars of enforcement, intelligence collection and dissemination and operations; control against precursors and synthetic drugs; demand reduction and awareness among people; and capacity building, coordination and monitoring by the anti-narcotics agencies.

Shah asked the state governments to ensure real-time information sharing under all circumstances.

"For this, the Narcotics Control Bureau has developed several portals. I urge all chief secretaries and police chiefs to upload crime details for their respective states to these portals in a time-bound manner. This will enable the government of India to review these cases and provide you with necessary feedback and suggestions," Shah said.

He urged all chief secretaries and police chiefs to move towards making NCORD meetings result-oriented.

"The number of meetings is certainly increasing, but it is also essential that they are result-oriented."

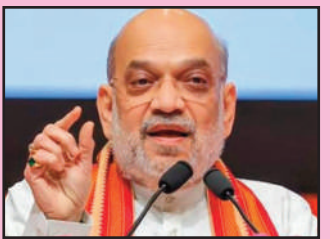
"Is effective implementation taking place of the decisions taken in the meetings? Are those decisions reviewed in the next meeting? Is there a rigorous and serious analysis of them? Efforts made at the state level in the direction of making meetings result-oriented alone can lead us to success," he added.

Shah said the country stands at such a delicate juncture in the battle against narcotics that the coming three years will determine "whether addiction conquers us or we conquer addiction".

"For the future of our nation over the next 100 years, we must collectively fight this with unwavering resolve. For this, all governments must come together on a single platform. We must also include seers who guide the public, youths who shape the future, and the power of mothers in this endeavour," he said.

The NCORD meeting brought together key stakeholders from 44 central ministries and departments, along with representatives from state governments and drug law enforcement agencies in hybrid mode.

The discussions focused on further strengthening the government's efforts to achieve a drug-free India. (PTI)



Transfer of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka another 'historic dark chapter' of Congress rule: BJP

NEW DELHI, June 26: The BJP on Friday criticised the Congress over the transfer of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974, calling it another "historic dark chapter" of the Congress rule and alleged it compromised India's national interests.

Katchatheevu is an uninhabited island in the Palk Strait. India recognised Sri Lanka's sovereignty over the island in 1974. BJP national spokesperson and Rajya Sabha MP Sudhanshu Trivedi said the transfer of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka marked another day in the Congress party's "calendar of surrender".

"Yesterday, we remembered the tragic chapter of the Emergency, and today marks another historic dark chapter in the Congress party's calendar of surrender. It was on this day in 1974 that the then Congress government ceded Katchatheevu, located near Tamil Nadu, from India to Sri Lanka. As a result, fishermen from Tamil Nadu continue to face numerous difficulties," he told reporters here. He also referred to the Saint Anthony shrine on the island and claimed that "even if people hoist the Indian national flag on their boats, they are not permitted to visit it."

Trivedi alleged that the Congress has a long history of "compromising" India's interests.

"The Congress party's calendar of surrender began in 1947 with the partition of India and its surrender before the Muslim League. It was followed by surrendering PoK to Pakistan in 1948, then the surrender of Aksai Chin to China in 1962. Assam too was almost surrendered, along with the surrender of Mansarovar," he said.

Referring to the transfer of Katchatheevu, he added, "That was followed by the surrender of Katchatheevu on June 26, 1974, and on June 28, it came under Sri Lanka's control."

"This is a tragic chapter that today's generation should remember. The manner in which the Congress compromised India's national interests is what this day reminds us of," Trivedi said. (PTI)



of 'I', she said.

She added that "'we' and 'I' are two words, two paths, and the choice defines our politics. The politics of 'I' divides, while the

politics of 'we' unites. A better future is built together. Let's choose 'we'. Let's choose Odisha."

Sujata further said that while "I" speaks of personal ambition, seeks credit for success and builds power for a few, "we" stands for shared responsibility, shared credit and opportunities for all.

Political observers said her choice of words appeared to be aimed at reassuring party leaders who had opposed her entry into the regional outfit, signalling her intent to work collectively and share responsibilities.

Though Sujata received a warm welcome at the BJD headquarters, Sankha Bhawan, on Thursday, several senior leaders who had earlier directly or indirectly opposed her induction were absent from the event. (PTI)

SIR now part of class 9 NCERT textbook, EC lauded for impartial polls

NEW DELHI, June 26: The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is now part of the NCERT's class 9 Social Science textbook, which describes it as an exercise to ensure that no eligible citizen is left out of the voter list and no ineligible person is included.

The new National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbook also lauds the Election Commission of India (ECI) for conducting impartial polls despite challenges such as fake news, misinformation and intimidation.

The SIR, which has so far led to the deletion of nearly 6 crore names from the electoral rolls and led to acrimony between the opposition parties and the ECI, has completed a year and continues in 19 states and Union territories.

The pilot SIR commenced in Bihar on June 24 last year ahead of the state polls. The result was a pruned voter list, with nearly 65 lakh names dropped amid claims by the opposition and activists that the ECI was working at the BJP's behest to disenfranchise citizens for want of documents.

"The ECI also conducts Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which involves updating, verifying and correcting the electoral rolls.



Through SIR, it ensures that no eligible citizen is left out and no ineligible person is included in the electoral roll.

"This exercise ensures the addition of all voters, especially the young voters who have just turned 18 and may be left out due to a lack of awareness of any other reason," reads a section of the textbook titled "Understanding Society: India and Beyond".

It notes that SIR also deletes names based on death of the voter, change of residence, duplicate enrolment and being permanently untraceable.

"EC gives time to raise claims or objections against the revised electoral roll and settles these claims and objections before publishing the final electoral roll," it said.

The old class 9 textbook, in a

chapter on electoral politics, had a section on voter lists, where it mentioned that "a complete revision of the list takes place every five years and this is done to ensure that it remains up to date".

The textbook revised in line with the new National Curriculum Framework also highlights the scale of India's electoral process and the ECI's role in conducting elections across the country.

"India's electoral exercise is unparalleled and distinct from those in other parts of the world with over 96.8 crore eligible voters spread across diverse regions and terrains," the chapter stated.

It further said the ECI manages this vast exercise autonomously and works to ensure elections across the country are conducted in a free and fair manner.

"Despite numerous challenges to conducting free and fair elections, the ECI tries to ensure that elections are carried out impartially at multiple levels," it said.

A dedicated section in the textbook titled "Challenges to free and fair elections" said, "In India, conducting elections for 96.8 crore voters with thousands of polling stations and hundreds of political parties spread across diverse regions and socio-economic realities is a challenging task." (PTI)

RAM TEMPLE DONATION ROW

All eight accused named in FIR arrested

AYODHYA (UP), June 26: Eight persons named in an FIR over the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple in Ayodhya have been arrested, senior officials said on Friday.

The FIR, lodged at the instance of Krishna Mohan, a member of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, follows recommendations made in the preliminary report of a Special Investigation Team (SIT) constituted by the Uttar Pradesh government to probe the allegations.

"All eight persons named in the FIR have been arrested and are being questioned as part of the investigation," the officials said on condition of anonymity.

Ayodhya SSP Gaurav Grover told PTI, "The accused are in our custody. They will be produced before the court following preliminary questioning about the case."

Those named in the FIR -- Avinash Shukla, Anukalp Mishra, Lavkush Mishra, Manish Kumar Yadav, Karunesh Pandey, Ramashankar Mishra, Subhash Srivastava and Ramshankar Yadav alias Tinnu -- were associated with the process of counting cash and valuables received as donations at the temple, an official said.



"All the accused were in Ayodhya itself and were picked up for questioning late Thursday night. Further questioning is underway. Police are preparing to present them before a magistrate," a senior official told PTI here.

The case has been registered under sections 306 (theft by clerk or servant of property in possession of master), 316 (criminal breach of trust), 317 (dishonestly receiving stolen property) and 61 (criminal conspiracy) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, among other provisions.

The controversy over the alleged embezzlement of donations received at the Ram temple surfaced on June 7. The Uttar Pradesh government constituted a Special In-

vestigation Team (SIT) on June 13 at the request of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, which submitted its preliminary report to the government on June 23.

An FIR was registered on the night of June 25 based on the SIT's recommendations, and Ayodhya police confirmed the arrests of the accused on Friday.

The names of some of the accused had been circulating on social media ever since Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav raised the issue on June 7, after which it snowballed into a major political controversy, with the VHP and the Aam Aadmi Party also demanding registration of a criminal case.

Subhash Chandra Srivastava was reportedly in charge of the

cash-counting staff, while the other accused were involved in counting cash, valuables or were associated with the process in different capacities.

