

6 WORLD

- Ukraine says it hit railway bridge to Crimea
- 'Imperative for India and China to respect each other's core interests'

8 NATION

- India must not sign trade pact as it stands: Ramesh
- Cabinet expansion decision rests with Cong high command: CM Shivakumar

Japan PM's tight schedule and logistical issues led to shifting of venue from Guwahati ● Japanese business delegation will come to Assam later: Himanta

Indo-Japan summit shifted to Delhi

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI, June 23: A plan to hold the next annual India-Japan summit in Assam has been shelved due to Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's tight schedule and logistical issues, people familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

The summit will now take place in New Delhi, they said.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also confirmed the development.

Takaichi is set to visit India from July 1 to 3, which will be her first trip to the country after becoming prime minister.

The Indian side had made initial preparations to hold the summit in Guwahati in line with Japan's focus on boosting its engagement with the Northeastern region.

Given PM Takaichi's domestic commitments, including an ongoing session of the Japanese parliament, the window between her proposed arrival in India and her departure is quite tight, said one of the people cited above.

Because of this and the additional logistical issues connected to a visit outside the capital, the summit is now likely to be held in New Delhi.

This will also accommodate certain programming elements that both sides are keen on to boost bilateral ties, the people said.

The annual summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his then Japanese



counterpart Shinzo Abe was cancelled in December 2019 in Guwahati in the wake of massive protests rocking the Assam city over the amended citizenship law.

In August last year, Modi travelled to Japan for the annual summit. Following the summit, Japan set an investment target of 10 trillion yen (approx ₹ 60,000 crore) in India over a decade. The two sides also sealed a

A Japanese business delegation will come to Assam later, the chief minister said.

"As per protocol, we cannot ask for the reason (why the Assam visit was cancelled). We have to discuss among ourselves. Maybe when I am in Delhi next time or meet (External Affairs Minister) Jaishankar, I can ask him," Sarma said.

Referring to then-Japanese PM Shinzo Abe's visit to Guwahati in December 2019 being cancelled in the wake of massive protests rocking the city over the amended citizenship law, Sarma said it is definitely unfortunate that two expected visits had to be cancelled.

He said personnel of the Japanese Embassy had been in Assam for the past one month, visiting various locations, checking hotel rooms and even preparing the food menu for the proposed visit.

Asked about the beautification drive in Guwahati ahead of the now-cancelled visit, the CM said the routine work will continue, though the special measures being undertaken will not be carried out.

Sarma added that the last week had brought two pieces of good news for the state, one being the European Union's withdrawal of its negative travel advisory for Assam and the announcement of direct flights from Guwahati to two new international destinations, Dubai and Abu Dhabi. (PTI)

Assam rolls out e-Zero FIR system to combat cyber fraud



Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, June 23: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday announced that the state government has rolled out the e-Zero FIR initiative, becoming one of the first states in the country to implement an automated system that converts cyber financial crime complaints registered through the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP) and the 1930 cyber helpline into First Information Reports (FIRs).

Announcing the launch, Sarma

Assam Bizman, wife, others booked for celebrating birthday on bridge



GUWAHATI, June 23: Assam Police on Tuesday registered a case against a local businessman, his wife and 12 others on charges of endangering public safety and creating nuisance by celebrating her birthday on a bridge over the Brahmaputra river in Guwahati, an officer said.

All 14 people have been summoned by the police for question-

ing in the matter, he said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic), Guwahati, Jayanta Sarathi Borah, stated that the case was registered at the Bharalumukh police station based on a video that was widely circulated on social media on Monday.

The video featured the birthday celebration of the businessman's wife on a section of the Kumar

India welcomes US-Iran peace MoU, says Hormuz opening will boost energy supplies

NEW DELHI, June 23: India on Tuesday welcomed the US-Iran Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on ending hostilities in West Asia, with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval saying it will stabilise global energy security and remove supply chain bottlenecks for key commodities and fertilisers.

The opening of the Strait of Hormuz is a very welcome move for global energy security, Doval said, addressing a meeting of NSAs of BRICS nations.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Russian NSA Sergei Shoigu, Deputy Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ghadir Nezami-pour and other top BRICS security officials attended the meeting chaired by Doval.

In his televised opening remarks at the BRICS NSAs meeting, Doval, touching upon impact of "geopolitical uncertainties and economic strains", underlined the need for the grouping to play a sig-



nificant role in addressing the challenges.

"India welcomes the MoU reached between the US and Iran. We have got cautious optimism, and we hope that it will work. It will help energy security," Doval said.

"The opening of the Strait of Hormuz is a very welcome development. It will remove supply

Cabinet clears automatic land conversion for micro, khadi enterprises

GUWAHATI, June 23: The Assam Cabinet on Tuesday approved automatic conversion of agricultural land for setting up micro, khadi and allied enterprises, as well as solar plants, without requiring approval from district commissioners, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

The Cabinet cleared the Assam Regulation of Re-classification and Re-classification-cum-Transfer of Lands (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which will be introduced in the assembly next month, Sarma told reporters after the meeting.

The state government also approved amendments to the Assam Private Universities Act, 2007, easing the minimum land and endowment fund requirements for establishing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Three NSCN cadres surrender before Changlang police

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, June 23: Three cadres affiliated with the NSCN, including two from the National Socialist Council of Nagaland-Reformation (NSCN-R) and one from the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (NSCN-IM), voluntarily surrendered before the Changlang district police in Arunachal Pradesh.

The surrendered individuals have been identified as Jongham Saijong (43) of Old Jukhi village, Lonjan Pangtha (51) of Jongji Havi village, and Khangjung Khanglim (22) of Old

Salang village.

According to police, the three individuals decided to surrender following counselling efforts and with the support of their family members.

"With the support of their family members and our counselling efforts, they chose to renounce violence and return to the mainstream of society," a police official said.

Meanwhile, security forces have launched massive operations against insurgents in the Tirap, Longding and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. "So far, many insurgents

from various groups have returned to the mainstream after security forces appealed to them to do so. The Assam Rifles and the police have been trying to help youths return to the mainstream," an official said.

Officials said such surrenders are being encouraged through sustained outreach and enforcement measures, with the broader objective of fostering normalcy and supporting long-term development in the district.

Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet Minister Mama (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

President confers Padma awards to Mammooty, Satish Shah, Rohit Sharma

NEW DELHI, June 23: Tennis legend Vijay Amritraj, actors Mammooty and Satish Shah, cricketer Rohit Sharma, and playback singer Alka Yagnik were among eminent personalities conferred with the coveted Padma awards by President Droupadi Murmu on Tuesday.

In the second civil investiture ceremony at the Ganatantra Mandap of Rashtrapati Bhavan, the president presented Padma Vibhushan to former Supreme Court judge K T Thomas for public affairs and eminent Malayalam journalist P Narayanan for contribution in literature and education.

Alka Yagnik, Mammooty, American oncologist Dattatreyyudu Nori, tennis player Vijay Am-

ritraj, industrialist S K M Maelanandhan and social worker and educationist Vellappally Natesan received Padma Bhushan from the president during the ceremony.

Rupi Soren, wife of JMM founder Shibu Soren, received the Padma Bhushan on behalf of the late leader. The president conferred Padma Shri to cricketer Rohit Sharma, who led India to victory in the last T20 World Cup, and hockey player Savita Punia. Vladimir Mestvirishvili, the Georgian coach who mentored Indian Olympic medallists like Sushil Kumar, Yogeshwar Dutt, Ravi Dahiya was awarded Padma Shri posthumously. His wife received the award on his behalf. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC celebrates 75th Foundation Day with pomp and grandeur

'The day featured tributes to legendary figures, ceremonial appointments, award distributions'

HT Bureau

DIPHU, June 23 The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) marked its 75th Foundation Day with grand celebrations on Tuesday, highlighted by the unfurling of the National Flag at Rangina Sarpoo Ahongjai, Taralango, KAAC Secretariat in Diphu, and the Hamren KAAC Branch Secretariat.

The day featured tributes to legendary figures, ceremonial appointments, award distributions and cultural programmes.

The programme commenced at 8:00 am with the unfurling of the National Flag. At 8:30 am, homage was paid to Semson Sing Ingti, Khorsing Terang and Sarsing Teron (Langkung Habe) at Rangina Sarpoo Ahongjai, Taralango, as well as at the designated locations of their statues in Diphu.

An open session was held at 11:00 am under the chairmanship



of Raju Tisso, Chairman of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council. Dr Tuliram Ronghang, Chief Executive Member (CEM) of KAAC, attended the programme as the chief guest, while Amarsing Tisso, Member of Parliament from the 6-Diphu (ST) Lok Sabha constituency, was present as the guest of honour. Several dignitaries, including Deputy Chairman Avijit Kro, MLAs and other officials, at-

Govt revises penalties under FCRA involving receipt of foreign contributions by NGOs

NEW DELHI, June 23: The home ministry has revised the compounding penalties for a number of offences under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010, involving the receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions by non-governmental organisations, according to a gazette notification.

The orders were notified by the ministry on Monday under powers conferred by section 41(1) of the Act.

The penalty for defraying foreign contributions beyond 20 per cent of the contributions received for administrative expenses, in contravention of section 8 of the Act, will be ₹ 1 lakh or 5 per cent of the amount spent beyond the limit, whichever is higher, the notification said.

The utilisation of foreign contribution in speculative activities, in contravention of section 8(1) of the Act read with rule 4 of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011, will now attract a penalty of ₹ 1 lakh or 30 per cent of the amount invested in such activities, whichever is higher. In addition, 100 per cent of the returns earned therefrom shall be recovered, the notification said.

In case a foreign contribution was utilised for purposes other than those for which it was received, a penalty of 30 per cent of the amount utilised for purposes other than the purpose for which such foreign contribution was received, or ₹ 1 lakh, whichever is higher,



shall be levied, it added. A similar penalty will also be slapped in cases of accepting or utilising foreign contributions in contravention of the Act, or utilising the funds for a purpose or in a state or a Union Territory for which registration has not been granted, it said.

In a separate notification on Monday, the government also amended the rules for receiving foreign funds, requiring NGOs to choose from a predefined list of purposes and their areas of operation, allowing a range of faith-based activities, while explicitly excluding proselytisation from several categories eligible for registration under the Act.

The ministry also said any association having foreign nationals, other than those of Indian origin, as its key functionaries will (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Goyal, US Trade Representative Greer begin talks on trade pact

NEW DELHI, June 23: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer on Tuesday began bilateral talks here on issues related to the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement.

Greer is in New Delhi on an official visit for the trade pact talks. "Warm welcome to @USTradeRep Amb Jamieson Greer, @USAmbIndia Amb Sergio Gor and their delegation to @DoC_GoI. Looking forward to productive discussions on the bilateral trade agreement between (India & US)," Goyal said in a social media post on X.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal and India's Chief Negotiator Darpan Jain, who is also Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce, are attending the meeting, which is underway at Vanijya Bhawan, the headquarters of the Commerce and Industry Ministry.

The meeting followed chief negotiator-level discussions on the pact held in the national capital earlier this month (June 2-4).

Agrawal on June 15 stated that the discussions between the two ministers are expected to be centred around giving final touches to the framework deal.

On June 17, US President Donald Trump said that the two countries are "very close" on the finalisation of the trade agreement.

Earlier on June 5, Goyal said India and the US are moving towards closing all the open ends of the interim trade agreement, and both sides are likely to execute the "very, very vibrant" first phase of the BTA by the middle of next month.

Both sides in February an-



nounced the contours, or framework, of the first phase of the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA). The framework was based on the 50 per cent tariffs imposed by the US on Indian goods. However, on February 20, the US Supreme Court struck down the sweeping tariffs imposed by the Trump administration.

Following that, the Trump-administration announced 10 per cent tariffs under Section 122 of the Trade Act on all the countries for 150 days on February 24. It will expire on July 24 this year.

The meeting between the two sides is important on account of these changes in the US tariff regime.

India and the United States formally launched BTA negotiations on February 13, 2025. On February 7, 2026, the two sides announced that they had reached a framework for an interim agreement regarding reciprocal and mutually beneficial trade.

According to that framework,

the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent from 50 per cent. It had removed the 25 per cent tariffs on Indian goods for buying Russian oil and was to cut the remaining 25 per cent to 18 per cent under the pact. But the US Supreme Court ruled against these tariffs.

Under the agreed framework, India proposed to eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of food and agricultural products, including Dried Distillers' Grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.

New Delhi has also expressed its intentions to purchase USD 500 billion of US energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal over the next five years.

As the tariff landscape changed in the US, both sides are relooking at the agreement's framework.

The February joint statement on the framework has a clause that, in the event of any changes to the agreed-upon tariffs of either country, the US and India agree that the other country may modify its commitments.

Meanwhile, the US Trade Representative launched two Section 301 investigations on March 11 and 12 covering about 60 economies. One focused on alleged excess industrial capacity, while the other examined forced-labour concerns in global supply chains. India was included in both investigations.

When the framework of the first phase of the agreement was finalised, India had a comparative advantage over its competitor countries, such as ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia), Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Under the framework, the US had announced an 18 per cent tariff on Indian goods. At that time, tariffs on India's competing countries ranged from 19 to 20 per cent. But now, all countries face the same 10 per cent additional levy.

It is now important that India gets an advantage over its competitor nations on the tariff front in the trade pact with the US.

The US was the second-largest trading partner of India in 2025-26.

India's outbound shipments to the US grew marginally by 0.92 per cent to USD 87.3 billion during the last fiscal year, while imports increased 15.95 per cent to USD 52.9 billion. The trade surplus declined to USD 34.4 billion in 2025-26 from USD 40.89 billion in 2024-25. (PTI)

Sensex, Nifty drop over 1 pc amid global equity rout; IT, metal shares major drag

MUMBAI, June 23: Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty declined more than 1 per cent on Tuesday following FIH outflows and heavy selling in IT and metal shares, mirroring losses in global stocks.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped by 893.39 points, or 1.16 per cent, to settle at 76,200.68. During the day, it plunged 1,011.56 points, or 1.31 per cent, to 76,082.51.

The 50-share NSE Nifty dropped 278.80 points, or 1.16 per cent, to end at 23,824.10.

Weak global trends, concerns over the sustainability of the AI-driven rally, and profit-booking after recent sharp gains dragged Indian stocks lower, according to analysts.

Sensex and Nifty had rallied more than 4 per cent since June 11, logging gains in six of the past seven sessions.

Among the 30-Sensex firms, Infosys and Tata Consultancy Services declined over 3 per cent each. Bharat Electronics, Tata Steel, Adani Ports, Eternal, HCL Tech, and State Bank of India were also among the laggards.

Power Grid, Axis Bank, Sun Pharma, and Maruti Suzuki were the winners.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 635.91 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

"Indian equity markets snapped their recent oil-driven rally and declined sharply alongside global peers as a broad technology-led selloff weighed on sentiment."

"Losses were led by the IT sector, which declined more than 2 per cent, while a weaker rupee and growing expectations of further US monetary tightening added to investor caution and weighed on overall sentiment," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended sharply lower. The Kospi tanked 10 per cent.

European markets were trading in negative territory. "The decline was largely influenced by weakness across Asian markets, which also weighed on U.S. futures amid concerns over the sustainability of the AI-



driven rally, dampening overall market sentiment. Meanwhile, the India VIX moved higher toward the 14 mark, while the rupee weakened following the day's market pressure," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd.

Broader markets also closed lower as the BSE Mid-Cap Select index dropped 0.99 per cent and SmallCap Select index by 0.50 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Metal tanked the most by 3 per cent, followed by IT (2.24 per cent), PSU Bank (2.08 per cent), Commodities (1.90 per cent), Telecommunication (1.88 per cent), Focused IT (1.81 per cent) and Bankex (1.42 per cent). Healthcare emerged as the only winner.

A total of 2,794 stocks declined, while 1,496 advanced and 157 remained unchanged on the BSE. "Market sentiment weakened as early gains proved unsustainable amid negative global cues and prevailing caution. Profit booking after the recent rally further intensified downside pressure, resulting in broad-based weakness across key sectors," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Most sectoral indices ended in red, with metals recording the sharpest decline due to falling global prices and demand concerns amid an uncertain global outlook, he said. "The domestic IT sector also remained under pressure, reflecting the global tech rout and persistent concerns over AI-led disruptions in the Indian IT space," Nair added.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.67 per cent to USD 77.46 per barrel. On Monday, the Sensex climbed 291.17 points, or 0.38 per cent, to settle at 77,094.07. The Nifty surged 89.80 points, or 0.37 per cent, to end at 24,102.90. (PTI)

El Nino impact: Govt flags 111 districts face severe risk as monsoon deficit hits 43 pc

NEW DELHI, June 23: The government has identified 111 districts as most vulnerable to crop damage as a 43 per cent monsoon deficit driven by El Nino threatens kharif sowing, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said on Tuesday.

Chouhan said weak monsoon conditions were likely to persist until July 2, leaving little time for farmers to plant the kharif (summer) crop. As of June 22, sowing of kharif crops covered less than 10 per cent of total sown area — marginally higher than the 11.79 million hectare recorded in the year-ago period, at 11.99 million hectare — with most crops tracking ahead except soyabean.

"Overall, there is a 43 per cent deficit in monsoon rains. IMD forecasts that the weak monsoon is likely to continue till July 2. It means, kharif crops could be impacted," Chouhan told reporters after the review meeting on monsoon progress.

The ministry has mapped 315 districts across Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Bihar, Jharkhand,

Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha — as likely to receive below-normal rainfall.

Of these, 111 districts — including 20 in Maharashtra — have been classified as "most vulnerable" owing to irrigation cover of less than 25 per cent. Another 76 districts with 25-50 per cent irrigation fall in the "medium vulnerable" category, while 128 districts with adequate dam and irrigation infrastructure are tagged "least vulnerable."

The ministry has drawn up state-wise contingency plans recommending alternative crops suited to deficient rainfall conditions. States have been directed to promote pulses, oilseeds and coarse cereals that require less water, and to encourage short-duration and climate-resilient seed varieties rather than dependence on a single crop.

"There is a gap in rainfall. We need to suggest to farmers to go for alternative crops. We will not let farm fields remain empty," the minister said. Seed and fertiliser availability is adequate for the season, he added.

Reservoir levels are currently

above last year's position, though declining. States have been asked to use water judiciously and to clean ponds, streams, farm ponds and check dams under the VB-GRAM G (Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission Gramin) programme to preserve water for irrigation contingencies.

The ministry has called for extensive enrolment under crop insurance schemes and Kisan Credit Cards in the identified states. The 731 Krishi Vigyan Kendras (KVKs) have been asked to step up farmer outreach, with timely advisories to be disseminated via SMS, WhatsApp, call centres, and other media. On production estimates, Chouhan said the forecasts are based on normal conditions but affirmed, "We will ensure production does not fall."

The ministry has set up an El Nino Monitoring Cell and a Crop Weather Watch Group for real-time tracking and advisory.

Agriculture Secretary Atish Chandra, ICAR Director General ML Jat and Agriculture Commissioner PK Singh were also present at the press conference. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Assam Bizman, wife, others

booked have been seized. "There were a total of 14 people, including the businessman and his wife, and all have been summoned for interrogation," Borah said. A case has been registered against them under BNS Sections 285 (for causing danger, obstruction or injury to others on a public road), 270 (creating public nuisance) and 125 (acting rashly, endangering human life or safety of others).

"Investigation is on in the matter. The businessman claimed that it was just for about five minutes, but it doesn't seem to be so. Whether the celebration was pre-planned or impromptu, we are looking into that also," the DCP said.

"We will take action as per procedure," the officer said, while also urging the public to exercise civic sense in their behaviour. (PTI)

Assam rolls out e-Zero FIR

financial crime complaints lodged through the NCRP or the 1930 helpline into FIRs," Sarma said in a post on social media platform X.

According to the Chief Minister, the new mechanism will enable jurisdiction-free and hassle-free registration of cyber crime cases, eliminating delays often caused by procedural requirements and territorial limitations.

He said the system is designed to facilitate faster police action and improve the chances of recovering defrauded funds before they are siphoned off through multiple accounts. Sarma further said cyber financial fraud cases involving amounts above ₹ 10 lakh will be automatically converted into Zero FIRs, enabling prompt investigation and action irrespective of where the complaint is initially registered.

A Zero FIR allows police to register a case without regard to territorial jurisdiction, after which it can be transferred to the appropriate police station for investigation. The Chief Minister credited Union Home Minister Amit Shah for guiding the initiative and praised the efforts of the Assam Police in ensuring its swift implementation.

Cyber fraud has emerged as one of the fastest-growing categories of crime in India, with thousands of complaints being reported every month. Officials believe the e-Zero FIR system will significantly strengthen Assam's cyber policing framework and enhance protection for citizens against online financial scams.

India welcomes US-Iran peace

strains, and disruptive technology," Doval said. "Not only that the threats are compounding, but the instruments and institutional mechanisms are increasingly finding themselves to be inadequate to resolve or mitigate these conflicts," he said. "Multilateralism is on the decline," he said, adding BRICS has a major role to play in addressing various challenges.

New Delhi hosted the conclave in its capacity as the current chair of the influential grouping. BRICS, originally comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, expanded in 2024 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, and the United Arab Emirates, with Indonesia joining in 2025.

BRICS has emerged as an influential grouping as it brings together 11 major emerging economies of the world, representing around 49.5 per cent of the global population, around 40 per cent of the global GDP and around 26 per cent of the global trade. "We have got a very special role to play in this world, which appears to be in turmoil, a world which appears to be changing, a world in which the instruments of conflict resolutions are probably getting blunted," Doval said. "What role we as a grouping can play is a matter that is important for us to ponder," he said.

Doval also made a mention of how BRICS took shape. "BRICS was conceived as an informal grouping of emerging economies to a more multipolar world order. It was to advance economic cooperation and strengthen the voice of the Global South," he said.

The national security advisor said BRICS also envisioned reforms in global governance and institutional improvements. "BRICS is a very special coalition of countries that believe in peace, progress, development, and cooperation," he added. (PTI)

Three NSCN cadres surrender

Natung said the return of the three NSCN cadres to the mainstream in Changlang district marked a positive step towards strengthening peace and stability in the state.

"I commend the efforts of the Changlang district police, whose dedicated counselling and rehabilitation initiatives, together with the unwavering support of the cadres' families, have helped them choose the path of peace over violence," he said.

"Our government remains committed to creating opportunities for the peaceful reintegration of misguided youths into the mainstream. I encourage all those who have strayed onto the path of violence to embrace dialogue and reconciliation. Let us all work together to ensure that peace, unity and development continue to shape the future of Arunachal Pradesh," he added.

President confers Padma awards

The function was attended by Vice President C P Radhakrishnan, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Union Home Minister Amit Shah among other dignitaries.

The arrival of 83-year-old folk artist and cultural guardian from Nagaland, Guru Sangyusang Pongener, added a dash of vibrant cultural touch to the ceremony. Dressed in traditional Naga attire, his spirited entry drew a huge round of applause from the audience, including Prime Minister Modi. He received the Padma Shri.

Social worker Budhri Tati, who worked in the field of education and women empowerment in the previously naxal-affected Bastar region of Chhattisgarh, also received Padma Shri. She, too, preferred her traditional dress and received warm applause as she walked up to accept the honour.

