

**6** WORLD

● US, Iran exchange intensifying fire across the Mideast

● Flooding from days of heavy rain in southern China has killed 39 people

**8** NATION

● PM's 3-nation visit yielding 'unprecedented' strategic gains: BJP

● Mantri Pradhan must resign, NTA should be disbanded: Congress

Govt introduces Bills in Assembly to ease doing business

## Existing MSME law set to be replaced

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** The Assam government on Thursday introduced a series of Bills in the assembly aimed at improving the ease of doing business, including a proposal to replace the existing MSME law and strengthen the state's single-window clearance mechanism.

Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises minister Bimal Borah tabled The Assam Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (Facilitation of Establishment and Operation) Bill, 2026, which seeks to replace the 2020 Act governing the sector.

In the Statement of Objects and Reasons, Borah said the MSME sector remains the backbone of employment generation, entrepreneurship and economic growth in the state.

He said the 2020 legislation was enacted to ensure time-bound processing of approvals for MSMEs, but experience gained from its im-



plementation, coupled with the Centre's emphasis on ease of doing business, the Business Reform Action Plan (BRAP), self-certification, single-window systems and digital clearance mechanisms, necessitated a comprehensive revision of the law.

The proposed legislation repeals and replaces the existing law to

create a more business-friendly framework for MSMEs, he said.

Labour Welfare Minister Rameswar Teli introduced The Assam Shops and Establishment (Amendment) Bill, 2026, aimed at reducing the compliance burden on commercial establishments while promoting a business-friendly regulatory environment.

Another legislation, The Assam Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, seeks to amend six existing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The amendment seeks to align the law with emerging concepts such as digital governance, self-certification, deemed registration and round-the-clock economic activities, while retaining safeguards relating to employee welfare, working conditions, safety, overtime and weekly holidays.

The government also introduced The Assam Ease of Doing Business (Amendment) Bill, 2026, proposing the creation of a Single Window Task Force to coordinate and expedite proposals relating to notified industrial areas.

Borah said the Bill also provides for a dedicated module on the existing centralised web portal for industrial area proposals and empowers the task force to engage external agencies to assist in discharging its functions.

Another legislation, The Assam Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026, seeks to amend six existing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Assam, M'laya boundary talks on track: Himanta

Assam CM attends annual Behdienkhlam festival in Jowai

**JOWAI, July 9:** Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said his state and Meghalaya continued to maintain a friendly and cooperative approach towards resolving their decades-old boundary dispute, asserting that there was "no friction" between them.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the annual Behdienkhlam festival in Jowai, Sarma said both governments remain in constant communication and are committed to resolving any issues that arise along the interstate border through dialogue.

Behdienkhlam is one of the most significant religious and cultural festivals of the Pnar (Jaintia) community.

Celebrated annually in Jowai town in eastern Meghalaya, the festival is observed to seek divine blessings for a bountiful harvest, good health and prosperity, while warding off diseases, calamities and evil spirits.

"I keep on meeting the CM and deputy CM. So, the channel of discussion is always open. We keep on meeting, and there is no friction. Whenever something happens, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



## Central Team assesses flood damage in East Siang and Lower Siang districts



**HT Bureau**  
**GUWAHATI, July 9:** An Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) from the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on Wednesday conducted an extensive assessment of flood-affected areas in East Siang and Lower Siang districts to evaluate the extent of damage caused by the recent floods and assess the requirement for additional central assistance, said an official statement on Thursday.

As per the statement, the team was led by joint secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Nishtha Tiwari, and was accompanied

by secretary, Department of Disaster Management, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Dani Salu. "The visiting team inspected several flood-affected locations, beginning with the Integrated Farm of Olik Tapok Taloh at Ledum village, where extensive damage to agricultural land and infrastructure was witnessed," the statement added.

The team also visited Rema Bridge under Korang Circle, Tene Bridge under Koyu Circle in Lower Siang district, and Remi Bridge in East Siang district to assess the impact of floodwaters on critical public

infrastructure and connectivity.

During the field visit, officials were briefed by the district administration and concerned departments on the scale of destruction, restoration measures undertaken, and the immediate as well as long-term requirements for rehabilitation and reconstruction.

"The team interacted with local residents, PRI members, and affected farmers to gain first-hand information on the challenges faced by the flood-hit communities," it added.

The assessment team was accompanied by 37th Pasighat West MLA Ninong Ering, Nari-Koyu MLA Tojir Kadu, Zilla Parishad chairperson Ruth Tabing Boko, deputy commissioner, East Siang, Sonalika Jiwani, IAS, additional deputy commissioner, Ruksin, administrative officers, representatives of line departments, PRI members, Gaon Burahs, and other government officials. The visiting team also appreciated the prompt response of the district administration and line departments (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## SC mulls larger bench reference in Meghalaya honeymoon murder case

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Supreme Court on Thursday said it might refer to a larger bench the legal question whether the mere mention of a wrong statutory section in an arrest memo, specifically a typographical error, was sufficient to invalidate an arrest and grant bail to Sonam Raghuvanshi in the murder case of her husband.

A partial working day bench comprising Justices Manoj Misra and Shree Chandrashekar also indicated that it would closely examine whether the Meghalaya High Court was justified in granting bail to Raghuvanshi on the grounds that the arrest memo contained a typographical error.

On July 3, another bench of Justices M M Sundresh and Sheel Nagu had refused to stay the high court order granting bail to Raghuvanshi.

On Thursday, solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state government, raised the question whether the mere mention of a wrong statutory section in an arrest memo, specifically a typographical error, was sufficient to invalidate an arrest and grant bail in the "shocking" murder case.

The high court had upheld Raghuvanshi's bail on the grounds that the police failed to supply proper written grounds of arrest, noting a "total non-application of judicious mind" because the memo cited Section 403 (which does not exist in the context) instead of Section 103(1) (punishment for murder) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS).



The solicitor general argued that the error was purely clerical. "In this matter, this is a very serious case where bail is granted on the

grounds that grounds (of arrest) were not supplied... though at the time of arrest, there is a record that there is a supply of grounds," he said.

The bench, however, said the court must reconcile conflicting judgments regarding the necessity of providing grounds in writing at the time of arrest. "We will consider this matter at length. We will decide whether this requires to be referred to a larger bench," Justice Misra said.

The top law officer said the gravity of the crime should outweigh a technical typo. "This is the case where both of them went on honeymoon in Meghalaya. It was a premeditated murder. She killed the husband on a hill and threw the body into a gorge... This is a very, very serious offense," Mehta said.

The bench directed the state police to provide legible photocopies of the original documents supplied to the accused to verify what information was actually communicated at the time of arrest.

"If this ground (the technicality) is not sustainable, then the bail order goes," Justice Misra orally observed. On July 3, another bench had refused to stay the high court order granting bail to (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Tata's semiconductor plant in Assam to get ₹ 14,044 cr govt incentive

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** The upcoming ₹ 27,000-crore semiconductor plant of the Tata Group in Assam will receive a ₹ 14,044 crore incentive from the government, the state Assembly was informed on Thursday.

In a written reply to a query from Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi on capital subsidies given to the project, Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises Minister Bimal Borah said the Centre will provide ₹10,255 crore as an incentive to the Tata Electronics facility.

"The Assam government has additionally sanctioned Rs 3,789 crore for the project to ensure its long-term success," he added.

Borah said the plant is likely to generate a total employment of more than 27,000, including 15,000 direct jobs.

With an investment of ₹ 27,000 crore, the upcoming facility of Tata Electronics' Outsourced Semiconductor Assembly and Test (OSAT) is expected to produce up to 48 million semiconductor chips per day, employing advanced packaging technologies like flip chip and Integrated System in Package (ISIP). (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Over 270 complaints lodged over fake SC certificates since 2022

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** A total of 273 cases of fake Scheduled Caste certificates have been registered in Assam since 2022, a state minister said on Thursday.

In 2023, the highest of 77 cases were lodged, followed by 54 in 2026, 50 in 2022, 49 in 2025 and 43 in 2024, Social Justice and Empowerment minister Ashwini Ray Sarkar said in the assembly.

In a written reply to a query by AGP MLA Prakash Chandra Das, Sarkar said inquiry of only 44 per cent of the 273 cases has been completed in the last five years. During this period, the authorities concerned have completed the inquiry in 120 cases - 37 each in 2022 and 2023, 21 in 2024, 20 in 2025 and five in 2026, Sarkar said. (PTI)

## West Karbi Anglong holds EDP training for CMAAA 2.0 beneficiaries

**HT Correspondent**  
**HAMREN, July 9:** In a significant step toward fostering local entrepreneurship and economic independence, the District Administration of West Karbi Anglong organised an Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) training session on Thursday.

The event, tailored for the beneficiaries of the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhijan (CMAAA) 2.0, was held at the Conference Hall of the District Industries & Commerce Centre (DI&CC) in Hamren.

The programme was graced by Preeti Kumari, IAS, district commissioner of West Karbi Anglong, as the chief guest.

Addressing the gathered beneficiaries, district commissioner



Preeti Kumari emphasised the critical role that entrepreneurship and self-reliance play in the socio-economic development of the region. She underscored the transformative potential of the CMAAA 2.0 scheme, urging participants to opti-

mise the resources and opportunities being made available to them.

"This training is not just a formality; it is a gateway to building sustainable livelihoods. I encourage every beneficiary to absorb these skills (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 30,032 teacher posts lying vacant in Assam schools: Minister

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** Nearly 20 per cent of over 1.54 lakh permanent teacher posts in schools across Assam are lying vacant, the state assembly was informed on Thursday.

In a written reply to a query by Leader of Opposition Wajed Ali Choudhury, School Education minister Ranaj Pegu said a total of 30,032 sanctioned teaching posts are currently vacant, including 18,801 in primary schools.

"Out of these vacant posts, 11,662 are in lower primary and 7,139 in upper primary schools," Pegu said.

In secondary and higher secondary schools, a total of 11,231 sanctioned teaching posts are lying vacant across the state, he added.

Assam has a total of 1,54,078 sanctioned teacher posts across all levels of schools, Pegu said.

On the steps taken to fill up these vacancies, the minister said the Assam government had announced that it would recruit two lakh youths in government jobs, and accordingly vacancy lists from schools are being prepared.

"In the coming period, these vacant posts will be



filled up," he added.

In a separate query by Congress MLA Asif Mohammad Nazar, Pegu said there are 44,103 state-run schools in Assam, including 39,531 primary schools.

"Out of these, 7,948 schools do not follow the mandatory 30:1 pupil-teacher ratio (PTR)," he added. Raising the issue of schools being run by a single teacher during the Question Hour, AIUFD MLA Badrudin Ajmal cautioned that this has resulted in low enrolment in recent years. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## The GSCDA shall be entrusted with the responsibilities of preparing the development plans

### Assam plans new authority to develop townships, satellite cities

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** The Assam government on Thursday proposed to create a new authority to promote and develop notified townships and satellite cities in the state.

The government introduced the 'Guwahati Satellite City Development Authority Bill, 2026' in the Assam assembly in this regard.

In the Statement of Objects and Reasons of the Bill, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Kaushik Rai said it is proposed to set up a new body - Guwahati Satellite Cities Development Authority (GSCDA).

"The objects of the authority shall be to promote and secure the development of notified township and/or satellite city(ies). The areas under

the purview of the authority shall be as notified by the State Government from time to time," he said.

The GSCDA shall be entrusted with the responsibilities of preparing the development plans for such notified areas, Rai said.

The minister said Assam has witnessed unprecedented rapid urbanisation and population growth, thereby increasing exponential pressure on existing urban centres, particularly in and around the municipal limits of Guwahati. The rising demand for healthcare and other state services in these urban centres has resulted in pressure on existing civic infrastructure, environmental stress on natural resources and regulatory



issues, he said.

"Concurrently, there is a need to explore, strategise and establish new

avenues of economic growth capable of attracting fresh investments, generating employment in a sus-

tained and scalable way," Rai said.

At present, township development, planning and its execution is fragmented across multiple government agencies and inevitably cause overlap in decision-making, he said.

"Therefore, to be able to efficiently address the need and challenges as identified, it is proposed to establish a dedicated centralised institution responsible for identifying future urban growth corridors," the minister said.

The proposed body will also consolidate contiguous land, particularly earmarked for planning, developing satellite cities, integrating transport, housing and economic infrastructure (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### PUBLIC NOTICE - LOSS OF DOCUMENT

Notice is hereby given that the original Agreement to Sell relating to DDA Flat No. 1633, Pocket/B-1, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi-110070 executed between Shri D.D Borwankar and M/s. Quality Synthetic Industries Ltd. on 04/09/1992, has been lost/misplaced. Despite diligent efforts, the original document could not be traced. Any person who finds the said document or has any claim, objection, or interest in respect of it is requested to contact the undersigned at 9711801387, Residence of Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, ward no.1 opposite KASA stadium main road, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice. If no claim is received within the stipulated period, it shall be presumed that no one has any objection, and the document shall be treated as lost for all legal purposes.

Name: Dr. Jayanta Rongpi  
Address: C/o Dr. Jayanta Rongpi, ward no.1 opposite KASA stadium main road, Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam.  
Phone: 9711801387  
Date:

## Sensex rebounds 238 pts on value buying after recent sharp losses

**MUMBAI, July 9:** Stock markets recovered on Thursday, with the benchmark Sensex closing higher by 238 points on broad-based buying by investors after a heavy correction in the previous session.

The 30-share BSE Sensex opened higher and jumped further 823.05 points, or 1.07 per cent, to hit a high of 77,326.65 later in the day. The index, however, pared gains due to some profit-taking in the last hour and closed at 76,741.82, up by 238.22 points, or 0.31 per cent.

The 50-share NSE Nifty rose by 80.75 points, or 0.34 per cent, to end at 23,962.80. The broader index hit a high of 24,134.70 before giving up some of the gains at day-end.

Analysts said caution prevailed in the market as the US and Iran exchanged fire for a second consecutive day.

Among Sensex shares, Sun Pharma emerged as the biggest gainer, rising by 2.7 per cent. Bharti Airtel rose by 2.15 per cent, lending major support to the benchmark index. Gains in Bajaj Finserv, InterGlobe Aviation, Eternal, Kotak Mahindra Bank and HDFC Bank helped Sensex close in the green.

Infosys emerged as the biggest loser, dropping by 1.8 per cent. Maruti, NTPC and Axis Bank were among the laggards.

TCS shares declined by 0.52 per cent. After market hours, the company reported a modest 4.61 per cent increase in its net profit to ₹ 13,349 crore for the June



2026 quarter. Revenue jumped by nearly 14 per cent year-on-year to ₹ 72,275 crore.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,962.80 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, traded marginally higher by 0.15 per cent to USD 78.14 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets staged a moderate rebound, aided by supportive global cues, though investors remained watchful of the geopolitical developments that had triggered the last trading day's sell-off," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

The recovery was led by mid and smallcap stocks, with realty

and PSU banks bouncing back strongly after their recent correction, he added.

On Wednesday, the Sensex tanked 1,677.12 points, or 2.15 per cent, to settle at 76,503.60. On similar lines, the Nifty tumbled 516.65 points, or 2.12 per cent, to end at 23,882.05.

"Indian equities showed resilience today despite global volatility and escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia. While the near-term market direction may remain mixed, strong domestic fundamentals are expected to support the broader recovery," Siddhartha Khemka - Head of Research, Wealth Management, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

The BSE SmallCap Select

index jumped 1.79 per cent and MidCap Select index climbed 1.39 per cent.

Among sectors, Realty surged 3.70 per cent, followed by PSU Bank (1.73 per cent), Telecommunication (1.67 per cent), Mid-Small Private Banks Quality Tilt (1.39 per cent), Services (1.36 per cent), Consumer Durables (0.94 per cent), Capital Goods (0.94 per cent), Industrials (0.94 per cent) and FMCG (0.94 per cent).

IT, Utilities and Auto were the laggards.

A total of 2,896 stocks advanced, while 1,342 declined and 178 remained unchanged on the BSE.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225 index and Shanghai's SSE Composite index rebounded and settled in the green, while Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower.

Markets in Europe were trading mostly in positive territory.

"Indian equity markets staged a partial rebound on bargain buying after the previous session's sharp Middle East-driven sell-off. However, investor sentiment remained cautious as the United States and Iran exchanged strikes for a second consecutive day, casting doubt over the prospects for diplomatic talks and keeping risk appetite subdued," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

US markets ended mostly lower on Wednesday. (PTI)

## TCS Q1 profit up 4.61 pc, sees West Asia-hit demand come back in 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter

**MUMBAI, July 9:** The country's largest IT services company TCS on Thursday reported a 4.61 per cent increase in its June-quarter net profit to ₹ 13,349 crore, and guided towards an improvement in demand impacted by the West Asia crisis, returning in the ongoing quarter.

In the results that come amid heightened worries over the sustenance of growth in the USD 315 billion domestic IT sector in the age of artificial intelligence, TCS said its net income rose 8.5 per cent on-year to ₹ 13,849 crore if one were to exclude exceptional items.

The company's managing director and chief executive, K Krithivasan, said the demand environment remained sluggish during the reporting quarter amid ongoing conflicts and noted that Q1 also saw some clients deferring work. However, even though the conflicts continue, he sounded more sanguine.

"We are still optimistic that the demand will resume sometime in Q2 primarily because our customers have a significant amount of pent-up technology backlog to be completed," he said on a

call with analysts.

From a topline perspective, TCS's revenues jumped by nearly 14 per cent year-on-year to ₹ 72,275 crore in the June quarter and were up 2.23 per cent against the March quarter's ₹ 70,698 crore. It reported an annualised AI revenue of USD 2.6 billion, which was up 13.6 per cent on-quarter.

Krithivasan said the quarter reflects continued growth momentum and the strength of our strategic positioning, despite geopolitical and macro-economic headwinds.

"As customers accelerate investments in AI, modernization, cybersecurity, sovereign cloud and platform simplification, our strong deal conversion, improving client mining and expanding ecosystem partnerships position TCS well to translate opportunity into sustained growth," Krithivasan added in a statement.

The company said it bagged USD 9.5 billion of total contract value (TCV) or new deals in Q1, which included a USD 800 million AI-led transformation mega deal with SKF. (PTI)

## JK Architect of the Year Awards to mark 35<sup>th</sup> edition in Guwahati

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** Guwahati is set to host the 35th edition of the JK Architect of the Year Awards (JK AYA) this month, bringing one of the country's longest-running architectural recognition platforms to the Northeast for a celebration of design excellence and regional identity.

As per an official statement, launched by JK Cement Ltd. in 1990, the awards have, over the past 35 years, recognised architects for their contribution to innovation, sustainable design and socially responsible architecture.

The platform has grown into one of India's most respected honours in the field, acknowledging projects that combine creativity with func-

tionality while responding to local needs and contexts.

The organisers said the event reflects JK Cement's long-standing association with the country's infrastructure and construction sectors. The company is among India's leading manufacturers of grey cement, ranks as the world's third-largest producer of white cement, and is the largest manufacturer of wall putty globally. It also has operations in more than 43 countries, including subsidiaries in the UAE and Africa.

According to the organisers, the awards continue to be guided by the leadership of JK Cement, including vice chairman Dr. Nidhipati Singhania, managing director and JK AYA chairman Dr.

Raghavpat Singhania, joint managing director and CEO Madhavkrishna Singhania, and JK AYA administrator Rana Pratap Singh.