Among those named in the FIR is Ram Shankar Yadav alias Tinnu Yadav, who is said to be a former driver of the Trust's general secretary Champat Rai. Tinnu denied any role in cash counting and blamed unnamed "jealous people" for the allegations.

Other accused, including Lavkush Mishra and Anukalp Mishra, were also allegedly involved in counting cash and valuables received as donations at the temple. PTI's attempts to contact senior Trust officials, including Champat Rai and Anil Mishra, for comment were unsuccessful. The three-member SIT was headed by Lucknow Divisional Commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant.

A senior official said the SIT had made "strong and strict" recommendations in its preliminary report submitted to the state government earlier this week and asserted that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was "very serious" about the matter, adding that anyone found guilty would face stringent action. (PTI)

Eight killed in truck-van collision in Jharkhand

RAMGARH, June 26: Eight people were killed after a coal-laden truck hit a van carrying a band party in Jharkhand's Ramgarh district, triggering a protest by locals, police said on Friday.

The accident occurred in the Barlaung Budhbazar area under the Rajprappa Police Station limits around midnight when the truck struck the van, a senior officer said. "Initially, seven people died in the accident. The injured, who was referred to Ranchi's RIMS for treatment, succumbed to his injuries during treatment, taking the total toll to eight," Rajprappa Police Station in-charge Krishna Kumar said.

Jharkhand Governor Santosh Kumar Gangwar and Chief Minister Hemant Soren expressed grief over the death of people in the accident.

"The news of the road accident near Lari-Barlong on the Ramgarh-Bokaro highway, in which many people have lost their lives, is extremely sad and painful. My deepest condolences to the grieving family members. May God grant them the strength to bear this hour of sorrow," Gangwar posted on X.

The CM wrote on the social media platform that he was "saddened by the tragic news of seven people dying in a road accident near Lari-Barlong on the Ramgarh-Bokaro road late last night".

"May Marang Buru grant peace to the souls of the departed and give strength to the grieving family members to bear this hour of sorrow," he posted.

Ramgarh Sub-Divisional Police Officer Alok Ranjan told PTI that six people were killed on the spot, while one died while undergoing treatment at a Ramgarh hospital. The bodies have been sent for post-mortem examinations, the SDPO said. However, Ramgarh Civil Surgeon Dr. Anil Kumar said eight people were brought to the sadar hospital, and seven of them were declared dead. (PTI)

Chaudhary instigated Goyal to eliminate her fiancée: Police

PUNE, June 26: The ongoing probe into the alleged murder of realtor Ketan Agarwal has revealed that it was co-accused Chetan Chaudhary who instigated Agarwal's fiancée Siya Goyal to eliminate him, a police official claimed on Friday.

In a related development, the Maharashtra government accepted the Agarwal family's demand for a fast-track court trial with noted lawyer Ujjwal Nikam as a special prosecutor.

"From the questioning of both the accused it has come to light that it was Chaudhary who instigated Siya Goyal to eliminate Agarwal at Lohagad Fort," a police official said.

Goyal's brother was also questioned in the case, he said.

Asked about media reports claiming that Goyal disliked Agarwal because he wore a wig, a police source said it was true that Agarwal wore a wig, but it could not be said that it was the sole rea-

son Siya did not like him.

Ketan's father Vishal Agarwal told reporters that it was true that Ketan wore a small patch of wig, and added that Siya and her family had been told about it before their engagement.

"...if she had any issues, she should have said no. What was the need to kill my son?" he asked.

Goyal (20) and Chaudhary (22), who were in a relationship, are accused of hatching a conspiracy to kill 25-year-old Ketan Agarwal who was allegedly pushed off a cliff at Lohagad Fort in the district on June 18. On Thursday, a Pune Rural Police official who is part of the probe had said that on reaching the cliff point, Goyal gave a pre-decided signal to Chaudhary who pushed an unsuspecting Agarwal to his death.

Meanwhile, Siya Goyal's mother has claimed that her daughter was reluctant to visit Lohagad Fort on June 18, but Ketan Agarwal and his mother per-



suaded her to make the trip.

"On the evening of June 17, Siya and Ketan had a video call, during which Ketan asked her to accompany him to Lohagad. During the call, Ketan's mother also spoke to Siya and urged her to go with him. Siya told her that she did not want to go trekking as there was a function scheduled for the following day and she wanted to rest," her mother claimed.

Speaking to reporters, Goyal's father dismissed reports that the family had booked a palace in Udaipur for the wedding and arranged a chartered aircraft.

"It is true that the wedding was to take place in Udaipur. The hotel charged around ₹ 81,000 per couple per day, and we had booked 70 rooms.

Our total expenditure on the wedding was not more than ₹ 3

crore," he said.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis met Ketan's father Vishal Agarwal in Pune on Friday, and assured that the government would ensure strict punishment to those responsible for his death.

The chief minister also accepted the family's demand to conduct the trial in a fast-track court and appoint Ujjwal Nikam as a special public prosecutor, said a release from Fadnavis's office.

Talking to reporters, Fadnavis said the incident reflected a disturbing social trend that required deeper introspection.

"We need to reflect on why educated young men and women from good families develop such criminal intent and desire for revenge. This is not merely a criminal issue, it also has a social angle. Society must create a strong support system to ensure such vengeful thinking does not develop among young people," he said. (PTI)

Kerala liquor policy to be decided after talks with coalition parties, says minister

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 26: Kerala Revenue Minister A P Anil Kumar on Friday said any policy decision on tax cut for low-alcohol beverages will be taken only after discussions within the ruling UDF and with the Congress leadership.

His remarks come amid controversy in Kerala over the government's proposal in the 2026 budget to cut tax for low-alcohol beverages.

The budget proposed a 120 per cent sales tax on drinks containing 0.5 to 10 per cent alcohol by volume and 175 per cent on those containing more than 10 per cent and up to 20 per cent.

The proposed tax structure has drawn criticism from the Opposition and some within Congress, who argue that lower taxes on low-alcohol beverages could encourage alcohol consumption and benefit private liquor companies. Senior Congress leader V M Sudheeran has also called for the proposal to be withdrawn.

Chief Minister V D Satheesan,



who holds finance portfolio, has maintained that the budget only provides the tax framework and that no final decision has been taken on marketing or sale.

Addressing the controversy, Minister Kumar said policy matters would not be decided unilaterally.

"If it is a policy matter, discussions are held within the front and among the constituent parties. If something appears to be wrong, it will be corrected," he said.

Explaining the government's position, the minister said when a new decision is taken, it will not be

unilateral as in the past.

"Any such decision will be made only after discussions with the concerned parties and the coalition leadership," he said.

Kumar further said that the chief minister himself has stated this on the floor of the Assembly, and everyone has heard it.

"If a stand has to be taken, it will be decided only after consultations with the party leadership and the coalition," he said.

Meanwhile, Thalassery Archbishop Joseph Pamplany welcomed CM Satheesan's decision to hold detailed discussions on the issue before taking a final call.

"The decision by the respected chief minister of Kerala to set aside time for a detailed discussion is a highly commendable one. We express our special gratitude to the CM for that stand," the Archbishop told reporters.

He said it was important that no one should appear to support or encourage substance abuse and that attempts to create confusion over the issue should be rejected. (PTI)

Three-language formula: Class 7-9 students can continue with existing combo, says CBSE

NEW DELHI, June 26: In a relief to lakhs of CBSE students currently studying in Classes 7 to 9 and who have opted for two foreign languages under the three-language policy, they will be allowed to continue with the same language combination till Class 10, officials said on Friday.

The development comes over a month after the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) announced that the study of three languages, including at least two native Indian languages, has been made compulsory for Class 9 students beginning July 1.

Several students and parents had approached the court against the CBSE order.

"The requirement of studying at least two Indian languages under the new language policy will be implemented prospectively from Class 6 and will not be applied retroactively to students already studying in Classes 7 to 9," a senior board official said.

"An official notification clarifying the same will be issued soon," the official added. (PTI)

Delhi HC denies bail to father accused of sexually assaulting daughter

NEW DELHI, June 26: The Delhi High Court has refused bail to a man accused of repeatedly sexually assaulting his own daughter for ten years.

The 17-year-old survivor, who was diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder, alleged that the assault began when she was about 6.

She approached the police in January after an incident, which led to an FIR under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act.

Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma rejected the father's contention that the minor's claims were unreliable on account of her psychological condition, saying that such a condition was associated with prolonged trauma and there was no reason to disbelieve her.

"Prima facie, therefore, this (the diagnosis) cannot be treated as a ground to discredit the allegations; rather, it may provide some context to the victim's version," the court stated in its judgement on May 5.