The president also conferred Padma Shri to actor Satish Shah posthumously. The actor was known for essaying prominent roles in the country's first sitcom Ye Jo Hai Zindagi, Sarabhai Vs Sarabhai and cult movie Jaane Bhi Do Yaaro. His brother received the award on his behalf.

Former CEO of Prasar Bharati Shashi Shekhar Vempati who is now the CBFC Chairman was also awarded Padma Shri by the president.

In the ceremony, the president conferred 65 Padma Awards, including two Padma Vibhushan, seven Padma Bhushan and 56 Padma Shri.

Actor R Madhavan, Indian aerospace scientist in Defence Research and Development Laboratory, Chandramouli Gaddamanugu, who led the Akash Missile system from development to deployment during Operation Sindoor, former MHA under secretary RVS Mani and a self-made entrepreneur from a Dalit cobbler family Ashok Khade who established a cutting-edge offshore fabrication company were awarded Padma Shri.

Dalit author Asok Kumar Haldar, who wrote inspiring literature while being a railway guard, Ranjani and Gayatri (counted as one award) for Carnatic music, famous actor Anil Kumar Rastogi and chemistry professor Mahendra Nath Roy were also conferred Padma Shri.

On Republic Day eve, the government had announced 131 Padma awards including two duo cases (in a duo case, the award is counted as one). The awards included five Padma Vibhushan, 13 Padma Bhushan and 113 Padma Shri. (PTI)

Cabinet clears automatic land

private universities. "The Cabinet also approved easing certain rules for private schools to expand the reach of school education in the state," Sarma said. The Cabinet further approved the Assam Tourism Accommodation (Development and Registration) Rules, 2026, providing for registration of homestays and other accommodation facilities through a single-window system.

The rules also provide for automatic renewal of registration every three years. It also sanctioned ₹ 9.75 crore for Assam Tea Corporation Ltd to implement a proposed voluntary retirement scheme for its executives.

The Cabinet extended the validity of licences of all fair price shops in the state until December 31, from the existing June 30 deadline, to ensure uninterrupted distribution of foodgrains to beneficiaries under the National Food Security Act, Sarma said. (PTI)

Govt revises penalties under

"ordinarily not be considered" for the grant of registration or prior permission to receive foreign funds under the Act.

The amended rules carved an exception, allowing the government to specify such cases or circumstances through an order in which foreign nationals may be permitted to be "key functionaries" of an association for registration or prior permission under the FCRA, the notification said.

The government has notified a number of amendments in the FCRA Rules, 2011, tightening the accountability for non-NGOs and other associations in India receive and use foreign money.

The amendments have broadened the definition of "key functionary in relation to a person other than an individual" to cover a wide range of roles, including company directors, partners in firms, trustees, the "Karta" of a Hindu Undivided Family and any person who has control over the management of the association. The government has introduced a new clause wherein NGOs seeking registration for receiving foreign funds will have to specify the exact purpose and the states and Union territories of its operations.

"Every application for registration shall mention the purpose or purposes for which registration is sought, chosen only from such list of purposes as specified in the Schedule appended to these rules; and the states or Union territories in which the association proposes to undertake the activities," the notification said. The details shall be specified on the certificate issued to the NGO, it added.

The applicants must now choose their activities from a "Schedule" provided in the rules, covering religious, cultural, economic, educational and social categories as purposes.

Under the religious purposes, various activities have been listed, ranging from construction, renovation and maintenance of religious places, religious education to promotion of devotional music, among others. The rules specify that three purposes -- religious education, documentation of faith traditions and preservation of indigenous beliefs -- must be carried out "excluding proselytisation".

The condition has also been mentioned in the "documentation, preservation and revival of indigenous and tribal faith practices, rituals and systems of worship" and "conduct of religious education, moral instruction, satangs, discourses and meditation retreats". The NGOs receiving foreign funds must also now provide details of their social-media accounts in their applications for registration or renewal under the FCRA. The rules give all associations registered before 2026 one year to disclose their specific purposes to the government and state what they want to keep in their registration.

The government has also introduced a fee structure under the amended rules, according to which an additional ₹ 300 will be charged for each additional state or purpose added to the application. To prevent inactive NGOs from holding on to licences, the government has introduced a minimum spending limit of ₹ 10 lakh on foreign contributions for their chosen activities over the last two financial years.

For an NGO to renew its registration or avoid cancellation, it must have spent the amount of foreign contribution over the last two years on its chosen activities. For the NGOs receiving foreign funds for a specific purpose under "Prior Permission", the second or any later instalment of funds will only be released after it has utilised at least 75 per cent of the previous instalment, the notification said. (PTI)

Delivery launches 'Abhayam' welfare programme for one lakh frontline workers

IT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 23: Logistics company Delhivery has launched 'Abhayam', a comprehensive welfare programme aimed at supporting its nearly one lakh frontline workers across India with enhanced social security, healthcare and career development benefits. The programme was launched on June 22 to mark the company's 15th anniversary and is designed to provide a broad safety net for delivery personnel and other frontline employees who form the backbone of its operations. Under the initiative, workers will receive accident insurance coverage of up to ₹ 15 lakh, health insurance coverage of up to ₹ 5 lakh, income support during hospitalisation and access to discounted medicines. The programme also extends health coverage to workers' spouses and up to two children.

Additional benefits include easier access to personal loans, educational scholarships for children and vocational training opportunities for spouses and daughters.

To support long-term financial security and career growth, Abhayam provides access to the National Pension System (NPS), financial assistance for higher education and early earned wage access, enabling workers to manage financial emergencies more effectively.

Announcing the initiative, Suraj Saharan, Executive Director and Chief Human Resources Officer of Delhivery, said the programme reflects the company's commitment to the workforce that has contributed significantly to its growth. "In 15 years, our frontline workers have helped deliver nearly five billion shipments. Abhayam is our attempt to deliver for them. We believe this programme is among the most comprehensive welfare initiatives in the country and ensures that our workers can focus on providing the best possible service while their health and families are taken care of," he said.

NAME CORRECTION

I Najmul Hussain, S/O-Tomosis Ali, Vill-Islam Nagar, P.O.-Nilbagan, P.S.-Hojaj, Dist-Hojaj (Assam) That, my actual and correct name is Najmul Hussain and my father correct name Tomosis Ali. That, in my son's name Fojail Alam birth certificate, HSLC Certificate, Admit, Registration card wherein my name has been recorded as Md Nazmul Hussain instead of my actual and correct name Najmul Hussain. Najmul Hussain and Md Nazmul Hussain smme and one person.

Najmul Hussain

AFFIDAVIT

I, Gagan Boro, DOB-08/10/1965, S/O-Kania Boro, Vill-Banmuri, P.O.-Taptola, P.S.-Bhura-gaon, District-Morigaon, Assam have changed my name from Gandhi Boro to Gagan Boro through an Executive Magistrate, Morigaon on 23/06/2026 at Morigaon court. Gagan Boro and Gandhi Boro is the same and one person.

Assam to hold supplementary exam for Higher Secondary students

New system will allow students failing in a few subjects to reappear within months, reducing academic loss and aligning with NEP reforms

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, June 23: Assam will introduce a supplementary Higher Secondary (HS) final examination from the upcoming academic session, allowing students who fail in a limited number of subjects to improve their performance without losing an entire academic year, Assam State School Education Board (ASSEB) Chairman Ramesh Chandra Jain announced on Tuesday.

Addressing the media, Jain said the supplementary examination will be conducted approximately two months after the declaration of HS final examination results.

The move is aimed at reducing academic loss for students and is in line with the reforms proposed under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

According to the ASSEB Chairman, students who are unable to clear the HS final examination in a few subjects will be eligible to appear in the supplementary test and continue their academic jour-



ney without waiting for the next annual examination cycle.

Jain said a similar system has already been implemented in several educational boards across the country and has yielded positive results by reducing dropout rates and providing students with a second opportunity within the same

academic year.

He noted that Assam has begun the process of implementing the reform under the NEP framework and claimed that the state would be among the first in the country to introduce such a comprehensive supplementary examination mechanism at the Higher Secondary

level.

The Chairman further stated that arrangements similar to those available for students appearing in the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) examination would also be extended wherever necessary to ensure a smooth transition to the new system.

The announcement comes after the merger of the Board of Secondary Education, Assam (SEBA), and the Assam Higher Secondary Education Council (AHSEC), which led to the formation of the unified Assam State School Education Board.

Jain, a retired IAS officer, was appointed as the first Chairman of the newly constituted board.

Educationists believe the initiative could significantly benefit students by providing an additional opportunity to clear examinations and pursue higher education without interruption, while also bringing Assam's school education system closer to the objectives outlined in the National Education Policy.

BJP observes Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee's Balidan Diwas in Haflong

Party leaders and workers pay tribute to Jana Sangh founder, reaffirm commitment to national unity and service

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, June 23: Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders and workers in Haflong on Tuesday observed the Balidan Diwas of Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, paying tribute to the founder of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and remembering his contribution to national unity and integrity.

The programme was held with solemnity and reverence, with party leaders recalling Dr Mookerjee's role in shaping nationalist thought and his commitment to safeguarding the constitutional and territorial integrity of the country.

According to an official statement, speakers highlighted Dr Mookerjee's courage, patriotism and steadfast adherence to his principles, describing his life and sacrifice as a continuing source of inspiration for generations of Indians. The commemorative event was convened by Konjit Kemprai, while the keynote address was delivered by Kulendra Daulagupu.

In his address, Daulagupu spoke of Dr Mookerjee's vision of a strong and united India and called upon party workers to up-



hold his ideals through public service and dedication to society.

The programme was attended by Dima Hasao Autonomous Council Executive Member Donpainon Thaosen, Vice-President Liton Chakraborty, Executive Member Niranjan Hojai, Haflong Mandal President Shambunath Hojai and a large number of BJP karyakartas.

Floral tributes were offered to the portrait of Dr Mookerjee, with participants reaffirming their

commitment to the values of nationalism, selfless service and dedication to the nation.

Speakers noted that Dr Mookerjee's sacrifice and contributions continue to hold significance in the country's political and social landscape and remain a guiding force for future generations.

The programme concluded with a collective remembrance of the leader's legacy and a pledge to work towards the ideals he championed throughout his life.

Assam makes significant progress in implementing agri fund: Himanta

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, June 23: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said that the state has made significant progress in implementing the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund (AIF) scheme, with more than ₹ 1,100 crore already disbursed to farmers and agri-entrepreneurs across Assam.

Sharing the update after a meeting with Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan in New Delhi, Sarma said the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund emerged as a key focus area of discussions between the two leaders.

In a post on social media platform X, the Chief Minister stated that Assam continues to make rapid strides in expanding the reach of the flagship central scheme aimed at strengthening rural agricultural infrastructure and improving farmers' access to post-harvest facilities.

"Following my meeting with Shri Shivraj ji, where AIF was a key takeaway of our discussion, I'm happy to share that we continue to make rapid progress in implementing the Agriculture Infrastructure Fund and expanding its reach. More than Rs 1,100 crore has been disbursed till now," Sarma said.

The Agriculture Infrastructure Fund was launched by the Central government in 2020 as a financing facility to support the creation of post-harvest management infrastructure and community farming assets. The scheme provides medium- to long-term debt financing for projects such as warehouses, cold storage units, grading and packaging facilities, primary processing centres, supply chain infrastructure, and smart agriculture projects.

Officials said the scheme has helped boost investment in the agriculture sector by enabling

farmers, Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs), cooperatives, agri-startups, self-help groups, and entrepreneurs to access affordable credit for infrastructure development.

Assam has been actively promoting agricultural modernisation and value-addition initiatives in recent years, with the state government encouraging the establishment of storage, processing, and marketing facilities to enhance farmers' income and reduce post-harvest losses.

The Chief Minister's meeting with Chouhan is also seen as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen coordination between the Centre and the state on agricultural development, rural infrastructure, and farmer welfare programmes.

The state government expects further expansion of AIF-supported projects in the coming months, particularly in rural and agrarian districts across Assam.

Jan Kalyan Shivir launched in Kokrajhar to boost welfare outreach



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 23: A two-day Jan Kalyan Shivir was formally inaugurated in Kokrajhar district on Tuesday with the objective of ensuring doorstep delivery of government services and welfare benefits to citizens.

The initiative is being conducted simultaneously across various development blocks of the district to maximise outreach and facilitate access to Central and State Government welfare schemes for eligible beneficiaries.

The inaugural programme for Kokrajhar Development Block was held at the IRAGDAO Community Hall in Kokrajhar in the presence of MLA Rupam Roy, BTC MCLA Dhaneswar Goyary, Additional District Commissioner Banti Talukdar, Block Development Officers, heads of departments and other officials. Addressing the gathering, MLA Rupam Roy said the Central Government, the Assam Government and the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Government have launched numerous welfare initiatives aimed at improving the lives of citizens.

He stressed that Jan Kalyan Shivir serves as an impor-

tant platform for taking government schemes to the grassroots level and ensuring that no eligible beneficiary is left out. Roy also urged people to familiarise themselves with various welfare schemes and spread awareness among others to maximise their benefits.

Speaking on the occasion, BTC MCLA Dhaneswar Goyary highlighted several citizen-centric initiatives, including healthcare programmes such as the HPV vaccination drive, medical assistance cards and other support mechanisms designed to assist people in need.

Earlier, Additional District Commissioner Banti Talukdar delivered the welcome address and described the Jan Kalyan Shivir as a mission-mode initiative aligned with the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

She highlighted the government's commitment to the empowerment of the four key segments of society—Garib (poor), Yuva (youth), Mahilayen (women) and Annadata (farmers). Talukdar also outlined the impact of several flagship welfare schemes implemented over the past twelve years and encouraged citizens to avail themselves of the services and benefits offered through the camps.

She elaborated on schemes such as Ayushman Bharat PM-JAY, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, PM-KISAN, Nijut Moina and the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyan, among others.

As part of the campaign, departmental help desks and exhibition stalls have been set up to provide information on government programmes, facilitate grievance redressal and offer on-the-spot assistance to beneficiaries. Officials have appealed to citizens to actively participate in the camps and make full use of the services being provided.

Two arrested on charges of assault in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, June 23: A couple were arrested by the police on Monday on charges of severely attacking three persons, including an elderly man, during a bhaona performance at the namghar of Derkuria village, in west Jorhat, on Saturday night.

According to a source, Jayanta Hazarika and his wife, Ranju Hazarika, of the same village, were arrested after the victims - Dharmendra Hazarika, his uncle (Budhin Hazarika), and his wife (Shivani Hazarika) - lodged an FIR with the police, alleging that the accused persons had physically attacked them during a bhaona performance after being asked by Dharmendra Hazarika to behave properly.

Dharmendra Hazarika and his uncle had to be hospitalised as both sustained severe injuries during the attack by Jayanta.

Budhin Hazarika was injured while trying to save his nephew.

Shivani Hazarika alleged that she was attacked by Ranju Hazarika in the incident.

Dima Hasao reviews preparedness against JE, Dengue during monsoon

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, June 23: A meeting of the District Task Force under the National Vector Borne Disease Control Programme (NVB-DCP) was held at the Officers' Conference Hall of the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC) in Haflong to review preparedness and strengthen preventive measures against Japanese Encephalitis (JE), Acute Encephalitis Syndrome (AES), Dengue and other vector-borne diseases.

The meeting focused on enhancing surveillance activities and adopting effective strategies for the prevention and control of JE and Dengue, particularly in view of the increased risk of disease transmission during the ongoing monsoon season.

Participants discussed the need for coordinated efforts among various departments to contain the spread of vector-borne diseases through timely intervention, awareness campaigns and strengthened field-level monitoring.

The meeting was chaired by ACS Partha Sarathi Jahari, Principal Secretary of NCHAC, and attended by ACS Rebecca Changsan, Joint Secretary of NCHAC.

Senior officials from the District Health Services, Public Health Engineering Department, Veterinary and Animal Husbandry Department, Social Welfare Department, Agriculture Department, Education Department, Municipal Boards and other line departments also participated in the deliberations.

Officials reviewed the existing preparedness measures and shared suggestions to strengthen the district's response mechanism against seasonal outbreaks.

Emphasis was laid on improving inter-departmental coordination, intensifying public awareness campaigns and ensuring effective implementation of preventive measures at the grassroots level.

The meeting also highlighted the importance of community participation in maintaining sanitation, eliminating mosquito breeding sites and promptly reporting suspected cases to health authorities.

The District Task Force reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening surveillance and disease-control measures to safeguard public health and minimise the impact of vector-borne diseases during the monsoon season.

Training of 100 yoga teachers begins

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, June 23: The training of 100 Yoga Teachers under the PM Shri Gaonwe Gaonwe Jog Maha-Abhiyan commenced on Monday at the Kokrajhar District Sports Association (KDSA) Indoor Stadium, marking a major step towards promoting health, wellness and holistic living at the grassroots level.

The ten-day training programme is being conducted by certified and experienced yoga instructors and is designed to equip participants with the knowledge and practical skills required to lead yoga sessions within their communities.

During the training, participants will receive instruction in various yoga asanas, breathing exercises and yogic practices, along with an understanding of the physical, mental and emotional benefits associated with regular yoga practice.

Officials said the initiative seeks to develop a cadre of trained yoga volunteers who will serve as wellness ambassadors and encourage healthy lifestyles among people of all age groups.

Upon completion of the training programme on July 4, the newly trained Yoga Teachers will be deployed across villages in Kokrajhar district to conduct yoga sessions, awareness campaigns and community outreach activities.

The initiative aims to strengthen preventive healthcare measures and foster a culture of fitness, mindfulness and well-being at the village level.

The PM Shri Gaonwe Gaonwe Jog Maha-Abhiyan was launched by Assam Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on the occasion of the 12th International Day of Yoga.

The programme envisions taking the message of health and wellness to every village and household across the state.

The campaign seeks to inspire communities to adopt yoga as part of their daily routine under the guiding principles of "Yoga for Self, Yoga for Society and Yoga for Humanity."

Officials expressed confidence that the initiative would help improve public awareness about the benefits of yoga while contributing to healthier and more resilient communities through sustained grassroots engagement.

Nagaon University holds academic meet with college principals, signs MoUs for collaboration

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, June 23: Nagaon University on Tuesday organised its first Academic Meet with principals of colleges from across Nagaon district, aiming to strengthen academic collaboration, research partnerships and institutional cooperation between the university and affiliated colleges.

The programme was organised by the Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC) of the university and was held under the chairmanship of Vice-Chancellor Hitesh Deka.

The proceedings began with an address by Dr Bhuban Chandra Chutia, Director of IQAC, who presented an overview of the university, highlighting its evolution from the legacy of Nowgong College, established in 1944, and its ongoing efforts towards academic excellence.

Participants appreciated the university's profile and its vision for advancing higher education in the region.

The meeting was attended by principals from 16 colleges of Nagaon district, who engaged in discussions on a wide range of issues, including academic collaboration, joint research activities, extension programmes, faculty and student exchange, internship opportunities, entrepreneurship development and the overall growth of higher education.

The principals also offered suggestions aimed at enhancing the quality of education and fostering a stronger academic environment under the leadership of Nagaon University. A major outcome of the meeting was the signing of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) between Nagaon University and the participating colleges.

The agreements are intended to facilitate collaborative research projects, academic cooperation and student internship programmes, thereby creating a stronger framework for institutional engagement and academic advancement.

KKHSOU hosts state-level workshop on graduate employability and career readiness



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, June 23: Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU), in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning-Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA), organised a one-day State-Level Workshop-cum-Sensitisation Programme on "Boosting Graduate Employability and Career Readiness in Higher Education" at its City Campus in Khanapara on Tuesday.

The workshop brought together 24 participants, including college principals, IQAC coordinators, faculty members, placement and career guidance officers, and representatives from higher education institutions across Assam to deliberate on ways to enhance graduate employability and strengthen the alignment between higher education and the changing needs of industry and society.

The programme was inaugurated in the presence of KKHSOU Vice-Chancellor Prof Rajendra Prasad Das, COL-CEMCA Director Dr Basheerhamad Shadrach and KKHSOU Registrar Prof Pranab Saikia.

Addressing the participants, the speakers emphasised

the growing importance of employability skills, career readiness and institutional reforms in preparing graduates for an increasingly competitive job market.

During the technical sessions, Prof Pranab Saikia introduced participants to the concept of graduate employability and explained the COL Graduate Employability Model and Employability Scorecard, a framework designed to help institutions assess and improve employability outcomes.

Participants were also provided with the Employability Scorecard for institutional self-assessment.

Interactive group activities led by Programme Coordinator Dr Indrani Kalita enabled participants to revalidate the employability scorecard for their respective institutions and develop institution-specific employability frameworks. The sessions facilitated the exchange of best practices and encouraged collaborative discussions on strengthening career readiness among students.

The organisers highlighted that employability today extends beyond academic achievement and encompasses critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving abilities and professional competencies.

They stressed that higher education institutions must adopt a holistic approach to equip graduates with the skills and attributes demanded by modern employers.

The programme concluded with a valedictory session and participant feedback, reaffirming the commitment of KKHSOU and COL-CEMCA to promoting employability-focused reforms and strengthening higher education in the northeastern region.

Poet-journalist Khargeswar Das to launch second poetry collection in Howraghat

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, June 23: Preparations are in full swing in Howraghat for the release of Mor Kabitai Edin Akash Chuba (My Poetry Will Touch the Sky One Day), the second poetry collection by local journalist and poet Khargeswar Das.

The book has been published with the support and collaboration of Bikram Kumar Chanda, a teacher of Howraghat Higher Secondary School and recipient of the Manav Daradi Award.

The poetry collection is scheduled to be formally unveiled on June 28 at the Real Concept Auditorium in Howraghat town.

The event is expected to bring together literary enthusiasts, poets, journalists and cultural personalities from different parts of the district.

Prominent entrepreneur and owner-cum-editor of the weekly newspaper Janakalyan Barta,

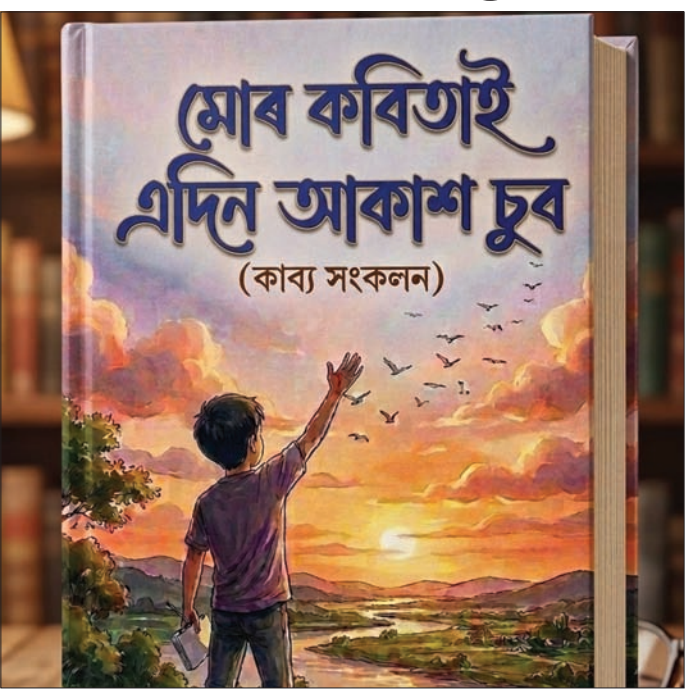
Kumud Nath, will attend the programme as the chief guest.