The selection process is carried out by an independent jury that reviews entries from architects across the country. The jury evaluates projects on parameters such as design quality, innovation, sustainability and social impact before selecting the winners.

As the awards complete 35 years, JK Cement said the initiative remains committed to encouraging architectural excellence and providing a platform for both established professionals and emerging talent, while promoting meaningful dialogue within the design community.

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Existing MSME law set

state laws, including those governing non-government educational institutions, private universities, town and country planning, fire and emergency services, land reclassification and cinema regulation.

The proposed amendments are intended to reduce avoidable compliance requirements, facilitate faster approvals and clearances, and encourage institutional expansion and investment in the state, Borah said.

Tourism minister Ajanta Neog also introduced The Assam Tourism (Development and Regulation) (Amendment) Bill, 2026, which proposes changes to several existing provisions and seeks to repeal the colonial-era Sarai Act, 1867. (PTI)

## Assam, M'laya boundary

we resolve that immediately with the spirit of friendship," Sarma said. Asked about reports of frequent friction in border areas, he dismissed it, saying the overall situation remains peaceful. "I don't think so... everything is smooth," he added.

Sarma's remarks came days after the Meghalaya government reconstituted its regional committees to take forward the second phase of boundary negotiations with Assam. The committees have been tasked with holding consultations with local stakeholders and examining the remaining six disputed areas between the two states.

In the first phase of the talks, Assam and Meghalaya signed a landmark border settlement agreement in March 2022, resolving disputes in six of the 12 identified areas of difference. The second phase aims to resolve the remaining six areas of difference -- Langpih, Borduar, Nongwah-Mavtamur, Deshdemoreah, Block I and Block II, and Psiar-Khanduli.

Extending his greetings to the people of Meghalaya for the festival, Sarma said it was his privilege to join them in celebrating Behdienkhlam. "Witnessing this beautiful tradition of the Pnar community has been a deeply enriching experience. Behdienkhlam reminds us of timeless values -- that we overcome adversity together, that collective prosperity is the foundation of individual well-being, and that our relationship with the Almighty is reflected in the compassion and respect we show one another," he said.

Meghalaya Deputy CM Sniawbhalang Dhar, cabinet ministers W Shylla, BL Sangma, S Sohtun and L Rymbui, and Assam MLA Tuliram Ronghang were present on the occasion. Later, Sarma visited Goddess Jayanti Temple at Nartiang, one of the 51 revered Shakti Peeths in the country. (PTI)

## Central Team assesses flood

in carrying out rescue, relief, and restoration works despite adverse weather conditions. The team assured that the observations and findings from the field inspection would be compiled into a detailed report for consideration by the Government of India while evaluating the need for additional financial assistance for relief, restoration, and reconstruction in the affected areas.

## Tata's semiconductor plant

Situated at Jagiroad in Morigaon district of central Assam, the modern facility is being set up after the closure of the PSU firm Hindustan Paper Corp's (HPC) Nagaon Paper Mill. (PTI)

## West Karbi Anglong holds

diligently and transform their entrepreneurial visions into robust, long-term ventures that contribute to our district's growth," Preeti Kumari, IAS, district commissioner.

The training session saw active participation from senior administrative officials and departmental heads including Preeti Kumari, IAS, District Commissioner, West Karbi Anglong; Tridip Deka, ACS, Assistant Commissioner, West Karbi Anglong, and General Manager, District Industries & Commerce Centre (DI&CC), Hamren reinforcing the government's collaborative approach to skill development.

The primary objective of the EDP training under CMAAA 2.0 is to bridge the gap between financial assistance and market success. The initiative focuses on equipping beneficiaries with foundational business knowledge and financial literacy; imparting practical managerial skills to sustain micro and small enterprises, and providing strategic guidance to ensure the long-term viability of local startups.

The event concluded with an interactive session where officials and resource persons addressed queries from the beneficiaries, charting out a clear roadmap for their upcoming entrepreneurial journeys.

## 30,032 teacher posts lying

Replying to this, Pegu said, "Single-teacher schools are a big problem for us. We are trying not to make a school run by a single teacher. The PTR in Assam is good in the entire India scenario."

To further strengthen the deployment of teachers, the government has adopted a three-pronged strategy -- regular recruitment, intra-district rationalisation and merger-amalgamation of schools that enhances the strength of teachers in an educational institute. (PTI)

## Assam plans new authority to

with existing civil infrastructure, and raising and deploying funds together with encouraging private investment to be able to realise the goal, he said.

"The concerned institution so established will be a specialised institution empowered to provide strategic direction, integrated planning and efficient execution," Rai added. (PTI)

## SC mulls larger bench reference

Raghuvanshi. The accused, a resident of Indore in Madhya Pradesh, was arrested in June last year in connection with the killing of her businessman husband, Raja Raghuvanshi.

The couple had gone missing while vacationing in Meghalaya's Sohra area on May 23 last year. Subsequently, Raja Raghuvanshi's body was found in a deep gorge on June 2, 2025. Police have alleged that Sonam Raghuvanshi conspired with hired assailants to kill her husband for financial gains.

On June 29, the Meghalaya High Court upheld a trial court order granting bail to the accused. The high court had dismissed a criminal petition filed by the state government, seeking cancellation of the bail granted by the trial court on April 27. It had held that the manner in which the grounds of arrest were prepared reflected a "total non-application of judicious mind". (PTI)

## SAIL's Bokaro plant to get 8.3 MT iron ore via slurry pipeline

**RANCHI, July 9:** SAIL's Bokaro Steel Plant on Thursday said it is set to receive 8.3 million tonnes (MT) of iron ore annually directly from SAIL mines through a modern slurry pipeline system.

To achieve this, SAIL is developing the longest slurry pipeline in India's steel sector, the company said, adding that this will eliminate dependence on railway rakes for transporting iron ore.

As part of an expansion project, the plant's crude steel production capacity will increase from the current 4.65 MT per annum (MTPA) to 7.25 MTPA, while its hot metal production capacity will be enhanced to 7.55 MTPA. The project involves a direct capital investment of approximately ₹ 15,000 crore.

"This (slurry pipeline) will be the first project of its kind for SAIL and marks a significant step towards ensuring a reliable and uninterrupted supply of raw materials to support Bokaro Steel Plant's future expansion," the company said.

Under this system, iron ore will be finely ground at the mines, mixed with water to form a slurry, and transported directly to Bokaro Steel Plant through a pipeline. At present, the process involves rake availability, loading at the mines, rail transportation and unloading at the plant, making the supply chain

heavily dependent on railway schedules and logistics.

With the slurry pipeline, iron ore will reach the plant directly and continuously, ensuring a faster, more reliable and uninterrupted supply.

"The pipeline will transport approximately 8.3 MT of iron ore annually from SAIL's Gua and Bolani mines to Bokaro Steel Plant. Iron ore from both mines will first be routed to Jamda, from where a 258-kilometre-long main pipeline will carry it to Bokaro. The pipeline has been designed with additional capacity and will be capable of transporting up to 16 MT of iron ore per year in the future, in line with the planned expansion of the plant," BSL said in the statement. Another key feature of the project is its sustainable water management system.

The water used to transport the slurry will be returned to the mines through a separate pipeline for reuse, ensuring significant water conservation and efficient utilisation of natural resources.

The project includes modern ore preparation facilities at the Gua and Bolani mines, pumping stations at both mines and at Jamda, as well as dedicated receiving facilities at Bokaro Steel Plant, the statement said. (PTI)

## Rupee rises 7 paise to settle at 95.41 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, July 9:** The rupee appreciated by 7 paise to settle at 95.41 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday even as crude oil prices firmed up and the greenback strengthened in the global markets.

A recovery in the stock markets and dollar selling by state-run lenders supported the local currency amid rising volatility triggered by the fresh escalation in the West Asia crisis. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the rupee opened lower by 4 paise at 95.52 against the US dollar and later traded in the range of 95.58 to 95.28 during the day. It settled at 95.41 (provisional), up 7 paise from the previous close. The rupee had declined by 52 paise to settle at 95.48 against the US dollar on Wednesday. Analysts said suspected RBI intervention provided support to the local unit, while elevated crude oil prices and a stronger dollar weighed on it.

"The rupee appreciated today after coming under pressure yesterday. The Reserve Bank of India's intervention supported the rupee while state-owned banks sold dollars, widely believed to be on behalf of the RBI. However, Middle East tensions remain the biggest negative factor, with fresh military action involving the US and Iran keeping concerns alive over the security of the Strait of Hormuz," said Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury and Executive Director, Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP. The dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 100.77, up 0.01 per cent. Brent crude futures were trading at USD 78.40 per barrel, higher by 0.46 per cent. (PTI)

## Aastha Spintex to acquire Falcon Yarns to expand manufacturing capacity

**MUMBAI, July 9:** Aastha Spintex Ltd, a Gujarat-based integrated cotton yarn manufacturer, has announced the acquisition of Falcon Yarns to significantly expand its manufacturing capacity and strengthen its growth plans, a statement said on Thursday.

After the completion of the acquisition, the company's spinning capacity will increase from 7,700 MT to 17,457 MT, while spindle capacity will rise from 25,920 to 61,824, the company said in the statement.

The expansion will help the company meet rising customer demand, improve operational efficiency and strengthen its position in the cotton yarn industry.

Falcon Yarns operates a modern spinning facility in Gujarat with an installed capacity of 35,904 spindles and an annual production



capacity of 9,757 MT. The acquisition will strengthen Aastha Spintex's integrated manufacturing capabilities and create opportunities to improve operational efficiencies through a larger production base, the statement said. Commenting on the acquisition, Divyang Jashwant Patel, manag-

## Gold slips ₹ 350 in Delhi as local demand stays muted



**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Gold fell for the fourth straight session, with prices slipping ₹ 350 to ₹ 1,48,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday as a strong rupee and sluggish local demand weighed on the precious metal.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at ₹ 1,48,450 per 10 grams in the previous session. Silver also extended its losses, falling ₹ 7,800 to ₹ 2,32,000 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes) on Wednesday's closing level of ₹ 2,39,800 per kg.

The precious metals declined despite gains in the overseas markets. Traders attributed the weakness to the appreciation in the rupee against the US dollar, which reduced the cost of imported bullion. In the international market, spot gold gained USD 27.23, or nearly 1 per cent, to USD 4,104.75 per ounce, while silver rose more than 1 per cent to trade at USD 58.96 per ounce after traders bought bullion following Wednesday's sharp selloff.

"Spot gold gained to trade around USD 4,106 per ounce in the overseas trade after the US military reportedly said that fresh attacks on Iran are over," Praveen Singh, head of commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said.

He said market participants are now awaiting US existing home sales numbers for fresh insights on the Federal Reserve's interest-rate path, while a steady dollar and Treasury bond yields suggest investors remain cautious.

"The US-Iran standoff is likely to be contained as a full-blown war will hurt both sides," Singh said. (PTI)

### AFFIDAVIT

I Umor Faruk Choudhury, S/O- Abdul Mozid Choudhury, R/O- Vill-Debosthan, P.O.- Debosthan Bazar, P.S.- Murajhar, Dist- Hojai (Assam) That, I belong to OBC Caste, I have obtained a OBC Caste Certificate. That, I am a registered Class-I (B) Contractor of PWD Roads of Assam vide License/REG No. APWRD/R/1B/GEN/205-30/53501 wherein my caste has been wrongly recorded as General instead of my actual and correct caste i.e., OBC Caste. \*Umor Faruk Choudhury\*

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from MD SAHAB UDDIN to SAHAB UDDIN by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam) SAHAB UDDIN S/O-ACHAN ULLAH Vill-DAKHIN SAMORALI, PO-CHOWDHURY BAZAR, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from MD RIJWAN AHMED to REJWAN AHMED by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam)

REJWAN AHMED S/O-SAHAB UDDIN Vill-DAKHIN SAMORALI, PO-CHOWDHURY BAZAR, PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

### NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from RAHMAN UDDIN to RAHMAN UDDIN AHMED by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam)

RAHMAN UDDIN AHMED S/O-LATE HAJI AHMED ALI Vill-Bandarmela, PO-CHARING PS-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

# Kokrajhar holds block-level meetings for 'Amar Mati-Amar Nayak'

## District administration sensitises stakeholders on flagship initiative and disaster preparedness

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, July 9:** The Kokrajhar district administration on Thursday organised a series of block-level stakeholder meetings across the district to facilitate the implementation of the Amar Mati-Amar Nayak initiative and familiarise grassroots representatives with its objectives and execution.

An awareness-cum-orientation programme was held at the office of the Block Development Officer (BDO), Dotma, in the presence of Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Executive Member Prakash Basumatary.

The meeting was attended by the BDO, Block Elementary Education Officer (BEEEO), Village Council Development Committee (VCDC) chairpersons and TLLCC chairpersons, who were briefed on the implementation process of the flagship programme.

The session also included



awareness on flood preparedness, storm safety and lightning protection.

A similar meeting was organised at the Titaguri VCDC Community Hall under Kokrajhar Circle, where officials explained the objectives of the Amar Mati-Amar Nayak initiative and highlighted

the role of various stakeholders in ensuring its effective implementation.

Another orientation programme was held at the community hall of the BDO office in Gossaigaon. It was attended by the BDO, BEEOs of Gossaigaon and Kachugaon, the Assistant BDO of

Hatidhura, VCDC chairpersons and representatives of the BTC Executive Member.

Along with discussions on the implementation of the initiative, participants were sensitised on flood preparedness, drowning prevention, storm safety and lightning safety.

VCDC chairpersons were urged to organise awareness programmes in their respective villages to ensure greater community participation in the scheme and improve disaster preparedness.

The meetings were organised to strengthen coordination among officials and grassroots representatives for the effective implementation of the "Amar Mati-Amar Nayak" initiative, a flagship programme launched by Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on International Yoga Day in five districts of Assam, including Kokrajhar.

# Over 2,300 beneficiaries selected under self-employment scheme

## Goalpara launches CMAAA 2.0 training for entrepreneurs



**HT Correspondent**

**GOALPARA, July 9:** The Goalpara district administration recently launched the first phase of a three-day training programme for beneficiaries selected under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyan 2.0 (CMAAA-2.0), aimed at promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment among the youth.

The training programme, organised by the District Industries and Commerce Centre (DICC), Goalpara, was inaugurated by District Commissioner Prodig Timung at Baldamari Higher Secondary

School.

Addressing the inaugural session, Timung described the scheme as a major initiative of the Assam Government to encourage entrepreneurship by providing aspiring entrepreneurs with financial assistance and institutional support.

He said the programme seeks to transform job seekers into job creators by enabling them to establish enterprises across sectors such as agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, handicrafts, food processing, small businesses and services.

He also expressed gratitude to

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for launching the initiative to strengthen self-employment opportunities in the state.

Officials informed that 2,352 applicants in Goalpara have been selected as beneficiaries after completing the interview process.

The first batch commenced its three-day training on July 8, while the remaining beneficiaries will undergo training in subsequent phases. The inaugural programme was attended by District Development Commissioner Pranab Kumar Bora, Co-District Commissioners Arun Kumar Brahma and Ritutomo Bora, Additional District Commissioners Jagdish Brahma, Darshana Chetia, Dipmala Gowala and Bibhas Medhi, Election Officer Pallavi Bora, Assistant Commissioner Anupam Das and other officials.

The training is being conducted by DICC General Manager Sajahan Ahmed along with experts from banks, the Veterinary Department and other technical fields, who are providing guidance on entrepreneurship, project implementation, financial management and business development.

## Free summer classes begin at Kaliapani school

**HT Correspondent**

**DEMOW, July 9:** A free summer class, organised jointly by the Assam Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA) and the Assam Tea Tribes Women's Committee, Athabari Sub-branch, commenced at Kaliapani Mazdoor Primary School recently. The inaugural programme was attended by Sivasagar District Inspector of Schools Dr Samiran Borah as the chief guest.

Among those present were Block Elementary Education Officer, Demow, Naranan Gohain; Headmaster of Kaliapani Mazdoor Primary School, Rajen Chaura; ATTSA Central Committee Executive Member Diganta Sahu Tassa; ATTSA Demow Branch Secretary Amon Mirdha; and members of the Athabari Sub-branch. The organisers said the initiative aims to provide academic support and constructive learning opportunities to students during the summer vacation.

## Dibrugarh Police arrest alleged drug peddler; narcotics, cash and stolen property seized

**HT Correspondent**

**DIBRUGARH, July 9:** In a significant crackdown on the illegal drug trade, Dibrugarh Police apprehended an alleged drug smuggler, identified as Bablu Mech alias "Beta," during a raid conducted at a rented house near the Lal Godown on PN Road in the Santipara area of the Dibrugarh city.

Acting on specific intelligence inputs regarding suspected narcotics trafficking, a police team launched a swift operation at the rented premises. During the search, officers recovered approximately 20 grams of suspected narcotic substances, six syringes believed to have been used for drug consumption, and several other intoxicating materials from the possession of the accused. Apart from the narcotics, the police also seized ₹22,000 in cash and nearly ₹8,000 in coins, which investigators suspect may be proceeds from the illegal drug trade.

The search further led to the recovery of several stolen household and personal items, indicating the possibility of the accused's involvement in theft and other criminal activities. Following the seizure, Bablu Mech was

taken into custody and shifted to the police station for further interrogation.

Police are now investigating the source of the narcotics, the distribution network, and whether the accused was operating as part of a larger drug trafficking syndicate active in Dibrugarh and adjoining areas.

Officials are also attempting to trace the rightful owners of the recovered stolen articles and are examining whether the accused has links to other criminal cases registered in the district.

A case has been registered under the relevant provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, along with other applicable sections of law. The seized contraband has been sent for forensic examination, while further investigation is underway.

The latest operation forms part of Dibrugarh Police's sustained drive against narcotics and organised crime, aimed at dismantling drug supply networks and ensuring a safer environment for residents. Police have reiterated their appeal to the public to share information regarding drug-related activities, assuring that the identity of informants will be kept strictly confidential.

## DDMA issues bore well safety advisory in Karbi Anglong

**HT Bureau**

**DIPHU, July 9:** The District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), Karbi Anglong, has issued a public advisory prescribing safety protocols for the digging, deepening and repair of residential bore wells and open wells to prevent accidents and protect groundwater resources.

The advisory urges residents to engage only experienced and licensed drilling agencies for excavation work and to ensure that new wells are located away from septic tanks and other potential sources of contamination to maintain water quality.

The DDMA has directed that all excavation sites be properly barricaded to prevent accidents, particularly involving children, and warned that open wells should never be left unattended.

It also advised that digging operations be suspended during heavy rainfall or whenever soil conditions become unstable.

Highlighting the risks associated with deep excavations, the authority stated that workers must wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

It also made oxygen-level and toxic gas testing mandatory before anyone enters a deep or old well.

In areas of Karbi Anglong known for subterranean gas leakages, the DDMA has advised residents to consult technical experts and inform local authorities before commencing any excavation work.

After completion of a well, the authority recommended that the water be tested at an authorised laboratory to ensure it is safe for drinking and domestic use.

The DDMA further cautioned the public against attempting rescue operations in the event of a well collapse, gas leak or any other accident.

Instead, residents have been asked to immediately inform the local administration or emergency services so that trained personnel can carry out rescue and relief operations safely.

## Unidentified man's body found at Jagiroad railway station

**HT Correspondent**

**JAGIROAD, July 9:** An unidentified man, believed to be around 50 years old, was found dead on the foot overbridge of Jagiroad Railway Station, police said on Thursday.