The court observed that the father allegedly threatened the girl not to disclose the assaults and therefore, her "silence" over a prolonged period cannot be termed unnatural or treated as a circumstance to doubt her version at this stage.

"In this court's view, the same appears to be a consequence of fear, psychological trauma, and her vulnerability as a minor, particularly when the allegations are against her own father, who was in a position of dominance and control," the court said.

Considering the seriousness of the allegations, the relationship between the parties and the possibility of the accused influencing or intimidating the victim or other witnesses, the court opined that it was not inclined to grant him bail at this stage.

Seeking bail, the accused, on the other hand, claimed that he was innocent and had been falsely implicated due to strained matrimonial relations and long-standing disputes between him and the victim's mother.

The court refused to accept accused's defence of matrimonial discord.

It said the minor's allegations disclose a continuing course of conduct over the years, and not merely a single incident.

"At this stage, there is no reason to prima facie disbelieve her version, and it cannot be rejected merely for want of independent corroboration or on account of prior family disputes," it observed. "The bail application is, therefore, dismissed," the court concluded. (PTI)

Govt proposes one-year residual shelf life for imported drugs

NEW DELHI, June 26: The Union Health Ministry has published a draft notification proposing amendments to the drugs rules under which imported drugs should have a minimum residual shelf life of 12 months at the time of import.

The step would ensure that patients receive medicines with adequate usable shelf life and improve utilisation of pharmaceutical inventories across the supply chain.

The draft amendment published for public consultation vide gazette notification on June 22 proposes to revise the existing requirement of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60 per cent for imported drugs to a minimum residual shelf life of 12 months at the time of import.

However, in view of their specialised nature and public health considerations, the existing requirement of a minimum residual shelf life of more than 60 per cent shall continue to apply to biological products and ra-



diopharmaceuticals.

The proposed amendment seeks to facilitate greater efficiency in the pharmaceutical supply chain while maintaining the availability of quality medicines for patients, the ministry said.

By ensuring that imported drugs have a

minimum remaining shelf life of 12 months upon entry into the country, the proposal provides sufficient time for distribution and consumption before expiry, thereby ensuring that patients continue to receive medicines with adequate usable shelf life, officials said.

The amendment is also expected to improve utilisation of pharmaceutical inventories across the supply chain by reducing avoidable wastage of medicines arising from restrictive residual shelf-life requirements.

This is expected to optimise supply management, reduce costs, and strengthen the availability of essential medicines in the country, they said.

The ministry said the proposed amendment pertains solely to the residual shelf-life requirement applicable at the time of import of drugs.

The proposal does not alter any other regulatory requirements relating to the quality, safety or efficacy of medicines under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940 and the Drugs Rules, 1945.

The ministry has invited objections and suggestions from all stakeholders on the draft notification. (PTI)

Toll rises to 15, rescue operations underway even after two days

KOLKATA, June 26: The toll in the Taratala warehouse collapse in south Kolkata rose to 15 on Friday as teams of multiple agencies, including army personnel, retrieved two more bodies and two others succumbed to their injuries while undergoing treatment, an official said.

The rescue teams continued intensive search operations through the rubble, two days after the warehouse roof caved in, he said.

Two bodies were recovered late on Thursday night, though their identities are yet to be established, he said. On Friday morning, two workers, Mannu Kumar and Sahil Sardar, succumbed to their injuries at the state-run SSKM Hospital, taking the toll to 15, the official said.

"Nineteen-year-old Mannu Kumar, a native of Munger district in Bihar, had been rescued from the debris on June 24 and had undergone surgery on Thursday night. Despite sustained medical efforts, he died in the early hours of Friday," the official said. His brother Ghi Kumar had died in the accident, while their father was undergoing treatment for injuries sustained in the warehouse collapse, he said.

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said personnel of the army and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have been working and will continue until the debris is cleared.

"I spoke to the NDRF personnel. They have indicated that if the weather remains favourable, the rescue operation may be completed by tonight," he told reporters. (PTI)

KOLKATA WAREHOUSE COLLAPSE

You will find them all if 'Welcome 4' is ever made: Akshay on Anil-Nana not being part of 'Welcome 3'

Anil Kapoor and Nana Patekar are like family and they will definitely return whenever "Welcome 4" will be made, says Akshay Kumar about the two veterans' absence from the franchise's latest entry "Welcome To The Jungle".

Anil and Nana essayed the fan-favourite gangsters Uday Shetty and Majnu Bhai in the franchise's first part "Welcome" in 2007, alongside Akshay, Katrina Kaif and Paresh Rawal.

The duo later returned for the second installment, "Welcome Again" in 2015 but Akshay wasn't a part of that film.

Akshay now headlines "Welcome To The Jungle", which is releasing in theatres on Friday. Beside Akshay, the

film will feature an ensemble cast that also includes Rawal, Suneil Shetty, Arshad Warsi, Disha Patani, Lara Dutta, Raveena Tandon and many more.

"Welcome" is a full family. This is Nana, Mr. Anil, me and all the people. This is like family. If "Welcome 4" is ever made, you will find all of them (in it)," Akshay told PTI.

"Welcome To The Jungle" is directed by choreographer-turned-director Ahmed Khan, who earlier helmed two "Baaghi" films and "Heropanti 2".

Ahmed said throughout the making of the movie, he was in touch with both Nana and Anil.

"We talked all the time. We used to call during the shoot (of

the film). Nana had just called and asked, 'How is it going? When will you show (the film) it to me? Tell Akshay that I am not available.' They keep calling and they talk. Anil sir called and said 'How is it going? And next time we will plan something'," the filmmaker said.

While the two characters won't be there in "Welcome To The Jungle", the film will introduce audiences to their siblings -- Yeda Anna and Romeo, played by Suniel Shetty and Arshad Warsi.

"Uday Shetty's brother is Yeda Anna and Majnu's brother is Romeo. They share the same bloodline. One thing that they have in common is the dream to become actors. You will like

Yeda Anna and Romeo as much. So, we have made it bigger. We made it younger and we have given it a different quest. Of course, you can't take away from them what they have done (Uday Shetty and Majnu Bhai)," he said.

"Welcome To The Jungle" revolves around a group of gangsters, criminals and quirky characters whose paths cross in a border-area jungle. What begins as a film-shoot-like operation turns into a series of absurd misadventures involving crime, confusion and action-packed situations.

The film is presented by A A Nadiadwala, Cape of Good Films and Star Studio18 in association with Seeta Films and Rakesh Dang. (PTI)



40-YEAR-OLD PROMISE FINALLY FULFILLED AS KAMAL HAASAN PRODUCES RAJINIKANTH'S 173RD FILM 'DHARMAN'



In what is being hailed as a "landmark collaboration" for Tamil cinema, the title and first look of superstar Rajinikanth's 173rd film, backed by Kamal Haasan as producer, were unveiled during a grand launch and puja ceremony on Wednesday. Titled

'Dharmam', it is being produced by Haasan's Raaj Kamal Films International (RKFI) and R Mahendran. Directed by Ashwath Marimuthu, known for 'Oh My Kadavule' and 'Dragon', the film features a soundtrack by Anirudh Ravichander, with Simran and Raashii Khanna playing the female leads. Speaking at the launch, Haasan reflected on his five-decade-long friendship with Rajinikanth and a promise they made decades ago. "About 40 years ago, during a flight to Bombay (Mumbai), we made a decision that we both should do a film together, where either he produces or I produce. That has been realised today," Haasan said, expressing gratitude to the industry and fans for sustaining them for over half a century. Rajinikanth credited Haasan for his unwavering support and encouragement since the 1970s. Speaking on how the project materialised, he noted the immense trust placed in him by the producer. "Kamal gave me complete freedom, saying he would leave everything to me and wouldn't even ask for the story.

That placed a huge responsibility on me," Rajinikanth said, adding that after considering multiple scripts and directors, they finalised Marimuthu. "It is a combined team effort aimed purely at success," he added. Director Marimuthu shared brief details about the film, clarifying that 'Dharmam' would be an entertaining, family-oriented thriller. He noted that Rajinikanth's character is a doctor with swag, and the film would carry a vibe reminiscent of both stars' respective blockbuster hits - 'Padayappa' and 'Vettaiyaadu Vilaiyaadu'. The ceremony was attended by prominent figures from the Tamil film fraternity, including producers Kalaipuli S Thanu and G K M Tamil Kumaran, and directors Lingusamy and R K Selvamani. Official shooting commenced following the customary clapping at the event. 'Dharmam' is one of two major projects reuniting Rajinikanth and Kamal Haasan after a long gap. The other is 'KH x RK', directed by Nelson Dilipkumar, in which the two will share screen space after decades. (PTI)

Mohanlal's 'Athimanotharam' set for Christmas release on Dec 24

Malayalam superstar Mohanlal has announced that his next feature film, "Athimanotharam", will make its debut in theatres on December 24.