According to the organisers, several distinguished litterateurs, writers, poets and media personalities have been invited to participate in the ceremony and share their views on literature and contemporary Assamese poetry.

Khargeswar Das, who has been actively associated with journalism and literary activities in the region, expressed hope that the programme would receive the support of literature lovers and well-wishers.

"I earnestly seek the active support, presence and heartfelt cooperation of all literature and poetry enthusiasts to make this book launch a grand success," he said.

The release of the collection is expected to add to the literary landscape of the region and provide a platform for celebrating emerging voices in Assamese poetry.



QUOTE OF THE DAY

The power to question is the basis of all human progress. - Indira Gandhi

Trouble growing for Mamata

It is political theatre of absurd in Bengal as the former Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo is witnessing the desertions of TMC leaders close to her and reports coming in from the districts of the state of the closure of the party offices or takeover of those by resurgent BJP supporters. Recently, Mamata got the news of the freezing of the TMC's three bank accounts at HDFC due to the legal problems arising out of the present challenge by the majority of the legislators and the parliament members to her leadership and the original TMC. Her closest aide Arup Biswas defected. Similarly, two confidants former minister Jyotirya Mullick and former Mayor of Siliguri Municipality Goutam Deb resigned from the party. It was only bad news all along as the first assembly session of the newly elected Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari is in session. Former state sports minister Arup Biswas has sent a letter to the HDFC bank asking the authorities to freeze the TMC accounts. He sent the letter as the treasurer of the TMC though after the elections results were out, Mamata reshuffled the TMC committee and replaced Biswas with another loyalist Biswas is under investigation. His sudden letter to the Bank authorities is seen as a signal to the BJP to change side and get the shelter of the ruling establishment.

Finance continues to be the sinews of war even it happens to battles of the ballot. What Biswas, a Mamata Banerjee acolyte till the other day sought have been supported in a letter from new Leader of the Opposition, Ritabrata Banerjee leading to the freezing of the TMC accounts. It seems post bank account freeze the TMC coffers are reported to have Rs 440 crore. The legal battle on the custody of the bank accounts will be prolonged. Till then, it will be a difficult time for Mamata and her loyalists now known as TMC (Kalighat) in doing organizational work. Since Mamata is not the CM now, no industry man will come to give funds to her. The state BJP including the CM are closely monitoring the situation and any person with deep funds, is sure to be under threat by the new government.

What has emerged is that Mamata Banerjee no longer has the last word in Trinamool Congress. Her authority slumped after more than 60 MLAs of the Trinamool Legislature Party broke away from it on the issue of allegedly fake signatures on a letter to Assembly Speaker, Rathindra Bose seeking Sovandeb Chatopadhyay be made the Leader of the Opposition (LoP). Growing numerically, the dissidents initially numbering 59 out of 80 have turned tables and their leader Ritabrata Banerjee is the LoP now. Even the Calcutta High Court did not interfere in the decision of the Assembly Speaker to make Banerjee the LoP.

Ambubachi Mela through the lens of science

Ambubachi Mela, the annual festival associated with the Kamakhya Temple, occupies a unique place in the cultural and religious life of Assam. For millions of devotees, it marks the period during which Goddess Kamakhya is believed to undergo menstruation, leading to the closure of the temple sanctum for three days before it is ceremonially reopened. The religious significance of the event is well known, yet a closer examination reveals that the festival also embodies a remarkable body of environmental knowledge accumulated through generations of careful observation. Long before the emergence of modern scientific disciplines, agrarian societies were compelled to understand seasonal changes, soil behaviour, rainfall patterns, water systems, and public health risks because their survival depended upon such knowledge. Ambubachi appears to have emerged from this intimate relationship between human communities and their environment. The timing of the festival is particularly significant. It coincides with the arrival of the monsoon in Assam, a period when the region undergoes dramatic ecological transformation. After months of intense summer heat, the first sustained rains soften the dry earth, recharge groundwater reserves, and initiate a new agricultural cycle. Ancient communities interpreted this seasonal transition through a

bubachi concerns the physical phenomenon associated with the Kamakhya Temple itself. The temple is situated on Nilachal Hill, a geological formation whose structure differs significantly from the surrounding plains. The sanctum is located within a natural cave beneath ground level, where water continuously emerges through fissures in the rock and keeps the sacred stone moist throughout the year. Scientific analysis suggests that the behaviour of this water source is closely linked to seasonal hydrology. During the monsoon, heavy rainfall infiltrates the hill's porous layers, replenishing underground aquifers and raising the groundwater table. As the volume of stored water increases, pressure builds within subterranean channels and forces water through natural cracks and crevices. The stream that emerges within the sanctum therefore represents a natural outlet of a larger groundwater system. The reddish colour sometimes observed in the water during Ambubachi has also attracted considerable attention and has often been interpreted within a religious framework. Geological and geochemical explanations, however, provide a compelling account of the phenomenon. The soils of Nilachal Hill contain substantial concentrations of iron-bearing minerals, particularly iron oxides commonly found in lateritic formations. When the first heavy monsoon rains saturate the soil after a prolonged dry season, iron compounds become mobilized and dissolve into percolating water. Simultaneously, oxidation reactions occur as dissolved iron interacts with oxygen, producing the characteristic reddish coloration associated with iron-rich environments. Groundwater carrying these dissolved minerals eventually reaches the sanctum through underground channels, creating an appearance that closely resembles blood. Biological processes may further intensify this effect. Iron-oxidizing bacteria thrive in mineral-rich, moisture-laden environments and can generate reddish deposits as part of their metabolic activity. Certain species of algae adapted to dark, damp habitats may also contribute pigments to the water. The interaction of geological, chemical, and microbiological processes thus provides a coherent scientific explanation for a phenomenon that has inspired religious reverence for centuries. Rather than diminishing the cultural significance of the event, such explanations highlight the extraordinary observational abilities

of earlier generations who recognized recurring natural patterns and incorporated them into enduring social traditions.

The agricultural practices associated with Ambubachi reveal an equally impressive understanding of ecological management. During the observance, activities such as ploughing, digging, and sowing are traditionally discouraged. While these restrictions are commonly viewed through a religious lens, they align closely with principles recognized today by soil scientists and agronomists. The first phase of the monsoon is a delicate period for agricultural land. After prolonged exposure to summer heat, the upper layers of soil become hard, compacted, and moisture-deficient. Initial rainfall begins the process of restoring soil structure by allowing water to penetrate deeply into the ground. Disturbing the soil at this stage can have adverse consequences. If fields are ploughed immediately after the first rains, the loosened topsoil becomes vulnerable to erosion from subsequent downpours. Since the uppermost layer contains the highest concentration of organic matter and nutrients, its loss can significantly reduce agricultural productivity. Allowing the land to remain undisturbed for a short period enables rainwater to infiltrate gradually, increases moisture retention capacity, and promotes the stabilization of soil aggregates. This interval also encourages the activity of earthworms and beneficial microorganisms that play a vital role in nutrient cycling and soil fertility. By enforcing a temporary pause in cultivation, Ambubachi effectively provided farmers with a scientifically sound framework for protecting the productive capacity of their fields. The observance functioned as a seasonal signal indicating when agricultural operations should be delayed and when conditions would become favourable for sowing. Such practices demonstrate that traditional communities possessed a sophisticated appreciation of environmental processes long before the emergence of formal agricultural science. The festival therefore illustrates how ecological knowledge was embedded within cultural institutions, ensuring its transmission across generations without the need for written manuals or scientific terminology.

Another important dimension of Ambubachi relates to public health and human well-being. The transition from summer to monsoon is often accompanied by sudden changes in temperature, humidity, and environmental conditions. These changes create

favourable circumstances for the growth and spread of bacteria, fungi, and other disease-causing organisms. Early monsoon rains frequently wash contaminants into ponds, wells, and other water sources, increasing the risk of gastrointestinal infections and waterborne diseases. Traditional dietary practices observed during Ambubachi appear to reflect an awareness of these seasonal vulnerabilities. The preference for light, easily digestible foods, fruits, and simple diets reduces the burden on the digestive system during a period when illness becomes more common. Since cooked food spoils rapidly under humid conditions, minimizing the storage and consumption of prepared meals would have lowered the likelihood of food contamination. Such customs may have served as practical public-health measures long before the causes of infectious diseases were scientifically understood. Beyond physical health, Ambubachi also carries significant social and psychological implications. The festival presents a rare cultural framework in which menstruation, a natural biological process often surrounded by stigma and silence, is associated with a revered divine figure. This symbolism challenges perceptions that regard menstruation as impure or shameful and instead links it with fertility, creativity, and the continuity of life. Equally important is the temporary withdrawal from routine labour that accompanies the observance. For agrarian communities standing on the threshold of an intense cultivation season, the festival provided an opportunity for rest, reflection, and mental preparation. Viewed in its entirety, Ambubachi emerges as a multidimensional institution encompassing geology, hydrology, chemistry, microbiology, agriculture, public health, psychology, and social philosophy. It demonstrates how traditional societies translated environmental observations into cultural practices that promoted sustainability, resilience, and collective well-being. The enduring relevance of the festival lies precisely in this synthesis. Modern science may explain the mechanisms underlying the phenomena associated with Ambubachi, yet those explanations also underscore the remarkable depth of knowledge embedded within the tradition. Far from representing a conflict between faith and reason, Ambubachi illustrates how cultural beliefs can preserve practical scientific insights, creating a bridge between human experience and the natural world that remains meaningful even in the twenty-first century.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

that connected the fertility of the land with the fertility of the human body. Just as menstruation represents a natural reproductive process in women, the monsoon-induced rejuvenation of the soil came to be viewed as the Earth's own fertility cycle. This symbolism was neither accidental nor arbitrary. It functioned as a practical means of communicating ecological realities to entire communities. By presenting natural processes through religious narratives, society ensured that environmental practices were observed not merely as recommendations but as collective obligations. Consequently, Ambubachi evolved into more than a religious observance; it became a social institution that synchronized human activity with seasonal rhythms. The festival therefore deserves examination not only as an expression of faith but also as a sophisticated cultural response to ecological conditions that were critical to agricultural productivity and community survival.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Am-

The Battle for the Indus

By: Satyabrata Borah

The relationship between India and Pakistan has always felt like a dormant volcano, constantly rumbling and ready to spill over at the slightest provocation. For decades, the world watched the Kashmir border, counted military battalions, and tracked cross border infiltration to gauge the temperature of this rivalry. Today, a completely different element is fueling the fire, an element that is essential for life itself. Water has transformed from a shared natural resource into a strategic point of conflict. A sixty six year old treaty that survived multiple wars is now unraveling, bringing two nuclear armed nations to the brink of a new kind of confrontation. When the Pakistani defense minister recently announced that water security could drive his nation to war, he was not just making a political statement. He was voicing a deep existential panic that is taking over his country as India takes a radically tougher stance on river management.

To truly understand why a water agreement is causing such a massive geopolitical storm, one has to look back to the autumn of nineteen sixty. After years of intense negotiations mediated by the World Bank, the prime minister of India and the president of Pakistan signed the Indus Waters Treaty in Karachi. It was hailed as a masterpiece of modern diplomacy. The agreement was remarkably simple in its division. It gave India total control over the three eastern rivers, namely the Ravi, the Beas, and the Sutlej. Pakistan received the rights to the three western rivers, which are the Indus, the Jhelum, and the Chenab. Because these western rivers flow through Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir before entering Pakistan, India was allowed to use their waters for limited purposes like run of the river hydroelectric projects and domestic agriculture, provided it did not store the water or block its natural flow. For over six decades, this arrangement held strong. It survived the full scale wars of nineteen sixty five and nineteen seventy one, the Kargil conflict of nineteen ninety nine, and countless terror attacks that brought both armies to the border. It seemed indestructible.

That sense of permanence shattered following a serious military clash between the neighbors. India decided to push back against what it saw as decades of asymmetric provocation. The Indian foreign ministry made a historic declaration, stating that the Indus Waters Treaty would remain suspended until Pakistan completely stops supporting cross border terrorism. The message from New Delhi was loud and clear. Blood and water cannot flow together at the same time. Shortly after this announcement, the Indian water resources minister amplified the pressure. He stated that the government is actively working on engineering and strategic plans to ensure that the flow of the Indus waters to Pakistan will eventually stop, even suggesting that Pakistan might not receive a single drop from these rivers in the coming years. This is a massive shift from India's historical policy of strategic restraint, and it has sent shockwaves through the political and military establishment in Islamabad.

For Pakistan, the threat of losing access to the Indus basin rivers is not a diplomatic inconvenience. It is an absolute catastrophe. The geography of Pakistan is such that the country is essentially a gift of the Indus River. A massive portion of the Pakistani population lives directly within the Indus basin, depending on it for daily survival. The agricultural sector, which forms the backbone of the national economy, relies on these rivers to irrigate more than ninety percent of its crops. From the vast wheat fields of Punjab to the cotton plantations of Sindh, everything is tied to the rhythmic flow of the western rivers. Energy security is equally tied to this water network. Every single one of Pakistan's twenty one hydroelectric power plants is situated within the Indus basin. If the water levels drop significantly, the country faces massive food shortages and immediate widespread blackouts. This vulnerability is magnified by the current financial state of the nation, which is surviving on emergency bailouts from the International Monetary Fund. A sudden shock to its water supply could trigger a total economic collapse.

Many global security experts point out that India does not actually need to completely dry up the rivers to cause immense damage to its neighbor. Building the infrastructure to totally divert three massive rivers through rugged mountain-

ous terrain would take years and require astronomical engineering efforts. India can exercise immense leverage simply by manipulating the timing of water releases from its upstream dams. In modern agriculture, timing is everything. If India decides to hold back water during the crucial sowing seasons when crops need heavy irrigation, Pakistani farmers will face widespread crop failures. On the flip side, if India releases massive amounts of stored water during the monsoon season or during harvest times, it can create artificial floods that wash away entire villages and agricultural yields. Pakistan has already started noticing these patterns, sending multiple urgent notices to India over abnormal and abrupt flow variations in the Chenab River.

These early disruptions show that the water war is no longer a distant theoretical scenario. It is actively playing out in the riverbeds.

The Pakistani defense minister's warning about going to war reflects a nation that feels backed into a corner. When a country perceives an existential threat to its water supply, military retaliation becomes an option of last resort, even against a militarily superior neighbor. The rhetoric coming out of Islamabad suggests that any major Indian move to alter the river flows will be interpreted as an act of aggression equivalent to a conventional invasion. The danger is that both nations possess nuclear weapons, meaning any local skirmish over a dam or a river diversion could rapidly escalate into a catastrophic global conflict. The diplomatic space required to de-escalate these tensions is shrinking rapidly. Years of frozen diplomatic ties, the absence of bilateral cricket matches, and the complete shutdown of trade mean that there are no informal channels left for the two governments to talk out their differences.

The internal political dynamics within India also contribute to this hardening stance. For a long time, there has been a growing narrative among the Indian public and strategic circles that the nineteen sixty treaty was overly generous to Pakistan, giving away eighty percent of the water system to a nation that has remained consistently hostile. Modern Indian policymakers are much more willing to use every tool in their arsenal, including ecological and water leverage, to compel Pakistan to alter its security policies. This approach views the treaty not as a sacred, permanent text, but as a political agreement that can be renegotiated or abandoned if it no longer serves India's national security interests.

This regional flashpoint involves other powerful neighbors as well. The Indus River originates in Tibet, which places China at the very top of this ecological chain. China is a close ally of Pakistan and has its own long running border disputes with India. If India decides to weaponize its downstream position against Pakistan, China could choose to respond by altering the flows of rivers that originate in Tibet and flow into India, such as the Brahmaputra. This could turn the entire subcontinent into a battleground of competitive dam building and water diversion, with disastrous consequences for hundreds of millions of people who live downstream in Bangladesh and other parts of South Asia.

The situation we see today is a stark reminder of how climate change and population growth are altering global politics. The Indus basin is already under immense stress from melting glaciers and unpredictable monsoon patterns caused by shifting global temperatures. As the total amount of available water shrinks and the demand from growing populations rises, the sharing of these resources becomes a zero sum game. What was once handled through technical commissions and legal meetings is now being debated by defense ministers and military strategists.

Resolving this crisis requires a fundamental shift in how both nations view their shared geography. Pakistan needs to address India's legitimate security concerns regarding cross border militancy to create an environment where cooperation is possible. India needs to recognize that pushing a neighbor to total ecological ruin could create an unstable, failed state right on its border, which would bring a whole new set of security nightmares. Right now, the path of escalation seems far more likely than cooperation. The sixty six year old treaty is fraying at the seams, and as the rhetoric turns into action on the ground, the rivers of South Asia are becoming the world's most dangerous geopolitical fault lines.

Why peacebuilding must become India's permanent national doctrine

By: Pramod Boru

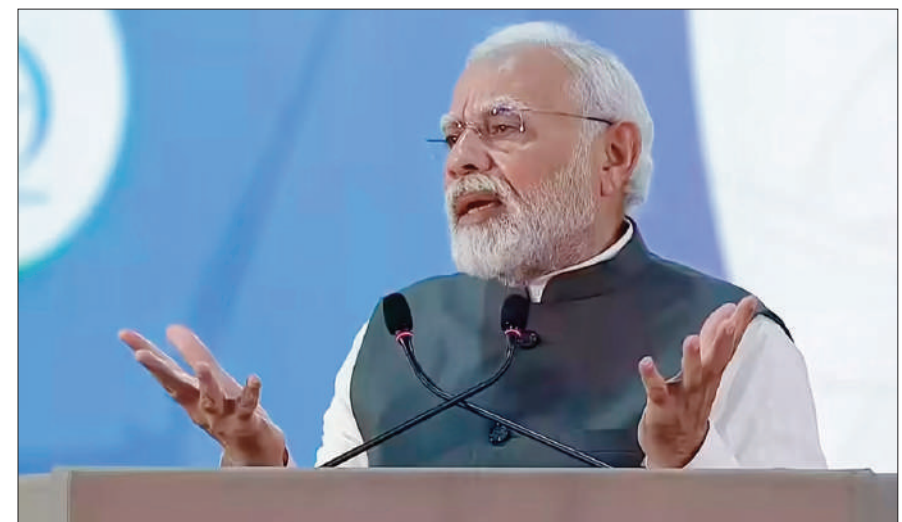
India stands at a defining moment in its national journey. Today, we are on course to become a global economic power, a technological leader and a steady voice in an increasingly uncertain world. We are able to speak confidently of a developed India, of innovation, infrastructure and international leadership. Yet, amid these ambitions, a fundamental question still haunts us. Can a nation truly become great if sections of its people continue to live amidst conflict, mistrust, fear and recurring violence? Our response to this basic, yet overarching question of the present times, will determine not only the India we live and build today, but also the inheritance we leave to the generations that follow. What shall we bequeath to our children? Would it be the ferocity and vagaries of unresolved conflict or the dignity of peaceful life?

For decades, several regions of India, particularly the Northeast, have endured the consequences of political struggles, insurgent movements, ethnic tension, and social fragmentation. These conflicts emerged from different histories and grievances, mainly owing to feelings of neglect, fear for loss of language and cultural identity, developmental disparities, displacement, and the absence of meaningful dialogue. Yet their consequences have been always painfully similar with episodes of conflict and violence, loss of lives, displacement, disruption of education, health services and economic activities. Sadly, in the past, generations of young people were seen to have been already denied the opportunity to dream freely.

Without doubt, India has made significant progress through peace accords, democratic engagement, ceasefires, constitutional arrangements and development initiatives. However, I am afraid that peace cannot remain a temporary project of a particular government. It must become a permanent national doctrine. Even as our commitment to national unity, justice and the constitutional rights of every citizen, and the pursuit of inclusive development must remain constant.

I have realized, through years of public life, that politicians change, governments change, bureaucrats are transferred or retired, political parties move between government and Opposition. Democracy is designed to accommodate such change, and this periodic renewal is one of its greatest strengths. But in the midst of these frequent transitions, did peace somewhere and somehow become a casualty? Should the fundamental objectives of the nation change with every political transition or a bureaucratic replacement?

Unfortunately, peace processes are often viewed through partisan or electoral lenses. Unlike knee-jerk responses, peace processes are long-term and very often inter-generational. There is every possibility, as it has so transpired in more than one instance, that one government initiates a negotiation, another signs the agreement, and a third inherits the responsibility of implementation. With the changes in political leadership, continuity of peace-processes immediately becomes vulnerable. Fluctuations in policy and delays in implementation create frustration, incomplete commitments weaken trust and unre-



solved grievances begin to return in new forms, sometimes in uglier shape too. Also, it must be noted that a peace agreement cannot be assumed as the destination itself. It must be held only as the beginning of a longer and more demanding journey. It is true that the success of peace must not be measured only by the signing of Memoranda of Settlements, the laying down of arms or the decline in violent incidents. Its true measure lies in whether children are able to attend school without fear, if the displaced families are able to once again return to their lands with dignity, and whether the youth are able to find gainful employment. Respect for all communities, and resumption of services, such as, roads, hospitals, educational and financial institutions, particularly, for those who were once excluded, are other key terms that re-stitch a coexistence framework. These are non-negotiable aspects of a peace-building process, if we are to see, previously adversarial parties rebuilding a shared future.

The Northeast offers India some of its most profound lessons in nation-building. It demonstrates both the enormous cost of conflict and the transformative possibilities of dialogue. For instance, the experience of Bodoland shows that replacement of confrontational strategy with dialogue, and promotion of trust through democratic accommodation enabled communities to move from conflict towards cooperation. This is also why the continuing pain of Manipur must concern every Indian, too, as the state yet stands as a warning to the entire nation. It cannot be swept under the carpet. Our parents, brothers, sisters, and children of Manipur have endured much anger, violence, grief, suffering and the lack of empathy over the years. Have we learnt anything at all from the collective suffering?

The Foundations of a National Peace Doctrine

India needs a long-term peacebuilding framework that can endure changes in political leadership. It should rest on five principles: continuous dialogue, inclusive development, respect for identity and dignity, youth participation, and reconciliation. Dialogue must never stop: In a diverse nation, differences are natural. What matters is how they are addressed. Dialogue must not begin only after violence erupts but should become a permanent democratic practice. Development, too, must reach every commu-

nity, because inclusion and opportunity encourage cooperation over conflict. At the same time, no citizen should be forced to choose between preserving their identity and participating in the national mainstream. It is essential to accept that India's unity is strengthened, not threatened, by its diversity. The Moral Responsibility of our Generation: Every generation inherits a historical responsibility. Some fought for freedom, while others, built institutions or drove economic transformation. Our responsibility is to transform conflict into cooperation. We need to work harder still to bequeath a Northeast India which is remembered not merely for the violence it has endured, but for demonstrating how dialogue, democracy and development could create a lasting peace.

Youth Participation is Key: The future of peace also rests with young people. They must inherit opportunities rather than grievances, and aspirations rather than animosities. The Nation be always placed above the individual: No politician, bureaucrat or government remains forever, but the nation endures. Peace processes must therefore be larger than individual tenures and protected through institutions, public policy, education and a bipartisan national commitment.