According to police, the deceased was approximately 5 feet 4 inches tall, had grey hair, and was wearing a white shirt and blue jeans at the time of recovery.

Following the discovery, police sent the body to Morigaon Civil Hospital for post-mortem examination. Officials said the body will be kept at the hospital mortuary for 72 hours to facilitate identification.

Police have appealed to the public to come forward with any information that may help establish the identity of the deceased.

## Central team assesses flood damage in Biswanath



**HT Correspondent**

**BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 9:** An Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) on Thursday visited flood-affected areas under Gohpur Co-District in Biswanath district to assess the damage caused by the recent floods and review the relief and rehabilitation measures undertaken by the district administration.

The central team was led by Praveen Kumar Rai, Joint Secretary (UT), Government of India, and included Mahesh Kumar, Joint Director, Flood Control Division, Department of Expenditure, Ministry of Finance, and Dr SVSP Sharma, Scientist-SF, National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC).

During the visit, the team inspected several flood-hit locations and reviewed the extent of damage caused to

roads, embankments, agricultural land, public utilities and other critical infrastructure.

District officials briefed the team on the flood situation, the response measures taken by the administration and the challenges faced by affected communities.

The delegation was accompanied by Biswanath District Commissioner Karabi Saikia Karan, Gohpur Co-District Commissioner Champak Deka, the Circle Officer of Halem Revenue Circle, Mukta Ram Deka of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), and officials from various departments.

At Alupara in Gohpur, the IMCT interacted with local residents and officials to obtain first-hand information about the hardships experienced during the floods and to assess the effectiveness of relief and rehabilitation efforts.

District officials informed the team about the administration's response, including the evacuation of affected people, operation of relief camps, distribution of relief materials, restoration of road connectivity and continuous monitoring of vulnerable areas.

The visit forms part of the Government of India's assessment process to evaluate flood-related damage in Assam. The findings of the IMCT will be incorporated into a report to be submitted to the Centre for consideration of assistance towards relief, restoration and long-term flood mitigation measures.

## Six of eight JE patients recover in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, July 9:** Six of the eight Japanese Encephalitis (JE) patients reported in Nagaon district since June have recovered, while two others remain under treatment, as the Health Department has intensified preventive measures to contain the disease.

According to Health Department sources, all eight patients were admitted to hospitals in Guwahati after being diagnosed with Japanese Encephalitis.

Of them, six, including an 11-year-old child, have recovered and returned home. Two patients continue to undergo treatment.

One of them, 72-year-old Holiram Patra of Raidangia Phulaguri village under Burhagoshain Than Primary Health Centre, has been hospitalised for more than 15 days and remains in critical condition.

The other patient is 65-year-old Dulali Roy from Laakhowa Road in Nagaon town.

## Week-long cultural workshop concludes in Tezpur

**HT Correspondent**

**TEZPUR, July 9:** A week-long cultural workshop on Satriya, Borgeet, Bongeet and modern dance concluded at Mazgaon in Tezpur, with nearly 50 children and teenagers participating in the programme jointly organised by Educo School of Art & Music and First Steps Pre-School.

The workshop, held from July 2 to 7, aimed to promote Assam's rich cultural heritage while encouraging young participants to develop their artistic talents under the guidance of experienced resource persons. Renowned Satriya exponent Kiran Borah of Uttar Kamalabari Satra, Majuli, conducted training in the classical dance form, while instructor Piku Mahanta imparted lessons in Borgeet and Khol.

Choreographer Anamika Barman trained participants in modern dance set to Assamese songs, and Educo School of Art & Music Principal Ractim Goswami conducted sessions on Bongeet. The valedictory function featured performances by the participants, showcasing the skills they had acquired during the workshop.

The programme opened with a Borgeet presentation by Devarshi Nandan Baruah, Bagmata Nath, Kavyam Baruah and Dibyam Saikia, followed by renditions of Bongeets composed by Bonkonwar Anandiram Das by a group of students. The event also featured modern dance performances by several participants, while the Satriya segment included presentations of Chali and Nadubhanghee by young dancers, including four-year-



old Devashreeeni Sarma.

The cultural programme concluded with a musical performance by Ractim Goswami, who presented Bongeet along with popular Assamese songs, drawing enthusiastic appreciation from the audience.

Speaking on the occasion, Ractim Goswami and Lipika Goswami, founders of the two institutions, said the workshop was organised to foster appreciation for Assam's indigenous cultural traditions among the younger generation while providing a platform to nurture their artistic abilities.

The resource persons were felicitated with traditional Selang Chadors, citations and mementoes, while all participants received certificates of appreciation. The initiative was widely appreciated by parents and members of Tezpur's cultural community.

## Hojai to host three-day Bhupen music workshop

**HT Correspondent**

**HOJAI, July 9:** Marking the birth centenary year of Bharat Ratna Dr Bhupen Hazarika, Hojai Sahitya Sabha, in association with the Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust, Guwahati, will organise a three-day Bhupendra Music Workshop from July 18 to 20 at Sahityarathi Bezbaruah Bhawan in Hojai.

Renowned musicians Nityananda Deka, Rupam Bhuyan and Manisha Hazarika will serve as resource persons and impart training during the workshop.

The morning session, from 9.30 am to 12 noon, will be conducted for children between the ages of 8 and 13 years, while the afternoon session, from 1 pm to 4 pm, will cater to participants aged 14 years and above, with special training on songs composed and popularised by Sudhakantha Dr Bhupen Hazarika.

Interested participants have been asked to submit their application forms along with a registration fee of ₹100 on or before July 15. A valedictory function will be held on July 20 at 2 pm to mark the conclusion of the workshop.

# NEATEHUB disburses ₹1.2 crore to 18 agri-startups

## RKVY-RAFTAAR grants to support innovation and entrepreneurship in Northeast agriculture

**HT Correspondent**

**JORHAT, July 9:** The North East Agriculture Technology Entrepreneurs Hub (NEATEHUB), the Atal Incubation Centre of Assam Agricultural University (AAU), on Thursday distributed grant-in-aid worth ₹1.2 crore to 18 agri-startups selected under the RKVY-RAFTAAR programme of the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

The cheque distribution ceremony was attended by Assam Agricultural University Vice-Chancellor Dr Dipjyoti Rajkhowa, Director of Students' Welfare Dr Binoy Kumar Medhi, Associate Director of Research Dr Mrinal Saikia, former Director of Research Dr GN Hazarika, NEATEHUB Directors Dr Danish Tamuly and Dr Luna Dutta Baruah, Chief Operating Officer Partha Borthakur and other officials.

The startups selected under this year's programme are Nutrikeric LLP, Dieticare Tribal Essence Pvt Ltd, ENW Lifestyle Pvt Ltd, Chayi



Trails Private Limited, AXOM Farm Machinery Pvt Ltd, Nature Axis Pvt Ltd, Abhamanu Van-Biotech Pvt Ltd, DBIPS Technology Solutions Pvt Ltd, GABA Tea Private Limited, Primrose Bio2x Lab, Ecoes, AYURQUENCH (OPC) Private Limited, DoNa Fermentary, Innovation, Med-Salt, Shrooms, Amberflow and Eco360 Solutions.

Addressing the gathering, Dr

Dipjyoti Rajkhowa said startups are vital to the future of agriculture and entrepreneurship in the region.

"Startups are the need of the hour. The University and NEATEHUB will always work for the betterment of our young entrepreneurs, and we are proud to stand behind each of you. The region needs many more innovators like you—you are not just building businesses, you are shaping the future of agriculture in

the North East," he said.

The grants were provided under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana—Remunerative Approaches for Agriculture and Allied Sectors Rejuvenation (RKVY-RAFTAAR) programme, with NEATEHUB serving as a knowledge partner of the Department of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare.

The financial assistance was distributed across three categories: Navyam for student-led startups with grants of up to ₹4 lakh, Isanya for early-stage startups with grants of up to ₹5 lakh, and Saranya for growth-stage startups with grants of up to ₹25 lakh.

Established in 2018 as a Section 8 company under the aegis of Assam Agricultural University, NEATEHUB functions as an Atal Incubation Centre under NITI Aayog's Atal Innovation Mission and supports agri-entrepreneurs across the Northeast through seed funding, mentoring, technical assistance and market linkage.

## Longtong Sema Naga Village celebrates Tuluni festival with traditional fervor

**HT Correspondent**

**MARGHERITA, July 9:** The historic Longtong Sema Naga Village, located about 18 km from Margherita in Tinsukia district, came alive with colour, tradition and community spirit recently as the Longtong Village Council celebrated the traditional Tuluni festival, one of the most significant festivals of the Sumi Naga community.

Observed between the sowing and harvesting seasons, Tuluni, also known as Anni, is an important agricultural festival symbolising prosperity, thanksgiving and community bonding.

The celebrations began with an invocation prayer by Saikha Chishi, Pastor of the Longtong Sumi Baptist Church, followed by a welcome address by Kasheto Sema, Gaon Pradhan of No 1 and No 2 Longtong villages.

A cultural performance by the Thishole Longtong Women Group highlighted the rich traditions of the Sumi Naga community through traditional songs and dances.

Chairman of the All Assam Sema Naga Council, Kahoto Sema, explained the historical and cultural significance of the Tuluni festival

and its role in preserving the community's heritage.

One of the major attractions of the celebration was the demonstration of the traditional Sumi Naga fire-making ritual and the Lokivi Tuluni ceremony, offering visitors a glimpse into the indigenous customs that have been preserved through generations.

The programme concluded with a benediction by women pastor Vinitoli Yephro.

More than 300 people attended the festival, including officials, academicians, students and representatives of various tribal organisations.

Among the distinguished guests were Divisional Forest Officer of Tezu, Aduk Paron (IFS), faculty members Dr Manoj Dutta and Dr Anshai B. Basumatary of Dibrugarh University, and a delegation of 34 students from the university's Centre for Social Work Studies.

Other prominent attendees included Tirap Autonomous District Council Demap Committee General Secretary Pallab Shyam Wailung, Singpho National Council Chairman Senggam Labram and Commandant Lt Colonel Hari Pradhan.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

People don't choose their careers; they are engulfed by them. - John Dos Passos

## School attendance problems

School attendance problems (SAP) are no longer a marginal issue. They have become a challenge affecting classrooms in nearly every country. The problem has far reaching consequences – both on individuals and society, but has never been properly addressed. The just released OECD report titled “Every Day Counts: Understanding, Preventing and Responding to School Attendance Problems” says that the school attendance problems are associated with important consequences for students, including lower academic achievement, reduced well-being, disengagement from learning and increased risk of early leaving from education and training. SAP can also have broader social and economic implications for education systems and societies. Post-Covid, growing concerns emerged across countries that some learners were struggling to re-engage with school attendance, further increasing attention to the need for effective prevention and response strategies. The report found that many face barriers that prevent regular attendance. SAP are not simply about skipping class or lacking motivation: absences often reflect deeper, systemic problems. Students may stay home due to negative school climate, bullying, lack of interest in education, physical or mental health struggles, family obligations, poverty-related obstacles, such as inadequate housing, unreliable transportation or food insecurity, among other factors.

These barriers do not just interrupt learning; they can widen educational disparities and reinforce cycles of disadvantage. While schools are meant to be places of growth and opportunity, for many students, even getting through the door is a daily challenge. The consequences of SAP ripple far beyond the classroom. Poor school attendance is associated with lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates and reduced job prospects in adulthood. The long-term effects of missing school can persist throughout life, exacerbating inequality and limiting social mobility. Absences reduce access to instruction, feedback, assessment and peer learning, which can weaken academic performance. SAP is also linked to weaker executive functioning, lower motivation, reduced perseverance and lower educational aspirations, all of which can further undermine students' capacity to learn. Effects can begin early and can intensify at key stages. Absences in primary education are linked to weaker development of foundation skills.

During lower secondary education, absences can be harmful because they coincide with important academic and developmental transitions. In upper secondary education, absences remain damaging, particularly during key assessment periods. SAP are also associated with weaker social and emotional skills, lower school connectedness and a reduced sense of belonging. Furthermore, they are linked to greater risks of internalising difficulties (e.g. anxiety), as well as externalising and risky behaviours. Consequently, repeated absences are a strong predictor of early leaving from education and training. Limited research also links SAP to poorer labour market outcomes, especially higher risks of unemployment.

# Rural prosperity and Assam's economic future

Rural Assam remains the true foundation of the state's economy despite the rapid pace of urban expansion and growing investment in cities. While urban centres often dominate public discourse on development, the reality is that a substantial majority of Assam's people continue to depend directly or indirectly on agriculture and allied rural activities for their livelihoods. This simple fact should shape every long-term economic policy of the state. Yet the condition of the rural economy continues to expose a troubling contradiction. Assam possesses fertile alluvial soil, abundant rainfall, extensive river systems, favourable climatic conditions, rich biodiversity, and a hard-working farming community. These natural advantages should have enabled the state to become one of India's strongest agricultural economies. Instead, rural prosperity remains uneven and uncertain. Economic growth recorded in official reports has not translated into a corresponding improvement in the everyday lives of ordinary farmers, agricultural labourers, artisans, and small entrepreneurs living in villages. Agriculture continues to function more as a means of survival than as a profitable enterprise capable of generating sustained wealth. Farmers frequently struggle with low productivity, fragmented landholdings, inadequate irrigation, weak storage facilities, limited mechanisation, and unstable market prices. The dominance of intermediaries further reduces farm incomes, while poor marketing infrastructure prevents producers from receiving fair compensation for their labour. Equally worrying is the persistence of bureaucratic inefficiencies that often delay or dilute the benefits of government programmes intended for rural communities. Excessive dependence on subsidies and financial assistance has also created an environment where long-term productivity sometimes receives less attention than short-term relief. Rural development cannot be built solely on welfare measures; it must rest upon expanding productive capacity, strengthening local entrepreneurship, encouraging innovation, and creating sustainable employment. Assam's economic future will not be secured merely through the construction of urban infrastructure or the expansion of commercial districts. Its future depends upon whether villages become centres of production, value addition, entrepreneurship, and technological adoption. Every investment in irrigation, rural roads, storage facilities, digital connectivity, agricultural research, skill development, and market integration strengthens not only village economies but also the broader economic resilience of the state. A prosperous Assam cannot emerge without prosperous villages, because rural prosperity is not an isolated objective but the

essential foundation upon which the state's overall economic strength must ultimately rest. Agriculture therefore requires a comprehensive transformation that extends far beyond increasing crop production. The structural weaknesses that have constrained the sector for decades demand systematic reforms rather than temporary interventions. A large proportion of farmers in Assam cultivate very small and fragmented plots, making mechanisation expensive and often impractical. Dependence on monsoon rainfall continues to expose agriculture to seasonal uncertainties, while irrigation infrastructure remains inadequate across many regions. The widespread use of traditional cultivation methods, limited access to quality seeds, insufficient scientific extension services, and inconsis-



DEGREE OF THOUGHT  
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

tent availability of fertilisers continue to suppress productivity. At the same time, climate variability has made farming increasingly unpredictable. Floods, droughts, irregular rainfall, pest outbreaks, and changing temperature patterns now present recurring challenges that require climate-resilient agricultural strategies. Crop diversification offers one of the most practical solutions to improving farm incomes. Assam possesses favourable conditions for horticulture, spices, medicinal plants, fisheries, livestock, floriculture, bamboo cultivation, and organic farming. Expanding these sectors can reduce dependence on a single crop while generating higher returns for farmers. However, diversification must be supported by strong research institutions, extension services, modern logistics, reliable cold storage facilities, scientific warehouses, quality certification systems, and efficient transportation networks. Equally important is the creation of transparent marketing systems where farmers receive prices determined by genuine market competition rather than by the bargaining power of intermediaries. Digital marketplaces, Farmer Producer Organisations, cooperative marketing structures, and contract farming models with adequate legal safeguards can all strengthen farmers' negotiating power. Food processing industries located close to production centres would further enhance value addition while reducing post-harvest losses. Such industries would also generate rural employment beyond agriculture itself, creating opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled youth. Rural industrialisation should therefore complement agricultural development rather than replace it. Investment in renewable energy, digital technology, precision farming, mechanisation suited to small holdings, financial literacy, crop insurance, and affordable institutional credit would create a more resilient agricultural economy capable of withstanding future uncertainties. When agriculture evolves into a modern, knowledge-driven, market-oriented sector, rural prosperity

becomes economically sustainable rather than dependent upon periodic government intervention.

Another dimension that demands urgent attention is the growing social transformation taking place across rural Assam. Migration of young people to other states has emerged as one of the most significant consequences of prolonged economic uncertainty. Thousands of educated and semi-skilled youth leave their villages every year because local employment opportunities remain scarce and agriculture no longer appears capable of providing stable incomes. This continuous outflow of human capital weakens village economies, reduces the availability of productive labour, and gradually alters rural social structures. Large areas of cultivable land remain underutilised because younger generations increasingly view farming as an occupation offering limited financial security and social prestige. Reversing this trend requires changing both economic realities and social perceptions. Agriculture must become technologically advanced, commercially viable, and intellectually rewarding so that educated youth see genuine opportunities within the sector. Educational institutions should integrate vocational training, entrepreneurship, agricultural technology, financial management, and digital skills into mainstream curricula so that students develop practical capabilities alongside academic qualifications. Rural entrepreneurship should receive stronger institutional support through easier access to finance, business incubation, market linkages, and professional mentoring. Women have already demonstrated remarkable leadership through Self-Help Groups that have expanded savings, micro-enterprises, weaving, livestock rearing, food processing, and other livelihood activities across many villages. Their contribution represents one of the most encouraging developments in Assam's rural economy. Nevertheless, these initiatives require stronger market integration, branding support, quality certification, packaging expertise, and access to larger domestic and international markets if they are to achieve long-term commercial sustainability. Financial assistance alone cannot guarantee lasting success unless accompanied by professional training and business development services. Cooperative institutions, which have underperformed for many years because of weak governance and political interference, also deserve comprehensive reform. Efficient cooperatives and Farmer Producer Organisations can improve procurement, processing, storage, marketing, and bargaining power while allowing small producers to compete more effectively in larger markets. Rural financial systems must likewise become more inclusive by simplifying access to institutional credit and reducing dependence on informal moneylenders charging excessive interest. Economic empowerment becomes meaningful only when rural households gain both income security and financial resilience. Stronger local institutions, greater community participation,

improved governance, and transparent implementation of development programmes can together create a rural economy capable of retaining talent, encouraging innovation, and generating widespread confidence among village communities.

Assam now stands at an important moment where decisions taken today will determine the character of its economy for decades to come. Sustainable development cannot be measured solely by expanding urban skylines, rising income statistics, or large public infrastructure projects. Genuine prosperity must also be reflected in the living conditions of farmers, artisans, agricultural workers, women entrepreneurs, and rural youth whose labour continues to sustain the state's productive economy. Climate resilience must become an integral component of every rural development strategy, particularly because annual floods, riverbank erosion, and increasingly unpredictable weather patterns continue to impose enormous economic costs. Scientific river management, stronger embankments, climate-adaptive agriculture, early warning systems, effective disaster preparedness, and long-term rehabilitation of erosion-affected families deserve sustained policy attention rather than seasonal responses. Simultaneously, rural infrastructure including reliable electricity, all-weather roads, broadband connectivity, healthcare, quality education, irrigation, and storage facilities should be viewed as productive investments rather than welfare expenditures. These assets expand economic opportunities, improve productivity, and encourage private investment within rural regions. Public policy should consistently encourage value addition, local manufacturing, agro-processing, tourism, fisheries, bamboo-based industries, handloom production, and other sectors capable of generating employment close to where people live. Such diversification reduces economic vulnerability while strengthening household incomes. Development also requires a cultural shift that recognises productive labour, entrepreneurship, innovation, and farming as dignified professions worthy of respect. The success of Assam's economy ultimately depends upon building confident rural communities that possess the knowledge, infrastructure, financial resources, and institutional support needed to compete in an increasingly integrated national and global economy. Rural prosperity should therefore be regarded not as a separate policy objective but as the central pillar of Assam's development strategy. When villages become centres of productivity, enterprise, technological advancement, and economic opportunity, the benefits will extend far beyond agriculture, creating stronger markets, higher incomes, greater social stability, and more balanced regional development. The future of Assam will be shaped not only by the growth of its cities but by the strength, resilience, and prosperity of the countless villages that continue to define the state's economic identity.