The "Drishyam" star shared the film's first poster, which features him alongside actor Meera Jasmine, on social media on Thursday evening.

"His world begins and ends with the people he calls family," the 66-year-old actor wrote on X.

"Athimanotharam" will reunite Mohanlal with filmmaker Tharun Moorthy, who earlier directed the actor in the 2025 crime thriller "Thudaram".

The film is produced by Ashiq Usman, known for backing movies such as "Mollywood Times" (2026) and "Odum Kuthira Chadum Kuthira" (2025).

It has a screenplay by Ratheesh Ravi, the writer of "Alappuzha Gymkhana" (2025) and "Ishq" (2019).

The movie will feature Mohanlal as a police officer, while Jasmine will essay the role of his wife. Mohanlal was most recently seen in "Drishyam 3", the third chapter of his blockbuster "Drishyam" franchise.

According to reports, the actor will next make cameo appearances in Rajinikanth's "Jailer 2" and frequent collaborator Prithviraj Sukumaran's "Khalifa: Part 1", which will come out in theatres in August. Mohanlal also stars in Jude Anthony Joseph's "Thudakkam", which is scheduled to release during Onam and will introduce his daughter, Vismaya Mohanlal, as an actor. PTI



'Shrek' spinoff officially announced, film to release in June



Makers have officially announced "Donkey", a standalone spinoff centred on the beloved "Shrek" character.

Hollywood star Eddie Murphy will reprise his role as the fast-talking sidekick in the movie, which Universal Pictures and DreamWorks will release in theatres on June 30, 2028, reported Deadline.

The movie will serve as an origin story, exploring how the donkey became the fan-favourite character known simply as Donkey.

Charlie Bean, known for "The Lego Ninjago Movie" and the live-action "Lady and the

Tramp", will direct the film. Rebecca Huntley will produce, while DreamWorks story artist Matt Flynn, known for working on "The Wild Robot", "Puss in Boots: The Last Wish" and "The Bad Guys 2", will serve as co-director.

The announcement comes ahead of the release of "Shrek 5", which is slated to hit theatres in 2027.

Mike Myers will return as the voice of Shrek, Murphy will reprise Donkey and Cameron Diaz will once again voice Princess Fiona.

Actor Zendaya has also joined the cast of the fifth installment, which will be directed by fran-

chise veterans Conrad Vernon and Walt Dohrn.

Launched with the Oscar-winning original film in 2001, the "Shrek" franchise reimagined classic fairy tales through the adventures of the unlikely hero Shrek, an ogre who befriends the talkative Donkey and falls in love with Princess Fiona.

The film was a global box office success and became the first recipient of the Academy Award for Best Animated Feature.

The franchise has since expanded with "Shrek 2" (2004), "Shrek the Third" (2007) and "Shrek Forever After" (2010), as well as two "Puss in Boots" spinoffs. (PTI)



Kevin Rankin, Noel Fisher join 'Blood On The Promontory'

Actor Kevin Rankin, known for "East New York" and Noel Fisher of "Shameless", became the latest addition to the star cast of "Warfare" filmmaker Ray Mendoza's directorial "Blood On The Promontory".

The actors will join the previously announced cast, which includes actors Sam Worthington, Jai Courtney, Jack Quaid, Jaeden Martell, and LaMonica Garrett, among others, according to the entertainment news outlet Deadline.

The film follows convicts trying to escape through the mountains following a violent train robbery, while shackled together by foot. While on the run, they must survive both the unforgiving landscape and the growing mistrust between each other.

It is set in 1871's Wyoming. The details of the roles of the actors are kept under wraps. It is produced by Nina Yang Bongiovi, Paul Hadad, Glenn Kleczkowski, and Mark Gillard.

Rankin started acting with his role in the 1990's show "Unsolved Mysteries". He had his breakthrough in 2006 with his role of Herc in NBC's drama series "Friday Night Lights".

He last featured in the ABC crime drama series "R J Decker", which released on March 3.

Noel Fisher is also known for roles in projects such as "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" and "Hatfields & McCoys". His latest work is "CognAltive", which released in 2025. (PTI)

AR Rahman receives Academy of Achievement Award in Washington

Oscar-winning composer A R Rahman has been honoured with the Academy of Achievement Award at a ceremony in Washington.

The music maestro shared the news in a post on X and posted photos of the Golden Plate award that he received acclaimed filmmaker Peter Jackson.

"I am deeply humbled to receive the Academy of Achievement Award this evening. #Washington #peterjacksonz. Epi"

The Academy of Achievement, a Washington-based non-profit organisation, honours individuals who have made extraordinary contributions across fields such as arts, science, business and public service. Rahman, 59, is regarded as one of India's most celebrated composers with a career spanning over three decades across Indian and international cinema.

He has composed music for films such as "Bombay", "Roja", "Taal", "Lagaan", "Rang De Basanti", "Guru", "Jodhaa Akbar", "Rockstar", "Highway", "Tamasha" and most recently "Main Vaapas Aaunga".

Rahman has won two Academy Awards -- Best Original Score and Best Original Song for "Jai Ho" from Danny Boyle's 2008 film "Slumdog Millionaire".

The film also earned him two Grammy Awards, a BAFTA Award and a Golden Globe. (PTI)



Marijne returns with mission to rebuild India into top-eight team after Olympic setback

NEW DELHI, June 26: Sjoerd Marijne has returned to Indian women's hockey with a clear mission -- to rebuild a team that lost its way after the Tokyo Olympics and restore it among the world's elite, with the Dutchman saying the challenge of taking the country back to the top is what motivated him for a second stint.

Marijne guided India to a historic fourth-place finish at the Tokyo Olympics but stepped down soon after due to family reasons. However, he was reappointed as the chief coach in January this year after a disappointing 2025 under Harendra Singh.

And within months of his return, Marijne helped India regain their place among the world's top competitions, with the team qualifying for this year's World Cup after finishing runners-up at the FIH Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad in March.

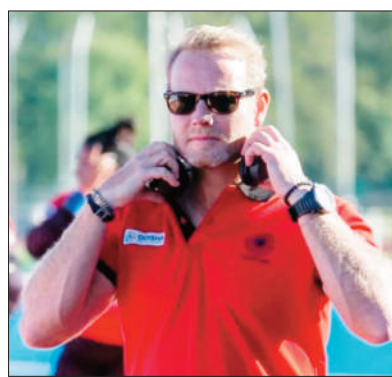
India then secured promotion back to

the elite FIH Pro League next year by winning the recently concluded FIH Nations Cup in New Zealand.

"What motivated me is that the girls wanted me back and that's the first thing. The second thing is that this was just the right moment for me because I felt I need a challenge and the challenge was there because they didn't do well and couldn't qualify for the Olympics, so I felt if I step in, bring back that happiness that would be a big thing and that motivates me daily to get them back at the Olympics," Marijne told PTI in an exclusive interview.

"These were the positives things why I returned and I also saw there is a lot of talent and I the first thing which I did was bring back a lot of players. There were 14 girls who were injured, we brought them back because the qualification for the World Cup was important."

The Dutchman said rebuilding the team culture was among his first priori-



ties after taking charge, stressing that discipline, communication and collective responsibility are essential for success at the highest level.

"There is very open, safe environment where players can be themselves, create a culture of positivity, talking about team and not about individuals. Players need

to talk to each other and not about each other. For me good behaviour is no.1, doesn't matter if you are the best player in the world or not and only that way we can become a team.

"Good behaviour is about discipline, if you are not doing your task inside the pitch and get irritated... irritations lead to bad team culture and that's what we want to avoid and get out of the team," Marijne said.

Marijne said world no. 9 India now need to take the next step and prove they belong among the top eight teams in the world at the upcoming World Cup and Asian Games.

"I don't know what to expect, we have proven in the last few months we are the best from no.9 to 20 of the world. We have won the World Cup qualifier and now we won the Nations Cup but now is to take the next step, to be the best in top 8 and that is a huge step and there will be

ups and downs because you need to learn to win big matches.

"The challenge is to see where we are. I am also curious and I think we can win against top 8 teams and we shouldn't be afraid about any teams in the world," he said.

"China is a very good team and will not be an easy team to take. We will play the first match against them in the World Cup, so we will know more about the level we are against them. We can compete with every team in the world but it's about moments to make use of your chances."

Marijne said improving India's field-goal scoring ability along with maintaining their penalty corner efficiency will be crucial ahead of the global events.