Not another Generation: When Indians fight Indians, clearly, there are no winners. How long shall we continue to fight within one home called "Bharat Mata"? Every life lost diminishes the nation, every conflict delays progress and every act of hatred weakens the very idea of India. India's civilizational heritage has always emphasized the sanctity of life, coexistence, and respect for human dignity. A civilized society is not defined by its economic growth, technological advancement, or political power alone. It is defined by the value it places on human life. From the teachings of Buddha to the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, from tribal traditions of community living to constitutional values of equality and fraternity, our collective wisdom has consistently affirmed that human life is sacred. It is now time to re-enliven this timeless value for the dignity of human life which has become the biggest casualty by acts of continued violence.

India's commitment to peace, justice, dignity and national unity must remain permanent. It must, rather, be the foundation of the India we seek to build, and that that foundation must endure even long after all of us are gone.



By: Nilantha Ilangamuwa

When Israel announced last Thursday that it was cutting “all contact” with Estonia-born EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas after accusing her of comparing Israel’s treatment of Palestinians with apartheid-era South Africa, the fallout created an immediate political crisis in Brussels. The obvious casualty was Kallas, the European Union’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs. But inside the EU’s power structure, some may have viewed the decision with quiet satisfaction. For Ursula von der Leyen, the powerful president of the European Commission and Kallas’s institutional superior, the controversy arrived at the height of their growing rivalry over who controls Europe’s foreign policy. A weakened Kallas would strengthen von der Leyen’s position in a battle that increasingly resembles a Cold War inside the EU itself.

This is not simply a clash between two ambitious women. It is a fight over what kind of power Europe wants to become. One side believes the European Union needs stronger central institutions, tighter coordination and a Commission powerful enough to act like a government. The other believes Europe’s influence depends on a strong diplomatic voice, clearer foreign policy and a tougher response to threats such as Russia. The rivalry between Kallas and von der Leyen is the latest battle in Europe’s unresolved argument over whether the EU should move towards something closer to a United States of Europe or remain a union of independent states. The irony is that both women want a stronger Europe. They simply disagree over who should control that strength.

Kallas entered Brussels in December 2024 with a reputation shaped by Estonia’s history, a country whose modern identity has been defined by Soviet occupation and fears of Russian expansion. As Es-

tonian prime minister, she became one of Europe’s most outspoken critics of Moscow and one of Ukraine’s strongest supporters. Her critics argue that she has continued to act like a national leader rather than an EU official whose role requires balancing the interests of 27 governments. Her supporters argue that this is exactly what Europe needs, a clear voice at a time when Russia, China and geopolitical competition are becoming more aggressive.

Her ally Marko Mihkelson, chairman of Estonia’s parliament foreign affairs committee, captured this argument when he described representing EU foreign policy as almost “Mission Impossible”. His point was not that Kallas was without faults, but that the role itself is designed to create weakness. The High Representative is expected to speak for Europe abroad, yet real foreign policy decisions remain controlled by member states. One government can block action. The

diplomat speaks, but national capitals decide. That contradiction sits at the centre of the dispute with von der Leyen. The European Union created the High Representative role after the Lisbon Treaty to give Europe a stronger international voice. But instead of creating a genuine foreign minister, it created a position caught between institutions. The High Representative serves as a vice-president of the European Commission while also leading the European External Action Service, the EU’s diplomatic body. The title suggests power. The reality is limited authority.

The result is predictable. Every major international crisis becomes a struggle over who leads.

The Commission under von der Leyen has steadily moved into areas once controlled mainly by traditional diplomacy. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine changed the nature of European foreign policy. Sanctions, defence production, energy security and industrial strategy became tools of geopolitical competition. China’s economic rise turned trade into a strategic weapon. The Commission argues that modern power is not just about diplomats and statements. It is about economic strength, technology and industrial capacity. Kallas’s supporters see this differently. They argue that von der Leyen’s expansion of Commission power has weakened the very diplomatic structure created to give Europe a single foreign policy voice. In their view, the Commission is gradually taking control of foreign policy without having the same democratic legitimacy or political accountability as national governments.

The dispute over the European External Action Service reflects this deeper struggle. Reports that the EEAS could be weakened or absorbed triggered concern among European diplomats. Kallas warned staff that the institution’s role was protected by EU treaties and that its structure remained unchanged. Her allies accused forces inside the EU system of attempting to reduce her influence and shift foreign policy authority towards the Commission. The roots of this conflict go back to the euro crisis, when another powerful woman faced a similar battle over the future of European power.

During the financial crisis, former German Chancellor Angela Merkel rejected the idea that Europe should respond by rapidly transferring more authority to Brussels. She stressed that under the Lisbon Treaty, “the member states are masters of the treaties”. The message was clear. Europe should integrate, but national governments must remain in control. It was a direct rejection of the federalist vision supported by figures such as Ur-

sula von der Leyen, who had previously spoken about the idea of a “United States of Europe”. Merkel feared that transferring power during a crisis would create public anger and make citizens feel that decisions were being taken by distant institutions they could not control. Merkel and von der Leyen came from the same German conservative tradition, but their instincts were different. Merkel believed Europe advanced through compromise, caution and gradual integration. Von der Leyen believed Europe needed stronger institutions capable of acting quickly when faced with global threats. The Kallas dispute is the latest version of that unresolved disagreement. History shows that conflicts between powerful women often emerge when institutions create competing centres of authority.

The relationship between Margaret Thatcher and Queen Elizabeth II remains one of the most discussed examples. Their tension was not simply personal. It reflected a clash between two forms of power. Thatcher represented electoral authority, political change and ideological conviction. A similar pattern appeared in American politics between Hillary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi. They were not direct enemies, but they represented different sources of influence. Pelosi controlled legislative power in Congress, while Clinton represented executive diplomacy and presidential politics. Their rivalry reflected a wider reality. Political systems often create overlapping authority, and those overlaps produce competition. The lesson is simple. Institutional rivalries are rarely caused only by personalities. They emerge when systems allow multiple figures to claim leadership. This is why the Kallas-von der Leyen relationship has become so politically sensitive. Von der Leyen’s Commission has increasingly presented itself as Europe’s geopolitical centre. Her supporters argue that the old separation between economics and foreign policy no longer exists. A Europe facing Russia, China and uncertainty from Washington needs a stronger institution capable of acting quickly.

Kallas’s supporters argue that Europe risks becoming a system where diplomacy serves Commission priorities rather than member states’ foreign policy interests. For them, the question is whether the EU will still have an independent foreign policy chief or whether that role will gradually become symbolic. However, this question will be decided by whether Europe’s institutions can adapt quickly enough to match a world that has become more competitive and dangerous. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Can menstrual leave work in India?

By: Arabe kesar

The petition filed by advocate Shailendra Mani Tripathi was dismissed by the Supreme Court in March 2026. Chief Justice Surya Kant and the bench explained that instead of helping, the policy might actually discourage companies from hiring women in the first place (Bawa, 2026).

The Petition and Its Constitutional Basis

The petition demanded that working women and female students be granted 2 to 3 days of mandatory paid menstrual leave per month nationwide. The constitutional argument was: Article 14 guarantees equality, Article 15 prohibits discrimination, and Article 21 protects bodily dignity. For many women, menstruation is much more than minor discomfort or inconvenience. There are many conditions like endometriosis, fibroids, adenomyosis, and severe dysmenorrhea which can cause acute cramping, nausea, and exhaustion, making a normal workday difficult. The Court directed the petitioner to approach the Ministry of Women and Child Development (Bawa, 2026). And by doing that, the court drew a line between what individual companies might voluntarily offer and what the law can realistically enforce across an economy as complex as India’s.

Workplace Structure and Gender

Many materialist feminist theories argue that the modern workplace was built around the idea of a worker who can work continuously without biological or physical interruptions. Thus, this model was based mostly on males. Menstruation and pregnancy were treated as private issues that workers had to handle on their own without affecting the productivity (Levitt & Barnack-Tavlaris, 2020).

Over time, the system, which was built around keeping the male worker

at the centre, became so standardized that it started appearing “neutral” or “default”. Because of this, when labour laws or workplace policies try to accommodate reproductive health needs, many employers see them not as fairness measures but as additional economic costs. Thus, the issue is fundamentally structural rather than functional; the conflict emerges from a labour system built around uninterrupted productivity, not from menstruation itself (MacKinnon, 1989; Federici, 2004).

The Court’s concern reflects a common argument in debates surrounding menstrual leave: that policies which are built around biological accommodation may unintentionally increase workplace discrimination against women. However, this position is strongly challenged by materialist and radical feminist thinkers (Catharine MacKinnon, Silvia Federici), who argue that the deeper problem lies not in accommodation itself, but in the structure of the workplace that treats uninterrupted male productivity as the default standard. Thus, any policy helping women will not work as efficiently as it should, because of the foundation of the system (MacKinnon, 1989; Federici, 2004).

International Experience with Menstrual Leave

Japan has had menstrual leave since 1947. But the usage is very low (Padmanabhan, 2021). Women bypass it because of workplace presenteeism and fear of being marked as weak or uncommitted. South Korea and Taiwan have similar legal provisions yet almost nobody uses it (Jones, 2024).

The Guardian reported that although Spain introduced Europe’s first menstrual leave law in 2023, the leave was rarely used by employees during its first year (Jones, 2024). The Spanish model was actually well-designed: it shifted the financial cost to the state social security system rather than mak-

ing employers pay directly. But it also required a formal medical certificate for dysmenorrhea, which added many layers of bureaucratic hurdle.

Challenges in the Indian Context

The case with Indian labour market is way more complex than Europe or Japan, because of sociological, economic and structural issues. More than 90% of working women in the country are in the informal economy — agriculture, construction, manual labour, home-based manufacturing, domestic work, brick kilns etc. They have no contracts, no access to basic sanitation at work, and no paid leave of any kind. A national menstrual leave mandate wouldn’t reach most of them (SPRF, 2023).

In the organized sector, the structures are different but the problem is still real. India’s corporate job market is intensely competitive, particularly at entry and mid-tier levels. If employers are legally required to fund an additional 24 to 36 days of paid leave per year — with no public subsidy — many will treat female candidates as more expensive and less productive than male ones (SPRF, 2023). The Supreme Court recognized this and acknowledged how markets actually behave when costs get attached to particular groups of workers.

What Actually Might Work

- A state-backed, gender-neutral health leave framework can be a better alternative to a separately designated “menstrual leave” category. Under such a system, all employees could access short-term personal or medical leave, while women experiencing menstrual health issues could use it without being pointed out as a separate category. This approach can help in preserving privacy and promoting the development of a more gender-inclusive workforce.

- State-funded support for diagnosed chronic conditions would remove the direct financial burden from employers, similar to the model adopted in Spain.

However, the toughest challenge in the Indian context remains the highly informal nature of female labour participation. With nearly 90% of women employed in the informal sector, meaningful reproductive workplace protections ultimately depend upon the long-term expansion of formal, regulated employment structures themselves.

Thus, India needs:

- o A reduction in the informal nature of women’s employment.
- o Gender-neutral leave policies, ensuring that workplace accommodations do not lead to a situation of “hyper-helping” for women.
- o State intervention in funding leaves up to a certain point.
- o Structural shift from treating humans purely as productivity machines, recognizing that the core tension stems from a capitalist market structure rather than gender differences alone. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)



Rights for the world’s forgotten 1.3 million vulnerable child widows must be strengthened



By: Mineke Schipper

There are an estimated 258 million widows in the world, with one in ten living in extreme poverty. Widows are significantly more numerous than widowers, who usually remarry quickly, almost always to younger women — so tend to die before their wives.

June 23 is International Widows’ Day, officially established by the United Nations to draw attention to widows and their all-too-problematic position and neglected rights.

The word “widow” naturally conjures up an image of elderly women. But in most countries where 23 June is marked, little attention has so far been paid to children who become widows.

Every year, 12 million girls around the world under the age of 18 are married off, mainly in parts of Africa and Asia. These children sometimes do not attend school, or drop out as soon as they get married. Afterwards, they rarely have the opportunity to continue their education.

The millions of girls married far too young are mainly found in rural areas, where customs and discriminatory interpretations of religious laws often take precedence over modern legislation that has long raised the legal age of marriage. In these contexts, widowhood means social death. A Child Widows Report in 2018 states that an estimated 1.36 million widows are under the age of 18, often even younger. The actual number is undoubtedly higher, since many child brides and child widows are undocumented. Some are little girls, not yet ten, or young mothers of around 12 years.

There are even toddlers and babies among them. In this photograph from a century ago are eight child widows cast out by their in-laws; they were fortunate enough to be taken in by a children’s home in Delhi.

A young widow from Bangladesh, who had only been married for a few months, summed up her married life in 2017: “I was absolutely terrified when I saw my future husband. He had one tooth, a hunchback, and was very old. I was so scared when I was left at his house that I tried to crawl under his mother’s bed to escape him. He hurt me. I was glad when he died.”

In sub-Saharan Africa, the number of child marriages is highest. In Niger, 76% of girls marry before the age of 18 and 28% before the age of 15. But most child brides live in South Asia because of the region’s larger populations.

Most countries have developed legislation prohibiting child marriage, and many have also signed the relevant international conventions. Thus, the number of child marriages has fallen, and the number of child widows.

But in rural, impoverished regions, custom carries more weight than national legislation. This is certainly true where parents are required to provide a dowry for their daughters. If there are many daughters, this can spell financial ruin. Those who cannot meet the demands of the in-laws cannot be choosy.

It is not uncommon for their much-older husbands to die before them, sometimes shortly after the marriage. In some places, the girls remain widows for life due to the tradition that dictates that a woman must never remarry out of respect for her deceased husband.

Modern Indians have long been opposed to the age-old practice of child marriage, but in many parts of the country, conservative families uphold the traditional rules, particularly in regions where poverty and illiteracy are rife.

In many families, there is barely enough food for the children, and so the boys are given lion’s share. The notion that baby boys are more valuable certainly does not exist in India alone.

Wherever a vocal preference for sons has been passed down, giving birth to boys has earned their mothers the highest possible social prestige. No wonder, then, that many mothers would rather have a son than a daughter.

“Life was a misery”
In 1994, a Widows’ Conference was held in Bangalore, where widows from a caste in which remarriage was forbidden dared to speak openly about their situation for the first time. A 70-year-old woman, widowed when she was five, told her own story:

“I was playing outside with my little sister and a cousin when my mother called me inside and said, ‘Your husband is dead.’ I asked, ‘Who is a husband, Mummy?’ I had never seen him. From that day on, my life changed. I was no longer allowed to play outside with the other children. I had to take off my jewellery. I continued to live with my mother, but she kept me indoors. I did all the housework — cooking, cleaning and washing. From that moment on, my life was a misery. I turned to god for help.”

In some countries, if her husband dies young, a girl is accused of having committed grave sins in a previous life; otherwise, her husband would not have died so soon. Child brides who have not attended school are entirely dependent on that older husband. Without social security, they are constantly at risk as child widows: they have no defence against violence, have no right to inheritance and, in many cases, are driven away, often accused of witchcraft.

The 2018 Child Widows Report first drew attention to their alarming situation at the United Nations. These child widows inevitably fall between two stools: they are often not covered by aid programmes for children, yet organisations concerned with the plight of widows also fail to recognise their rights. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

Ukraine says it hit railway bridge to Crimea

KYIV, June 23: Ukraine said Tuesday its forces struck a railway bridge, a power plant and other key infrastructure targets in Crimea as Kyiv's military authorities seek to isolate the vital Russian-held peninsula in the latest stage of the 4-year-old war.

The drone attacks added to the woes on the Black Sea peninsula, where Russian authorities have had to suspend gasoline sales to civilians as Ukraine has intensified its recent campaign to disrupt supply lines and the electrical grid at the height of the summer tourist season.

The peninsula was seized by force and illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014. Ukrainian long-range strikes have highlighted its ability to inflict painful damage on Russia and put added pressure on the Kremlin while Moscow's advances recently have ground to a near halt, Western analysts and officials say.

Ukrainian Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said last week that his forces are "isolating Crimea with drones."

"It looks like in the nearest time, Crimea will become an island. This could lead to some very unexpected consequences for Russians," Fedorov said on a blogger's YouTube channel.



Ukraine also has hit targets near the Kremlin in Moscow and in St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city this month.

Parts of Crimea are without power

Ukraine's Defence Ministry said drones struck an oil storage depot at the Kerch thermal power plant in eastern Crimea, an electrical substation in the west, and a liquefied natural gas distribution station in Simferopol, the peninsula's second-biggest city.

In addition, Ukraine's Special Operations Forces said their units, working with what it said was the resistance movement in Crimea, destroyed a rail bridge over the

North Crimean Canal near the village of Rozdolne.

The military described the span as a key logistics route used to supply Russian forces in southern Ukraine and said drones began hitting the structure late Sunday to Monday, collapsing part of it. A second strike early Tuesday targeted railway repair equipment deployed at the bridge and its remaining sections, it said on Telegram.

It was not possible to independently verify the Ukrainian claims.

Parts of Crimea were without power Tuesday, the area's energy supplier said. But it attributed the outages to "technical malfunc-

tions" in local electrical grids and said it expected power to be restored within 24 hours.

Successes against Russia boost Ukrainian morale

On the front line in eastern Ukraine, where Russia's war of attrition has made slow and costly advances since Moscow's full-scale invasion in February 2022, Ukraine has deployed cutting-edge drone technology to keep the enemy pinned down.

Meanwhile, its medium-range drones have also disrupted Russia's supply lines to the front, and its long-range strikes have increasingly damaged Russian oil facilities that provide vital revenue for the Kremlin's war effort.

The Ukrainian Defence Ministry said Monday its forces have hit more than 800,000 enemy targets with drones since the beginning of the year and that 95 per cent of drones used by the armed forces are domestically produced.

The successes have boosted Ukrainian confidence, and President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says sustained foreign support is locked in to help stop Russia.

Officials have shown renewed vigor in talking about the war.

Ukraine's UN Ambassador Andrii Melnyk said Monday that Kyiv remained ready for direct

talks with Russia to achieve a "just and lasting peace" based on the UN Charter, but warned that Ukraine's willingness to compromise was not open-ended.

Melnyk said at a UN Security Council meeting that a ceasefire along the current front line already represented a major concession and urged Russia to withdraw from occupied Ukrainian territory.

He also said recent Ukrainian strikes had altered the dynamics of the war, adding: "This is just the beginning."

Russia's top diplomat says Moscow will defend Belarus

Meanwhile, the Kremlin is ready to "ensure the security" of its neighbor and ally Belarus, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Tuesday, days after Zelenskyy demanded that Belarus remove relay equipment on its territory that Kyiv said aided Russian drone attacks.

The relay stations are used for signal transmissions to Russian drones attacking Ukraine, according to Zelenskyy.

Lavrov told the Russian news agency Interfax that Kyiv was trying to drag Belarus into the conflict. Moscow, in fact, had used Belarus territory to launch its invasion of Ukraine. (AP)

Afghan Taliban to hold rare, closed-door talks with EU officials on deportations



BRUSSELS, June 23: A delegation from the Afghan Taliban is travelling to Brussels on Tuesday for closed-door talks with European Union staff, expected to focus on deportations, said a Taliban official.

Afghans make up one of the largest groups of migrants seeking asylum in the European Union, but a growing number of governments in the 27-nation bloc want to speed up and increase deportations for those whose claims are rejected or who commit crimes in their host countries.

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

Rights groups said Tuesday's meeting undercuts the EU's human rights obligations and could endanger people in Europe and Afghanistan.

"Any engagement with the Taliban needs to prioritise protecting human rights and accountability — not deporting people to danger there," said Fereshta Abbasi, a researcher at Human Rights Watch. "EU countries are undermining their credibility by condemning Taliban abuses and pursuing accountability on one hand, while cooperating with the Taliban to forcibly return Afghans on the other."

With not a single EU nation recognising the Taliban, the meeting in Brussels symbolises a small crack in the group's diplomatic isolation since seizing power five years ago.

The five-person delegation in Brussels from the Taliban — a government that none of 27 EU nations recognises — includes Abdul Qahar Balkhi, a New Zealand-born spokesperson for the Taliban's foreign ministry, said a Taliban official speaking on condition of anonymity.

Belgian Foreign Minister Maxime Prevot said that while Belgium doesn't recognise the Taliban, it would comply with EU requests to grant the Taliban visas.

"Belgium cannot confer legitimacy on a regime accused of serious human rights violations," he said in a statement referring to Belgium's hosting of the EU institutions. "Making a meeting possible in the framework of our host-state policy does not amount to recognition, does not amount to legitimacy, and does not constitute an invitation by the Belgian government."

Members of the Taliban delegation were issued visas after security screening with limited territorial validity, giving them 24 hours in Belgium and no access to other countries in the Schengen border-free travel zone.

Since neither Belgium nor the EU officially recognises the Taliban government, the meeting will not take place on official buildings or sites belonging to either. The European Commission has declined repeated requests to provide additional information.

Drive to increase deportations

A spokesperson for the European Commission said Monday that the meeting is in response to pressure from a clear majority of the 27 EU nations — 20 of whom signed a letter in October calling for stronger migration policies including a ramping up of deportations.

"They had asked the Commission to coordinate such technical contacts on returns," said spokesperson Markus Lammert. "Member states are looking into ways to return persons who have committed serious crimes and who are possibly a security threat."

The first EU-Taliban meeting was held in Afghanistan in January when the Commission sent a mission to Kabul. It also maintains staff there.

The October letter was drafted in part by Belgian Migration Minister Anneleen Van Bossuyt, who said then that "we have sent a clear and powerful message to the European Commission: we can no longer afford a standstill. It is high time for a firm and joint approach, so that Europe can regain control over migration and security."

Bossuyt said that across the EU, only 2 per cent of the 22,870 Afghans told to return had done so.

Another Commission spokesperson said the meeting "does not mean by any means recognition."

Deteriorating situation in Afghanistan

Afghanistan has been dealing with the return of about 3 million Afghans from Pakistan and Iran in the past year alone, all of whom have been pretty much been forcibly repatriated from those two countries, exacerbating a humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan, already reeling from food and economic crises including biting sanctions on the Islamic Emirate.

Afghan Taliban authorities have imposed draconian restrictions on women and girls, including bans on education beyond primary school and on working in all but very few professions, as well as strict regulations on what women are allowed to wear in public.

"The desperate scenes of people — including EU staff — fleeing Afghanistan are a recent memory. It is unconscionable that the EU would now try and deport people to Afghanistan, which has only become more dangerous in the meantime," said Eve Geddie, Director of Amnesty International's European Institutions Office.

Facing political pressure to toughen migration policies across the 27-nation bloc, the EU has recently passed deep reforms to its collective rules aiming to ramp up deportations — including allowing the setting up of so-called "return hubs," increased domestic surveillance capabilities, tighter border controls, and engagement with the Taliban government which it does not recognise because of human rights abuse allegations.

With Afghanistan facing food shortages and economic collapse, the Taliban government is in need of humanitarian aid and hopes to lessen its international economic and political isolation. (AP)

Trump says Iran will buy US corn, soy, wheat

WASHINGTON, June 23: President Donald Trump has heralded the peace talks with Iran as a win for US farmers, saying that the unfreezing of sanctioned Iranian money will be tied to that country buying American-grown corn, soybeans and wheat.

"These are things that are desperately needed by Iran," Trump posted on social media. "This is a humanitarian crisis, and I feel it is necessary to help."

But Iran is unlikely to start buying a vast amount of US farm products.