## Promoting indigenous Agricultural varieties of Assam in export markets

By: Mowsam Hazarika

Assam, the lush green land of the Brahmaputra, is home to a diverse range of indigenous agricultural products that hold immense potential in global markets. From aromatic rice varieties like Jaha and Bora to world-famous Assam Tea, vibrant turmeric, juicy citrus fruits, and exotic herbs, the state's agricultural wealth is deeply intertwined with its cultural heritage. However, despite their uniqueness and superior quality, many of these indigenous varieties remain underutilized in international trade. Promoting these agricultural treasures in export markets can not only boost Assam's economy but also secure the future of its farmers, preserve biodiversity, and elevate India's global agricultural footprint.

The global food industry is increasingly shifting towards organic, sustainable, and traditional food products, with consumers demanding healthier and more authentic choices. Assam's indigenous agricultural produce aligns perfectly with this trend. The world is recognizing the value of traditional food systems, and Assam's naturally grown crops, cultivated for centuries using eco-friendly methods, offer a unique selling proposition. The demand for non-GMO, chemical-free, and climate-resilient crops is rising, making it the ideal time for Assam to step forward and claim its rightful place in the international market. Among Assam's most significant agricultural products, the state's rice varieties stand out as a prime export opportunity. Jaha rice, with its distinct aroma and taste, has the potential to compete with international aromatic rice varieties such as Basmati and Jasmine rice. Similarly, Bora rice, a glutinous variety, is perfect for making traditional sweets and rice-based snacks, which are highly popular in Southeast Asia and Japan. If these rice varieties receive the right branding and international market linkage, they can fetch premium prices, benefiting farmers and boosting the agricultural sector.

Assam Tea is already a global brand, known for its strong flavor and briskness. However, the focus has mainly been on the mass production of CTC (Crush, Tear, Curl) tea, while specialty teas like Orthodox Assam Tea, White Tea, and Hand-Rolled varieties remain underrepresented in premium markets. The emerging preference for artisanal and organic teas in Europe and North America presents an opportunity for Assam's tea planters to reposition their products as luxury beverages. Moreover, the demand for traditional herbal infusions, such as those made from locally grown herbs like Thekera (Garcinia), Brahmi, and Tulsi, can open new avenues for

Assam's tea industry.

Turmeric from Assam, particularly the Lakadong variety grown in nearby Meghalaya, has gained attention for its high curcumin content. Similarly, the local Assamese turmeric varieties, known for their deep color and rich aroma, can be marketed as premium spices in health-conscious markets. The increasing demand for curcumin-based supplements, herbal medicines, and natural food colorants in the West provides an untapped market for these indigenous spices. Assam's Black Pepper, Bhut Jolokia (Ghost Pepper), and exotic citrus fruits like Kaji Nemu (Assam Lemon) also hold great promise in international spice and fresh produce markets.

Another significant segment that can be explored is Assam's indigenous pulses and oilseeds. The naturally grown black gram (Matimah), pigeon pea (Arhar dal), and sesame seeds from the region have unique nutritional properties that can attract global health-conscious consumers. The trend of plant-based protein consumption is growing, and these indigenous legumes can be positioned as superfoods in international markets. Additionally, Assam's mustard oil, known for its purity and pungent flavor, can find a niche among the Indian diaspora and gourmet food lovers abroad.

One of the key aspects of successfully promoting Assam's indigenous agricultural varieties in export markets is ensuring proper certification and branding. Organic certification, Geographical Indication (GI) tagging, and adherence to global food safety standards will enhance the credibility of these products. Currently, many small farmers struggle to obtain such certifications due to high costs and bureaucratic hurdles. Government initiatives and private partnerships must focus on streamlining these processes so that more farmers can access export markets.

Infrastructure also plays a crucial role in the export potential of agricultural products. Efficient cold storage facilities, food processing units, and logistics networks must be developed to ensure that perishable items such as citrus fruits, medicinal herbs, and organic vegetables reach global markets in optimal condition. Establishing export hubs, dedicated agricultural clusters, and farmer cooperatives will help in aggregating production and reducing transportation costs, making Assamese products more competitive on the international stage. Digital marketing and e-commerce platforms can also revolutionize the way Assam's agricultural products reach global consumers. With the rise of direct-to-consumer models, farmers and agripreneurs can leverage online marketplaces like Amazon, Flipkart, and dedicated organic food plat-

forms to sell their products directly to international buyers. Social media campaigns, storytelling about traditional farming practices, and influencer collaborations can further enhance the brand value of Assam's unique agricultural products. Apart from commercial benefits, promoting indigenous agricultural varieties in export markets plays a crucial role in biodiversity conservation. Many traditional crop varieties are on the verge of extinction due to the over-reliance on high-yield hybrid crops. Encouraging the cultivation and export of indigenous crops will provide financial incentives for farmers to continue growing them, ensuring their survival for future generations. Additionally, these crops are naturally adapted to local climatic conditions, making them more resilient to climate change, droughts, and pests. The government's role in facilitating exports cannot be understated. Policymakers should prioritize trade agreements, reduce export barriers, and provide financial assistance to farmers and agribusinesses looking to expand internationally. Assam's agricultural universities and research institutions can contribute by developing high-quality, disease-resistant indigenous seed varieties while maintaining traditional characteristics. Training programs on best export practices, value addition, and sustainable farming techniques should be implemented to empower farmers and agripreneurs.

International collaborations can further strengthen Assam's position in global agricultural trade. Engaging with countries that have strong trade ties with India, such as the UAE, USA, UK, Japan, and European nations, will help in gaining insights into market demands and consumer preferences. Participating in global food expos, trade fairs, and agricultural summits will allow Assamese producers to showcase their products and establish direct connections with international buyers. It is also essential to involve Assam's young entrepreneurs in this agricultural transformation. The new generation of agripreneurs can bring innovation, technology, and modern marketing strategies to the sector. Startups focusing on organic farming, food processing, and blockchain-based traceability systems can revolutionize the export potential of Assam's indigenous products. Public-private partnerships should be encouraged to create an ecosystem where traditional knowledge meets modern technology for sustainable agricultural growth. Promoting Assam's indigenous agricultural varieties in export markets is not just an economic opportunity but a necessity for the preservation of the region's rich agrarian heritage. By embracing global trade with a strategic approach, Assam can position itself as a key player in the international organic and specialty food industry. The time is ripe to showcase the state's agricultural excellence on the world stage, ensuring a prosperous future for farmers while preserving Assam's traditional farming legacy for generations to come.

## Precise numbers: Redefining the 2027 caste census

The debate around the counting of caste in India has once again taken center stage as the country prepares for the massive exercise of Census 2027. Rehearsals for the second phase of this grand demographic operation began recently across sixteen states and union territories. It brings a highly controversial and technically challenging feature to the table: an open column where citizens can state whatever caste identity they choose, and the enumerator is legally bound to write it down exactly as spoken.

This is a significant shift from previous attempts, as this specific round of caste counting within the official census framework now carries full statutory backing. The government intends to use this preliminary testing phase to finalize its methodology, but history suggests that this open-ended approach might be heading toward a familiar administrative nightmare. The underlying hope among experts is that this trial run will quickly expose the structural flaws of a completely unrestricted response system, reminding policymakers of why past data proved completely unusable. When you give millions of people an empty box to fill with their caste identity, the sociological reality of India causes the system to fracture under its own weight. We saw this play out in vivid detail during the Socio-Economic and Caste Census of 2011, which utilized a similarly unchecked method. That exercise resulted in an astronomical return of over forty-six lakh distinct caste names across the country. To put that number into perspective, the last comprehensive caste census conducted under British rule in 1931 recorded just over four thousand categories. This massive explosion in numbers did not mean that thousands of new social groups had suddenly evolved over eighty years. Instead, it revealed that citizens were using surnames, clan names, sub-castes, and regional titles completely interchangeably. The data became an incoherent web of local dialects, spelling variations, and hyper-local lineages that no computer algorithm or human committee could sort into meaningful categories. The central government eventually had to admit to the Supreme Court that the figures were so riddled with errors that they could not form the basis for any serious policy or reservation framework.

The primary lesson from that failure is that collecting data without a strict, pre-determined structure is counter-productive. Instead of relying on an open text field, a modern digital census needs to leverage technology to guide the process. Enumerators today carry handheld electronic devices that can easily be loaded with a curated, pre-verified master list of recognized castes and sub-castes specific to each state. When a citizen names their group, the officer can match the spoken word against an official directory, selecting the legally and sociologically accurate entry. Mistakes and human errors will still happen on the ground, but this structured digital method has already shown great promise.

The caste survey conducted by Bihar demonstrated that utilizing a predefined list of codes and categories yields far cleaner, more organized, and ultimately more actionable data. If the national census aims to produce numbers that can actually shape public welfare, it must abandon the illusion of a completely open-ended questionnaire. Looking at the concept of caste itself, it stands out as an incredibly abstract and irrational marker com-

pared to the other identities tracked by the census. When the government counts language, it measures a tangible tool of communication that people actively speak. When it counts religion, it measures a set of professed beliefs and practices. When it counts gender, it looks at biological and social realities.

Caste, on the other hand, does not depend on physical attributes or personal choices. It is a primordial identity assigned purely by the accident of birth, placing individuals into a rigid, predetermined social hierarchy. This hierarchy is not even universally agreed upon, as different communities often hold conflicting views about their own status relative to their neighbors. The architects of the Indian Constitution were deeply aware of this destructive hierarchy and designed a legal framework explicitly aimed at dismantling it. They abolished untouchability, outlawed discrimination based on birth, and envisioned a republic where an individual's worth would be defined by their character and contribution, not their lineage. This historical commitment to a casteless society raises a profound question about why the state should be involved in counting these divisions at all. The very act of state-sponsored enumeration risks solidifying and legitimizing an abstract identity that the nation has spent decades trying to weaken. When the government officially records a person's caste, it breathes new life into an ancient division, making it a permanent fixture of modern bureaucratic life. The only logical defense for undertaking this risk is that these deep-seated social inequities still dictate reality on the ground.

Refusing to count caste does not make caste discrimination disappear. Across India, access to education, wealth, land, and social mobility continues to be heavily influenced by one's place in the traditional hierarchy. Welfare measures and affirmative action programs designed to correct these historical injustices require accurate, empirical data to be effective. Over time, targeted state intervention can help level the playing field, effectively neutralizing the sting of casteism by removing the economic and social disparities that keep it alive. Clean and precise data becomes absolutely indispensable when addressing the internal conflicts within the current reservation system. For decades, political and legal battles have raged over the concept of the creamy layer, which questions whether the wealthy elite within backward classes should continue to receive the same benefits as their impoverished peers. Similarly, there is a growing demand for the sub-categorization of larger groups, ensuring that smaller, extremely marginalized sub-castes are not completely crowded out by more politically powerful communities within the same reservation bracket.

These are incredibly sensitive questions that cannot be resolved through political rhetoric or emotional appeals. They require hard, undeniable statistical proof that can withstand judicial scrutiny. If the state is going to embark on the controversial path of counting caste, it owes it to the citizens to ensure the job is done with scientific precision. An open-ended, chaotic collection method fails to serve the cause of social justice and only succeeds in muddying the waters of public policy. The current pre-test offers a vital window of opportunity for the administration to course-correct, choosing structured technological control over administrative chaos.



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# India's rising strategic strength and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific

*Indonesia occupies a strategically vital position in the Indo-Pacific region. Situated along the Malacca Strait—one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes—it plays a pivotal role in global commerce and maritime security. The expanding defence partnership between India and Indonesia strengthens not only bilateral ties but also contributes to maintaining the strategic balance across the Indo-Pacific. Enhanced cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, defence technology, cybersecurity, and joint military exercises is expected to reinforce regional stability and resilience. A defining feature of Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy is that India now builds relationships based on equality, mutual respect, and shared interests rather than dependence.*

By: Lalit Garg

India today is not only the world's largest democracy but is also emerging as a major global power with a distinct and influential identity. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's foreign policy has demonstrated unprecedented confidence, strategic clarity, and long-term vision, significantly reshaping its global standing. A nation that once depended heavily on foreign suppliers for its defence needs has transformed into a trusted exporter of advanced missiles, defence systems, and military equipment. This remarkable transition is not merely an economic achievement; it reflects India's growing strategic, scientific, military, and diplomatic capabilities. The Prime Minister's recent high-level engagements with Indonesia and other Indo-Pacific nations stand as compelling evidence of this new diplomatic approach. Agreements covering defence, maritime security, trade, technology, and strategic cooperation reaffirm that India is no longer just a regional player but an indispensable pillar of global peace, stability, and security.

One of India's most significant achievements has been the transformation of its defence sector through self-reliance. For decades, India was regarded as the world's largest importer of arms. Today, that narrative is changing rapidly. The Make in India and Atmanirbhar Bharat initiatives have propelled indigenous defence manufacturing to unprecedented heights. Advanced platforms such as the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, Astra air-to-air missile, Akash air defence system, Pinaka multi-barrel rocket launcher, Tejas light combat aircraft, and a wide range of sophisticated defence technologies are earning the confidence of countries across the world. India's in-

digenuous missile systems are no longer symbols of national military strength alone; they are becoming reliable solutions for the security requirements of friendly nations. Their demonstrated effectiveness during counter-terrorism operations against Pakistan has attracted global attention. It is therefore unsurprising that Indonesia is keen to procure Astra missiles for its Sukhoi fighter aircraft and is actively exploring the acquisition of the BrahMos missile system. This growing interest reflects the international community's increasing trust in India's defence industry.

Indonesia occupies a strategically vital position in the Indo-Pacific region. Situated along the Malacca Strait—one of the world's busiest maritime trade routes—it plays a pivotal role in global commerce and maritime security. The expanding defence partnership between India and Indonesia strengthens not only bilateral ties but also contributes to maintaining the strategic balance across the Indo-Pacific. Enhanced cooperation in maritime security, counter-terrorism, defence technology, cybersecurity, and joint military exercises is expected to reinforce regional stability and resilience. A defining feature of Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy is that India now builds relationships based on equality, mutual respect, and shared interests rather than dependence. India does not seek to impose its influence on others.

Instead, its diplomatic philosophy is guided by the timeless ideals of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam—"The World is One Family"—along with the principles of Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas (Together with All, Development for All, Trust of All) and global fraternity. Consequently, while strengthening strategic partnerships with the United States, Japan, Australia, and Europe, India is si-



multaneously deepening trusted relationships with Southeast Asia, Africa, West Asia, and the countries of the Global South.

Today, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the epicentre of global geopolitics. China's expansionist policies, militarisation of the South China Sea, coercive approach towards smaller nations, and attempts to establish strategic and economic dominance continue to raise concerns within the international community. In response, India has adopted a balanced, peaceful, yet resolute strategy. India seeks conflict with no nation, but it remains uncompromising in safeguarding its sovereignty, national interests, and regional stability. This balanced approach has enhanced India's credibility as a dependable global partner. India's expanding defence capabilities also send a clear message to countries such as China and Pakistan that the new India possesses both the determination and the capability to protect its sovereignty and strategic interests. National security today extends well beyond territorial borders to encompass maritime security, space security, cybersecurity, and preparedness for next-generation warfare. Indigenous defence production has become one of India's greatest strategic strengths in this evol-

ving security landscape.

One of the most notable successes of Prime Minister Modi's international diplomacy has been the remarkable enhancement of India's global image. Today, leading nations view India not merely as a vast consumer market but as a trusted strategic partner, technology collaborator, investment destination, and security ally. India's successful G20 Presidency, proactive role in the Quad, leadership in Indo-Pacific cooperation, advocacy for the Global South, and contributions in areas such as climate change, the digital economy, and disaster resilience all reinforce this evolving stature. India's foreign policy has evolved far beyond traditional diplomacy; it has become a powerful instrument of national development. Rising defence exports are generating valuable foreign exchange, creating employment opportunities for millions of young people, accelerating research and innovation, and strengthening the global competitiveness of Indian industry. These developments represent critical milestones in India's journey towards becoming a developed nation.

India's diplomatic philosophy has always been rooted in peace, peaceful co-existence, and mutual respect. Ideally,

strategic partnerships between nations should be founded not on hostility towards a third country but on shared objectives of development, security, and stability. However, international politics is shaped less by idealism than by national interests and the balance of power. In this context, China and Pakistan are actively seeking to expand their military and economic cooperation, including greater engagement with Saudi Arabia. Recent diplomatic activity between Riyadh and Beijing indicates the emergence of new geopolitical dynamics. Although Saudi Arabia's primary security concerns differ from those of China and Pakistan and remain largely focused on Iran's regional influence, these changing strategic equations underscore the importance of India's continued vigilance. Pakistan consistently seeks opportunities to gain strategic leverage against India, while China continues to pursue policies that seek to alter the regional balance of power. Against this backdrop, Prime Minister Modi's forward-looking, balanced, and proactive diplomacy has proved effective in safeguarding India's national interests. His foreign policy not only strengthens trust with friendly nations but also demonstrates the capacity to respond

firmly and prudently to the strategic challenges and provocations posed by China and Pakistan. This farsighted approach is steadily establishing India as a responsible, reliable, and influential global power.

The world today is searching for leadership capable of harmonising power with peace, development with security, and technological progress with human values. India possesses both the vision and the capability to fulfil this role. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India has demonstrated that true national strength lies not only in the ability to defend itself but also in its commitment to promoting global peace and the welfare of humanity. India stands today as a symbol not of expansionism but of development. Its growing defence capabilities are intended not to fuel conflict but to preserve peace, deter aggression, and maintain strategic balance. This reflects India's civilisational ethos, democratic values, and commitment to responsible global leadership. In the years ahead, India's balanced foreign policy, self-reliant defence capabilities, and credible diplomatic leadership will not only help realise the vision of a developed India but also contribute to shaping a safer, more stable, and more just international order.

## Small grants, Big stakes: India's evolving approach to development partnerships

By: Sunaina Kumar

India's approach to development partnerships in the Global South is becoming increasingly inventive. This is evident in its outreach to the Caribbean and Latin America, where India has extended US\$1 million grants to nine countries to set up food and agro-processing units that support small and medium enterprises.

Two of those facilities were handed over by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in May this year on his tour of the Caribbean: a passion fruit processing and packaging facility in Suriname and a fruit and vegetable processing facility in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T). Similar facilities for food processing have also been set up in Saint Vincent & Grenadines, Dominican Republic, Barbados, Honduras, Belize, Saint Kitts & Nevis, and Guyana. They are part of the SEEDS initiative (Supply of Equipment for Efficient Development of SMEs), a development cooperation programme by the Ministry of External Affairs, which provides critical agricultural machinery and equipment from India to support value addition and enhance productivity and income for farmers and agri-SMEs.