"That (field goals) is something which you can address in training and depends upon the quality of players. In Nations Cup we had a high percentage of goals

from PCs but it will be perfect when we will have combination of both, pc and field goals. It's not a concern for me but one thing which we surely can improve.

"We now have 4 weeks of camp and then we go to Germany and then Netherlands and the World Cup. We want to perform at the World Cup because we want to improve with every match. Our focus is on ourselves. With every match this team will learn and improve."

Marijne is looking at the World Cup, to be held in Belgium and the Netherlands from August 15 to 30, as an important preparation step for the Asian Games, which will be a qualifier for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

"We are looking at the World Cup to perform and that performance will help us at the Asian Games and we want to win the Asian Games for Olympics qualification. The World Cup will help us at the Asian Games." (PTI)

JUNIOR SHOOTING WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

India rules rifle and pistol, draws a blank in shotgun

SUHL (GERMANY), June 26: Indian shooters topped the medals tally the ISSF Junior World Championship with seven gold, finishing the campaign in style through outstanding performances in the pistol and rifle events, despite drawing a blank in shotgun.

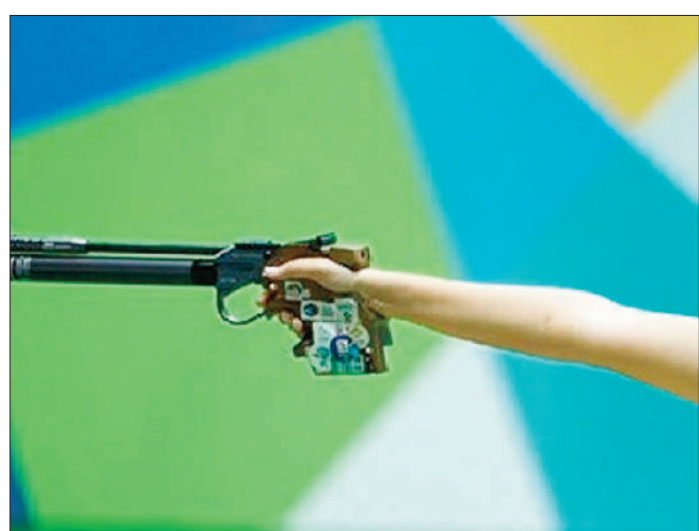
India finished with 24 medals -- seven gold, eight silver and nine bronze -- to top the standings, ahead of the Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN), who claimed 14 medals, including six gold, while powerhouse Italy finished third with 10 medals, also featuring six gold.

India's campaign got off to a flying start as Sejal Kamble won the women's 10m air pistol gold, while Himanshi claimed bronze.

A third Indian, Vanshika Chaudhary, suffered a bizarre heartbreak after failing to fire her final shot while in contention for gold and a possible junior world record, apparently due to confusion during the closing moments of the final.

That would have given India a rare clean sweep of the podium.

The trio of Sejal, Vanshika and Navya Bishnoi then claimed gold in the team event to give India an early lead in the championship. India continued to remain on course as Sameer won gold in the men's 25m rapid fire pistol event and Rohit Kanyan emerged victorious in the



men's 50m rifle 3-positions competition. Prachi Gaikwad added a silver in the women's 50m rifle 3-positions event, while India picked up bronze medals in the men's 50m rifle 3-positions team and men's 25m rapid fire pistol team events.

India's medal surge continued with Anvii Rathod claiming bronze in the women's 10m air rifle before Pritam Kendre struck gold in the men's 10m air rifle.

However, India also endured disappointment in the women's 10m air rifle team event, where Shamb-

havi Shrivani Kshirsagar was disqualified for violating the International Shooting Sport Federation's (ISSF) apparel stiffness regulations. The rule governs the stiffness and flexibility of shooting jackets and trousers, and failure to clear the mandatory equipment test results in immediate disqualification.

India's final medal tally could have been even more impressive had Vanshika not missed her final shot while in contention for gold and a possible junior world record, and had Shambhavi not been disqualified.

India also claimed bronze in the men's and women's 25m pistol team events. In the men's 10m air pistol, Shiva Narwal won silver while Yug Pratap Singh Rathore took bronze to complete a double podium finish for the country.

Narwal then teamed up with Sandeep Bishnoi and Chirag Sharma to secure silver in the men's team event before partnering Vanshika Chaudhary for another silver in the 10m air pistol mixed team competition.

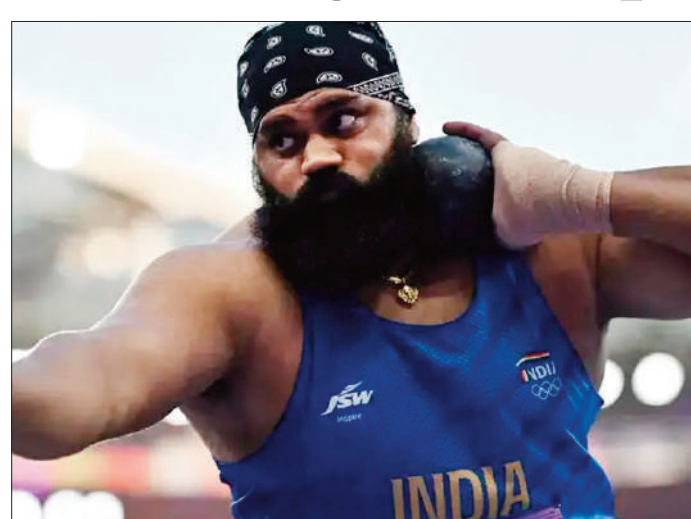
Despite their dominance in rifle and pistol, India's long-standing struggles in shotgun persisted.

The country failed to win a single medal in the men's and women's trap, skeet and mixed team events, exposing a glaring weakness that is likely to concern the National Rifle Association of India ahead of future international competitions.

The men's trap and skeet shooters endured a particularly disappointing campaign, with none progressing to the eight-shooter finals and the teams finishing well down the standings.

In the women's events, Bhavya Tripathi reached the trap final but finished eighth, while Rishan Guron was placed seventh after qualifying for the skeet final. India also failed to qualify for the trap mixed team final. (PTI)

Toor targets elusive 22m mark following CWG qualification



NEW DELHI, June 26: A bout of food poisoning threatened to derail Tajinderpal Singh Toor's bid to qualify for the 2026 Commonwealth Games, but the seasoned shot putter refused to let the setback define his season.

Weeks after a disappointing outing in Ranchi, where illness robbed him of the chance to compete at his best, the 31-year-old bounced back by clearing the Commonwealth Games 2026 qualification standard with a 20.72m throw at the Indian Athletics Series-9 in Ludhiana.

For Toor, India's most accomplished shot putter, the throw was more than just another qualification mark. It marked a return to rhythm after two injury-plagued years and reinforced his belief that the long-awaited 22-metre barrier is finally within reach.

A two-time Asian Games champion and a two-time Olympian, Toor has dominated Indian shot put for nearly a decade.

The national record holder with a personal best of 21.77m also owns the Asian Games record and had briefly held the Asian record before it was surpassed. Yet, despite a glittering resume, the Punjab thrower believes his best may still be ahead.

"Before Ranchi, I was throwing well in training. But when I reached Ranchi, I suffered food poisoning after eating chicken from the hotel. I was vomiting, had low energy, and my whole body was affected. Because of that, I couldn't throw my best there," Toor told PTI.

The setback was particularly frustrating because he had already achieved the qualifying distance multiple times in training.

"I requested the officials for another opportunity because I knew I was throwing well. I had already crossed the qualification mark two

or three times in training, throwing around 20.51m and 21.05m. Eventually, I qualified in Ludhiana," he said.

The Ludhiana meet itself threw up another challenge as the floodlights went off during the competition, but Toor said the conditions were manageable for shot put athletes.

"Our event doesn't cover that much distance, so we didn't face too many problems. It would have been much more difficult in events like discus or javelin, where the implement travels much farther," he said.

However, there were already signs that Toor was returning to his best. Earlier this season, the national record holder registered a season-best effort of 21.03m at the Indian Athletics Series-3, his first 21m-plus throw after battling injuries over the last two years.

The reigning Asian Games champion was slowly rediscovering his rhythm, a relief after recently being pushed to second place at the National Federation Senior Athletics Championships by the emerging Samardeep Singh Gill.

Fellow Punjab thrower Karanveer Singh has also established himself as a consistent 20m-plus athlete, underlining the growing depth in Indian men's shot put.

Having now secured the Commonwealth Games qualification standard, Toor has shifted his focus to breaching the elusive 22-metre barrier while also reclaiming the Asian record.

The continental mark of 21.80m, currently held by Saudi Arabia's Mohammed Tolo, is firmly in his sights. With the world record standing at 23.56m and his own personal best at 21.77m, Toor believes this could finally be the season when he reaches another level.