"I don't expect that trade would be very large in the short run," said Joseph Glauber, a research fellow emeritus at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Glauber noted that Iran was "unlikely" to abandon its other trade partners on food for America. He said Iran's major suppliers include Brazil, India, Turkey, the European Union, Canada, Australia and Argentina and that Trump's demand to buy from the US would "create some hard feelings with some of our competitors. (AP)

'Imperative' for India and China to respect each other's core interests: Wang

BEIJING, June 23: Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi has said that it is "imperative" for India and China to respect each other's "core interests" and take concrete actions to implement the "important consensus" reached by the leaders of both countries. Wang, who is in New Delhi to attend the BRICS NSA conference, made the remarks during his meeting with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Monday, according to China's state-run Xinhua news agency.

During their meeting, Wang and Doval discussed the bilateral relations and progress of the normalisation process. Both Wang and Doval are the Special Representatives of the India-China border issue.

India is an important neighbour of China, and bilateral relations have returned to the track of recovery and improvement, said Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the ruling Communist Party of China and director of the Office of the Central Commission

for Foreign Affairs.

Wang noted that the leaders of the two countries agreed that China and India are partners instead of rivals, thus forming the most important strategic consensus between the two sides, providing an important impetus and strategic guarantee for the healthy and stable development of China-India relations, according to an official press release issued here on Monday night on the Doval-Wang meeting.

As the two economies with the largest populations, China and India should not only view bilateral relations from a long-term perspective, but also promote cooperation between the two countries from a global perspective, Wang said.

He noted that both sides should take concrete actions to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, promote their respective development and revitalisation through cooperation, and accelerate the modernisation process of the

Global South.

It is imperative to respect each other's core interests, properly handle sensitive issues, and place the China-India border issue in an appropriate position, so that it doesn't affect the overall situation of bilateral relations, Wang said.

He also underlined the need to advance the restoration of dialogue mechanisms and promote exchanges in various fields, such as trade, finance, law enforcement and media, Xinhua reported, quoting the official press release.

The two sides should also actively guide all sectors of society to form a correct understanding, and lay a solid public opinion and social foundation for improving bilateral relations, Wang added.

Responding to a question on Doval-Wang talks, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told media here on Tuesday that the China-India border area is generally stable and the two sides maintain open communication channels on

border-related issues.

"Both sides are actively implementing the common understandings reached in the 24th Round of Talks Between the Special Representatives of China and India on the Boundary Question, and are working hard in preparation for the 25th round of talks," he said.

In New Delhi, External Affairs Ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal on Monday said that the Doval-Wang discussions were "constructive and forward-looking". "NSA Doval underlined that stable, predictable and constructive bilateral relations contribute to building of trust and better understanding between the two sides," he said.

India and China rolled out a series of measures in the last over one year to rebuild their relationship after it witnessed a major downturn following the deadly Galwan Valley clashes in 2020 and the subsequent military face-off that lasted for over four years. (PTI)

Dozens of Awami League activists arrested as party marks founding anniv defying ban

DHAKA, June 23: Dozens of activists of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina's now-disbanded Awami League party were arrested overnight as they staged sporadic street marches to mark the party's 77th founding anniversary in defiance of a nationwide security ban, authorities said on Tuesday.

Founded on June 23, 1949, when present-day Bangladesh was East Pakistan, the Awami League is the country's oldest political party and led the nation's 1971 Liberation War.

The party was disbanded by the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government after Hasina's government was toppled on August 5, 2024, following a violent student-led street protest dubbed the July Uprising. The move was later endorsed by Parliament under the government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

Through its social media platforms, the Awami League urged supporters to hold digital discussions, hoist party flags, organise processions and conduct poster campaigns to mark the anniversary.

A police headquarters spokesman said 26 activists of the "banned party" were arrested in Dhaka alone, while several others were detained in other places in the country for staging processions or attempting to defy the ban amid heightened security.

"We have foiled their plan so far, and I hope that within the remaining time, they will not be able to bring out a procession, hold a rally or gather anywhere," Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) Commissioner Mosleh Uddin Ahmed told a media briefing.

The DMP, later in a statement, said that legal proceedings against those arrested were underway and operations would continue to maintain public safety and law and order in the capital.

Despite the restrictions, Awami League social media platforms uploaded video clips showing party leaders and activists holding street marches, carrying party flags and banners and chanting slogans.

On the eve of the anniversary, Hasina, in a social media post, said, "We were not born to be defeated." Hasina has been staying in India

since her ouster in 2024. She was sentenced to death in absentia by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal over charges linked to attempts to suppress the student-led agitation.

"We are returning with people's support with 10 times more strength," the Awami League said in a social media post.

Bangladesh's mainstream media and online news platforms are barred from publishing or broadcasting Hasina's statements or activities of the Awami League.

However, in commentaries published by regional media outlets, Hasina has accused successive governments of using the judiciary as a political weapon, facilitating "mob terror", and creating a "farical" electoral environment.

In Barishal district, Awami League activists reportedly staged unauthorised flash processions, prompting authorities to deploy extra police in riot gear.

Media reports said troops have also been deployed in Gopalganj, a traditional Awami League stronghold and the site in which five protesters were killed in 2024 in police action during a march organised by leaders of the July Uprising, who later formed the youth-led National Citizen Party (NCP). Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed on Monday said the Awami League no longer existed as an organisation.

"There is no organisation by the name of Awami League," he told reporters when asked about the party's founding anniversary.

The government, on the same day, deployed the army and paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) personnel in aid of civil administration as tensions mounted over the anniversary celebrations and reported deaths of two Awami League activists. A Home Ministry spokesman said military and BGB personnel were deployed in Dhaka and five other districts, including southwestern Gopalganj, Hasina's hometown, until June 30.

The redeployment came a week after troops were formally withdrawn to barracks following nearly two years of law-enforcement duties after Hasina's government was toppled in the student-led uprising. (PTI)

Teenage girl on way to high school in Gaza killed in Israeli strike, relatives say

DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA), June 23: An Israeli strike killed a teenage girl on Monday as she walked to her high school to take an exam in Gaza City, relatives said.

Raghad Hassan Ashour, 16, was headed to the 11th grade test when the blast occurred in a busy street in the Rimal district, according to a relative, Jameel Ashour.

The military said the strike targeted a Hamas militant, but that it was aware of a claim that an "uninvolved individual was harmed".

Dozens of Palestinians, including Ashour's mother, gathered to mourn the girl after her body was taken to Shifa Hospital. Three other people were injured in strikes in the same area, the Palestine Red Crescent Society said.

Videos of the strike and its aftermath showed groups of people gathered around two destroyed vehicles. Rescue workers were also at the scene and bloodstains could be seen on the ground.

Israel has continued to launch strikes in Gaza despite a ceasefire

deal that was reached in October.

The military says it targets Hamas and other militants who pose a threat and has accused the group of violating the ceasefire, but civilians also have been killed.

Israeli operations in the Gaza Strip have killed over 1,000 Palestinians since the ceasefire was reached, the Gaza health ministry said last week.

Five Israeli soldiers have been killed since the truce.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking 251 hostages on October 7, 2023.

Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed 73,018 Palestinians, including those killed since the ceasefire, Gaza's health ministry said.

The ministry, part of the Hamas-led government, is staffed by medical professionals and maintains detailed records that are generally considered reliable by United Nations agencies and independent experts. (AP)

Turkey detains 209 in raids in capital Ankara

ANKARA, June 23: Security forces in the Turkish capital carried out sweeping raids on Tuesday ahead of next month's NATO summit, and detained more than 200 people with suspected links to extremist groups, including the Islamic State group.

US President Donald Trump is expected to join other leaders of the 32-member alliance in Ankara for the July 7-8 summit.

Turkey is planning strict security measures for the summit, including banning demonstrations and restricting access to roads leading to airports, as well as sealing off areas around the summit venue and hotels hosting delegations.

The government of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has prioritised security and authorities regularly carry out security raids. Last month, security forces detained 324 people suspected of links to the Islamic State group in a nationwide sweep. (AP)

Red alert over France, heat that may rewrite record books

PARIS, June 23: Millions of people across France woke up drenched in sweat on Tuesday after another night of scorching heat, with most of the population exposed to extreme and exceptional temperatures, while 40 people died from drowning over the past five days in the country.

Temperatures will remain high around the clock as the national weather service, Météo France, placed 54 departments under a red heat wave alert. That is about half of the country.

French Prime Minister Sebastian Lecornu said after a crisis meeting that the 40 people who died by drowning since last Thursday were mainly young people.

In a country without widespread air conditioning, schools, trains and sporting events remain impacted.

Human-caused climate change is tied to increasingly extreme weather, and UN climate agency projections

duration," the weather service said. It has already been compared to the August 2003 heat wave, when the highest temperatures in over half a century caused an estimated 15,000 deaths, many of them among older people in apartments and retirement homes without air conditioning.

France introduced a heat watch warning system after that heat wave.

Europe is the world's fastest-warming continent, with temperatures increasing twice as fast as the global average since the 1980s, according to the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

Over the last four years, more than 200,000 people across Europe died from heat-related causes, and most of those deaths were preventable, the World Health Organisation's Europe office said this month. The above-average temperatures can cause heat exhaustion and life-threatening heat stroke.

Heat waves hits Britain

Across the English Channel, the Met Office issued a red extreme heat warning for Wednesday and Thursday, with forecasts suggesting June's all-time daily temperature record could be broken.

Temperatures of around 37 C are expected in southern England, with up to 35 C in southeast Wales. The peak of the heat wave is now forecast for Wednesday and Thursday, when highs could reach at least 39 C. Conditions are expected to ease by Friday, the weather agency said.

The EU monitoring agency found that in Europe and globally, 2024 was the hottest year on record and the continent experienced its second-highest number of "heat stress" days. Scientists warn that climate change is exacerbating the frequency and intensity of heat and dryness, especially in southeastern Europe, making the region more vulnerable



say the next five years should shatter more heat records.

"Sunshine continues to dominate across France, maintaining oppressive and exhausting heat throughout the country," Météo France said. Extreme conditions are expected to last at least until the end of the week, with daytime highs above 40 degrees

Celsius in many towns.

"Further record-breaking temperatures are expected, including some that could surpass all previous records, regardless of the time of year," Météo France said.

The heat wave is exceptionally intense, coming very early in the summer, "but with a still uncertain

duration," the weather service said. It has already been compared to the August 2003 heat wave, when the highest temperatures in over half a century caused an estimated 15,000 deaths, many of them among older people in apartments and retirement homes without air conditioning.

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The draft rolls will be published on July 4 • Period for filing claims and objections from July 5 to August 4

Mizoram students' group alleges 121 pc voter surge in Chakma-majority areas

AIZAWL, June 23: An influential students' group of Mizoram on Tuesday demanded a rigorous purge of suspected illegal foreigners from the voters' list in the ongoing SIR, alleging a staggering 121 per cent increase in the electoral roll and the emergence of nearly 100 new villages in Chakma-majority areas in the southern part of the state.

The Mizo Zirlai Pawl (MZIP) claimed that its internal analysis of electoral data revealed an alarming demographic shift in

the Chakma areas that threatened the integrity of Mizoram's voter base.

MZIP president C Lalremruata said that to ensure a fair and proper implementation of the Special Intensive Roll Revision (SIR), the organisation has scrutinised several constituencies that have historically experienced rapid growth in foreign population. "The MZIP conducted an independent analysis comparing the base 2005 roll with the 2024 lists and has discovered an exponential increase in voter numbers

and emergence of 97 new villages specifically in Chakma-dominated areas that did not exist in 2005," Lalremruata told a news conference here.

He alleged that in 195 villages, which have long been flagged for suspected illegal immigration, the voter count has skyrocketed from 43,540 in 2005 to 96,531 in 2024, a massive jump of 121.7 per cent.

According to figures compiled by the MZIP, voter numbers in 98 villages that appeared in both the 2005 and 2024 electoral

rolls increased from 43,540 to 57,103, registering a relatively normal growth of 31.15 per cent, he said.

Lalremruata also said that a total of 97 new villages that did not exist in the 2005 Electoral Roll but appeared by the time of the 2024 roll recorded 39,428 voters.

He also claimed that they uncovered cases of dual Indian and Bangladeshi citizenship, and voter entries without valid house numbers during the analysis.

The MZIP leader said that they will soon

submit a formal complaint to the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), seeking detailed verification of all 195 villages identified in its review, even if the SIR has already been completed in those areas.

Finding it unacceptable that genuine citizens of Mizoram continue to face hardships due to foreigners, the MZIP urged the CEO and other state election officials to remove all individuals illegally registered on the electoral roll through the SIR.

It further urged the Booth Level Offi-

cers (BLOs) to work with honesty and integrity, and to have the courage to remove non-citizens. Citing its historical involvement in electoral roll verification, Lalremruata recalled that the MZIP functionaries had travelled across the state and assisted election officials during the SIR in 1995, which resulted in the removal of over 10,000 illegal Bangladeshi immigrants from the rolls, including more than 4,000 voters from Tlabung constituency in Lunglei district alone. (PTI)

Three militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 23: Three militants have been arrested from two districts of Imphal Valley in Manipur for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, police said on Tuesday.

The insurgents, belonging to two different banned outfits, were nabbed from Imphal West and Thoubal districts.

"Two extortionist active cadres of KCP (MFL) were arrested from Thoubal Bazar in Thoubal district on Sunday. They have been identified as Abujam Sumit Singh (20) and Makuchung Gangmei (23). Forty-eight 'donation cards' have been seized from their possession," police said in a statement.

An active cadre of the banned militant outfit, People's Liberation Army, was arrested from Khumanlampak in Imphal West district on Monday. He has been identified as 29-year-old Oinam Dhanaraj Singh, it said. (PTI)

More forces being deployed in hills, de-weaponisation drive underway: Manipur Home Minister

IMPHAL, June 23: Manipur Home Minister Govindas Konthoujam on Tuesday said additional security forces, including the newly arrived CoBRA unit of the CRPF, are being deployed in the state's hill districts to tackle disturbances, while "de-weaponisation exercises" have begun.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of an event here, Konthoujam said the security situation was relatively calmer in the valley areas, allowing forces to focus on operations in the hills.

"Small things may happen in valley areas. However, disturbances are there in hill areas. We must try to maintain a peaceful atmosphere in valley areas so that security personnel may be able to act in hill areas," he said.

The hill areas account for around 90 per cent of Manipur's geographical area and have witnessed heightened tensions in recent



months between rival armed groups belonging to tribal communities.

"More security forces, including the newly arrived CoBRA unit of CRPF, are being deployed in hill areas to hunt out culprits, as there is less disturbance in valley areas. De-weaponisation exercises have

also started," the minister said.

"My appeal is that peace must be maintained for a progressive state," he added.

On the recent arrest of three alleged members of Arambai Tengol by the NIA in connection with an arms-looting case, Konthoujam said the state government had discussed the matter with the DGP.

"We held discussions with the DGP over the recent arrest of three Arambai Tengol members by the NIA. We held talks that no further arrests are made," he said.

However, the minister said intelligence inputs indicated that illegal arms were still in circulation in the valley areas.

"We urge that those weapons be handed over to security agencies so that no further arrests are made by NIA, CBI or state police," he said.

"Operations are being conducted for recovery of illegal arms," he added. (PTI)

Ziro meeting pushes for stronger APST verification, ILP enforcement

HT Correspondent
ZIRO, June 23: A high-level coordination meeting involving community organisations, student bodies, traditional leaders and government officials was held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hall in Ziro on Tuesday to deliberate on strengthening the integrity of Arunachal Pradesh Scheduled Tribe (APST) certificates and improving enforcement of the Inner Line Permit (ILP) system.

The meeting, convened as part of a broader effort to safeguard indigenous rights and enhance regional security, was jointly led by the MLA of Ziro and the district administration. Participants discussed measures to ensure transparency in the issuance of APST certificates and to strengthen monitoring mechanisms governing the entry of non-residents into the district.

The deliberations brought to-

gether a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including senior administrative and law enforcement officials, representatives of civil society organisations, student bodies and traditional institutions.

Among the organisations represented were the Tanw Supun Dukun (TSD), Apatani Women Association Ziro (AWAZ), Apatani Youth Association (AYA) and Apatani Students' Union (ASU), whose members voiced concerns relating to the protection of indigenous identity and community interests.

Grassroots representatives, including the Head Gaon Burah and Zilla Parishad Members from various sectors such as Niti, Diibo, Hari and Tjang, also participated in the discussions, highlighting the importance of community involvement in implementing and monitoring regulatory measures at the local level.

Legal and advocacy perspectives

were presented by representatives of the Lower Subansiri Bar Association, the ST Bachao Andolan Committee and local bazaar committees.

Participants emphasised the need for a coordinated approach involving both government agencies and community institutions to ensure the credibility of APST certification processes and the effective implementation of the ILP system.

The meeting underscored the district administration's efforts to adopt a participatory model of governance by involving local organisations and community leaders in addressing issues of public concern.

Stakeholders expressed hope that the collaborative initiative would help strengthen the protection of indigenous rights, preserve the region's cultural identity and improve compliance with existing legal and administrative safeguards.

Authorities must work harder to protect women, children: Kruse

KOHIMA, June 23: Amid growing public outrage over crimes against women and children in Nagaland, state minister Salhouonuo Kruse on Tuesday said authorities must step up efforts to ensure the safety of women and children.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a programme here, Kruse, Nagaland's first woman minister, expressed concern over the increasing reports of sexual abuse involving women and girl children, saying such incidents have become alarmingly frequent.

"Today, we are hearing a lot of news through the papers every morning. Almost after a few days, another story comes up like that. I feel that our authorities should work harder to keep our women and children safe," the minister for Women Resource Development and Horticulture, added. (PTI)

Indo-Naga issue does not belong to any group or party: NPF

HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, June 23: Taking note of the statement made by the working committee of the Naga National Political Groups (NNPGs) that it would oppose extraction of crude oil from Naga areas before settlement of the Naga political issue, the ruling Naga People's Front (NPF) in Nagaland asserted that the Indo-Naga issue does not belong to any one person, group, or political party.

The governments of India, Assam and Nagaland signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) in New Delhi recently for exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas along the Assam-Nagaland border, which was described by Nagaland CM Neiphiu Rio as historic.

The working committee of the NNPGs said any attempt to explore or extract natural resources, including petroleum, in Naga areas is "illegal" and

"against the agreed principles" until the Indo-Naga political settlement is formally signed.

In a lengthy statement on Monday night, the NPF said the Indo-Naga issue was built on the sacrifices and hopes of generations of Nagas, calling for wisdom, maturity, and unity to find an honourable, acceptable, and inclusive political solution.

The party said the task before the Nagas is bigger than any one group or party, adding responsible groups should support constructive dialogue and constitutional processes instead of using sensitive issues for short-term political gain.

The NPF said it understands the concerns raised by different sections of Naga society on ownership and management of natural resources, but such issues must be handled with a historical view, clear facts, and collective responsibility.

Cong Legislature Party leader seeks timeline for restoration of normalcy in Manipur

IMPHAL, June 23: The Congress Legislature Party leader in Manipur, Keisham Meghachandra, has demanded that the state government provide a timeline for the restoration of normalcy in the northeastern state and steps being taken to ensure justice, security, and reconciliation.

In a post on X, Meghachandra said that since May 3, 2023, the people of Manipur have endured prolonged hardship, displacement, uncertainty, and disruption of normal life.

Manipur witnessed the killing of at least 260 people and the displacement of thousands in violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities since May 2023.

The Congress leader said the nearly five-month-old BJP government should be able to present a clear and practical roadmap for restoring peace and normalcy in the state.

"While the situation remains complex, people deserve clarity and concrete action. The government must explain the steps being taken to restore public confidence, ensure rehabilitation, facilitate the safe return of displaced persons, and create conditions for lasting peace," Meghachandra said. (PTI)

Meghalaya steps up El Nino preparedness; focuses on water security, farming

SHILLONG, June 23: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Tuesday directed government departments to intensify preparedness and roll out coordinated action plans to mitigate the possible impact of an anticipated El Nino event.

Chairing a meeting of the Meghalaya Climate Council at the State Guest House in Taraghar, Sangma said the state must plan proactively to limit the fallout of extreme weather conditions linked to El Nino-related climatic variations.

"The state must prepare in advance rather than respond after adverse conditions emerge," he said.

The CM asked departments to translate preparedness plans into time-bound, actionable measures with clearly defined responsibilities.

He stressed the need to prioritise water conservation, catchment protection,



groundwater recharge and community participation, while also calling for wider

dissemination of weather advisories and early-warning information.

El Nino conditions are often linked to altered monsoon patterns, prolonged dry spells and below-normal rainfall.

Sangma directed departments to strengthen support systems for farmers and vulnerable communities.

The meeting reviewed sector-specific contingency plans covering drinking water supply, agriculture, food security and disaster management.

Representatives of India Meteorological Department (IMD), Meghalaya Basin Management Agency, Public Health Engineering Department, Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Department, Food Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Department, and other agencies briefed the council on vulnerability assessments and preparedness measures. (PTI)

IN THE COURT OF DISTRICT & SESSIONS JUDGE
AT KARBI ANGLONG
Matrimonial Suit No. 31/2025

Smt. Mitali Mech Doimray
.....Petitioner
Sri. Susanta Neogi
.....Defendant/Opp. Party

-VERSUS-

NOTICE

To,
Sri. Susanta Neogi
S/O. Lt. Brajendra Narayan Neogi
Add: G-133, 2nd Floor, Gurugram
Pin: 122018
State: Haryana

Whereas the above-mentioned suit/proceeding has been instituted against you by the plaintiff/petitioner and whereas this Hon'ble Court, being satisfied that summons/notice cannot be served upon you in the ordinary manner, has been pleased to order substituted service by publication under Order V Rule 20 CPC.

You are hereby called upon to appear before this Hon'ble Court either in person or through a duly authorized advocate on 03/07/2026 at Diphu District & Session Judge, Karbi Anglong, Diphu, and file your written statement/show cause, if any, in the above-mentioned case.

Take notice that in default of your appearance on the aforesaid date, the suit/proceeding shall be heard and determined ex parte against you.

Given under my hand and seal of the Court on this 20th day of June, 2026.

By Order of the Court
Chief Administrative Officer
District & Sessions Judge
Karbi Anglong Diphu

District Judge, Karbi Anglong
Present: Yusuf Azzaz
Title Suit (Matrimonial) case no: 31/2025

Sl. No.	Date	Order	Signature
	15/5/2026	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The petitioner is represented. The Ld. Counsel for the petitioner has vide petition no: 294 submitted that the present whereabouts of the opposite party Susanta Neogi is not known and the notice to the last known address of the opposite party has been sent but the same is returned without service; as such the petitioner may be permitted to serve the notice by substituted manner, i.e through publication in newspaper. Heard learned counsel for the petitioner. Perused the record. It appears from the case record that notice issued to the opposite party at his last known address has returned unserved. The petitioner has submitted that despite due diligence, the present whereabouts and address of the defendant could not be ascertained and there is no immediate likelihood of effecting personal service in the ordinary manner. Considering the facts and circumstances of the case and being District Judge, Karbi Anglong satisfied that the opposite party's whereabouts are not ascertainable or that for any other reason the summons cannot be served in the ordinary way, I deem it proper to permit substituted service under Order V Rule 20 of the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908. Accordingly, the prayer of the petitioner is allowed. The petitioner is permitted to take steps for substituted service upon the defendant by publication of the notice in: One leading daily newspaper having wide circulation in the State of Assam; and One National daily newspaper having sufficient circulation. The publication shall contain the necessary particulars of the case along with the next date fixed for appearance of the opposite party. The steps should be taken by next date. Fixing 29/5/2026 for steps. 	Sd/- District Judge, Karbi Anglong, Diphu

No. KDB/BTC/15th FC/NIT/2025-26/2321 Date 22/06/2026

NOTICE INVITING TENDER

In cancellation to earlier tender notice published vide No. KDB/BTC/15th FC/NIT/2025-26/Dtd.021/02/2026 a fresh Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable Court Fee Stamp of Rs.8.25 (Rupees Eight & Twenty-Five Paise) only with a validity period of 180(one hundred eighty) days. Which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the APWD's printed F-2 forms are invited from the registered contractors of Class-II and Class-I (A, B & C) category of Assam PWD (Roads & Building) and BTC, according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the following work under 15th Finance Commission fund for the year 2024-25 during 2025-26. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 2.00 P.M. on 14.07.2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M.