Agricultural productivity and value addition are challenges in countries like Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and across the Caribbean and Central American region, which is a net importer of food. A majority of farmers in the region are smallholders, with limited access to infrastructure and processing capacity, directly impacting food security and livelihoods. The facilities under the SEEDS initiative are designed to reduce post-harvest losses, enhance value addition, increase farmers' incomes, strengthen the agri-SME ecosystem, create employment opportunities, and improve export capabilities. They are also adaptable to local production systems and value-chain priorities—the SEEDS initiatives include cocoa processing in the Dominican Republic, coconut processing in Barbados, and juice processing in Honduras. These challenges are pervasive in the Global South, which, according to estimates, has nearly 500 million smallholder farmers, who produce a third of the world's food on just 12 percent of agricultural land. Along with the overlapping pressures of climate change, smallholder farmers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America also grapple with challenges related to ac-



cess to markets, finance, and agricultural resources.

It is in this context that the SEEDS initiative, if scaled up, has the potential to be far-reaching, especially in African countries. In India and across much of the Global South, significant quantities of harvested produce go to waste because of fragmented supply chains and inadequate post-harvest infrastructure. Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest rate of food loss between the stages of harvest and retail in the world at 23 percent, compared to the global average of 13.3 percent—an issue that threatens food security and is a major contributor to climate change.

**A New Model for South-South Cooperation**

Investments and partnerships in agro-processing can help address this gap and deepen agricultural cooperation between countries. The facilities in Suriname, T&T and the other countries were implemented with technical support from National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) Consultancy Services (NABCONS), a subsidiary of NABARD, which provides technical assistance and services in agriculture and rural development. NABCONS conducted a feasibility study after each country submitted proposals based on local needs and oversaw procurement and installation of the machinery. Though relatively modest in scale compared to big-ticket infrastructure projects which form the crux of international economic diplomacy, the SEEDS programme showcases India's technical expertise, manufacturing capabilities, development experience, and creates opportunities for

the private sector while strengthening its economic diplomacy.

India's South-South cooperation model is driven by mutual growth and demand-driven partnerships. It has steadily expanded its footprint as a development partner: between 2000 and 2023, it extended over US\$14.7 billion in grants and US\$32 billion in concessional Lines of Credit, supporting more than 600 development projects across 68 countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Pacific. India's grant assistance programme supports projects in agriculture, technology, infrastructure, community development, energy, and defence.

Given the critical role of agriculture — almost half the world's population lives in households linked to agrifood systems, the vast majority in Asia, Africa, and Latin America — identifying scalable, context-specific solutions in the sector is a key priority of India's development partnerships. Under its agriculture cooperation programme, India's partnerships have spanned financing of productive infrastructure, capacity-building, and technical cooperation under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC), alongside agricultural research and training.

Drawing on its domestic experience, India is increasingly integrating agro-processing and agricultural value chain development into its development cooperation with Global South partners.

An underlying principle of India's South-South cooperation model is to leverage indigenous development innovations and adapt them to partner-country needs. In recent years, India's domestic agricultural policy has focused on strengthening post-harvest infrastructure, agro-processing, and smallholder value chains to enhance value addition, reduce agricultural waste, and drive exports. Drawing on its do-

mestic experience, India is increasingly integrating agro-processing and agricultural value chain development into its development cooperation with Global South partners.

**Prioritising African Partnerships**

Africa is of particular relevance, as agriculture is a strategic sector for India-Africa cooperation. Both India and Africa have similar demographic trends, growing youth populations, and confront challenges related to food security, nutrition, and agricultural transformation. Agriculture and food systems are central to African economies, providing livelihoods for 70 percent of the population and contributing nearly 30 percent of the continent's GDP. At the same time, African nations are increasingly critical to global food value chains, as exporters of key agricultural products. In India, where agriculture continues to support the livelihoods of nearly half of the population, there has been a greater emphasis on increasing farmers' income through investments in agricultural infrastructure, mechanisation, and digital technology. With a renewed focus on India-Africa cooperation and the India-Africa Forum Summit expected to be convened later this year, there is fresh momentum to convert shared agricultural priorities into more structured partnerships.

For India, initiatives like SEEDS — where the Caribbean and Latin American experience has provided proof of concept — are an opportunity to diversify from large, capital-intensive projects towards smaller, more adaptable interventions that promote inclusive, locally-owned outcomes and that can be matched to rising demand in partner countries.

With ever-increasing gaps in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) financing and a decline in international aid — 2025 saw the largest recorded annual drop in the history of official development assistance — demand-driven, asset-based models of South-South cooperation are increasingly relevant. For India, initiatives like SEEDS — where the Caribbean and Latin American experience has provided proof of concept — are an opportunity to diversify from large, capital-intensive projects towards smaller, more adaptable interventions that promote inclusive, locally-owned outcomes and that can be matched to rising demand in partner countries. The future resilience of agriculture and food systems will be determined in the Global South, and so will the shape of partnerships that support them. (Courtesy: ORF)

## Titan: Earth's Cosmic Cousin

By: Akankhya Bora

Titan, the largest moon of Saturn and the second-largest moon in the Solar System, is one of the most fascinating celestial bodies known to humankind. Discovered by the Dutch astronomer Christiaan Huygens in 1655, Titan has intrigued scientists for centuries. In 1847, the English astronomer John Herschel proposed the name "Titan", inspired by the Titans of Greek mythology.

Humanity's fascination with Titan grew significantly in 1979, when NASA's Pioneer 11 obtained the first close-up observations of the moon, revealing its mysterious orange haze. However, the greatest breakthrough came on 14 January 2005, when the Huygens probe, carried by the Cassini-Huygens mission, successfully landed on Titan's surface. For the first time, scientists were able to observe this alien world from its surface, transforming our understanding of one of the Solar System's most mysterious moons. Data collected by the Cassini mission revealed that Titan has a diameter of about 5,150 km, making it the second-largest moon in the Solar System. Remarkably, it is the only moon known to possess a dense atmosphere composed primarily of nitrogen. Although Titan's gravity is only about one-seventh that of Earth's, its atmospheric pressure at the surface is even greater than Earth's, making it one of the most Earth-like environments beyond our planet in terms of atmospheric characteristics.

Titan's surface is extremely cold, with temperatures averaging around  $-179^{\circ}\text{C}$ . Unlike Earth, where mountains are primarily made of rock, Titan's mountains are composed largely of water ice, which behaves like rock under such frigid conditions. Its vast equatorial dunes are made up of dark organic materials formed through complex chemical reactions in the atmosphere.

One of Titan's most extraordinary features is that it is the only known world in the Solar System, apart from Earth, with stable lakes, rivers, and seas on its surface. However, these bodies are not filled with water. Instead, they contain liquid methane and ethane. Titan also experiences a methane cycle that closely resembles Earth's water cycle, with methane evaporating, forming clouds, falling as rain, and flowing through rivers into lakes and seas. Scientists have also identified features that may be cryovolcanoes, or ice volcanoes. Unlike volcanoes on Earth that erupt molten rock, cryovolcanoes are believed to release water, ammonia, and other volatile substances from beneath Titan's icy crust. These unique geological features make Titan an important natural laboratory for understanding planetary evolution beyond Earth.

Titan has fascinated scientists as one of the most promising places in the Solar System to search for extraterrestrial life. Its thick atmosphere, stable liquid bodies, and rich organic chemistry make it an exceptional target for astrobiological research. These remarkable characteristics continue to inspire scientists to investigate whether the building blocks of life—or even simple forms of life—could exist on this distant moon.

In addition to its remarkable surface features, scientists believe that beneath Titan's icy crust lies a vast subsurface ocean of liquid water mixed with ammonia. This hidden ocean has led researchers to speculate that Titan may harbour conditions favourable for life. Although no evidence of life has been found so far, astrobiologists believe that if life does exist on Titan, it could take forms very different from those on Earth. Such life may exist as microscopic organisms within the subsurface ocean or, hypothetically, as exotic methane-based life forms adapted to Titan's icy environment. To further explore this extraordinary moon, NASA is preparing the Dragonfly mission, an innovative nuclear-powered robotic rotorcraft designed to fly through Titan's dense, nitrogen-rich atmosphere. Scheduled for launch in 2028 and expected to arrive at Titan in 2034, Dragonfly will investigate multiple locations across the moon, searching for signs of prebiotic chemistry and studying Titan's potential habitability.

Titan is far more than just Saturn's largest moon. It is a fascinating world where icy landscapes, methane lakes, a dense atmosphere, and complex organic chemistry come together to create an environment unlike any other in the Solar System. As future missions continue to unveil its mysteries, Titan may one day help answer one of humanity's greatest questions:

Are we alone in the Universe?

# US, Iran exchange intensifying fire across the Mideast

*Crossfire threatening interim deal to end war*

**DUBAI, July 9:** The United States launched new airstrikes against Iran early Thursday, and Tehran responded by targeting US-allied Mideast countries in an exchange of fire that threatened an interim deal intended to help end the war in the Middle East.

Back-and-forth attacks, including a day earlier, have repeatedly threatened the ceasefire, but Thursday's appeared bigger all around, with sirens sounding at least three times in Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters, and missiles targeting Kuwait and Qatar.

Sirens sounded Thursday afternoon in Jordan as well, where the US has stationed troops and aircraft.

An Iranian official accused the US of launching an airstrike later Thursday targeting the area around Iran's sole nuclear power plant, and other explosions were reported elsewhere in the country during the afternoon.

The strikes came hours after US President Donald Trump said recent Iranian attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz signalled the end of a fragile ceasefire and threatened to escalate the conflict if they



didn't stop.

That raised concerns that the region could tip back into a war that would engulf several countries and could halt energy shipments through the strait that are crucial for the global economy.

In Iran, the two days of American airstrikes have killed at least 14 people and wounded another 78, Iran's Health Ministry said Thursday — most of those reportedly members of the armed forces.

In Kuwait, the military said falling debris wounded one person as it shot down three ballistic missiles, a cruise missile and 10 drones. Bahrain said it shot down

incoming fire, without elaborating. There was no immediate word of damage in Qatar.

US strikes hit more targets. The US military's Central Command said it hit some 90 targets across Iran, releasing black-and-white footage of what appeared to be strikes on an airport runway and missile launchers.

The US said the strikes were intended to "further degrade" Iran's ability "to threaten freedom of navigation" in the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and natural gas passed before the war began with US and Israeli attacks on February 28.

Attacks on ships — and the threat of them — virtually halted traffic in the waterway during the conflict, causing the price of oil to skyrocket and raising prices on many basic goods, including food, far beyond the region.

Iranian state media reported explosions in several locations, including Bushehr, home to Iran's nuclear power plant complex, and southern port cities.

In Iran's southwestern Khuzestan province, at least three people were killed Thursday, state media reported. In Iranshahr, authorities said a strike killed a firefighter at an airport. Those fatalities followed the deaths of at least nine members of Iran's armed forces in Wednesday's strikes, according to state media. It wasn't clear when the other death happened and who was killed.

For the first time since April, US strikes also appeared to target Iranian bridges. State media reported a strike on a railway bridge in Iran's northeastern Golestan province, and the Revolutionary Guard said two bridges were attacked on the route to Mashhad, where officials plan to bury the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Thursday. (AP)

# Flooding from days of heavy rain in southern China has killed 39 people

**BEIJING, July 9:** Authorities in southern China said Thursday that 39 people died in flooding after a tropical storm dumped heavy rainfall, as the country's east coast and Taiwan prepared for a typhoon expected to make landfall in the coming days.

Most of the deaths were in Hengzhou, where the partial collapse of a reservoir dam sent torrents of water into the city and claimed 26 lives, said Ding Wei, the vice mayor of Nanning city, which has jurisdiction over the area. Nine people remained missing in the broader Guangxi region. Tropical Storm Maysak brought record rainfall to Guangxi starting Saturday, breaching reservoirs and stranding people for days in homes and other buildings. The previously announced death toll on Tuesday was six people.

A second storm, Typhoon Bavi, was at sea on a northwest track that would take it over some remote Japanese islands and then just north of Taiwan before making landfall in China's Fujian or Zhejiang province on Saturday. Fishing boats could be seen tightly packed at ports in northern Taiwan on Thursday in anticipation of heavy rain hitting the island of 23 million people.

Bavi, which brought violent winds to Saipan and other US ter-



ritories earlier this week, was downgraded Thursday from super-typhoon strength but still had maximum sustained winds of 184 kilometres per hour, according to Taiwan's Central Weather Administration.

Classes were suspended in several cities and towns in the Philippines and ships prohibited from leaving northern ports as the typhoon passed east of the northern island of Luzon.

In southern China, military rescue teams finished bringing out more than 10,000 trapped students and teachers from a cluster of schools in Guigang city, about 60 kilometres northeast of Hengzhou. Video on state broadcaster CCTV showed the students, wearing bright orange life vests, clambering onto boats that took them away

from the surreal scene of school buildings rising out of a lake of muddy water.

Animals were also stranded or swept out by the floodwaters.

A zoo in Guigang said more than 100 animals were missing, including two zebras, four porcupines and dozens of tropical birds. In Hengzhou, encounters with snakes that reportedly escaped from a farm prompted authorities to stock up on antivenom and advise residents what to do if they were bitten. An animal shelter operator in Binyang county, about 75 kilometres northwest of Hengzhou, struggled in recent days to rescue about 200 cats and dozens of dogs, bringing the dogs two at a time through deep water. The cats climbed up to the rafters as the water level rose. (AP)

## Nominations open in contest to be UK leader, with Andy Burnham likely only candidate

**LONDON, July 9:** Nominations open Thursday in a Labour Party election to replace Keir Starmer as Britain's prime minister, a contest in which there is expected to be just one candidate.

Former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham will be collecting signatures from Labour lawmakers, and needs at least 80 to run — a target he's likely to well exceed.

Other potential contenders have all ruled themselves out. Former Defence Minister Al Carns, who had been pondering a run, confirmed late Wednesday that he will not challenge Burnham.

"I'd hoped a leadership contest would give us the opportunity for a proper debate," Carns said in a statement. "But months of internal Labour politics isn't what the country needs right now. We've got to get on with the job. Andy Burnham's earned this and he's got my full backing."

Nominations remain open until July 16. Burnham is highly likely to be announced as the new Labour leader the following day, and to become prime minister after a meeting with King Charles III on July 20.

Starmer announced last month that he would resign as soon as his centre-left party chose a successor. He was elected in a landslide in July 2024, but quit after two years in office marred by missteps and judgment errors that eroded his standing with his party and the public.

Burnham spent almost a decade running Manchester in northwest England before returning to Parliament by winning a special election last month.

He's promising sweeping change, vowing to reverse almost two decades of low growth since the 2008 financial crisis through an approach dubbed "Manchesterism" — harnessing private and public money to invest in areas like transport, housing and infrastructure.

But he will face many of the same political and economic challenges as Starmer, including a sluggish economy, tattered public services and a cost-of-living squeeze.

He also promised continuity in foreign policy, writing in The Times of London that the government's "commitment to NATO and the UK's nuclear deterrent will remain absolute." He said Britain will remain a firm ally of the United States and a strong supporter of Ukraine. (AP)

## Don't support Tibetan independence: China to US

**BEIJING, July 9:** China on Thursday urged the US to honour its commitment to recognise Tibet as part of China and not to support Tibetan independence.

The US State Department said in a statement on Wednesday that it supports the aspirations of Tibetans to preserve their culture and called on China to return to dialogue with the Dalai Lama.

Reacting to the US statement, China's Foreign Ministry said that all Tibet-related issues are China's "internal affairs". China calls Tibet as Xizang.

"Xizang-related affairs are purely China's internal affairs and no country has the right to make interference," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here while re-

sponding to a question on the US statement on Thursday.

"We urge the US to honour its commitment that it recognises Xizang is part of China and does not support "Tibet independence," and stop using Xizang-related issues to interfere in China's internal affairs," she added.

She, however, did not react to the US call to hold talks with the Tibetan spiritual leader, who turned 91 on July 6.

The Dalai Lama was born on July 6, 1935, to a Tibetan farming family in the small village of Takster, located in Amdo in Tibet.

The Tibetan spiritual leader, who has lived in Dharamsala (India) in exile since he left Tibet in 1959, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989. (PTI)

# Eye on Indo-Pacific: India and Australia deepen ties across nuclear, maritime and mineral sectors

**MELBOURNE, July 9:** India and Australia on Thursday sealed a raft of landmark pacts spanning civil nuclear energy, maritime security and critical minerals sectors, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese reinforced the vital role of the bilateral partnership in ensuring a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

The agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel New Delhi's nuclear power projects came nearly 12 years after the two countries inked a historic civil nuclear cooperation pact.

In another significant decision, India and Australia decided to work expeditiously to firm up the proposed Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement as well as a bilateral investment protection framework.

A joint declaration on defence and security cooperation, a maritime security collaboration roadmap, a joint statement on energy security and a partnership for cyber, critical technologies and supply chains were among 18 pacts signed following summit talks between the two prime ministers.

Modi described as "unparalleled" the outcomes from his talks with Albanese, especially in areas of renewable energy, climate action, nuclear energy, critical minerals, technology and education.

The agreements sealed at the summit also included one between the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) and the Maritime Border Command (MBC) of Australia and it will provide cooperation in the fields of maritime law enforcement, domain awareness, and maritime border protection.

The two sides also vowed to work closely in shipbuilding, ship repair and maintenance.

Modi landed in Australia from Indonesia on the second leg of his three-nation tour that is aimed at

boosting trade, energy and defence ties against the backdrop of an increasingly fractured geopolitical environment.

Under the provisions of the energy security framework, India and Australia vowed to strengthen energy security by maintaining a stable, secure and reliable supply of coal, diesel, other liquid fuels and natural gas.

The maritime security roadmap provides for defence and security collaboration with a long-term perspective to enhance collective strength besides deepening cooperation in the defence industrial sector to co-develop military hardware and build supply chain resilience.

It will also accelerate efforts to build interoperability and information sharing between the defence forces of the two sides and expand aircraft deployments from each other's territories, the document said.

In his media statement, Modi elaborated on the outcomes in areas such as renewable energy, climate action, nuclear energy, critical minerals, technology and education.

"Today, we have signed an important agreement in the field of nuclear energy. This will open the way for uranium supplies from Australia to India and give new impetus to our clean energy objectives," he said.

"Our cooperation in critical minerals is vital to our strategic security and clean energy transition. With this in mind, today we have launched the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies, and Supply Chains," he said.

The prime minister said both sides will also work together on a critical minerals corridor.

Modi also mentioned growing engagement between the two countries in the defence domain and emphasised the importance of a free and stable Indo-Pacific.

The new initiatives to bolster



defence ties came amid growing concerns over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the Indo-Pacific.

"The Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two oceans. It also symbolises the shared aspirations of like-minded democracies like India and Australia," he said.

"Today, we have issued an important Joint Declaration to enhance cooperation in defence and security. Through the India-Australia Defence Innovation Corridor, we will work to connect defence startups and industries," he said.

The prime minister said the India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Roadmap will give new impetus to shared efforts in the Indo-Pacific. "We will also move forward together in shipbuilding, ship repair, and maintenance."

An announcement was also made on the deployment of an Indian military instructor in the Australian Defence College for 2028-29.