"I feel that if this year goes well, I can achieve my personal best and cross 22 metres. The previous couple of years were affected by injuries, so I believe this is the year I can break that barrier," he said.

The confidence stems from encouraging training numbers and a body that finally feels capable of withstanding the demands of elite competition.

"My jumping, weight training, throwing sessions, everything is going well. If I stay injury-free, then with God's grace, I believe this year I can achieve it," he said.

Toor also revealed that shedding nearly 15 kilograms has transformed both his movement and durability.

"I have reduced my body weight by around 15 kilograms. That has helped me a lot. The small injuries I used to get have reduced, and I've been able to train consistently," he said.

Despite being among India's leading medal hopes for next year's Commonwealth Games, Toor is keeping his expectations simple and refusing to burden himself with medal calculations.

"My first target is simply to throw beyond 21 metres. I don't want to put unnecessary pressure on myself. If possible, I'd like to challenge the national record," he said.

Far from feeling threatened by the emergence of younger throwers, Toor said he wants to leave behind a stronger legacy by raising the benchmark in Indian shot put.

He believes the rise of athletes such as Samardeep Singh Gill and Karanveer Singh is a healthy sign for the event, much like Neeraj Chopra's success has inspired a new generation of Indian javelin throwers.

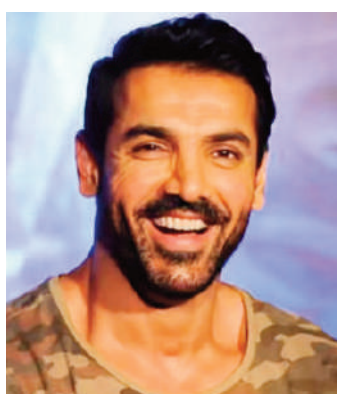
"My target is to open the 22-metre barrier for the younger generation. Even if they don't immediately reach 22, they'll consistently throw beyond 21. Athletes like Samardeep and Karanveer are already throwing over 20 metres. Karanveer recently threw 20.50m in training."

"If our event keeps progressing like this, it will be great for Indian athletics. Just like Neeraj has opened the 90-metre barrier in javelin, now you see so many Indians consistently throwing beyond 80 metres," he said.

Even after conquering almost every major title in Asia, one ambition continues to drive him.

"I still have the desire to break the Asian record again. Hopefully, with God's grace, it will happen this time," Toor signed off. (PTI)

John Abraham becomes co-owner in ETPL's Rotterdam Dockers



ROTTERDAM, June 26: Bollywood actor John Abraham has become a co-owner in the Rotterdam Dockers, one of the six franchise teams that will compete in the inaugural European T20 Premier League from August 26 to September 20.

Abraham joins a leadership group comprising cricketing greats Jonty Rhodes, Faf du Plessis and Heinrich Klaasen, alongside Managing Partner Madhukar Shree.

The ETPL will bring together six city-based franchises representing Glasgow, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Dublin, Belfast and Rotterdam.

Featuring 32 matches, the tournament is aimed at accelerating the growth and development of the game across Ireland, Scotland and the Netherlands, according to the organisers.

"Cricket has the power to inspire, unite and create opportunities, and that's exactly what excites me about the European T20 Premier League. Europe represents one of cricket's most exciting growth markets, and Rotterdam Dockers has the vision, leadership and ambition to build something truly special," said Abraham.

Welcoming Abraham to the Rotterdam Dockers, Abhishek Bachchan, Co-Founder of ETPL, said: "John's passion for sport and his track record as a sports entrepreneur make him a fantastic addition to the Rotterdam Dockers' ownership group."

The ETPL franchise ownership group includes stalwarts like Steve Waugh, Rahul Dravid, Jonty Rhodes, Matthew Hayden, Faf du Plessis and Heinrich Klaasen, among others. (PTI)

Race walk foreign coach urges AFI to take tough weather conditions into account in Asiad selection

BUBANESWAR, June 26: India's race walk foreign coach Ronald Weigel, on Friday, urged the national selectors to account for the extremely humid conditions in which the half marathon event at the National Inter-State Championships was held while picking the team for the upcoming Asian Games in Japan.

Weigel, who took charge as national race walking coach in March last year, also suggested that in future such selection events ahead of prestigious multi-sporting events should be held as stand alone competitions or at venues where weather would be less punishing.

"The tough weather conditions affect the athletes a lot, a lot of minutes. Look, I'm sweating, I have to change my shirt. We have 94 per cent humidity," Weigel told PTI after his ward Munira Prajapati won the women's half marathon (21.098km) race walk event with a time of one hour, 45 minutes and five seconds.

"For example, in the 2019 Doha World Championships, (because of warm conditions) the best walkers in the 20km event clocked 10 minutes slower compared to a normal race. So, the officials have to understand that in this condition, endurance athletes cannot compete fast."

"With these conditions, slower timings, the first and second placed athletes can be selected for the Asian Games. That would be a good and fair solution," said the German who is currently based at the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre in Bengaluru. The Indian athletics team for the Asian Games is expected to be announced on Sunday, the last day of the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships.

Prajapati's winning time was far below the Asian Games qualifying mark of 1:37:20 set by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI). In fact, the qualifying time is tougher than the national record of 1:39:15, achieved by Ravina while winning the Indian Race Walking Championships in Chandigarh in February. (PTI)

'Pride Match' organisers highlight Seattle's inclusivity

SEATTLE, June 26: Seattle's stadium is expected to be brimming with rainbow flags on Friday for a World Cup match between teams representing two of the most representative countries for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

It was just a coincidence that the city's "Pride Match" ended up as a high-stakes matchup between Iran and Egypt -- with advancement from Group G still up in the air -- and the move has come with plenty of pushback from both countries. But Seattle officials and its soccer community say this distinctive pairing is an opportunity to showcase the city's inclusivity as well as the common ground that can be found at the World Cup. Jess Fishlock, captain of the National Women's Soccer League club Seattle Reign, said this is what the World Cup is all about.

"I don't think there is a sport that has a global event that creates unity and diversity and a bringing together of so many cultures quite like the World Cup," she told The Associated Press on Thursday. "I think we get to see that firsthand at the Pride Match." (AP)

No money to buy proper equipment, Sindhushree used borrowed pole to break national record

BHUBANESWAR, June 26: National record-breaking pole vaulter G Sindhushree lacked the funds to buy proper equipment after her father's death in 2022, forcing her to compete with shorter poles until she borrowed a longer one just two weeks before the National Inter-State Championships here.

Using her friend's gear, unheralded Sindhushree from Karnataka set an unexpected national record, clinching the gold medal and also a ticket to the Asian Games. The 25-year-old, hailing from a family of modest means at Bhadravati in Shimoga district, cleared 4.25m to better Tamil Nadu athlete Baranica Elangovan's one-month old previous national record of 4.20m.

"My father died in 2022 due to heart attack. What I achieved today is all because of my father. Every morning, he would take me for running and he wanted me to play for the country in international events. I am going to fulfil his dream with the Asian Games (participation)," said Sindhushree, holding a photo of her father.

"I qualified for the World University Games but my father was not there to



watch me. I am the first one doing sports in my family, other members do want to send a girl to sports. My father would want

all of them and so I joined SAI hostel in Bengaluru in 2016. I started my sports journey at that time."

Her father, R Ganesh, was an electrician and her mother does tailoring.

"Since my mother is looking after my younger sister's study, my grandfather is supporting me financially," said an emotional Sindhushree who dedicated his gold and expected ticket to the Asian Games to her father. "I have no sponsors, no job and it's difficult to manage. I was searching for a job but could not find as my performance was not coming. I am hoping to get a job after this performance. I need to help my family," said the diminutive pole vaulter who stands at 159cm (5 feet two-and-half inches).

Sindhushree bettered her personal best by 25cm. Her earlier personal best was 4m during the Indian Athletics Series 6 in Chennai in May. She has won just one medal in a major domestic championships so far -- a silver in 2023 National Inter-State Championships at the same venue here with a performance of 3.80m.

The financial struggles meant that she could not even buy a proper pole for herself for competition. She was using a shorter pole before coming here.

"I didn't have a proper pole earlier. All the

poles were shorter and they have become loose after competitions. I did training and learned techniques with shorter poles, that was why I could not do well in earlier competitions like the Federation Cup.

"Luckily, I came here with a longer pole which was actually brought by a friend of mine. I got this just a few days back and I could do better here."

Initially, Sindhushree was a 400m runner, but a local coach made her to shift to pole vault in 2017. My coach said I can do better in pole vault." Asked about qualifying for the Asian Games, she said, "It seems it's a dream. It all happened because of my father (above)."