Against the scheme shown below:-

Sl. No.	Name of Scheme	Estimated Amount	Earnest Money	Cost of Tender	Time for completion
1	Const. of C.C. Block road From Titaguri-Kashibari road to Lotif's house at New Titaguri Village	19,00,000.00	(ST, SC, OBC- 1% & Gen-2%)	570/-	3 months

Details NIT may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractors or their authorized agent from 22-06-2026 to 14-07-2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment of cost of Tender paper in the form of demand draft/Banker Cheque from any Nationalized Bank, duly pledged in favour of Principal Secretary, BTC, Kokrajhar, payable at Kokrajhar.

Sd/-
Block Development Officer,
Kokrajhar Dev. Block, Titaguri

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/636

ASSAM POWER GENERATION CORPORATION LIMITED

Registered Office: Bijulee Bhawan, Paltanbazar, Guwahati-781 001, Assam
CIN: U40101AS2003SGC007239
Tel.No.: 0361-2739502, Fax No.03612739546/22

Extension Notice

SHORT TENDER NOTICE NO. APGCL/KLHEP/GM/Tech-10(E)/2026-27/21(E-01) Dated: 23/06/2026

The tender invited vide Notice No.: APGCL/MSHEP/GM/Tech-10(E)/2026-27/21 dtd. 20/05/2026 has been extended as follows: -

"Overhauling of 03 nos. of 4000 KVA 3.3/33 KV Generator Transformer at MSHEP-I & 03 nos. of 2000 KVA 3.3/33 KV Generator Transformer at MSHEP-II."

Financial Involvement: Rs. 13,57,590.00 (Rupees Thirteen Lakhs Fifty-Seven Thousand Five Hundred Ninety) only

Tender Paper Issue : Up to 13:00 hrs. of 30-06-2026
Tender receiving : Up to 12:00 hrs. of 01-07-2026
Tender Opening : At 15:00 hrs. on 01-07-2026

Details tender documents may be obtained from the O/O The General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengery, West Karbi Anglong, Assam during working hours. The tender inviting authority reserves the right to accept or reject any bid/tender and to cancel the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.

Sd/-
General Manager KLHEP, APGCL

Gujarat: AAP MLA Vasava, 8 others get 7 years in jail for assaulting forest officials

RAJPIPLA (GUJARAT), June 23: A sessions court here on Tuesday sentenced Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) MLA Chaitar Vasava, his wife and seven others to seven years' imprisonment in a November 2023 case of assaulting forest officials and extortion.

Additional sessions judge A V Hirpara also imposed a fine of ₹ 25,000 on each of them, government lawyer Vandana Bhatt said. The accused included four women including Shakuntala Vasava, the MLA's wife.

As per the prosecution, the incident took place on October 30, 2023. Forest

officials removed cotton crop cultivated on illegally occupied government land, which led to a dispute. The officials were then called to Vasava's residence at Dediapada in Narmada district to discuss the issue.

At his residence, Vasava, a tribal leader who represents Dediapada (ST) assembly constituency, threatened the officials, slapped one of them, and fired in the air from a pistol. The accused, including Vasava's wife, extorted a total of ₹ 60,000 from forest officials for removing the crop and Vasava later destroyed the evidence by concealing or disposing of

the pistol, the police said.

Vasava's personal assistant Jitendra Vasava was accused of contacting the MLA over the phone and asking him to come to collect the extortion money.

A case was registered against the MLA, his wife and seven others under Indian Police Code (IPC) sections related to rioting, extortion and attack on government officials as well as provisions of the Arms Act. Charges were framed on August 7, 2025.

"A total of 17 prosecution witnesses were examined during the trial, along with several pieces of documentary evi-

dence, and all the witnesses supported our case. We sought the maximum sentence of 10 years, arguing that an elected representative is expected to pursue lawful remedies rather than resort to violence, and no individual is above the law," special public prosecutor Amit Nair said.

During the trial, Nair argued that witness testimonies, documentary evidence, call records and bank statements established the accused's involvement.

He also cited other recent First Information Reports naming Vasava for offences such as assault and creation of

public disorder, contending that they reflected a pattern of similar conduct.

At the stage of final arguments, Vasava's lawyers sought recall of certain prosecution witnesses, but the sessions court rejected the plea. An appeal against the ruling was rejected by the Gujarat High Court on May 7, 2026, and by the Supreme Court on May 19. The accused then filed an application seeking permission to examine defence witnesses, despite having chosen not to do so earlier. This application too was rejected by the sessions court and later by the high court. The AAP MLA was arrested on July 5,

2025, under section 109 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) for an attempt to murder after he allegedly attacked a taluka panchayat president during a meeting. While granting him bail last September, the high court laid down a condition that he shall not enter Dediapada taluka for a year.

In April 2026, three FIRs were registered against Vasava and some other local leaders at Jhagadia GIDC police station in Bharuch district after he slapped and was in turn slapped by a person at a factory where they had gone to demand compensation for the victims of a fire. (PTI)

'PM Modi must stop appeasing good friend Trump'

India must not sign trade pact as it stands: Ramesh

NEW DELHI, June 23: With US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer visiting India, the Congress on Tuesday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi must stop appeasing his "good friend" President Donald Trump and there is absolutely no need for India to be "bamboozled" into signing any trade pact which at present is heavily against its interests.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government must seek inspiration from Malaysia which has rebuffed its own trade deal with America following the US Supreme Court's verdict.

"The US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer is in New Delhi today and tomorrow. On the request of PM Modi, while he was under pressure from Rahul Gandhi's expose in Parliament of his cowardice in front of China, an India-US Joint statement on trade was issued on February 6, 2026," Ramesh said on X.

"The US promised to reduce tariffs on Indian exports from 25% to 18%. India promised to eliminate its tariffs or reduce them deeply on US agricultural commodities and industrial products and purchase up to USD 500 billion from the US over five years," he said.

Ramesh pointed out that on February 20,



2026, the Supreme Court of the US ruled that President Trump's reciprocal tariff strategy was illegal.

The very tariff concession that the US had offered India in the February 6, 2026, joint statement effectively disappeared overnight, he said.

"Within hours of the US Supreme Court ruling the US imposed a temporary 10% tariff on all its trading partners including India. The legal basis for this expires on July 24, 2026. There is considerable uncertainty on what will happen thereafter," Ramesh said.

However, India along with about 60 other countries is under investigation by the US for

unfair trade practices that supposedly violate US laws, he said, adding that final outcomes from this investigation are expected in the coming weeks.

The US is clearly using this investigation as a threat to get India to formally sign the agreement as announced on February 6, 2026, he said.

"Such an agreement is not a deal but a steal by the US. Indian farmers in different states that include J&K, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Maharashtra will be very adversely impacted. The US makes very little firm commitments whereas India commits to at least trebling its present levels of annual imports from the US," Ramesh said.

Despite having trade agreements with Japan and the EU, the US has threatened increased tariffs on them, he said.

Even if a deal is signed, what and where is the guarantee that tariffs will not be unilaterally imposed or threatened to be imposed thereafter, Ramesh asked.

"There is absolutely no need for India to be bamboozled into signing any trade agreement which as it stands now is heavily against India's interests," Ramesh said. (PTI)

Bihar: RJD leaders criticise CM for describing Lalu Prasad as 'villain'



PATNA, June 23: The opposition RJD in Bihar on Tuesday lashed out at Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary for describing its president Lalu Prasad as "sabse bada khalnayak" (greatest villain).

Choudhary made the remark a day ago, while addressing a BJP function, where he had mocked the RJD supreme and his wife Rabri Devi for sulking over the downgrading of their security cover.

"The biggest villain, whom all are scared of, is now living in fear. It is proof that Bihar now has a 'sushasan ki sarkar' (good governance)," Choudhary had said.

Addressing a press conference, RJD national spokesperson Manoj Jha called Choudhary "a product of Lalu ji's school (pathshala)" who, after joining the BJP, had become "a chief minister without political mandate".

"We uphold modesty of language in public speeches. We don't even describe villains as villains, and here they are, describing the greatest 'nayak' (hero) of this land as 'khalnayak' (villain)," Jha told reporters in Patna during a press conference.

He said that Samrat Choudhary is that student of Lalu Prasad's 'pathshala' who "could not take his lessons well, and is now part of an altogether different school".

"Choudhary made an unwarranted and immature statement. People consider Lalu Prasad as a fighter who made inroads into people's hearts on account of his empowering welfare politics," RJD state president Mangni Lal Mandal said. He claimed that people from backward classes are aggrieved by such a statement.

Mandal criticised the government's decision to downgrade the security of Lalu Prasad and Rabri Devi, saying that "there are established parameters for bungalow allocation" which should not be violated. (PTI)

Minister Priyank Kharge targets RSS to remain in news: Tejasvi Surya

BENGALURU, June 23: Bengaluru South MP Tejasvi Surya on Tuesday targeted Karnataka Home Minister Priyank Kharge, accusing him of focusing on attacks against the RSS to remain in the news while neglecting issues related to investment, industry and job creation in the state.

Addressing a press conference in Bengaluru, the BJP leader alleged that the minister was prioritising political messaging over governance at a time when Karnataka was facing increasing competition from neighbouring states for industrial investments and business expansion.

"It seems someone has given him very good public-relations advice. The advice is that if you want to be in the news every day and appear on television more than the chief minister himself, then this is the strategy. Every

day, attack RSS," Surya said.

The BJP MP claimed that companies in Bengaluru and other parts of Karnataka had raised concerns over land acquisition hurdles, inadequate infrastructure, unreliable power supply and corruption, leading some of them to explore opportunities outside the state. He said neighbouring states were actively attempting to attract such firms by offering alternative locations for investment.

Surya cited instances of leaders from Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh reaching out to companies that had publicly expressed dissatisfaction with the business environment in Karnataka. According to him, rival states were aggressively competing to secure investments, generate employment and strengthen their economies. (PTI)

Tharoor condoles loss of lives in Lucknow fire tragedy

JAMMU, June 23: Congress leader Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday condoned the loss of lives in the Lucknow fire incident, and sought strict enforcement of safety codes and regulations to avoid such cases.

Tharoor, who is the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs which is visiting Jammu and Kashmir, was talking to reporters here before the panel left for Srinagar on the second leg of the four-day study tour.

A major fire broke out at a three-storey commercial building housing an animation centre in Lucknow's Aliganj area on Monday, killing at least 15 people, mostly students, and injuring nine others.

"Our thoughts are with the families of those who lost their loved ones. Earlier, a similar incident happened in Delhi... we must ensure proper enforcement of safety standards and related regulations so that such incidents do not happen again," Tharoor said.

On the panel's Jammu visit, the Congress leader said they had several engagements, including a visit of the passport office on Monday, and will come out with a report after conclusion of the tour.

"We are now going to Srinagar, where we will meet the Lieutenant Governor and the Chief Minister. We will then visit Kargil the day after, followed by Leh. After completing the entire tour, we will come out with our report," he said.

The Congress leader had said the committee is in the Union Territory to study three specific issues --India-Pakistan relations, Sino-Indian relations, and the functioning of passport offices and Passport Seva Kendras. (PTI)

Maharashtra: Oppn objects to Speaker allowing ministers to reply to questions of other departments

MUMBAI, June 23: The Opposition in the Maharashtra assembly on Tuesday took exception to Speaker Rahul Narwekar's decision to allow the ministers present in the House to reply to questions not related to their departments.

NCP (SP) MLA Jayant Patil demanded that the decision be withdrawn, while Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Aaditya Thackeray said the Minister of State of a department can reply to a question related to it and not any other minister.

Congress MLA and former minister Nitin Raut said such a practise had not been seen earlier. The Speaker defended his decision, stating that running a government is a collective responsibility, and "you were doing the same thing in 2019," apparently referring to the period when the Maha Vikas Aghadi was in power. Opposition MLAs walked out briefly in protest against the Speaker's decision.

Speaking to reporters, Aaditya Thackeray alleged that Narwekar was shielding an "inefficient" government.

"Speaker Rahul Narwekar claimed that during the MVA regime, the charge of one ministry used to be given to another during legislative sessions.



This is incorrect and should be removed from the record of the assembly," he said. He also slammed Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, who heads the rival Shiv Sena, for 'failing' to answer legislators' questions directly.

Shinde routinely delegated his ministerial responsibilities during the session which was "unacceptable", Thackeray said, claiming that ministers took direct responsibility for answering questions during the MVA government.

The Opposition has been raising issues of public concern and not personal questions, and

ministers should discharge their duties seriously instead of "indulging in politics of breaking parties", said Thackeray, with apparent reference to six Sena (UBT) MPs joining Shinde's party last week.

NCP (SP) MLA Jitendra Awhad too claimed that the Speaker was trying to cover the government's "sins".

He also sarcastically remarked that the Speaker's "heavy words" would be sent to Congress MP Shashi Tharoor to decipher, and added that the Opposition was being treated as if it was "uneducated".

Awhad further alleged that the Opposition was being denied basic facilities in the legislature complex.

"We have not even been given a proper office. We will sit on the steps and have our meals," he said.

Shiv Sena (UBT) MLA Bhaskar Jadhav also questioned the denial of office space, pointing out that smaller parties with fewer or no legislators had been allotted offices, while his party, with 20 MLAs, had been ignored despite repeated representations. (PTI)

Mamata camp claims it sent office-bearers' list to EC before unveiling of rival leadership line-up

KOLKATA, June 23: The battle for control of the TMC escalated on Tuesday, with Mamata Banerjee's camp claiming it had finalised a revamped National Working Committee (NWC), and communicated the new organisational structure to the Election Commission before a rebel faction removed her as party chairperson and unveiled a rival leadership line-up.

The disclosure came as dissident leaders led by Leader of Opposition Ritabrata Banerjee prepared to approach the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) in West Bengal later in the day, seeking to bolster their claim over the party organisation, and opening a fresh institutional front in the struggle for control of the outfit founded by Mamata Banerjee in 1998.

According to leaders loyal to Mamata Banerjee, the party's leadership structure and a 24-member NWC were finalised on Saturday, and the revised list was submitted to the EC on Monday, hours before the dissident camp held a special session in Kolkata and announced a parallel organisational set-up.

"While the rebel camp was making preparations for its own NWC, Mamata Banerjee had already finalised the party's organisational structure and sent the list to the EC as the chairperson of the TMC," a senior leader of her camp told PTI.



Sources said the list submitted to the poll panel named Mamata Banerjee as chairperson, Subrata Baski as vice-president, Abhishek Banerjee as national general secretary, Derek O'Brien and Dolan Sen as joint secretaries, and Subhasish Chakraborty as treasurer.

The revised panel marked a departure from the committee announced earlier this month, dropping several leaders who subsequently joined the dissident camp. Among those omitted were Firhad Hakim and Aroop Biswas, while Rajya Sabha MP Nadimul Haque was inducted into the new structure, the sources said. (PTI)

Bidadi township row: Kumaraswamy awaits CM's response on meeting, seeks farmers participation

BENGALURU, June 23: JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy on Tuesday said he is awaiting Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar's response to his letter, seeking rescheduling of a meeting on the proposed GBIT project near Bidadi in Bengaluru South district, and the government's land acquisition for it.

The Union Minister also stressed that the talks should involve the farmers affected by the project, instead of a few holding a discussion at Vidhana Soudha, as proposed by the CM. Shivakumar had on Monday invited Kumaraswamy to his office at Vidhana Soudha on June 26, for discussion on the issue.

However, citing prior commitments, Kumaraswamy had sought to reschedule the meeting to June 27, proposing the discussion be organized at a suitable venue in Bidadi or Byramangala instead of Vidhana

Soudha, aiming to give affected farmers and villagers an opportunity to participate. Meanwhile, reacting to Kumaraswamy's letter, Shivakumar told reporters on Tuesday, "let's not discuss it now. I will get back to you on the matter."

Despite opposition from sections of farmers and villagers, a final notification was recently issued for the acquisition of 499 acres across three villages in Ramanagara and Harohalli taluks for the Greater Bengaluru Integrated Township, one of Shivakumar's ambitious projects, projected as India's "first AI-powered integrated township".

The project is expected to cover a total of 7,481 acres across nine villages in the region, sources said, adding that the notification issued recently is likely the first in a series of land acquisition notifications expected in the coming days. (PTI)

IIT Hyderabad launches Nuclear Technology Orientation Programme with Crimson Energy Experts

HYDERABAD, June 23: IIT Hyderabad on Tuesday announced the launch of Nuclear Technology Orientation Programme in collaboration with Crimson Energy Experts Pvt Ltd, describing it as a significant step towards strengthening country's nuclear energy talent pipeline.

The programme, which will commence on August 3 at the IITH campus, is a three-month residential programme designed to equip Engineers and Professionals with a comprehensive understanding of nuclear power technologies and operations and build skilled workforce for India's growing nuclear energy sector, a release from IIT Hyderabad said.

As India accelerates its clean energy transition and expands its nuclear power capacity, the demand for trained professionals with domain knowledge in nuclear technologies is expected to grow significantly, it said.

The Nuclear Technology Orientation Programme (NTOPI), aims to bridge this indus-



try-academia gap by offering participants exposure to the technical, operational, safety, and regulatory aspects of nuclear power generation, it said.

The programme is targeted at early and

mid-career Engineers, Managers from EPC companies, engineering consultants, power sector personnel, and executives from public sector undertakings engaged in energy and infrastructure development.

The curriculum combines foundational nuclear engineering concepts with practical industry perspectives and covers topics such as Reactor Physics, Reactor Engineering, Radiation shielding, Nuclear safety, Waste management, Reactor instrumentation and Control systems, Thermal hydraulics, Quality assurance, Emergency preparedness, and Advanced Nuclear technologies including Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).

Participants will learn from IIT Hyderabad faculty and experienced scientists and engineers from the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) organisations, the release said.

Speaking on the launch of the programme, IITH Director Prof B S Murty said through this programme, IITH aims to contribute to capacity building by bringing together academic expertise and industry experience to develop a highly skilled workforce for strategic sectors. (PTI)

LUCKNOW FIRE TRAGEDY

Demolition notice to building with no emergency exit, investigators begin probe

LUCKNOW (UP), June 23: The building gutted in a fire that killed 15 people was operating as a commercial establishment with only one main entry point, no emergency exit and no measures to prevent smoke accumulation, police said on Tuesday as investigators and grieving families alike tried to make sense of the tragedy.

A day later, the three-floor building once buzzing with activity stood testimony to the negligence that was. Neon coloured packets shining through ash covered floors, shelves lined with goods and a fire extinguisher probably never used... debris from the fire Monday afternoon littered the charred building reduced to mangled metal and torn wires hanging from blackened ceilings. The two-member Special Investigation Team (SIT) set up to probe the cause of the fire and possible lapses promised to submit its report at the earliest and the Lucknow Development Authority issued a demolition notice to the building in north Lucknow's upscale Aliganj area over violations and illegal operations.

The building housed an animation centre and a pet shop. Police said four people have been arrested so far -- Ram Krishna Upadhyay (43), building owner Virendra Prasad Shukla (62), animation centre operator Tushar Krishna Jaiswal (31) and Suresh Kumar Sahoo. Four officials have also been sus-

Those responsible will be held accountable, says Rajnath Singh

LUCKNOW, June 23: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh assured that "responsibility will be fixed" for those accountable for the fire tragedy in Lucknow, which claimed 15 lives on a busy Monday afternoon. Upon his arrival in Lucknow, Singh went directly to the site of the incident. There, he received a briefing about the situation from Deputy Chief Minister Brajesh Pathak.

Speaking to reporters, Singh stated that Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has assured that the entire incident will be investigated, adding that responsibility will be determined regarding those accountable for this tragedy, and all necessary actions will be taken.

He described the incident as "very unfortunate" and offered his condolences to the families of the victims. Following

this, he visited King George's Medical University (KGMU) to inquire about the condition of the injured. He gathered information about their treatment from the doctors and instructed them to ensure that the patients received the best possible care, the Lucknow city unit of the BJP said in a statement. Upon reaching Lucknow, Rajnath Singh spoke to Adityanath over the phone to obtain detailed information about the incident.

"Briefing the defence minister on the entire sequence of events, Chief Minister Adityanath said that strict action is being taken against the guilty. An SIT has been constituted to investigate the incident. The team is to submit its report to the government within seven days," the Lucknow city unit of the BJP said in a statement. (PTI)

ended, including officials from the electricity department, fire department and LDA.

On Tuesday, large crowds gathered outside the building. Among the 15 people killed and nine injured are many students who attended

class at the centre. Scores of people were trapped inside as flames and smoke engulfed the building. In 2016, the three-storey building was issued a demolition order over unauthorized construction but it was revoked less

than two months later. "We have once again issued a demolition notice over (construction) violations for the Aliganj building where the fire incident took place on Monday," LDA Vice Chairperson Prathamesh Kumar told PTI.

"We have also initiated inquiry against officials for laxity and action will be taken against them," Kumar said. The process to identify such officials and their role in the negligence has begun. Authorities have also launched a crackdown against its own officials in connection with the illegal operation of the residential building as a commercial space.

The two-member SIT formed on the directions of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath comprises Additional Chief Secretary (Tourism, Religious Affairs and Culture) Amrit Abhijit and Additional Director General of Police, Lucknow Zone, Praveen Kumar. It has been asked to submit its report within seven days. "We will investigate all aspects of the incident. We will complete the probe within the stipulated time and ensure necessary action," Kumar told reporters at the site. The FIR in the case spelt out details of the alleged negligence. It said the fire broke out around 2.30 pm. It alleged that the building owners and persons associated with the establishments "had not made any arrangements for fire safety" and that there was "no arrangement for immediate emergency exit or entry" in the building. (PTI)

West Bengal CM pays homage to Syama Prasad Mookerjee on death anniversary

KOLKATA, June 23: West Bengal Chief Minister Suvedu Adhikari on Tuesday paid homage to Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee here on his death anniversary.

He paid floral tributes at the bust of Mookerjee at Keoratala crematorium in south Kolkata. The CM was accompanied by the state's Finance Minister Swapan Dasgupta and Industries Minister Tapas Roy.

Earlier in the day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid homage to Mookerjee, and said his unwavering conviction and courage in public life and commitment to national interest continue to inspire generations.

West Bengal BJP president Samik Bhattacharya also paid floral tributes at the bust of Mookerjee here. Mookerjee died under mysterious circumstances on this day in 1953 in a Srinagar jail, after being arrested for entering Jammu and Kashmir without a permit.