Describing India and Australia as two vibrant democracies and ocean powers, Modi said the common worldview of the two countries is an inspiration to continue

moving forward with deep mutual trust.

"The Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement signed in 2022 has steadily expanded our trade and investment horizons. We have now decided to expedite work on the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA), which will be balanced, ambitious, and a win-win for both countries. We will also move forward rapidly on the Bilateral Investment Treaty," he said.

Modi also said that India and Australia recognised that terrorism poses a serious challenge not just to any one country, but to all of humanity.

"Therefore, our fight against terrorism is shared, our resolve unwavering, and our cooperation continues to strengthen," he said.

"We also believe that the tensions and conflicts raging in many parts of the world can only be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. Together, we will further strengthen peace, stability, freedom of navigation, and a rules-based order throughout the Indo-Pacific region," he said.

In his remarks, Albanese said Australia's relationship with India has never been more consequen-

tial than it is today.

The Australian prime minister said the pact on nuclear energy will facilitate uranium exports from Australia to India for peaceful purposes.

"The arrangement facilitates Australian uranium exports to India to help increase the share of non-fossil fuel power capacity, providing an additional market for the Australian resources sector," he said.

Albanese said the two sides are focusing on diversifying ties to grow from strength to strength.

"Six years into our strategic partnership, Australia's relationship with India has never been more consequential than it is today. Our partnership has never been stronger," he said.

"We share a focus on deepening and diversifying the relationship between our countries so we can continue to grow from strength to strength."

"Today, we have done exactly that across the breadth of our relationship. With new landmark agreements, we are expanding our relationship across defence and security education, science and technology and energy security and critical minerals," he said. (PTI)

## South Korea's Supreme Court upholds prison sentence for Yoon in first martial law case



**SEOUL, July 9:** South Korea's Supreme Court on Thursday upheld a seven-year prison sentence for former President Yoon Suk Yeol in the first case to reach the country's highest court from his several criminal trials related to his brief imposition of martial law in 2024.

The court upheld an April ruling by the Seoul High Court that found Yoon guilty of infringing on Cabinet members' right to deliberate before he declared martial law, falsifying the official proclamation to cover up the lapse before later destroying the document, and deploying presidential security forces to illegally resist law enforcement efforts to arrest him weeks after his impeachment.

Martial law lasted only hours before lawmakers broke through a blockade of heavily armed soldiers and police at Seoul's National Assembly and voted to repeal it, forcing Yoon's Cabinet to lift the measure.

Yoon remains in detention and did not attend the ruling, which is final. He is still standing trial in other cases, and he has appealed the life sentence he received for the most serious conviction against him, on the charge of rebellion. In a statement, Yoon's legal team expressed "deep regret" over the Supreme Court's ruling, saying the justices concluded a significant case without sufficient review.

The ruling aligned with the views of the Constitutional Court, which, in removing Yoon from office in April 2025, found that his martial law decree lacked legal grounds and failed to follow required procedures.

While Yoon called 11 Cabinet members to his office shortly before declaring martial law on late-night television on December 3, 2024, several participants, including then-Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, have testified that Yoon unilaterally informed them of his decision rather than inviting deliberation. The Seoul High Court said Yoon also violated the rights of nine other Cabinet members by failing to call them to the meeting or notifying them too late.

Though brief, Yoon's martial law declaration plunged South Korea into a political crisis, paralysing politics and high-level diplomacy while rattling financial markets. The turmoil eased only after his liberal rival, Lee Jae Myung, won an early presidential election in June 2025. (AP)

# Australia's Victoria University receives approval to set up, operate campus in Gurugram

**MELBOURNE, July 9:** Australia's Victoria University has received an approval to set up and operate its campus in Gurugram in India, signifying a part of educational partnerships towards strengthening people-to-people ties, the Ministry of External Affairs said Thursday.

Handing over a Letter of Intent (LoI) to another Australian university for setting up its campus in India and an MoU between Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and a third university here were among the outcomes of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit Down Under. Modi and his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese noted with satisfaction the "growing presence" of Australian universities in India and the contribution of educational partnerships towards building a future-ready workforce, fostering innovation, and strengthening people-to-people ties, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

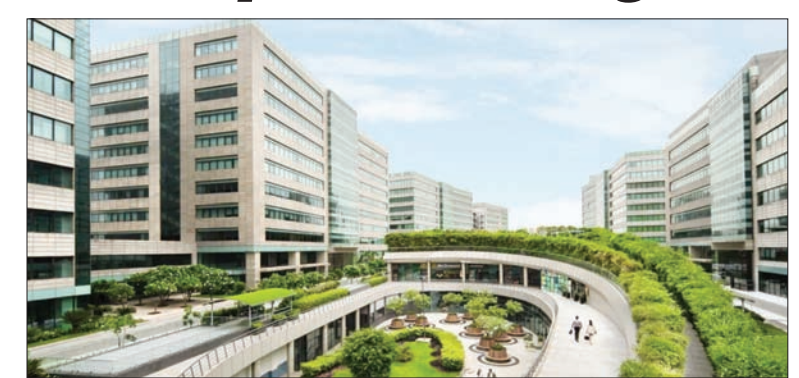
Modi, who arrived in Melbourne a day ago on the second leg of his three-nation visit, participated in the third India-Australia Annual Summit hosted by Prime Minister Albanese here.

The two leaders also held one-on-one

discussions followed by delegation-level talks. They welcomed the successful completion of six years of the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Among the host of outcomes from Modi's visit to Australia is the handing over of a Letter of Approval to Victoria University which permits it to set up and operate its campus in Gurugram in the national capital region.

According to its website, the Victoria University, for more than 100 years, as an institution, has offered accessible education to students in Melbourne's west and beyond. Another outcome in the education sector, is the handing over of a Letter of Intent (LoI) to Flinders University for setting up its campus in India. This will enable the institution to set up its campus in Bengaluru, according to the MEA.

The two leaders also highlighted the "continued expansion of education cooperation between the two countries," the ministry said in a statement issued after the India-Australia Annual Summit. The Australian Prime Minister's Office said the two countries are "committed to unlocking the full potential of our relationship" by investing in ed-



ucation, science and technology.

"Australian university campuses in India are a cornerstone of our education partnership, driving innovation, skills development and economic growth in both countries," Albanese was quoted as saying in its statement.

Education and skills are "key pillars" in the relationship between Australia and India, the Australian Prime Minister's Office said. India is Australia's second-largest source of international students, with over 1,40,000 Indian students studying in Australian institutions last year, it said. The two

prime ministers welcomed Flinders University receiving approval to establish a campus in India, joining seven other Australian universities endorsed to have campuses across India.

The two leaders also noted the "benefits of Australia's growing vocational education programmes in India and welcomed the agreement between Western Australian TAFE and India to support a Centre of Excellence for Skilling in Mining and Mining Equipment, Technology and Services in India," the Australian Prime Minister's Office said. (PTI)

## BJP-ZPM alliance retains power Mizoram: Chakma autonomous council chief wins floor test

**AIZAWL, July 9:** Mizoram's Chakma Autonomous District Council's Chief Executive Member (CEM) Nirupam Chakma on Thursday won a floor test, securing the support of 18 members in the 20-strong council, ensuring that the BJP-ZPM alliance retained power in the body, officials said.

The confidence motion, conducted under the chairmanship of Deputy Chairman Sundor Muni Chakma, was passed with 18 votes in favour. The lone Mizo National Front (MNF) member, Rasik Mohan Chakma, remained absent from the sitting, they said.

Chakma was sworn in as the CEM on Wednesday after being appointed by the governor of Mizoram following his election as the leader of the Chakma Democratic Alliance Legislature Party, a coalition of the BJP and the Zoram People's Movement (ZPM).



The governor directed him to seek a vote of confidence within seven days of assuming office.

The CADC currently has 20 elected members, including 10 from the BJP, nine from the ZPM and one from the MNF, giving the ruling alliance a decisive majority.

Speaking after the floor test, Nirupam Chakma thanked council members for reposing faith in his leadership and the governor for fa-

cilitating the restoration of an elected government after nearly a year of governor's rule.

He said the remaining members of the executive committee would soon be inducted to ensure the council functions effectively in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The CEM said the new coalition government would prioritise improving road connectivity, upgrad-

ing school infrastructure, expanding access to safe drinking water and strengthening healthcare services across the council's jurisdiction. He also identified youth employment and skill development as key focus areas, while stressing the need for close coordination with the Mizoram government and the Centre to accelerate development in the CADC.

He expressed confidence that the council would contribute to the national vision of 'Viksit Bharat'.

Chakma's swearing on Wednesday marked the end of the governor's rule in the council after a year. The CADC was placed under the governor's rule for a year between July 7, 2025 and July 7, 2026 due to prolonged political instability caused by frequent change in leadership. The CADC governs parts of Lawngtlai district of southern Mizoram. (PTI)

## Ensure effective implementation of tribal dev progs: Nagaland gov

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, July 9:** Reviewing the tribal affairs department's ongoing programmes, achievements and future plans at Lok Bhavan in Kohima on Thursday, Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav called for effective implementation of tribal development programmes, timely completion of infrastructure projects, and efficient utilisation of available resources to ensure that developmental benefits reach the intended beneficiaries.

He also stressed the importance of close monitoring, transparency and coordinated efforts among all stakeholders for the holistic development of tribal communities across Nagaland.

During the meeting, the department made a comprehensive presentation on its functioning, major schemes, infrastructure projects

and implementation status across the state.

The officials presented details of budget allocations, progress under Article 275(1), the Development Action-Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan (DA-JGUA), the Pradhan Mantri Adi Adarsh Gram Yojana (PMAAGY), and the implementation of various community infrastructure projects benefiting tribal areas.

Yadav reviewed the status of completed and ongoing projects.

He also reviewed the progress of Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) in the state.

Officials informed that three EMRSs are presently functional with a total enrolment of 751 students, and all three schools achieved a 100% pass percentage in the HSLC Examination 2026.

The governor was also apprised



of the construction progress of new EMRS campuses across various districts and the challenges affecting timely completion, including land-related issues, power and water connectivity and approach roads.

The review meeting was attended by senior officers of the tribal affairs department and officials from the governor's secretariat.

## Arunachal: Fresh floods, landslides damage houses, crops



**ITANAGAR, July 9:** Houses, roads and crops were damaged as fresh floods and landslides were reported across six districts of Arunachal Pradesh, officials said on Thursday.

The fresh incidents were reported in Keyi Panyor, Upper Siang, Tirap, Changlang, Papum Pare and Upper Subansiri in the last 24 hours, the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) said in a statement this evening. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an 'orange' alert (be updated) for Shi Yomi, Siang, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit and Longding districts on Thursday, warning of heavy to very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning.

Rainfall is expected to ease from Friday, with an 'orange' alert issued only for Papum Pare, Lower Dibang Valley and Tirap districts that day. The weather is likely to improve further over the weekend, with most parts of the state expected to remain free from warnings by Saturday, the IMD said.

However, eastern and foothill districts are likely to remain under 'yellow' alert (be aware) through Monday for thunderstorms and heavy rain, it said.

In the last 24 hours, among the settlements affected were Yingkong village in Upper Siang; Khonsa town and Kheti village in Tirap; Phantip, Old Jukhi, Yanman, Bubang-I, Jongji Havi, Songko Havi, Thamiyang, Namtok headquarters, Noitong, Chagra and Phungsa villages in Changlang; Geram, Goya, Hoji-I, Hoji-II, Kheel, Langpek, Mepsoro, Techir, Toru and Yayee-I villages in Papum Pare; and Eru, Ningpin, Daru, Uli, Segi, Debom, Bui, Lida, Bulu, Nguki and Riddi villages in Upper Subansiri.

Recent rainfall-triggered floods and landslides wreaked havoc across Arunachal Pradesh, with six people losing their lives in the state. Two labourers from Bihar were killed and four others were injured after a rain-triggered landslide struck a construction site in Lohit district on Wednesday.

Two women were swept away in a flash flood in Keyi Panyor on June 24 and remain untraced despite continued search efforts. Earlier, one person was killed in a landslide at Sarti village in Anjaw district on June 28, while three others died in the flash flood at Possa in Keyi Panyor district.

In the recent rain-triggered floods and landslides, at least 94,201 people have been affected across 333 villages in 237 circles spread over 26 districts, the statement said.

Floods and landslides have caused extensive damage to agriculture and public infrastructure.

A total of 334.2 hectares of crop area has been affected, including 185.5 hectares under horticulture and 148.7 hectares under agriculture, while 1,010 hectares of forest area have also been impacted. Infrastructure losses include damage to 131 roads, 19 bridges, 21 culverts, 191 water supply systems, 58 government buildings, 21 power lines, 224 electric poles, four hydel projects, seven retaining walls, seven flood protection walls, two hospitals and three schools, besides drainage networks and other public assets. Hundreds of houses have also been damaged across the state, it said.

Two relief camps continue to operate in Keyi Panyor, where 252 people are currently taking shelter. Rescue and relief operations are continuing in the affected districts. (PTI)

## Centre approves 17 road projects worth ₹ 611 crore for Arunachal

**ITANAGAR, July 9:** The Centre has approved 17 road projects worth ₹ 611.17 crore to improve connectivity across Arunachal Pradesh, Chief Minister Pema Khandu said on Thursday.

Announcing this in a social media post, Khandu termed it another major boost to the state's development journey and thanked Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari for their continued support.

"Our state's development journey has received another significant boost with the Ministry of Road Transport & Highways (MoRTH), Government of India, approving 17 road projects worth ₹ 611.17 crore under the Central Road and Infrastructure Fund (CRIF) 2026-27 for Arunachal Pradesh," the chief minister said in a post on X.

According to an official communication by the ministry, the approval follows a proposal

submitted by the Arunachal Pradesh Public Works Department seeking clearance for 17 priority road projects under the CRIF scheme. While the state government had sought approval for projects worth ₹ 592.50 crore, the ministry approved works amounting to ₹ 611.17 crore.

The sanctioned projects are spread across several districts and include the construction and improvement of major district roads as well as important connectivity projects.

Among the major works approved are the construction of the Ningcho-Langpia road in East Kameng, Latsum Pate-Namorah road in Pakke Kessang, Hara Happa to Upper Nyoroh road in Papum Pare, Gengi to Subansiri Ferry Ghat road in Lower Siang, and Mirem to Resing road in East Siang.

The Centre has also cleared the construction of the MV Road near Assam Rifles camp to Miao Singhpo village road in Changlang, the

PMGSY road point to Pongchau via Kaila Komnu and Longwo villages in Longding, an internal village road from Ngonthong to Kola-gaon in Tirap, and the Bizari to Ngopok road in Lower Dibang Valley.

Other approved projects include the Kam-lai-Laptang internal village road and Dadam CO Headquarters-Longkai road in Tirap, NH-13 to Giturijo road in Kamle, Longding to Nokjan road in Longding, NH-13 to Hote road in Papum Pare, Thembang to Lachang road in West Kameng, Hamba Pinda to Kamsa road in East Kameng, and improvement of the NH-513-Gobuk-Harkam via Herak Army Camp road in Upper Siang.

The approval is expected to improve connectivity in remote and border areas, facilitate movement of people and goods, and support economic growth by strengthening road infrastructure across the state, officials said. (PTI)

## Manta ray gill plates worth ₹ 2.3cr seized in one of Mizoram's biggest wildlife-related hauls

**AIZAWL, July 9:** Around 210 kg of suspected manta ray gill plates worth an estimated ₹ 2.3 crore were seized in Mizoram's Champhai district, in one of the state's biggest wildlife-related hauls, police said on Thursday.

A pick-up truck was intercepted by the Special Task Force (STF) of the district police on the night of July 7, and dehydrated manta ray or mobula gill plates concealed in nine bags were recovered, they said.

The occupants of the vehicle, Rajiv Hussein Laskar (26) and Jinuk Uddin Laskar (30), both residents of Silchar in Assam, were arrested, they added.

The consignment was estimated to be worth around ₹ 2.30 crore in the international black market and is believed to be among the largest wildlife contraband seizures ever made in Mizoram, police said in a statement. Gill plates are cartilaginous filtering structures found in the mouths of manta ray fish. Prized in parts of Asia for use in traditional medicine, they have become a lucrative wildlife product, contributing to increased exploitation.

As the recovered items belong to species protected under wildlife laws, the seized consignment, vehicle and the two accused have been handed over to the Divisional Forest Officer of Champhai, which shares a border with Myanmar, for scientific examination and legal action, police said.

In another major operation, a joint team of the Aizawl District Special Branch (DSB) and the Assam Rifles seized 1.95 kg of methamphetamine valued at ₹ 1.60 crore from Lawpui in Aizawl on Monday.

One person, identified as Marcus Lalvenpuia (19) -- a resident of Luimawi village in Mamit district, was arrested in connection with the seizure, police said.

Meanwhile, a team of the Saitual district police intercepted a truck at the Kualmawi check gate on Wednesday after its driver allegedly attempted to flee during routine checking.

The driver, identified as Fulchand Ali Mondal (35) of Assam's Dhubri district, was arrested and 102 grams of heroin worth about ₹ 20.4 lakh concealed in nine soap cases inside the vehicle was recovered, the statement said.

In separate operations, two Myanmar nationals were arrested with heroin in the state, police said.

An SUV heading to Aizawl from Zokhawthar in Champhai district was intercepted on July 7, and 26 grams of heroin concealed inside a pot kept beneath the rear seat was recovered. Lalrinchhana (20), a resident of Khawmawi in Myanmar's Chin state, was arrested from the vehicle, they said.

A day earlier, a maxi-cab was intercepted in Zokhawthar and 48 grams of heroin hidden in a sling bag carried by a Myanmar national, identified as Thuanmawia (42) of Tshambhari village in Falam district, was recovered, they added.

In another operation on July 5, personnel at the Champhai Khankawn police check gate intercepted a lorry and seized 2,960 kg of dry areca nuts worth ₹ 10.36 lakh, suspected to have been illegally imported from Myanmar. (PTI)

extension activities to help students develop into responsible citizens capable of contributing to society and nation-building.

Shivaraj assured the governor of his commitment to strengthening academic standards, promoting meaningful research, improving institutional governance and fostering a vibrant campus culture, the statement said.

He said he would work with all stakeholders to build on the university's achievements and further establish Rajiv Gandhi University as a leading centre of higher learning, innovation and societal engagement in the region. Former vice chancellor-in-charge SK Nayak and registrar NT Rikam were also present during the meeting. (PTI)

## Arunachal Guv asks new RGU VC to focus on academic excellence, research

**ITANAGAR, July 9:** Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik on Thursday asked the newly appointed Vice Chancellor of Rajiv Gandhi University, Shivaraj, to strengthen academic excellence by promoting quality research, with a special focus on the state's biodiversity.

The governor, who is also the chief rector of the state's lone central university, made the remarks when Shivaraj called on him at Lok Bhavan shortly after assuming office, according to an official statement.

Welcoming the new vice chancellor, Parnaik expressed confidence that under his leadership, the university would further strengthen its position as a centre of excellence in higher education, innovation and knowledge



creation. He said professionalism, discipline, punctuality and commitment to academic pursuits should remain the defining values of the institution, while stressing the need to create an environment conducive to intellectual growth through the active participation of faculty, administrative staff and research scholars.

The governor urged the vice chancellor to promote research on the state's rich biodiversity, indigenous traditions, natural resources, environmental conservation and socio-economic development.