Sindhushree coach Vijeesh MM said her most important quality is her patience.

"Her patience is her strength, because the performance was not coming for many years, she was not competing with proper poles and she has financial difficulties.

"With right poles and right nutrition support, she will do better in the Asian Games. She does not need to focus on her technique. I am hoping that she can go above 4.30m." (PTI)

Rounak shocks Tien Chen to make quarters at US Open



FULLERTON (US), June 26: Young Indian shuttler Rounak Chouhan packed off world number six and top seed Chou Tien Chen of Chinese Taipei in straight games to create a big upset at the US Open here.

World No. 80, Chouhan, who was part of India's bronze medal winning world junior campaign, defeated Chou 21-17 26-24 on Thursday to set up a quarterfinal clash against Misha Zilberman of Israel.

The 18-year-old India kept the pressure on his more experienced opponent from the start and though Chou kept his nose ahead till 17-15, Chouhan won six straight points thereafter to pocket the opening game. Chou was the dominant player for most part of the second game as he commanded a 17-11 lead before Chouhan once again bagged six straight points to draw level.

It was a neck-and-neck battle thereafter as Chouhan saved four game points before converting his second match point to clinch victory in 49 minutes. Also advancing to the last-eight stage were world junior silver medallist Tanvi Sharma, Rakshitha Sree and Devika Sihag in the women's singles.

Fifth seed Tanvi defeated Tung Ciou-Tong of Chinese Taipei 21-12, 21-19, Rakshitha got the better of Tung's compatriot Chen Su Yu 21-4, 21-19 while sixth seed Devika beat Tonrug Saeheng of Thailand 21-17, 21-19. The experienced Kidambi Srikanth then capped off a fruitful day for India with a 21-14, 21-13 win over Lee Zii Jia of Malaysia. (PTI)

Serena Williams to learn her first-round opponent in a comeback at age 44

LONDON, June 26: Serena Williams will find out who she's facing in the first round at Wimbledon — for her first singles match in nearly four years, and at age 44 — when the draw is held Friday.

The seven-time Wimbledon singles champion accepted a wild-card entry to the grass-court Grand Slam, where she'll also compete in doubles with her older sister Venus, who turned 46 last week. It's all part of a tennis comeback that started with two doubles warmup matches but kicked into high gear Sunday when All England Club announced Serena would play singles.

Because she has no ranking, the 23-time Grand Slam singles champion could potentially face a highly ranked player such as defending champion Iga Swiatek or No. 1 Aryna Sabalenka. Williams hasn't played a singles match since a third-round loss to Ajla Tomljanovic at the 2022 U.S. Open. At the time, she said she didn't want to use the word "retiring" and instead declared she was "evolving" away from tennis. Her second daughter was born in 2023. (AP)

Americans look ahead to World Cup knockout stage Turkey beats US 3-2 with last-gasp goal

INGLEWOOD, (CALIFORNIA), June 26: Kaan Ayhan scored on the final kick of the match, and Turkey beat the United States 3-2 Thursday night for its only win of the World Cup.

Auston Trusty scored in the third minute and Sebastian Berhalter got a tying goal early in the second half for the Americans, who had already won Group D with victories over Paraguay and Australia. Coach Mauricio Pochettino's team will meet Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Round of 32 on Wednesday.

Pochettino fielded nine new starters for this low-stakes game, but Christian Pulisic entered in the 58th minute. He hadn't played since the first half of the Americans' opener due to a calf injury.

Arda Güler and Orkun Kökçü scored in the first half of a resilient performance by Turkey, which had already been eliminated after losing its first two matches despite largely dominating both statistically.

Turkey improbably won in the eighth minute of stoppage time when Can Uzun got the ball in space on the back post and pushed it past sprawling goalkeeper Matt Turner to Ayhan, who slid to knock it home.



The game's meaninglessness didn't matter to the raucous sellout crowd that packed SoFi Stadium. The American team's fan base has been energized by its strong start to this home World Cup — and this Los Angeles-area crowd was still chanting and standing when Berhalter airmailed a long corner to Trusty, who made the stadium shake when he banged it home inside the back post.

Trusty's goal was the Americans' seventh of the tournament, tying their scoring record for any World Cup before knockout play even begins. It was also the 173rd goal of this tournament, breaking the record for the most combined goals scored in a World Cup set in Qatar four years ago — and doing it in four fewer matches.

Turkey evened it in the 10th

minute with an excellent two-man game from Baris Alper Yilmaz and Güler, the 21-year-old Real Madrid rising star.

Güler then set up another goal in the 31st minute with a pass that eventually led to Kökçü's close-range shot. Turkey scored on both of its shots on net in the first half.

Berhalter tied it in the 49th minute by running on to a loose ball about 20 yards from the net for a vicious strike.

Pulisic replaced Tim Weah in the 58th minute for his first game action since the first half of their 4-1 victory over Paraguay nearly two weeks ago.

Pulisic said this week that he is ready to play again after coming out at halftime with a calf injury in the Americans' home World Cup opener. The AC Milan midfielder entered the 2-2 game to an enormous roar, and he created a scoring opportunity just a couple of minutes later with a dynamic run down the left side.

Pulisic nearly scored again in the 63rd minute, but his quick shot off a nice pass from Berhalter was knocked off the goalpost by Turkey goalkeeper Ugurcan Cakir, and Brenden Aaronson botched the resulting sitter. (AP)

Pochettino annoyed by perceived disappointment



INGLEWOOD (US), June 26: The United States only wanted to get through its final World Cup group stage match Thursday night without an injury or a red card, while Turkey was playing for a face-saving victory to end a dismal tournament.

Both teams got what they wanted most out of their meaningless meeting before the Americans head on to the knockout stage — and coach Mauricio Pochettino was annoyed by any suggestion that the Americans' last-gasp, 3-2 defeat said anything negative about the state of his team.

Kaan Ayhan scored on the final kick of the match to send Turkey past the U.S. in the eighth minute of stoppage time for its only win of the World Cup.

The result was meaningless to the Americans, who will meet Bosnia-Herzegovina in the Round of 32 on Wednesday. Pochettino sent out nine new starters, including eight who were starting a World Cup match for the first time.

The U.S. tied it early in the second half on a goal by Sebastian Berhalter, and the Americans got within a few seconds of an unbeaten run through the group stage. But in his postgame news conference, Pochettino expressed his annoyance with what he perceived as disappointment in the result.

"For you not say congratulations that we won the group, that is a little bit sad," Pochettino told reporters.

"What we need to remember is we won first place in this group," Pochettino added while speaking in Spanish and English. "We ended up being No. 1, and we managed all the pressure and the expectations quite well. We had other priorities. We wanted to win. We did want the victory, but there are other things we needed to balance out, and that's how I made the decisions. ... Making history is win-

ning the World Cup, not just winning the group. It's a little bit petty, if you will. You're thinking just a little bit too small."

Auston Trusty scored in the third minute for the Americans, who beat Paraguay and Australia by a combined 6-1 to book their place in the knockouts.

Pochettino fielded nearly an entirely new lineup for this low-stakes game, notably resting all four key players who picked up yellow cards earlier in the tournament.

Christian Pulisic entered in the 58th minute, however. The AC Milan midfielder hadn't played since the first half of the Americans' opener due to a calf injury, and he was involved in a couple of early scoring chances before getting beaten on the wing on Turkey's winning goal.

"We could have done better on some defensive plays, but it happens," said Brenden Aaronson, one of nine new starters chosen by Pochettino for the group finale.

"You make (nine) changes, and the team might not be used to as the guys that have been playing," Aaronson added. "It showed the hustle, the aggressiveness of the team. I think it's a positive, because Turkey is a top team. They might have not performed their best throughout this tournament, but their quality is on the pitch and you can see it."

Berhalter said he doesn't believe the Americans lost any momentum from this close defeat.

"You saw the second half, how we came out," said Berhalter, who tied it in the 49th minute by running on to a loose ball about 20 yards out for a vicious strike. "I think we deserved more out of that game. We slipped in the last second of the game. ... We gave everything we had, and we'll be ready for the knockouts. The guys did well. We fought. Unfortunately not to get a result, but we'll be ready for sure."

Arda Güler and Orkun Kökçü scored in the first half of a resilient performance by Turkey, which had already been eliminated after losing its first two matches despite largely dominating both statistically.

Turkey improbably won in the eighth minute of stoppage time when Can Uzun got the ball in space on the back post and pushed it past sprawling goalkeeper Matt Turner to Ayhan, who slid to knock it home. (AP)

India lose on penalties to England in FIH Pro League match

LONDON, June 26: The Indian men's hockey team went down 1-4 to England in a penalty shootout after the two teams were locked 2-2 in regulation time of their FIH Pro League match here.