Later, attending a blood donation camp in memory of Mookerjee at Hazra crossing here, Adhikari said this was the first time that the Information and Cultural Affairs Department and the Kolkata Municipal Corporation jointly observed the 'Balidan Divas' on his death anniversary.

The chief minister said that 'Paschim Banga Divas' (West Bengal Day) was observed on June 20

to highlight the significance of the day in 1947, which he said "had been kept a secret" from the present generation.

The significance of June 20 lies in the events of 1947, when legislators from the western districts of undivided Bengal voted in favour of partition and joining India, a decision that laid the foundation for the state, which emerged after Independence.

"The 34-year rule of the CPI(M)-led Left Front and the subsequent corrupt dispensation that was at the helm in the state had kept the contributions of Mookerjee and Bharat Sevaram Sangha founder Swami Pranabandana hidden from the people," he claimed.

Adhikari said that Mookerjee's death in incarceration is shrouded in mystery.

"We regard his death as a conspiratorial murder," the CM asserted, maintaining that Mookerjee's clarion call for 'Ek Desh Mein Do Vidhan, Do Pradhan aur Do Nishan Nahi Chalenge' (A country cannot have two constitutions, two prime ministers, and two national emblems) led to his untimely death. "We Bengalis have been indebted to him over generations for leading the way for West Bengal's induction into India in August, 1947 to provide a homeland for us," he said. (PTI)

Administration of justice must remain fundamentally human endeavour: CJI



NEW DELHI, June 23: Chief Justice of India Surya Kant said on Tuesday that the administration of justice must remain fundamentally a human endeavour and though artificial intelligence may assist judges, it cannot determine outcomes or exercise judicial discretion.

Delivering an address during his meeting with Igor Krasnov, Chairman of the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, at Moscow, the CJI said if technology enhances the capabilities of courts, it is investment in people that determines how effectively those capabilities are utilised.

He said institutions may evolve, technologies may change and new challenges may emerge, but the fundamental purpose of courts remains to uphold justice in a manner that commands public trust.

"Yet, even as we embrace innovation, we remain

acutely conscious of its limits. The administration of justice is, and must remain, fundamentally a human endeavour," the CJI said.

He said AI may assist judges by organising information, facilitating translations, generating transcripts and streamlining administrative processes, but "it cannot determine outcomes, assess witness credibility, evaluate evidence or exercise judicial discretion".

The CJI asserted that this distinction is reflected in the draft regulations for the use of AI in the judiciary, recently notified by the Supreme Court, which seeks to ensure responsible deployment of AI while preserving judicial independence and human oversight.

He said the supreme courts of India and the Russian Federation serve societies of immense scale and diversity.

Justice Kant said although the legal traditions of the two countries have evolved along different historical paths, "we share a common challenge: how to preserve public confidence in the administration of justice while adapting to a rapidly-changing world".

He said the effectiveness of modern judiciaries increasingly depends upon two closely-connected factors -- their ability to harness technology intelligently and responsibly, and commitment to investing in people through sustained judicial education and professional development.

"While technology may expand the reach of courts, it is ultimately the learning, integrity and commitment of the judges who serve within them that determine the quality of justice delivered," he said. (PTI)

Every file represents aspirations, lives of countless citizens: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, June 23: Every file represents the aspirations, concerns and lives of countless citizens, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told young IAS officers on Tuesday, while asking them to place people at the centre of every decision and ensure that governance remains empathetic, responsive and inclusive.

Interacting with 183 officer trainees of the IAS-2024 batch, who have been attached as assistant secretaries in various ministries and departments here, the prime minister also said major developmental challenges cannot be solved in silos and effective coordination across departments is essential for achieving meaningful and lasting outcomes.

He told the young civil servants to dedicate themselves to nation-building with a strong sense of purpose, innovation and citizen-centric governance, and urged them to always remember the human impact behind every administrative file.

Modi said every file represents the aspirations, concerns and lives of countless citizens, according to an official statement.

Stressing the mantra of "Nagrik Devo Bhava", the prime minister called upon the young officers to place citizens at the centre of every decision and ensure that governance remains empathetic, responsive and inclusive, the statement said.



He urged them to constantly evaluate their own contribution towards nation-building and derive satisfaction not from positions held, but from measurable outcomes achieved.

Modi said after two years of field exposure and administrative learning, the officers now stand at a crucial stage where their decisions will shape not just their own careers, but the future of crores of citizens.

He emphasised that the real test of public service begins by handling real-life situations with integrity, sensitivity and commitment.

Highlighting the vision of "Viksit Bharat 2047", Modi noted that every policy and administrative decision over the coming decades must contribute towards building a developed India.

Calling for a whole-of-government approach, he stressed that the country's priorities today include "Aatmanirbhar Bharat", "Make in India", manufacturing growth, energy security and creating opportunities for youngsters.

The prime minister underlined the transformation in governance over the last 10 years, noting that administration has moved from a process-centric model to a result-oriented approach.

He cited the growing role of digital governance, artificial intelligence and technology in improving service delivery, enabling citizens to access services with ease and transparency.

Emphasising the importance of data-driven governance, Modi said data must not be viewed merely as numbers, but as a reflection of the collective lives, challenges and aspirations of millions of people.

He asked the officers to regularly verify whether policies are effectively translating into outcomes on the ground.

The prime minister also highlighted the growing role of women in nation-building, noting that more than 40 per cent of the current batch comprises women officers.

He expressed confidence that their energy, talent and dedication would play a pivotal role in taking India's development journey to new heights. (PTI)

Kerala CAG report flags revenue gaps in liquor, transport sectors

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, June 23: The CAG has identified revenue shortfalls and compliance issues in Kerala's liquor and transport sectors, among other departments, in its report on state revenues for the year ended March 2024 that was tabled in the state legislature on Tuesday.

According to it, Kerala's revenue receipts for 2023-24 stood at ₹ 1,24,486.15 crore, comprising ₹ 90,674.97 crore in the state's own revenue and ₹ 33,811.18 crore received from the central government.

The CAG also reported revenue arrears of ₹ 30,308.52 crore, equivalent to 24.35 per cent of the state's total revenue, and noted that audit observations involving ₹ 4,978.61 crore remained outstanding as of June 2024.

The report, covering taxes on vehicles, excise duty, stamp duty and registration fees, and other receipts,



contains 11 audit observations and two subject-specific compliance audits with a combined revenue impact of ₹ 603.53 crore.

In its review of the manufacture and sale of foreign liquor, the CAG said a distillery in Thiruvalla had not recovered losses arising from a shortage of Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) in stock, leaving ₹ 51.88 crore unrecovered.

The audit also said cross-verification of transit permits for liquor

imported into Mahe found 22 permits involving 1,10,720 bulk litres of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) without corresponding exit records at check-posts, indicating possible diversion into the Kerala market and an estimated revenue loss of ₹ 5.10 crore.

According to the report, shortcomings in tax assessments, including failure to include sales tax while computing turnover tax, irregular exemption on beer sales to

a brewery in Kanjikode and inadequate verification of tax returns, resulted in short levy or non-levy of taxes amounting to ₹ 19.17 crore.

Separately, the Comptroller and Auditor General's audit of the functioning of Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) and the State Transport Authority found that despite an expenditure of ₹ 37.48 crore on nine Automated Driving Test Tracks (ADTTs) and nine Automated Testing Stations (ATSS), only two ADTTs were operational while none of the ATSSs had become functional.

The report said analysis of VAHAN data showed 91,477 vehicles were operating with expired Certificates of Fitness or Registration Certificates without action by authorities, resulting in non-collection of penalties, renewal fees and compounding charges estimated at ₹ 47.69 crore. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, June 23: The Delhi government on Tuesday approved rehabilitation benefits for all eligible families living in settlements established till January 1, 2025, in a decision expected to benefit nearly 20 lakh people and facilitate permanent housing for an estimated 4-5 lakh families.

The decision was taken at the 36th board meeting of the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB), chaired by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta at the Delhi Secretariat, according to a statement released here. Urban Development Minister Ashish Sood, Chief Secretary Rajiv Verma and senior officials attended the meeting.

The move removes a key hurdle that had prevented many families from qualifying for rehabilitation benefits under earlier eligibility norms and expands the scope of the recently approved Delhi Slum and JJ Cluster Rehabilitation and Relocation Policy, 2026, the statement said.

"Nearly 20 lakh people living in Delhi's JJ clusters stand to benefit after the city government decided to extend rehabilitation benefits to all eligible slum-dwelling families settled till January 1, 2025, paving the way for permanent housing for an estimated 4-5 lakh families," Gupta said. She said the decision would provide a pathway to permanent and dignified

housing for lakhs of families living in JJ clusters across the national capital and strengthen the government's commitment to "Jahan Jhuggi, Wahan Makaan".

Gupta further said the revised cut-off date would enable a much larger number of eligible families to avail rehabilitation benefits and secure permanent housing. According to the chief minister, eligible beneficiaries would be provided multi-storey flats equipped with essential civic amenities. As far as possible, rehabilitation would be undertaken within or near existing settlements to minimise disruption to livelihoods and social networks, she added.

Gupta said the initiative was aimed not only at providing houses but also at improving the overall quality of life of residents through planned rehabilitation colonies with adequate social infrastructure.

The proposed colonies will include facilities such as schools, anganwadi centres, health centres, children's playgrounds and other basic public amenities required for community living, she said.

The decision is in line with the outcomes of a recent high-level review meeting chaired by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and provisions of the Delhi Slum and JJ Cluster Rehabilitation and Relocation Policy, 2026, the statement said. (PTI)

From early morning particulate matter spikes to afternoon ozone peaks, Delhi's air tells a complex story

NEW DELHI, June 23: An hourly analysis of major air pollutants in Delhi found sharp differences in the time of day when pollutant concentrations rise and fall, offering crucial clues about the sources driving poor air quality and when mitigation efforts could be most effective.

The analysis suggests that tackling Delhi's pollution problem may require not just seasonal strategies but also time-specific interventions, as pollutants such as PM2.5, PM10 and ozone display distinct daily patterns influenced by factors ranging from traffic emissions and dust resuspension to atmospheric conditions and sunlight-driven chemical reactions.

A new feature added to a public dashboard developed by research and advisory think tank Envirocatalysts compiles hourly air quality records from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) since 2015, allowing users to track long-term trends across pollutants and seasons.

A PTI analysis of data from April 15 to



June 15, 2026 (summer) and December 1, 2025 to January 31, 2026 (winter) found striking differences in the behaviour of particulate matter and ozone, underscoring the complexity of the capital's air pollution challenge. PM2.5, considered among the most harmful pollutants because it can penetrate deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream, displayed stark seasonal variations.

During summer, PM2.5 concentrations remained around 61-66 micrograms per cubic

metre (µg/m3) during the night and early morning before rising steadily after sunrise to peak at 77 µg/m3 at 9 am. Levels then declined through the afternoon, reaching around 40 µg/m3 by 6 pm, before increasing again after sunset.

In winter, PM2.5 concentrations were consistently elevated throughout the day. Levels peaked at 244 µg/m3 around midnight and remained above 180 µg/m3 until noon. The lowest concentration period was

between 3 pm and 6 pm, when concentrations fell to around 140 µg/m3, before climbing sharply again in the evening and night. The seasonal comparison showed that average PM2.5 concentrations during the summer study period stood at 57 µg/m3, about 70.3 per cent lower than the winter average of 192 µg/m3.

The highest hourly PM2.5 concentration recorded during summer was 263 µg/m3 on April 19 at 9 am, compared with a winter peak of 484 µg/m3 recorded on January 18 at 1 am. PM2.5 concentrations exceeded the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) limit of 60 µg/m3 during 34.6 per cent of summer days and 98.1 per cent of winter days. Against the World Health Organization's (WHO) 24-hour guideline of 15 µg/m3, concentrations exceeded the recommended limit during 98.8 per cent of summer days and 100 per cent of winter days.

PM10 also showed pronounced seasonal variation but remained elevated throughout the year. (PTI)

Teacher's friend booked for bid to sexually assault boy at Nagpur madrasa

NAGPUR, June 23: Police have registered a case against a Nagpur madrasa teacher's male friend for allegedly attempting to sexually assault a minor boy, and rescued 10 children from the facility, officials said on Tuesday.

The madrasa, located in the Tajbagh area of Nagpur, housed 10 children, mostly from Madhya Pradesh and Bihar, who were studying Arabic and Urdu. Sakkardara police station in-charge Ramesh Khunde told PTI Videos. The 26-year-old accused, a resident of Bihar and friend of the madrasa teacher, was visiting the facility and allegedly tried to sexually assault a 16-year-old boy while he was sleeping there in the wee hours of June 19, he said. The boy woke up, freed himself, and informed the teacher about the incident the next morning. The teacher then questioned the accused and removed him from the premises, the official added.

Police said the boy had arrived at the madrasa only about a week earlier to pursue his studies. After being alerted, the police and the Child Welfare Committee sprang into action, and a case was registered against the accused on June 21 under relevant provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Efforts were on to nab the absconding accused, the official said. Ten boys have been rescued from the madrasa and lodged at a child shelter home, the official said. Maharashtra State Minority Commission Chairman Pyare Khan said it was a very serious matter. As soon as he got the complaint, he immediately spoke to Nagpur's Joint Police Commissioner and sought immediate action, Khan said. (PTI)

Madonna says Budget dispute with universal derailed her biopic project

Pop icon Madonna has revealed that a disagreement over budget with Hollywood studio Universal Pictures led to the collapse of her planned biographical film. The singer-songwriter was attached to co-write and direct the project, which would have chronicled her rise from Michigan to global stardom. Madonna, who delivered chart-topping hits such as "Like a Virgin", "Material Girl", "Vogue", "Like a Prayer" and "Hung Up", said she spent nearly two years developing the screenplay and working with the studio on casting and budgeting before the film was shelved.

"I was supposed to make a movie about my life. I worked on my script for two years and spent two years at Universal Studios with the line producers doing budgeting and casting," Madonna told Interview magazine. "We had a falling out, me and Universal, regarding budget because I needed - I've had an extraordinary life. I've had a huge life, so I needed a big budget," she added. The project was officially announced in 2021 after Universal won a competitive auction. Over the years, it attracted several high-profile collaborators, including screenwriters Diablo Cody and Erin Cressida Wilson.

In 2022, Emmy-winning actor Julia Garner was cast as Madonna following an extensive audition process. Madonna said the studio struggled to justify the scale of the budget she felt was necessary to tell her story. According to the singer, she even explored the possibility of lowering production costs by shooting in Serbia, but the effort failed to convince studio executives. "Maybe they just didn't believe in me... One of their

first reactions was, 'We don't believe you'd stay in Serbia more than four days.' And I said, 'Did you read the script?' My whole life has been survival. I'm not going there for a holiday."

Following the collapse of the film project, Madonna said she began exploring the possibility of adapting her life story into a television series after being approached by Netflix. "That was a whole other long process, because I couldn't use the script I had with Universal unless I bought it from them for an extortionist's price, even though I wrote it. Don't ask," she said. "I started trying to understand how making a series would work. It's a very, very different process. You have to meet a lot of writers and find the right showrunner, and I couldn't find one. This went on for another eight or nine months. I was like, 'Good thing I have another job because I need to work, I need to create. I need to do what I was put on this earth to do,'" she added.

According to Variety, the now-shelved film would have traced Madonna's journey from her early years in Michigan through her emergence as an artist in New York during the 1980s, ending around the release of her acclaimed 1998 album "Ray of Light". Netflix is currently developing an autobiographical series about the singer under producer Shawn Levy's television deal with the streamer. Garner is no longer attached to the project. While the Universal biopic never moved forward, Madonna and Garner are set to revisit the concept in fictional form in the second season of Apple TV+'s comedy series "The Studio", where a Madonna biopic serves as a key storyline. (PTI)



Shraddha Kapoor transforms into legendary Lavani icon

Shraddha Kapoor is stepping into one of the most challenging roles of her career with Eetha. The actress has transformed into legendary Lavani and Tamasha performer Vithabai Narayangaonkar for the upcoming biographical drama which is slated to hit theatres on August 28, 2026. The film's first teaser has now been unveiled which offers a glimpse of Shraddha in a striking new avatar.

Eetha teaser opens with a group of Lavani dancers who are seen performing on stage as the audience loudly chants, "Eetha Bai," eagerly waiting for her to appear.

It then cuts to Shraddha Kapoor's character, Vithabai Narayangaonkar, who is in labour and struggling through intense pain as she gives birth to a child.

A man's voice is then heard saying, "Mar jaegi tu."

But Eetha refuses to back down and responds, "Pade pad mari toh bechari keh laungi, nachte hue mari toh misaal ban jaungi."

Despite having just delivered her baby, she walks onto the



stage to perform as the crowd erupts in cheers.

The teaser then flashes the words "The Power Of Her" to introduce Shraddha in a powerful and never seen before avatar.

Ahead of the teaser release, Shraddha shared the official poster of the film on Instagram while announcing its theatrical release date. Sharing the poster, she wrote, "Taiyaar Ho... Aa Rahi Hai #EETHA."

Eetha is inspired by the extraordinary life of Vithabai Narayangaonkar, one of Maharashtra's most celebrated Lavani and Tamasha artistes. Vithabai was born in July 1935 in Pandharpur in Solapur district. She grew up in a family where Maharashtra's folk performance traditions were deeply rooted.

Vithabai started performing at a young age and went on to become one of the biggest names in Lavani and Tamasha theatre. Admired for her commanding stage presence, expressive performances and powerful singing, she earned the title "Tamasha Samradni," meaning the Queen of Tamasha. Her immense contribution to Indian folk culture was recognised with two President's Awards in 1957 and 1990.

Directed by Laxman Utekar, Eetha stars Shraddha Kapoor in the lead role alongside Randeep Hooda, Nana Patekar, Mohammed Zeeshan Ayyub and Siddharth Jadhav. The film is produced by Dinesh Vijan of Maddock Films.

The biographical drama is scheduled to release in theatres on August 28, 2026. (Agencies)

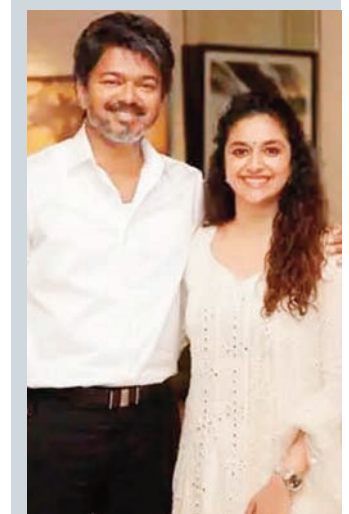
Milap Milan Zaveri's 'Tera Yaar Hoon Main' to release on July 24



Tera Yaar Hoon Main", directed by Milap Milan Zaveri, is set to release on July 24. The film features Aman Indra Kumar, who is marking his

acting debut alongside Akanksha Sharma, known for films such as "Kesari Veer" and "Trivikrama", among others. It also features Paresh Rawal. The "Ek Deewane Ki Deewaniyat" director shared the teaser of the film on his Instagram handle on Tuesday as he revealed the new release date. It was previously slated to release on July 31. "Ab Har YAAR karega PYAAR ka izhaar #TeraYaarHoonMainTitle-Track Teaser out now. Full song releasing TOMORROW on 24th June. #TeraYaarHoonMain releasing in cinemas on 24th July 2026," read the caption. The film is presented by Ajay Murdia in association with Mumbai Films, BIK Productions, and Enter10 Television. It is produced by Murdia, Bina Indra Kumar, and Manish Singhal. (PTI)

'We are all rooting for you': Keerthy Suresh's birthday wish for Vijay



Actor Keerthy Suresh has shared a heartfelt birthday message for Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay, lauding him for embarking on a new chapter of leadership and public service.

Vijay, one of Tamil cinema's biggest superstars who assumed office as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu on May 10, turned 52 on Monday.

In a post on X on Monday night, Suresh said Vijay's birthdays were traditionally been associated with announcements related to his films, including first looks, teasers and trailers, something fans eagerly anticipated every year.

"For years, your birthday meant waiting for a first look, a teaser, a trailer, or the announcement of a new film. It became a ritual we all looked forward to," the actor wrote alongside photos with the Tamil Nadu CM.

"For the first time in over a decade, there isn't a new character being introduced to the world. Instead, we are witnessing something far more significant. You are reintroducing yourself, not as a hero on screen, but as a leader stepping into a new chapter of service and responsibility," she said.

The National Award-winning actor, who featured alongside Vijay in 2017's "Bairavaa" and 2018's "Sarkar", said his latest phase marks "a brand new journey" and expressed her support for him.

"We are all here rooting for you," she added. Concluding the note, Suresh wrote, "Happy birthday to Thalapaty, who will always hold a special place in our hearts."

Vijay entered politics by launching his party Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) in 2024.

In the recently-held Tamil Nadu assembly elections, the TVK emerged as the single largest party with 108 seats and formed the government with the support of the Congress and other parties. (PTI)



Timothee Chalamet to feature in animation film 'Not Alone' with Selena Gomez

mination and distributed by Universal Pictures. It is directed by Jonathan del Val alongside Claire Dodgson and Eric Guillon.

"When Joe and Fran are brought together to prepare for the inaugural launch of this revolutionary rocket, there are immediate sparks, but neither is particularly adept at romance. Life becomes more complicated when three aliens - tiny, unruly and adorable - take refuge in Joe's home," the film's synopsis reads.

"Dunk, Welly and Shirm are on the interplanetary run from a zealous yet inept officer of the law named Zandro. The aliens determine that Fran's rocket could provide their means of getting back home to safety."

Dunk, Welly and Shirm will be voiced by Rob Brydon, Diane Morgan and Jamie Demetriou, with Brett Goldstein essaying Officer Zandro.

The project also reunites Chalamet and Gomez, who have previously worked in the 2019 film "A Rainy Day in New York". (PTI)

Cinerea Films: A Decade of Commercial Excellence



Mumbai-based production and storytelling company Cinerea Films announces the formal expansion of its founding team, with Sumukh Tawde and Rohan Patil joining as Co-founders alongside Rohit Mhatre, who established the company in 2016. Together, the three bring over three decades of combined experience across production, content development, and brand strategy, and a shared conviction that India's best stories are still largely untold.

• Sumukh Tawde and Rohan Patil Join Rohit Mhatre as Co-Founders to Lead the Studio's Next Chapter

• A New Development Slate Spanning Feature Films and Streaming Originals Takes Shape

Over the past decade, Cinerea has delivered 250+ brand films across 60+ clients spanning FMCG, automotive, real estate, hospitality, fashion, consumer durables, lifestyle and luxury, and social impact, building campaigns for brands including HUL, Honda, Tanishq, Reliance Digital, ITC, Sterling Holidays, Tata Trusts, and Maruti Suzuki. With creative development, production, and marketing now fully integrated under one roof for the first time, Cinerea is extending its capabilities into feature films, streaming originals, and original IP development, while its advertising and production work remains a thriving

core vertical.

As India's content ecosystem evolves, shaped by the rise of streaming platforms, shifting audience behaviour, creator-led media, and AI, the lines between entertainment, branded storytelling, and audience engagement are converging. Brands are increasingly seeking integrated content solutions, and the companies best positioned to deliver are those that can think, create, market, and measure under one roof. Cinerea's expanded founding structure is built to address exactly this convergence: a full-stack studio combining storytelling, content production, marketing strategy, and AI capabilities.