He also called for greater emphasis on sports, wellness, community engagement and

## Two militants arrested in Manipur

**IMPHAL, July 9:** Security forces have arrested two militants belonging to proscribed outfits from Manipur's Imphal East and Kakching districts, a police officer said on Thursday.

A 27-year-old active cadre of the Kangleipak Communist Party (Peoples' War Group) was apprehended from Aihang village gate in Kakching district on Tuesday, he said. On Wednesday, a member of the banned Kanglei Yawol Kanna Lup (KYKL) was arrested from Kalika Bamon Kampu in Imphal East district, he said.

A pistol and a large stash of ammo were seized from his possession, the officer added. (PTI)

National Programme for Control of Blindness & Visual Impairment  
O/o The Jt. Director of Health Services cum Member Secretary, DHS  
Diphu, Karbi Anglong, Assam

No: Jt.DHS/KA/NPCB&VI/Inviting Quotation/2026-27/ 01 / 233 Date: 08/07/2026

### NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION

The Department of Health and Family welfare, Karbi Anglong invites sealed quotation affixing court fee of Rs.8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty-five paise) only of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, cash receipt of Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only from the eligible Suppliers/Firms for supply of Ophthalmology Instruments and Medicines for various Hospitals in the Karbi Anglong District as per requirement. Interested suppliers/firms may collect the detailed quotation documents, terms and conditions, and specification from the Joint Director of Health Services, Karbi Anglong during office hours. Last date for submission of quotation: 18/07/2026 up to office hours.

Sd/-  
Joint Director of Health Services  
Cum  
Member Secretary, District Health Society  
Karbi Anglong

IPRD/ KAAC/ 2026-27/ 84

### OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT LEGAL SERVICES AUTHORITY WEST KARBI ANGLONG

Office Address: Judicial Courts & Offices compound,  
Sai Ali, Hamren, Pin: 782486, West Karbi Anglong, Assam  
Contact No-6901281649

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জিলা আইন সেৱা প্ৰাধিকৰণ, পশ্চিম কাৰ্বি আংলং, হামৰেণ।

Memo No: DLSA/WKA/2026/

Dated the 6th July, 2026

### ADVERTISEMENT

06.07.2026

Applications are invited from the eligible candidates, who are citizens of India as defined in the Constitution of India, in Standard Form as published in Part IX of the Assam Gazette for engagement of 01 (one) Driver (contractual) in the office of the District Legal Services Authority, West Karbi Anglong, Hamren at a fixed pay of Rs.15,000/- per month. The engagement shall be purely contractual and it may be terminated at any time without assigning any reason.

Name of Post	Number of vacancy	Eligibility criteria	Category	Remuneration (Fixed pay)
Driver (Purely contractual)	01 (one)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The candidates must possess the minimum educational qualification of Class VIII standard (passed) and those who have passed Higher Secondary or above shall not be eligible to apply for the said post.</li> <li>Must possess a valid LMV driving license.</li> </ul>	Unreserved	Rs. 15,000/- (Rupees Fifteen thousand) only per month.

Last date of submission of application: 31.07.2026

Sd/-  
Secretary,  
District Legal Services Authority,  
West Karbi Anglong, Hamren

# PM's 3-nation visit yielding 'unprecedented' strategic gains: BJP

Uranium agreement with Australia to provide further momentum to India's efforts to achieve its nuclear target power by 2047



**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The BJP on Thursday said Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ongoing three-nation tour has been marked by several "unprecedented" achievements, including a major BrahMos missile deal with Indonesia, agreements on critical minerals and the development of strategic infrastructure that strengthen India's global standing.

Modi is currently on a three-na-

tion visit to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand.

Addressing a press conference at the BJP headquarters here, party national spokesperson Tuhin Sinha said every foreign visit by Modi reflects the government's commitment to development and national progress.

"This visit, too, has been associated with several significant and, in many ways, unprecedented

achievements that deserve greater attention," he said.

Sinha termed the proposed BrahMos missile agreement with Indonesia the "biggest outcome" of the visit and said India has agreed to supply the supersonic cruise missile system to Jakarta under its "largest-ever" defence deal, valued at around Rs 5,400 crore.

He also highlighted cooperation in the critical minerals sector, saying the partnerships with Indonesia and Australia will strengthen India's semiconductor, electric vehicle and renewable energy ambitions.

"In the last two years, India has signed critical minerals agreements with 25 countries. Indonesia is one of the world's leading producers of nickel, while Australia is a key source of rare earths. These partnerships will strengthen India's ambitions in semiconductor man-

ufacturing, EV production and renewable energy," he said.

On the joint development of Sabang Port in Indonesia's Aceh province, Sinha said the project would significantly enhance India's strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific because of its proximity to the Strait of Malacca.

"If this agreement is viewed alongside India's Great Nicobar Project, it represents concrete evidence of India's expanding strategic footprint in the Indo-Pacific," he said.

Stressing the importance of the nuclear energy agreement with Australia to supply uranium to India, Sinha said it would provide further momentum to the country's efforts to expand nuclear power generation.

"The uranium agreement with Australia provides further momentum to India's efforts to achieve its target of generating 100 gigawatts

of nuclear power by 2047," he said.

On Modi being conferred Indonesia's highest civilian honour and his visit to the ninth-century Prambanan Temple, Sinha said the prime minister has consistently promoted India's civilisational heritage during his foreign visits.

Targeting the Congress over its criticism of Modi's foreign visits, Sinha said the prime minister's 35 highest civilian honours reflect his global leadership and vision for the Global South.

"Even before the prime minister departed on this visit, the Congress had mocked him by saying he was travelling abroad merely to collect another award.

"These 35 highest civilian honours are a recognition not just of Prime Minister Modi personally, but of his global leadership and his vision for the Global South," he said. (PTI)

## Mantri Pradhan must resign, NTA should be disbanded: Congress

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Congress on Thursday attacked the Modi government over the alleged irregularities in the UGC-NET exam, demanding that Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan must resign and the NTA disbanded. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh shared on X a media report which stated that several students, who appeared for the Sociology paper in the University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET) on June 30, have alleged that the examination was leaked.

He said days after the NEET-UG exam was leaked in May 2026, the 'Mantri Pradhan' announced that the NEET exam would now be conducted via a computer based test (CBT) from next year onwards.

The implicit promise was that a CBT paper cannot be leaked unlike a pen and paper examination, Ramesh said on X.

"Now there are reports that the UGC-NET Sociology examination this year appears to have been leaked despite being a CBT. Earlier we had seen that questions in the UGC-NET English Exam were wholesale lifted from past papers without any changes," Ramesh said.

The bottom line is that whatever be the format of the exam, paper leaks and irregularities are occurring because the Modi government's Education Ministry is compromised and the National Testing Agency (NTA) is deliberately incompetent and incapacitated, the Congress general secretary in-charge communications alleged.

"The Mantri Pradhan must resign and the NTA must be disbanded," Ramesh said. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi had also attacked the Modi government on Wednesday over alleged irregularities in the UGC-NET exam, saying it continues to turn a blind eye and sleep soundly despite repeated "scams" as years of hard work put in by lakhs of students hold no value for it.

The Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha had said the entire country knows that its is futile to expect any accountability or action from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Pradhan. Gandhi had shared on X a screenshot of a media report claiming that student leaders in Rohtak, Haryana, had levelled serious allegations regarding the UGC-NET June 2026 examination conducted by the NTA. (PTI)

## Modi govt hurt national interests by letting China capture India's critical industries: Congress

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Congress on Thursday alleged that the Modi government has hurt national interests by letting China "capture" India's most critical industries and opening more opportunities for the Chinese to "flourish".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge cited a media report, which claimed that China still powers India's strategic industries, to attack the government.

There was no immediate reaction from the government or the BJP on the Congress' allegations.

He claimed that six years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi handed a clean chit to China after 20 brave soldiers made the supreme sacrifice in Galwan.

"Our bravehearts chose martyrdom, but Modi Govt has surrendered India's interests to China," Kharge alleged in a post on X.

He claimed that dependence on China runs through the most critical sectors of India's economy, which are supposed to define the country's future.

Kharge said since the Galwan clash, imports from China have



"exploded" by 101.81 per cent by 2025-26, pushing India's trade deficit with the neighbouring country to USD 112.1 billion.

"China supplied a jaw-dropping 86 per cent of India's antibiotic imports. Why? China cornered nearly 74 per cent of India's API, bulk drug, and drug intermediate imports in 2024-25," he said.

Kharge further claimed that 66 per cent of India's EV component imports still flow from China.

Nearly 75 per cent of lithium-ion batteries powering Indian EVs are imported, and the overwhelm-

ing bulk of them are Chinese, he said, adding that India imported nearly 93 per cent of permanent magnets from China in 2025-26.

"For all the hollow talks by the Modi government on solar energy, it is appalling that China supplied more than 99 per cent of India's undiffused silicon wafer imports in 2025-26, a near total capture of a sector Modi ji's claims to champion under Atmanirbhar Bharat. These undiffused silicon wafers are the foundation of our solar cells," the Congress chief said. (PTI)

## Suspend Wayanad tunnel work pending fresh study: Cong leader; CPI(M) says it shouldn't be derailed

**THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 9:** Senior Congress leader M M Hassan on Thursday sought suspension of work on the Anakkompyil-Meppadi tunnel project pending a fresh environmental study.

CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan, however, said the recent Wayanad landslide should not derail the major infrastructure project.

Two days after a landslide at the tunnel project site in Wayanad claimed six lives, Hassan, senior Congress leader and former KPCC president, demanded that construction be suspended until an independent expert committee conducts a fresh environmental impact assessment.

The July 7 landslide struck the Kalladi stretch of the proposed tunnel project connecting Wayanad and Kozhikode districts. The death toll rose to six on Thursday with the recovery of three more bodies.

In a statement, Hassan alleged that the project area was environmentally fragile and claimed the

previous LDF government proceeded with the project despite being aware of the risk of landslides.

He said the then Leader of Opposition and present Chief Minister V D Saheesha, along with the UDF, had cautioned against going ahead with the project without a comprehensive environmental impact assessment. The LDF, however, ignored the warning and branded the UDF as anti-development, he alleged.

Hassan claimed there were serious lapses in the approval process, alleging that the State Level Expert Appraisal Committee relied on a questionable Public Works Department report to conclude that the project area was not an ecologically sensitive zone.

He alleged that incorrect information had been furnished to the Union Environment Ministry to obtain environmental clearance.

The Congress veteran sought stringent action against the construction company, alleging violations of safety norms in soil



excavation and disposal.

Govindan, however, said the landslide tragedy should not be used as a reason to stall major development projects such as the tunnel.

He said the project was launched on the basis of scientific studies and reports, including those prepared by central agencies, and that any shortcomings in those reports should be thoroughly investigated. The incident, he said, was caused by a massive hill collapse.

PWD Minister P K Basheer

made it clear that the government had no plans to abandon the project, stressing that ensuring safety was its foremost priority.

"The intention is not to stop the project. Safety is the key factor. We will examine all aspects and decide how the project can be taken forward safely," he told reporters here.

Basheer said the tunnel project had received environmental clearance from the Union Environment Ministry and that the recent landslide had raised concerns warranting a detailed examination. (PTI)

## Rani Kamalapati-Agartala Special Express upgraded with LHB coaches

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, July 9:** Indian Railways has upgraded the Rani Kamalapati-Agartala-Rani Kamalapati Special Express by replacing its conventional ICF coaches with modern Linke Hofmann Busch (LHB) coaches to enhance passenger safety, comfort and travel experience.

According to a railway statement, Train No 01665 (Rani Kamalapati-Agartala) Special Express began operating with the new LHB rake from July 9, while Train No 01666 (Agartala-Rani Kamalapati) Special Express will commence service with the upgraded coaches from July 12.

The introduction of LHB coaches is part of Indian Railways' ongoing modernisation programme aimed at improving passenger amenities and operational efficiency.

The LHB coaches are equipped with advanced antitelescopic technology, which significantly reduces the risk of coaches climbing over one another during collisions, thereby enhancing passenger safety.

They also feature superior suspension systems that provide a smoother and more stable ride, are capable of operating at higher speeds and offer improved interiors for greater travel comfort.

The upgraded rake comprises 22 coaches, providing accommodation across multiple travel classes to cater to the needs of different categories of passengers.

Indian Railways said the initiative reflects its continued commitment to modernising passenger services through advanced technology, improved amenities and a safer, more comfortable and passenger-centric railway network.

## CJP announces Parliament march on July 20; asks students, parents to join in

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Cockroach Janta Party announced that it would march peacefully to Parliament on the first day of the monsoon session on July 20, even as its protest at Jantar Mantar entered the 20th day amid heavy rain on Thursday.

The youth-led outfit, which has been demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged examination irregularities, accused the Delhi Police of preventing the protesters from bringing tarpaulins to the protest site despite heavy rain.

In a statement issued on Thursday morning, the CJP said its Parliament march on July 20 would begin from Jantar Mantar along with educator and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike since June 28.

The CJP called upon students, parents and citizens from across the country to join the march to seek justice for students who allegedly ended their lives after glitches in competitive examinations surfaced, to demand a transparent and credible examination system, and to press for Pradhan's resignation.



In an X post on Wednesday night, Wangchuk appealed to people across the country to join the march, saying Parliament was the appropriate forum to raise the issue.

"Thanks for all your messages to break my hunger strike, but that wouldn't help the 20 students who committed suicide, nor will that help protect the mountains of Ladakh or the rivers of India..."

"If you really want to help, then do a little more than messages from comfy couches; come to Delhi and to Jantar Mantar on July 20, when the monsoon session of Indian Parliament starts. Together, we'll start a very peaceful march to the Sansad and appeal to our honourable MPs to take the issue up and find a lasting solution," Wangchuk's post read.

Meanwhile, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke shared a video on X, showing him confronting Delhi Police personnel over their alleged refusal to allow tarpaulins at the protest site despite heavy rain. In the video, Dipke contrasted the dry clothes of police personnel, who were sitting under a waterproof tent, with the conditions faced by protesters exposed to the rain and questioned why tarpaulins were not being allowed.

"Delhi Police is not allowing us to bring in tarpaulins. It rained all night, and we need them to protect the students who have been on a hunger strike for the past 12 days. For the last three days, we have been struggling to get the tarpaulins inside the protest site," Dipke said in the video. (PTI)

## 'Gigantic scandal led to dismissals': Cong on removal of Bhupender Yadav's aides

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Congress on Thursday stepped up its attack on the government over the "sudden sacking" of four close aides of Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav, alleging that there has been a "gigantic scandal" that has led to the dismissals.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said from June 2025 onwards, determined efforts have been made by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests, and Climate Change and the Rajasthan government to redraw the critical tiger habitat boundary at Sariska (near Alwar).

This will enable over 50 mining companies, which have been closed down, to resume operations, the former environment minister said.

"Then on September 20 2025, the Forest Survey of India in a communication to the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change had recommended strongly against the redefinition of the Aravalli Hills that would open up the range to mining and real estate development. The Supreme Court-mandated Central Empowered Committee and the Supreme Court's Amicus Curiae had also supported the FSI. Yet the Ministry advocated the redefinition," he said on X.

These developments bear recall now in light of the sudden sacking of four close aides of the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Ramesh said.

"This shows a complete collapse of due diligence and accountability at the very top. Undoubtedly there has been a gigantic scandal that has led to these dismissals," the Congress leader said.

The Congress on Wednesday had alleged a collapse of governance in the Union environment ministry after four close aides of Yadav were "sacked" in two days. Ramesh alleged that the ministry has done little to protect the environment and forests in the country and that the "Paryavaran Mantralay has become a Pravachan Mantralay". (PTI)

## NORMAL LIFE ACROSS NORTH, WEST INDIA DISRUPTED

# Monsoon fury batters several states

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Torrential monsoon rains unleashed widespread destruction across several parts of the country on Thursday, inundating roads, uprooting trees, damaging property and disrupting normal life, while authorities scrambled to restore normalcy amid forecasts of more rain.

Roads and residential areas remained submerged in several cities, with commuters wading through knee-deep water and traffic crawling on major roads and highways. Trees uprooted by strong winds blocked roads at several places, while flooding disrupted vehicular movement and damaged houses.

Rescue operations also continued at the site of a building that collapsed a day earlier at a waste-to-energy plant in Maharashtra's Pimpri Chinchwad near Pune after a massive mound of garbage gave

way due to heavy rain.

One body was recovered on Thursday, while around eight people are still feared trapped under the debris. Nine people have been rescued so far.

Delhi witnessed one of its heaviest spells of rain this season, with widespread waterlogging, uprooted trees and traffic snarls throwing life out of gear.

The India Meteorological Department issued a 'red' alert for the day as the Safdarjung, the capital's base weather station, recorded 72.6 mm of rainfall in the last 24 hours that ended at 8.30 am.

Waterlogging was reported from Vikas Marg, parts of east Delhi, New Delhi railway station, Munirka, Sadar Bazar, and Dwarka. Traffic crawled on the Delhi-Noida Expressway. In parts of Jangpura, pedestrians and vehicles waded through knee-high water. Two-



wheeler riders were seen pushing their vehicles through inundated streets.

Several commuters and residents took to social media to share their ordeal.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta inspected the drainage arrangements in Shalimar Village in her assembly constituency and directed officials to ensure proper water drainage, while Public Works De-

partment (PWD) minister Parvesh Sahib Singh also visited the PWD's control at ITO to review the dewatering arrangements and said that in most cases the stagnant water was removed and the "situation is better than in previous years".

The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) said it has cleared 57,000 metric tonnes (MT) of silt from stormwater drains till now and announced that a dedicated 24/7 helpline is also being set up for waterlogging-related complaints.

In neighbouring Gurugram, a section of the balcony of a luxury apartment complex collapsed on a rain-soaked Thursday morning, though no injuries were reported.

Among other parts of the national capital region, widespread waterlogging and traffic disruptions were reported from Noida, Ghaziabad, Ghazipur and Faridabad.

In Noida, areas including Sectors 16, 33, 12, 62 and parts of the Noida-Greater Noida Expressway were inundated, leaving vehicles stranded and forcing commuters to wade through flooded roads.

Severe waterlogging near the Ghazipur border on National Highway-9 triggered long traffic snarls on the Delhi-Ghaziabad road. (PTI)

## Trauma of giving birth in jail not bearable: Court on bail to TCS staffer Nida Khan



**NASHIK, July 9:** As it granted bail to a pregnant Nida Khan in a Nashik TCS case, a local court observed that the trauma of giving birth in prison is unbearable for any woman, drawing a comparison with the circumstances surrounding the birth of Lord Krishna.

In his order, Additional Sessions Judge (Nashik Road court) K G Joshi, however, noted that the overall investigation shows that Khan, with the help of co-accused, attempted to "brainwash the victim", and tried to change her ideological views and religion.

Citing the probe into a sexual harassment and alleged religious

conversion case, the order also said that they tried to convince the victim that "there are objectionable stories in the Hindu religion".

While the court had granted bail to Khan, who was arrested nearly two months ago, on July 6, the reasoned order was made available on Thursday, with the judge asserting that the FIR clearly mentions Khan's alleged role.

The judge allowed her plea, considering the defence argument that she was five months pregnant.

"The trauma of giving birth in a prison like Lord Krishna or the related social stigma is not bearable for anyone," the court said.

"To avoid such an agonising situation and for the welcome and overall welfare of the newborn baby, it would be just and proper to exercise judicial discretion in favour of the applicant-accused," it added. The judge said that keeping the pregnant applicant detained would serve no purpose as the investigation was complete and the charge sheet had been filed.