At the Lee Valley Hockey and Tennis Centre on Thursday night, Dilpreet Singh (10th minute and 58th minute) scored an impressive brace for India while David Goodfield (29th minute) and Nicholas Bandurak (56th minute) were on the score-sheet for England.

Later in the shootout, Thomas Sorsby, James Albery and captain Zachary Wallace converted their attempts in the shootout for the hosts, besides one attempt that led to a penalty stroke, which was also scored off by Wallace. Captain Harmanpreet Singh was India's lone scorer in the shootout.

India will next face Pakistan late on Friday night.

Earlier, during regulation play, the first half was edgy as both teams found the net and created a few chances.

India made a bright start to the first quarter, claiming an early penalty corner. However, captain Harmanpreet Singh's dragflick was saved by English goalkeeper James Mazarelo.

England too secured a penalty corner at the other end in the fifth minute but Bandurak's attempt was stopped by the Indian defence.

The opening goal came in the 10th minute as Mandep Singh dribbled along the baseline and set the perfect pass for Dilpreet who slotted the ball into the goal with a diving finish to put India ahead. (PTI)

Australia clinches knockout round spot with 0-0 draw

Paraguay also likely to advance



SANTA CLARA (US), June 26: Australia and Paraguay played to a 0-0 draw Thursday night in a result that clinched a spot in the knockout round of the World Cup for the Socceroos and will likely be enough for the Paraguayans to advance.

The expanded tournament to 48 teams that provides a spot in the knockout round for eight of the 12 third-place teams in the group stage led to the cautious approach for both teams in their final Group D match after they each entered with three points thanks to wins over Turkey.

The winner of this game was assured second place behind the United States in the group with Australia also clinching that spot with a draw thanks to a better goal differential than Paraguay. But the draw that gave Paraguay four points in the group also was likely to be enough barring a string of bad results in the final two days of group play.

"We tried to win the game," Australia coach Tony Popovic said. "In the end, a draw was enough for both nations. Congratulations to Paraguay as well. ... I'm sure we are feeling euphoria and joy as a nation, I'm sure Paraguay is as well."

This marks the third time that Australia has advanced to the knockout round after losing in the round of 16 in 2006 and 2022. The Socceroos will play in the round of 32 on July 3 in Arlington, Texas, against the second-place finisher from Group G that will be determined Friday night.

"We really did work hard for this moment and I think we should enjoy it," midfielder Ajdin Hrustic said.

Paraguay must wait to learn its fate, but is in good position to

advance to the knockout round for the fifth time.

"Now we have to wait," coach Gustavo Alfaro said. "I am optimistic that we will be able to move on to the next phase."

The Socceroos had the best chances in the first half, but Paraguay goalkeeper Orlando Gill stopped an early attempt from Jackson Irvine and then made another save in stoppage time against Cristian Volpato.

The cautious play continued in the second half when Paraguay did have more possession than in the opening 45 minutes but neither team came close to scoring. Jordan Bos had the best chance for Australia in the 90th minute, but his shot went wide from the right side of the box.

Patrick Beach then made a save for Australia on a low shot by Mauricio that lacked power in stoppage time.

"You can have opinions on how the game was played or what we both thought we needed," Popovic said. "We at no stage felt we were playing for a draw. I felt we controlled the game quite well, were in control and had the better opportunities. We just gave one away at the end from the edge of the box, which was a heart in the mouth moment unfortunately for us."

Popovic made six changes to his lineup for the game, including giving 18-year-old Lucas Herrington his first World Cup appearance. Herrington, who plays for the Colorado Rapids in the MLS, became the youngest Aussie to appear in a World Cup game.

Paraguay midfielder Diego Gomez got his second yellow card of group play and will miss the round of 32 if the team advances. (AP)

Palamuru Strikers secure first win as Rohit Rayudu's maiden fifty steers chase

NEW DELHI, June 26: Rohit Rayudu scored an unbeaten half-century to guide Palamuru Strikers to a five-wicket victory over Medal Falcons in the Sreenidhi University T20 here.

This was Palamuru Strikers' first win of the season.

Rishab Baslas (2/33) and Ravi Kiran (2/34) were the pick of the bowlers as the Strikers restricted the Falcons to 164/9 here on Thursday.

Vignesh Reddy's quickfire 39 off 22 provided the platform for the Falcons, but Rayudu's unbeaten 42-ball-54 anchored the Strikers' chase and guided them home with 13 balls to spare.

From the outset, the Strikers' bowlers kept the Falcons' batters under pressure. Ravi Kiran struck in the opening over to remove Purnanand Rao for 1 off 2 and returned in the fourth to dismiss Naman Agarwal for 21 off 13, slowing the Falcons' scoring rate. (PTI)

More than 100 women players sign up for ICC's protection programme against online trolling

LONDON, June 26: More than 100 women cricketers have signed up for the ICC Player Protection Programme to "silence trolls on social media platforms" in partnership with AI-powered moderator Freedom2hear, which has weeded out almost 60,000 "harmful pieces of content" during the ongoing T20 World Cup.

Over 50 new sign-ups were recorded at the start of the tournament here, the ICC said in a release.

"...while the service provides additional protection across official ICC social media accounts. Seven of the 12 teams competing at the ICC Women's T20 World Cup 2026 are protected, with umpires and broadcasters also registered," the statement read.

After the first week of the T20 World Cup, the tool reviewed nearly 250,000 comments and removed almost 60,000 harmful pieces of content.

"More than 2,000 repeat offenders had temporary restrictions put on their interactions, and 370 users were blocked."

Indian left-arm spinner Radha Yadav highlighted the growing "toxicity" of social media as a reason for joining the programme.

"Social media can be such an



amazing resource for me to interact with friends, family and fans all over the world, but it's also become an increasingly toxic space, especially for female athletes," said Yadav.

"It's important to talk about this openly and find solutions to the problem, which is why I signed up for the ICC Player Protection Programme."

Another protected player is England wicketkeeper-batter Amy Jones, who also said that the programme has helped her deal with some of the abuse on social media.

"It is something that we sadly have to deal with as international athletes in the public eye, and it can have a negative effect on you when you are simply trying to play

the game to the best of your ability," she said.

"We have a great relationship with the vast majority of our fans, and we love interacting with them in person and on social media... But the downside is that there are people who choose to abuse you instead..."

"And for the ICC to be fully supportive in providing this kind of service is fantastic. It is a programme that puts our wellbeing at the forefront, and that is a good thing."

First introduced ahead of the 2024 women's T20 World Cup, the programme is a key component of the ICC's "wider approach to player wellbeing and safeguarding."

The programme has been operated across all ICC events since then, helping participants engage confidently with fans while reducing exposure to harmful online content.

Scotland's Sarah Bryce, who signed up for it in 2024, said the ICC Player Protection Programme has "made a massive difference".

"It's nice having that peace of mind because a lot of the players, the young players in particular, use social media a lot," said Bryce. (PTI)



ARLINGTON (US), June 26: Daizen Maeda gave Japan the lead and Anthony Elanga took it away six minutes later, helping Sweden to a 1-1 draw Thursday night that sent both teams to the knockout round of the World Cup.

Elanga's impressive left-footed strike from just outside the right corner of the box in the 62nd minute was his second goal of this year's tournament. Elanga has scored only three goals in 49 games for Newcastle, but zero in 32 Premier League matches.

Six minutes earlier, Maeda set a nifty pass from Ritsu Doan with his left foot in the penalty area and easily beat Jacob Widell

when they reached the semifinals the last time the US hosted soccer's biggest event.

Elanga had another chance in injury time, with his right-footed attempted forcing goalkeeper Zion Suzuki to make a diving deflection. On the ensuing corner kick, Suzuki deflected Alexander Isak's header off the crossbar and into the air, eventually ending the scoring chance with a leaping grab in a crowd of players.

The Blue Samurai's bag-waving, chanting fans among 70,137 at the sold-out home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys were persistent as a scoreless game dragged into the second half. Japan seemed content to sit back and play for a draw that would have guaranteed the same spot in the knockout round as a win.

Just like that, things changed when Doan put Maeda in perfect position to score.

Elanga wasn't anywhere near scoring range, but Suzuki appeared screened and reacted late as the shot beat him to the far post.

Just three minutes later, Isak was inside the penalty area with a great scoring chance, but Suzuki deflected it wide and over the end line, angrily gesturing toward some of his teammates as Sweden lined up for another corner kick.

The Swedes had eight corner kicks to only two for Japan. (AP)