The Founding Team:

Rohit Mhatre, Co-Founder, Production & Original Media, spent over a decade building Cinerea from a respected ad-film company into a full-fledged production house, before turning to original cinema. He has produced two Marathi feature films, including Punashcha Hari Om, widely viewed on ZEE5 and Zee Talkies, and is now leading Cinerea's push into next-generation production.

Sumukh Tawde, Co-Founder, Content & Creative Development, brings over a decade across cinema, television, OTT, and digital. Part of the team that launched ZEE5, where he led shows across Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, and Telugu, and a

long-standing voice in Zee's Marathi Movie cluster, he brings a sharp narrative instinct and a deep understanding of what connects with audiences across languages and markets.

Rohan Patil, Co-Founder, Strategy & Growth, brings a strong understanding of audience behaviour, brand building, and entertainment marketing, having led the launch of five television channels, sports IPs, marquee events, and film campaigns across Zee Entertainment and Viacom18, earning multiple industry Golds including CMO Asia. At Cinerea, he leads growth and strategic initiatives aimed at building an integrated creative ecosystem where storytelling, audience understanding, and business objectives work in tandem for both scale and impact.

"Our DNA has always been rooted in powerful visual grammar. We spent a decade mastering it in advertising. Now, with the right team in place, we are ready to bring that same rigour to long-form storytelling."

Rohit Mhatre, Co-Founder, Production & Original Media, Cinerea Films

"Good creative work is never just about aesthetics. It's about what someone feels when the screen goes dark, and whether that feeling stays with them. That conviction is what drives everything we build at Cinerea."

Sumukh Tawde, Co-Founder, Content & Creative Development, Cinerea Films

"The market no longer separates content from marketing from distribution. It's all one conversation now. Cinerea is built for that reality, where strategy and storytelling sit together from day one, and every piece of work is designed not just for creative impact, but for real commercial value."

Rohan Patil, Co-Founder, Strategy & Growth, Cinerea Films

The expanded founding team will lead Cinerea Films' growth initiatives, institutional entertainment partnerships, and an active development pipeline of original IPs. The studio's content slate spans feature films, streaming originals, and branded content across languages and distribution platforms.

Further announcements regarding Cinerea Films' development slate and upcoming production partnerships are expected in the coming months. (PTI)

Lionel Messi becomes top scorer in World Cup history with two more goals for Argentina



ARLINGTON (TEXAS), June 23: Scoring goals and breaking records is what Lionel Messi does, and he is already doing that again in his sixth World Cup. The Argentina captain now has the World Cup scoring record all to himself after another standout performance, one that began with frustration after missing a penalty kick and ended in pure elation

with another victory. Messi, who many consider the greatest player of all time, scored both goals in his team's 2-0 victory over Austria on Monday. That gave him 18, six days after his first-ever hat trick in the tournament had matched Germany striker Miroslav Klose's previous record of 16 World Cup goals.

"Beyond anything I'm so happy for the win," Messi said. "It was huge, tough and difficult. It would allow us to be relaxed to what's ahead. All matches in this World Cup are very even, very intense. I'm enjoying this moment and craving to enjoy with my teammates."

The first goal against Austria came in the 38th minute and two days before his 39th birthday, and amid the concern of an ailing father back at home. It was the sixth consecutive World Cup game in which Messi has scored — joining France striker Just Fontaine and Brazil

great Jairzinho as only players to do so. That was about a half-hour after he missed a penalty kick with a chance to match the record.

"There were moments when I was really angry about missing the penalty, but I was able to make up for it," said Messi, who has won a record eight Ballon d'Or awards as the best player in Europe.

Argentina advanced to the knockout round by winning its first two group games. Messi also scored all of his team's goals in a 3-0 win over Algeria in Kansas City.

Messi added his 18th World Cup goal in the waning seconds of stoppage time when he shot one through several defenders after the first attempt was turned away by goalkeeper Alexander Schlager.

"I knew it wasn't going to be easy," Messi said in translated remarks. "The way things are going in the World Cup, the way it's being played, it's a very even game. No one is giving away anything."

The goal record became Messi's alone in the first half when he caught Schlager leaning the wrong way after Thiago Almada let Facuno Medina's pass go by him and directly onto Messi's left foot from about 20 yards.

"I have no more words to talk about Leo," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said through an interpreter.

As the ball went into the net on the record 17th goal, Messi ran toward a corner and thrust his right arm into the air to celebrate the mark with the decidedly pro-Argentina crowd among the 70,649 fans in the sold-out home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys.

"Someone who is 39 years old and can score two goals, and five goals overall at the beginning of the World Cup, well, that makes a difference," Austria coach Ralf Rangnick said through an interpreter.

"We knew that he is on a level of his own, and Lionel Messi showed us today that he's one of the best, and he is the best."

There had been a gasp from those same fans when Messi missed the penalty kick in the ninth minute.

His left-footed attempt went just wide of the right post. He is now 4 of 7 on penalty kicks in regulation play at the World Cup with misses in three consecutive tournaments.

Klose played in 24 World Cup matches for Germany, which wrapped up his fourth tournament by winning the 2014 final 1-0 in extra time over Messi and Argentina.

In an interview published on June 12, Klose said he expected Messi to break the scoring record.

"With the larger field of competing teams there are more games and so more chances to score goals. And I assume Argentina and France will go far," Klose

told German newspaper Sueddeutsche Zeitung.

"That's perfectly OK, the record will be broken eventually anyhow and Messi is welcome to be the one who does it. I'm a big fan of Messi, always have been. Messi is a genius."

Messi's hat trick in the previous game, in his 200th international appearance, came 20 years to the date of his World Cup debut in Germany, when he also scored. Monday was his FIFA-record 28th match in the tournament.

The penalty kick came after Lautaro Martinez was running free in the box and was tackled from behind by Xaver Schlager and Stefan Posch, the defender playing with a broken jaw.

Play continued for more than a minute with Martinez still on the ground near the goal. When the game was stopped for him, officials reviewed the play and called the penalty. (AP)

France storm into World Cup knockouts with 3-0 win over Iraq

PHILADELPHIA, June 23: Kylian Mbappe scored twice to move into a tie for second in career World Cup goals with 16, as France played through the tournament's first rain delay to beat Iraq 3-0 on Monday and advance to the knockout stage.

Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele also scored for Les Bleus, giving fans who stuck out a rainy night in Philadelphia a reason to cut loose.

Mbappe scored in the 14th and 54th minutes to cap a momentous and soggy 100th international appearance for one of the best players in the world.

Mbappe's first goal gave France a 1-0 lead at halftime, when heavy rain and an incoming thunderstorm prompted a delay of just over two hours and forced the grounds crew to squeegee water

off the swampy Kentucky bluegrass at Lincoln Financial Field.

Scoreboard messages directed the crowd to take shelter in the stadium's covered areas, warning that a severe storm was on the way. Sheets of rain continued to fall through halftime as fans wrapped themselves in ponchos and huddled in the concourse and under balconies.

Iraq coach Graham Arnold wrestled with a poncho for a few seconds before he pulled it over his head and returned to the covered dugout.



MBAPPE SCORES TWICE

French fans who stayed in their seats in the last few covered rows at the top of the stadium waved the country's flag, and many splashed around the concourse to pass time.

Others fled for the exits — at the same stadium where last season's opener for the NFL's Philadelphia Eagles was delayed 65 minutes in the third quarter because of lightning — as the delay dragged on, giving overseas spectators a triple dose of American sports nuisances: rain delays, overpriced concessions and TV timeouts in the form of hydration breaks.

There was no second-half hydration break in this game after the long, wet pause in action.

Weather aside, this game — as so many do for France — belonged to Mbappe as he tries to keep pace on the career goals list with new record holder Lionel Messi.

Playing in his third World Cup, the 27-year-old Mbappe matched Miroslav Klose of Germany on the goals list and moved one ahead of Brazil great Ronaldo.

Messi scored twice for Argentina earlier Monday to set the tournament record at 18.

He equalled Klose with his first World Cup hat trick in Argentina's 3-0 win over Algeria last Tuesday night in Kansas City, Missouri.

Mbappe scored his third goal of the tournament with a left-footed strike — his supposed weaker foot — from the edge of the box that got past Iraq goalkeeper Ahmed Basil, who got his first start in the tournament after captain Jalal Hassan allowed all four goals in Iraq's 4-1 loss to Norway.

For his second goal, Mbappe took advantage of a poor pass to the goalkeeper by Iraq defender Zaid Tahseen. Dembele controlled the loose ball and passed to Mbappe, who tapped it in with his right foot.

Mbappe had a chance at the hat trick on a late breakaway, but missed before he was subbed out at the 90-minute mark.

Mbappe helped France win the World Cup in 2018 and reach the final in 2022, when he was awarded the Silver Ball as the second-best player.

Joined up front by Desire Doue and Dembele, France entered this year's tournament as a co-favorite with Spain.

France could return to Philadelphia to play Germany on July 4.

Iraq striker Aymen Hussein was subbed out with an apparent injury in the 26th minute and replaced by Ali Al-Hamadi.

Hussein scored his 34th international goal in Iraq's World Cup opener against Norway.

Iraq is playing in the World Cup for just the second time after debuting in 1986. (AP)

Algeria rallies past Jordan 2-1 for its first win at a World Cup since 2014



SANTA CLARA (USA), June 23: Algeria scored off two corner kicks in the second half to rally from an early deficit and defeat Jordan 2-1 on Monday to bolster its chances of advancing to the knockout round of the World Cup.

Second-half substitute Nadhir Benbouali headed in a corner kick in the 69th minute and Amine Gouiri provided the game-winner in the 82nd to give Algeria its first win at the World Cup since 2014.

"We deserved to win this game," Algeria coach Vladimir Petkovic said. "It certainly gives us a lot of confidence and belief ahead of our next match."

The Jordanians had taken the lead for the first time at a World Cup on a first-half goal by Nizar Al Rashdan but couldn't withstand the continual pressure from Algeria in the second half.

This marked the first time Algeria had ever won a World Cup game after conceding the first goal. The Algerians had seven losses and two draws previously when that happened.

Now, after bouncing from a 3-0 to Argentina in its opening game, Algeria can finish second in Group J — and clinch a spot in the knockout round — with a win on Saturday against Austria.

"The three points are the most important thing," midfielder Ibrahim Maza said. "I think we have more confidence to go to the next game. We will fight even more than today."

Jordan is out of contention for the knockout rounds following a second straight loss. It opened with a 3-1 defeat to Austria but put up a strong effort in its first appearance on soccer's biggest stage.

"We didn't see a big gap of difference when it comes to skills, except for the corner kicks and the set pieces," Jordan coach Jamal Sellami said. "I was proud of the performance of my players. Yes, sad results. We were hoping for better results but I'm happy with my players."

Momentum clearly swung after Benbouali equalized when Riyad Mahrez's corner kick found him in the middle of the box and he sent a header into the corner that Yazeed Abulaila couldn't stop.

Algeria kept up the attack and took the lead when Gouiri got a touch on a ball in the box that deflected off Abulaila and into the net, setting off an Algerian celebration with their fans just behind the goal at Levi's Stadium.

"The team was a lot better in winning the tackles and winning balls in the second half," Petkovic said. "We made a lot fewer mistakes and that ultimately paid off." (AP)

Julián Álvarez says he wants out of Atletico Madrid

ARLINGTON (TEXAS), June 23: Argentina forward Julián Álvarez wants out of Atletico Madrid.

Álvarez spoke after Argentina's 2-0 win over Austria on Monday at the World Cup in Arlington, Texas.

"The best thing for everyone is a transfer," the 26-year-old player told ESPN. "I don't think it's the right time to talk about this, but I can't hide either. I have to be honest, and I spoke with people at the club, the ones I needed to talk to."

Not long after his comments were published in Spain, images of some Atletico fans burning the player's jersey were posted on social media.

Earlier this month, Real Madrid said Atletico rejected an offer of 150 million euros (USD 171 million) for the 26-year-old Álvarez. The offer was part of the campaign promises made by Real Madrid President Florentino Pérez ahead of his reelection. (AP)

Suryansh Shedge replaces Nitish Reddy in India's squads for Ireland and England series

NEW DELHI, June 23: The promising Suryansh Shedge has replaced injured all-rounder Nitish Reddy in India's squads for the upcoming T20I series against Ireland and England, the BCCI said on Tuesday.

Earlier, India were dealt a blow as Reddy was ruled out of the white ball tour of UK with a quadriceps injury that he had sustained during the recent ODI series against Afghanistan.

"The men's selection committee has named Suryansh Shedge as a replacement for Nitish Kumar Reddy in India's squads for the upcoming T20I series against Ireland and England," the BCCI said in a statement.

Reddy reported left quadriceps discomfort after the third ODI against Afghanistan on June 20. Following a subsequent medical assessment, the BCCI medical team has recommended a period of rehabilitation, ruling him out of both T20I series.

Shedge earned the call-up following a string of impressive per-

formances for India A in the recently concluded tri-series in Sri Lanka. Batting in the middle order, the 23-year-old scored 147 runs in five matches and also chipped in with the ball, bowling 23 overs across the tournament.

He was also one of the standout performers for Mumbai in their victorious Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy campaign in 2024-25, scoring 131 runs at a strike rate of 251.92 in the lower middle order.

Reddy was also supposed to fill in the void left by Hardik Pandya, who also has quadriceps niggle and is not in condition to bowl 10 overs in ODIs.

"Nitish Kumar Reddy has been ruled out of the Ireland series. The MRI has revealed swelling with fiber disruption in the left quadriceps. He has been asked to report at COE for further assessment," the medical bulletin in possession of PTI stated.

It is understood that Reddy will take a minimum of four weeks — the recovery timeline could extend too — to complete his rehabilitation



before he can start his 'Return To Play' protocols.

The 23-year-old played 10 Tests, 6 ODIs and 4 T20Is for India so far. During the Afghanistan series, he had played two ODIs while missing the second game in Lucknow.

While bowling coach Morne Morkel had then said that the in-

jury didn't look serious, it has now taken a far more serious turn.

Many believe that although Reddy's stint with independent fast bowling coach Steffan Jones helped him increase his speed from late 120 kmph to a brisk mid 130 kmph, the flip side is that his body is unable to adjust with demands of sudden uptick in pace. (PTI)

Batting order flexibility is key in white ball cricket: Former all-rounder Vijay Shankar



CHENNAI, June 23: Batting-order flexibility has become a key factor in modern white-ball cricket, and former India all-rounder Vijay Shankar believes players who can seamlessly adapt to different roles are increasingly valuable in a format driven by situational demands.

Having batted everywhere from No. 3 to No. 8 for India and in the IPL, Vijay said the game's evolution has enhanced the importance of genuine all-rounders, who can contribute with both bat and ball while adjusting to the team's requirements.

He also stressed that aspiring all-rounders must embrace the demands of the role rather than complain about workload and fitness challenges.

"We as all-rounders can't blame the workload. We became all-rounders after dealing with double workloads from the beginning. So fast-bowling all-rounders can't blame any extra workload for their injuries or lack of fitness," Vijay, who recently retired from Indian domestic cricket, told PTI during an interaction.

For Vijay, all-rounders are genuine game-changers and also ones who are the most flexible in any set up because of their multiple skills.

"The beauty of all-rounder is, you know, you bat anywhere and everywhere. So, the thing I had was that I was batting everywhere. I was batting up the order and at times down the order.

"Whatever the team needs, I was very flexible. That was like plus and minus for me. Because individually, I was not able to score bigger runs since I was floating up and down," Vijay lamented about his brief international career in which he played 12 ODIs and 9 T20Is for the national team. He recalled his brief stint with national team when he was used by Ravi Shastri and Virat Kohli as a floater. In IPL he played 78 games.

"The last time I batted for India in T20Is was actually at No. 3 in New Zealand. I have also batted No. 7. I have batted No. 5, 6 everywhere. Even in IPL, I have batted from No.3 to No. 8 everywhere. I realised why I

got better or why I ended up playing for the country. Because it was very flexible to bat anywhere," Vijay cited his attributes as an all-rounder. He was a controversial selection for the 2019 World Cup but he did play against Pakistan before a toe fracture cut short his only ICC campaign.

"My international cricket career suffered because of that toe injury (fracture) sustained during the 2019 World Cup. I had a toe fracture when I last played in the World Cup. So, I couldn't play after that. I was out of cricket for close to a month and a half.

"So, after that, I just played a couple of India A matches and then didn't make a comeback. It was actually quite difficult because you need to keep pushing yourself every time that you play. I just feel all those difficult moments have made me a much stronger person," the batting all-rounder recalled, "one could gauge the pain in his voice.

He still remembers like yesterday, getting the wicket of Imam ul Haq off the very first delivery that he bowled in the tournament against arch rivals Pakistan.

"It was always a dream to play the World Cup. It was always good to had a record like that a first-ball wicket in the World Cup. More than that, I felt I was doing pretty well during my time with the Indian team."

He also remembers defending 10 runs against the mighty Australians in the bilat-

eral series prior to the World Cup.

"I remember bowling the last over against Australia and defending 10 runs in the final over to win for India. And then injuries caused me some setbacks. I had some injuries which I had to deal with. I learnt a lot in that phase. It was a bit difficult. But then, I enjoyed the journey," he remembered.

It was not just his short stint with senior team but also the exposure he got playing for India A on shadow tours across all major cricketing nations under the guidance of Rahul Dravid was an experience that he would cherish forever.

"I remember playing five years for India A. Travelled almost every country to play India A and did well. My cricketing idol was always Rahul Dravid. I was very fortunate to have played with him and played under him. So, I was very, very happy about that," the former Tamil Nadu captain said.

Having already completed his Level 2 certification, coaching is only a natural progression but before that he would like to ply his trade as a freelance player in foreign leagues as he is only 35.

"This game has given me a lot. And I need to definitely give something back to the sport. I have done my Level 2 certification as well in coaching through BCCI. And till the time I am fit, I want to play cricket, like competitive cricket. (PTI)

A dream is fulfilled, and words can't explain it: Sooryavanshi on India selection



NEW DELHI, June 23: Teenaged batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi says getting selected in the Indian T20 squad is the "biggest step" of his nascent career so far and he does not have words to describe how it feels.

The 15-year-old was included in the India squad for the tours of Ireland and England starting June 26 after a stellar run in the IPL 2026, where he scored 776 runs for Rajasthan Royals at a strike-rate over 230.

"Words can't explain it. The reason I picked up a bat from day one and went to the cricket ground for practice, and today that dream is fulfilled," Sooryavanshi said in a brief video posted by BCCI on its social media handles.

"The biggest step in the journey

was completed today. I truly cannot put this feeling into words," he added.

Sooryavanshi started his cricketing journey from the humble surroundings of Samastipur in Bihar and came to limelight in IPL 2025, scoring a marauding hundred against Gujarat Titans.

At 14 years and 32 days then, he remains the youngest centurion in T20 cricket with his 38-ball 101 on April 28, 2025 against Gujarat.

Now, the left-hander's national debut might happen in Belfast against Ireland either on June 26 or 28.

If he appears against either Ireland or England, Sooryavanshi could become the youngest ever international cricketer for India at 15, surpassing the great Sachin Tendulkar's record of 16 years and 205 days.

Sooryavanshi said he deeply cherishes the moment he unboxed his India T-shirt with his name imprinted on the back.

"I just felt it like a dream, the moment I saw that T-shirt. I couldn't stop smiling," he said.

"Sometimes, something happens that you never even imagined could happen and when it finally does, you don't know how to react. That's what exactly I felt," he beamed. (PTI)



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A nation shaped by its waters, rising towards a bold new future

“ We Indians are the inheritors of a glorious maritime heritage, and it is the endeavour of our Government to restore India's position of eminence in the global maritime sector.

~ Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

12 YEARS BY THE NUMBERS

1,668 MMT

Total cargo handled at Indian ports, a 59% rise from 1,052 MMT

2,818 MMT

Total port capacity, an 81% rise from 1,561 MMT

218 MMT

Cargo on national waterways, a 652% rise from just 29 MMT

3.23 LAKH

Indian seafarers deployed globally, up 155% from 1.27 lakh. Women seafarers grew 340%

₹26,583 CR

Major port annual revenue, up 126% from ₹11,760 Cr



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Maritime India Vision 2030 target achieved five years ahead of schedule



PILLARS OF TRANSFORMATION



PORTS

BIGGER & SMARTER

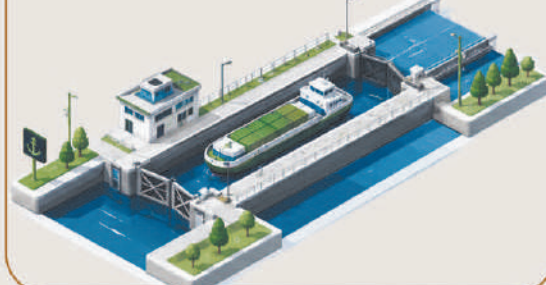
- ₹15,000 Cr Annual maritime CAPEX, up 362% since 2014.
- PPP investment alone surged 836% to ₹8,000 Cr.
- Coastal cargo more than doubled, from 74 to 177 MMT.



WATERWAYS

A REVOLUTION UNDERWAY

- 111 National Waterways notified, up from 5 in 2014.
- Operational waterways grew from 3 to 32.
- Over 10 crore passengers now travel by inland waterways every year.



SHIPBUILDING

RISING TO THE WORLD STAGE

- Mega Shipbuilding push: ~ ₹70,000 Cr
- New dry dock at Cochin Shipyard inaugurated 2024.
- Domestic fleet acquisition plan: 437 vessels worth ₹2.2 lakh Cr.



GREEN TRANSITION

CLEANER SEAS, CLEANER RIVERS

- Renewable energy use at major ports up 30x since 2014.
- India's first hydrogen-powered ferry launched at Varanasi, December 2025
- Green Tug Transition Programme targets zero-emission tugs at all major ports by 2040.



LANDMARK PROJECTS

- **Jal Marg Vikas Project** — Transforming NW-1 from Haldia to Varanasi, ₹5,061 Cr
- **Jogighopa IWT Terminal, Assam** — New gateway for Northeast India's trade corridor
- **Mumbai Marina** — 424 yacht berths, ₹887 Cr, India's first world-class marina, 2028
- **Vadhvan Port, Maharashtra** — India's future largest container port, ₹76,000 Cr investment
- **National Maritime Heritage Complex, Lothal** — Envisioned as the world's largest maritime museum
- **Tuna Tekra Container Terminal, Gujarat** — 2.19 million TEU annual capacity

REFORMS & MILESTONES

- **3 Indian ports in Global Top 30** — 7 in Global Top 100 (World Bank Container Port Performance Index 2025)
- **Sagarmala Programme** — 7,100+ km of port connectivity infrastructure across India
- **11 landmark Acts enacted** — including the Merchant Shipping Act 2025 and Indian Ports Act 2025, replacing colonial-era laws
- **One Nation One Port Process** — Over 39% reduction in documentation transactions at all 12 major ports
- **Sea cruise passengers up 328%** — from 1.08 lakh to 4.62 lakh
- **Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047** — 300+ initiatives targeting 10,000 MMTPA port capacity

12 Saal **Vishwas ke, Vikas ke, Jan-kalyan ke**

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