Besides her pregnancy, Khan's lawyer Rahul Kasliwal also claimed that she was innocent and had been falsely implicated.

He submitted that Khan was highly educated and was previously employed as an "Associate" at TCS before being terminated in April 2026.

Public prosecutor Vijay Gaikwad, along with lawyers Milind Kurkute and Nitin Pandit, appearing on behalf of one of the victims, opposed the bail pleas of Khan and co-accused Danish Shaikh.

Their contention was that enough evidence of sexual assault and religious coercion came to the fore during the investigation of the case. (PTI)

## More than ₹ 6 lakh cr investment in first phase targeted Gujarat launches ambitious Data Centre Policy

**GANDHINAGAR, July 9:** The Gujarat government on Thursday launched the 'Viksit Gujarat Data Centre Policy 2026-29', and announced that it has already received proposals from 14 companies to set up data centres and expects investments of more than ₹ 6 lakh crore in the first phase. Launching the policy at the Mahatma Mandir Convention Centre here, Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel said the initiative will make Gujarat the country's preferred destination for data centres and further strengthen its digital economy.

Science and Technology Minister Arjun Modhwadia said the state aims to emerge as India's leading AI and data centre hub over the next decade. Gujarat has become the first state in the country to have such dedicated policy, he added.

Addressing reporters later, Modhwadia said around 14 hyperscale data centre investors, including companies partnering with global technology firms, have expressed interest in Gujarat.

"Dholera alone is expected to



house a data centre cluster with a capacity of 7 to 8 GW, attracting investments of about ₹ 6-7 lakh crore. A one GW data centre requires an investment of ₹ 70,000 crore to ₹ 1 lakh crore. In the first phase itself, we expect investments exceeding ₹ 6 lakh crore," Modhwadia said.

Calling data the "new wealth" of the digital economy, Modhwadia said India currently has only around 200 data centres with about 2 GW capacity compared to nearly 5,500 in the United States and more than 500 in the United Kingdom. He said the policy is aimed at

creating a complete AI ecosystem encompassing artificial intelligence, cloud computing and quantum computing rather than merely building data storage facilities.

Speaking at the launch, Patel said, "India, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, is emerging as one of the world's largest producers and users of data, making digital infrastructure a key pillar of economic growth. With Viksit Gujarat Data Centre Policy 2026-29, Gujarat will become the best destination for setting up data centres in the country."

He said rapid growth in AI,

cloud computing, electronics manufacturing and digital services has created unprecedented demand for scalable digital infrastructure.

"The policy reflects the state's commitment to sustainable and long-term development and will play an important role in building next-generation digital infrastructure for both Gujarat and the country," Patel said.

Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi said Dholera is set to become the world's largest "data centre city", with the government already receiving requests from domestic and global companies seeking nearly twice the policy's target capacity of 7.5 GW.

He said the government also plans to develop Dholera into a hub for Global Capability Centres (GCCs), supported by a new airport and a semi-high-speed rail link connecting the area with Ahmedabad.

Sanghavi said stakeholder consultations would soon be held and senior nodal officers will be appointed to facilitate investors and speed up project approvals. (PTI)

## Merger of banks does not shield tenant from eviction under Delhi Rent Control Act: SC

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Thursday held that the amalgamation of a tenant bank with another does not exempt the transferee bank from eviction under the Delhi Rent Control Act if the landlord's written consent was not obtained.

Putting an end to nearly a four-decade-long protracted legal battle, a bench comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and K Kotiswar Singh ordered the Punjab National Bank (PNB) to deliver "a peaceful and vacant possession of the tenanted premises" by January 31, 2027 at Connaught Circus here to the owner, the British Motor Car Company Ltd.

It allowed the eviction plea of British Motor Car Company which had moved a local court in 1987.

The dispute dates back to 1947, when the landlord, British Motor Car Company Ltd, leased a prime commercial space in Pratap Building, Connaught Circus, to Hindustan Commercial Bank (HCB).

Following a Reserve Bank of India-backed scheme, the HCB was amalgamated with the PNB in December 1986. This led to PNB taking over the possession of the premises.

The landlord initiated eviction proceedings on the ground that the transfer of possession to the PNB amounted to as-



ignment or parting with possession without its written consent attracting Section 14(1)(b) of the Delhi Rent Control (DRC) Act.

The DRC Act provision says that a tenant is liable to be evicted if the tenanted premises are sublet, assigned or otherwise parted with the possession "without obtaining the consent in writing of the landlord".

The bench dealt with the question whether the amalgamation of HCB with PNB attracted Section 14(1)(b) of the DRC Act or not.

Justice Karol, writing the judgment for the bench, held that even if a merger is

"involuntary" or mandated by a government notification, it does not exempt the successor bank from the requirement of obtaining the landlord's permission under the DRC Act.

"A plain reading of this provision shows that the following ingredients must be satisfied before an order of eviction can be passed under Section 14(1)(b): (1) The tenant has sub-let or assigned or parted with the possession of the whole or any part of the premises; and (2) Such sub-letting, assignment or parting with possession has been done without obtaining the written consent of the landlord," it said.

The amalgamation scheme framed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) cannot be accorded the status of a statutory enactment so as to override the operation of the DRC Act provision, it said.

"We hold that the amalgamation of the original tenant HCB with PNB rendered PNB liable to be evicted from the premises under Section 14(1)(b) of the DRC Act," it said.

The case saw a series of conflicting judicial opinions over four decades, and in 1995, the additional rent controller dismissed the eviction plea, viewing the merger as a statutory "law" binding on the landlord. (PTI)

## Balcony of luxury society flat collapses in Gurugram

**GURUGRAM, July 9:** A section of a balcony fell in a luxury apartment complex in Gurugram's Sector 37D on a rain-soaked Thursday morning, police said. There were no immediate reports of any injuries.

The incident occurred in Tower E of the Imperia Esfera Phase-2 complex. A loud noise was heard by the residents when a part of the first-floor balcony fell down, they said. A resident said that no one was struck by the debris even though people were crossing the space beneath the balcony around the time of the collapse, adding that he was not aware of any injuries caused by the incident.

Upon receiving information, police and local administration teams arrived at the scene. Officials said the entire area has been cordoned off. An investigation has been initiated, and an inspection has been conducted, they added. The incident has sparked fear and outrage among residents who alleged that the incident was a consequence of the builder's persistent negligence. Just last month, residents had staged a protest within the society complex against the dilapidated state of basic amenities, they said.

They appealed to the administration to order a "structural audit" of the entire project by an independent and reputable third-party agency. They added that no tower can be considered completely safe until the structural integrity of the entire project has been verified.

"This is a deeply alarming incident. Although the flat was unoccupied, the falling debris could have injured other residents. The collapse of the slab has also damaged a pillar, compromising the safety of the entire tower. (PTI)

## NGT directs completion of proceedings to levy ₹ 2.65 cr on BHU for illegal tree-felling

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The National Green Tribunal has directed the Uttar Pradesh Pollution Control Board to complete the proceedings for levying an environmental compensation of over ₹ 2.65 crore on the Banaras Hindu University for illegal felling of trees.

The green body had earlier formed a panel which said that 33 trees, including seven sandalwood and 26 other tree species, were illegally felled in the 1,300-acre campus, following which it disposed of the matter and directed the UPCCB to assess the environmental compensation and complete the proceedings within three months in August last year.

The petitioner, Advocate Saurabh Tiwari, had then filed an execution application seeking compliance with the tribunal's directions.

In an order dated July 7, made public on Thursday, a bench of NGT Chairperson Justice Prakash Shrivastava and expert member Afroz Ahmad noted that UPCCB had assessed a compensation of over ₹ 2.65 crore for the illegal felling of 33 trees, and further steps for imposition of environmental compensation are in process.

The tribunal said that, according to the board's counsel, proceedings concerning the levy of the environmental compensation will be completed within three months.

It said, "Though the UPCCB has not carried out the direction of the tribunal to complete the proceedings within three months from the date of the order of the original application (OA), considering the circumstances which are disclosed, we extend the time further and direct the UPCCB to complete the proceedings concerning the levy of environmental compensation."

The tribunal also noted the Divisional Forest Officer's (DFO's) report, according to which 978 trees of different species had been planted by the University in 2025 as compensatory plantation, of which 859 trees were found to be surviving and in safe condition. (PTI)

## Army chief visits forward areas in J-K's Poonch, corps headquarters



**JAMMU, July 9:** Chief of Army Staff General Dhiraj Seth on Thursday visited forward areas in Jammu and Kashmir's twin border districts of Rajouri and Poonch and reviewed the prevailing security situation, operational preparedness and combat readiness of troops.

The visit, his first to the forward areas in Poonch after assuming office, comes amid heightened security measures in Jammu and Kashmir in the wake of the ongo-

ing Amarnath Yatra.

"General Dhiraj Seth, COAS, visited forward areas along the Line of Control in Poonch, Rajouri and Sunderbani. He reviewed the prevailing security dynamics along the Line of Control and the counter-insurgency grid of the White Knight corps," the ADGPI said on X. The COAS was briefed on the evolving security environment, operational deployments, surveillance architecture, field in-

novations and integrated operational readiness, it said.

He also assessed the ongoing infrastructure development and the formation's sustained efforts to empower the communities of India's first villages through people-centric initiatives.

The Army chief also met senior military officials at the Poonch Brigade headquarters, where he was briefed on troops deployment, the prevailing security scenario and operational readiness.

The Army chief earlier visited the Nagrota-based White Knight Corps headquarters, where he was briefed by senior commanders on the security situation in the Jammu region and the operational preparedness of formations under the corps, officials said.

The top officers apprised the Army chief of the overall security environment and the preparedness of troops to effectively respond to emerging challenges. (PTI)

## ABVP celebrates foundation day with blood donation, plantation drives

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) on Thursday celebrated National Students' Day and its 78th foundation day by organising seminars, blood donation camps, tree plantation drives, cleanliness campaigns and other programmes across the country. According to a statement issued by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) youth organisation, the celebrations also included youth interactions, counselling sessions, essay and debate competitions, cultural programmes and intellectual discussions, it said.

"The celebrations included seminars, youth interactions, community service initiatives, blood donation camps, tree plantation drives, cleanliness campaigns, counselling sessions, essay and debate competitions, cultural programmes, intellectual discussions, and floral tribute and cleanliness programmes at me-

morial of Swami Vivekananda," the statement said.

The programmes were organised at the University of Delhi, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Banaras Hindu University, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gorakhpur University, the University of Allahabad, Panjab University, the University of Hyderabad and several other educational institutions.

"Through these initiatives, lakhs of students reaffirmed their commitment to national development and social responsibility," it said. ABVP said the programmes introduced students to its initiatives such as Students' for Seva (SFS), Students' for Development (SFD), Rashtriya Kala Manch (RKM), Khelo Bharat, Mission Sahasi and the Students' Experience in Interstate Living (SEIL) programme.

The organisation also shared a roadmap for several nationwide campaigns planned for the com-



ing year, including Screen Time to Activity Time, SEIL@60, 150 Years of Vande Mataram, 50 Years of Resistance to the Emergency, the 350th Martyrdom Anniversary of Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji and the 650th Birth Anniversary of Sant Ravidas Ji.

The ABVP said it has over 7.7 million active members and is committed to the holistic development of students, quality education and contributing to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047. Addressing the Vasundhara

programme at Banaras Hindu University, ABVP National General Secretary Dr Virendra Singh Solanki said, "Throughout its 78-year journey, ABVP has consistently connected the holistic development of students with the larger objective of nation-building."

"As the world's largest student organisation today, we remain committed to reaching every student with the spirit of service, organisation, and Nation First," he said. (PTI)

## Road caves in, car falls into pit as heavy rain inundates Noida, Ghaziabad



**NOIDA/GHAZIABAD, July 9:** Heavy rainfall disrupted normal life in Noida and adjoining Ghaziabad on Thursday, causing widespread waterlogging, traffic snarls and the collapse of a residential road that sent a parked car and a scooter plunging into a pit. Authorities also declared a holiday in government schools in Ghaziabad.

In one of the most serious rain-related incidents, a section of a road in Vasundhara Sector 13 in

Ghaziabad caved in beside an under-construction basement after incessant rain, sending a parked car and a scooter into the pit. A nearby electricity pole also tilted into the crater. No one was injured, but both vehicles were extensively damaged.

Vehicle owner Ajay Agrawal said the vehicles were parked outside his house, where he lives with his brother Pushkar Singh, a retired superintendent engineer of the Awasthi Vikas Parishad.

He alleged that a builder had excavated nearly 20 feet for a basement without adequate safety arrangements and that the road suddenly gave way towards the excavation around 8 am due to continuous rain.

According to Agrawal, the builder later used a crane to retrieve the vehicles. He said he has lodged a complaint at the Indrapuram police station, seeking action against the builder, proper safety arrangements at the construction site and compensation for the damage caused to his vehicles.

In Noida, several areas, including Sectors 16, 33 and 12, witnessed severe waterlogging, with knee-deep water reported at places, making movement difficult for pedestrians and two-wheeler riders.

Several motorcycles and scooters stalled after water entered their exhausts, forcing riders to push their vehicles through flooded stretches. Some commuters crossed inundated roads by walk-

ing along roadside dividers.

Heavy traffic congestion was reported during the morning peak hours near the Botanical Garden area, where hundreds of cars, buses and two-wheelers moved at a crawl or remained stranded for long periods.

A police officer said traffic was disrupted due to increased congestion caused by the rain but added that personnel remained deployed to regulate movement and ease traffic flow.

In Sector 63, a boundary wall of a company collapsed due to the rain. No injuries were reported.

In Ghaziabad, the district administration declared a holiday in government schools because of the heavy rainfall.

Local residents blamed poor drainage for the situation.

Salman, a milk supplier, told PTI Videos that the rain had affected his work. "I could not deliver milk in some areas because the roads were heavily waterlogged and it became difficult to

pass through," he said.

Another resident, Akbar Ali, alleged that drain-cleaning was merely "an eyewash".

"If the drains had been cleaned properly, the water would have drained out. Water has risen above knee level and even roadside shops have been flooded. It has affected the supply of essential items," said Ali, who is engaged in the flour and grocery supply business.

Shalini Singh, executive chairperson of the NGO Noida Citizen Forum, said the rainfall had exposed the inadequacy of the Noida Authority's monsoon preparedness.

"Officials should step out of their air-conditioned offices and see the actual condition on the ground. When a little rain brings the city to a standstill, it is not merely a natural disaster but an administrative failure," she said, demanding accountability, disclosure of drainage-related contracts and action against officials responsible for lapses. (PTI)

## From star tortoises to Egyptian vultures, CBI-DRI bust wildlife trafficking racket; six held

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** From star tortoises and slow lorises to Egyptian vultures and Shikra birds, 53 protected animals and birds were rescued after the CBI and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) busted an inter-state wildlife trafficking racket in a joint operation, officials said on Thursday.

Six accused were arrested in Mumbai and Kolkata, they said.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in a statement said the operation, carried out with support from the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB), led to the rescue of 15 slow lorises, two binturong, 28 star tortoises, six Egyptian vultures and two shikra birds, all protected under Schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

The arrested accused have been identified as Noman Khan, Mohd Faruq and Insha Shakil from Mumbai, and Saikat Biswas, Mithun Mondal alias Himanshu Mandal and Arjun Mondal from Kolkata, officials said.

Among the rescued wildlife, the slow loris is classified as endan-

gered/critically endangered, the Egyptian vulture as endangered, while the binturong and the star tortoise are listed as vulnerable. Shikra is categorised as "least concern", though all the rescued species are protected under Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which provides them the highest level of legal protection in India. The action was carried out at multiple locations in Maharashtra and West Bengal based on specific intelligence developed by the DRI, Mumbai, about the inter-state syndicate.

"The CBI registered two separate cases on July 7 and July 8, 2026, and three accused persons have been arrested in Mumbai, and three others arrested in Kolkata," the agency said. The cases have been registered under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, and provisions relating to criminal conspiracy under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023.

"The animals and birds were sourced by the accused from various parts of India for trading," the statement said. (PTI)

## We don't have to be airbrushed just to show up: Hollywood star Jennifer Garner

*'I'm not a perfect cook and yet I love to cook. So in my own quiet way, I'm trying to just encourage that side of other women and feel like we don't have to be airbrushed just to be, just to show up for each other'*



Hollywood star Jennifer Garner feels lucky to have a "lovely life", but the actor, popular for romantic comedies like "13 Going on 30", "Ghosts of Girlfriends Past" and "Valentine's Day", says she never tries to present a perfect image on social media.

Garner said she leads a normal life and encourages others to do the same.

"Look, I don't post on Instagram very often, maybe once or twice a week. But when I do, I definitely am usually not in makeup. I usually am in whatever I happen to be wearing. And granted, I do live a lovely life and I'm very lucky that way... But I try to take the perfection out of it."

"I'm not a perfect cook and yet I love to cook. So in my own quiet way, I'm trying to just encourage that side of other women and feel like we don't have to be airbrushed just to be, just to show up for each other," Garner told PTI in a virtual

interview from Los Angeles.

The actor now stars in "The Five-Star Weekend", an adaptation of Elin Hilderbrand's novel of the same name that will see her play a celebrity as a food influencer. Hilderbrand's "The Perfect Couple" was recently adapted by Netflix.

In "The Five-Star Weekend", Garner's Hollis Shaw invites her girlfriends from different decades of her life as a way to process her grief after the sudden death of her husband.

The Peacock show features a star-studded cast in Chloe Sevigny, D'Arcy Carden, Timothy Olyphant and Gemma Chan among others. It will start streaming in India on JioHotstar from Friday.

Garner said she was looking for something interesting and complicated when she found Hilderbrand's 2023 novel and instantly connected with its story.

"I love Elin Hilderbrand's writing. I loved this particular novel. I

was surprised by it as I read it all the way through from beginning to end. I love Bekah Brunstetter, who is our showrunner. I loved her adaptation. She's a playwright. She has a deft hand. She's gifted at character, at comedy, at drama, all of it," the actor said.

"There aren't that many roles that are appropriately complex and compelling for a woman in their 50s. So, I was thrilled to be offered the role, honestly. There were lots of ways that I connected with Hollis Shaw and definitely one of them was being a public person while dealing with something privately."

Like her character in the show, Garner said she has always found strength in her friends.

"I don't mean to be dramatic about it, but my girlfriends are everything. They've propped me up. I have two wonderful sisters. So my girlfriends are a continuation of a sisterhood for me," she said, adding that it would be beau-

tiful to host a party for friends in a place like Nantucket, a beach island in Massachusetts that has become popular with

Hilderbrand's readers. "I can't imagine any more beautiful place for a girl's weekend than Nantucket. As a matter of fact, Nantucket has become a really popular gathering for groups of women, particularly fans of Elin Hilderbrand's books who gather in Nantucket throughout the summer.

"They go around and see all the places they've read about in her books. And as we were shooting there, they'd be on the lookout for us. That was really fun. But honestly, I think a gathering of girlfriends can be just as comfortable in your own home. It doesn't matter as long as you're together," she said.

The 54-year-old actor was also happy to reunite with her "13 Going on 30" co-star Judy Greer on her new show. The 2004 movie, directed by late Gary Winick and also starring Mark Ruffalo and Andy Serkis, continues to be a favourite among Garner's fans. It is now getting a reboot by Netflix with the actor attached as an executive producer.

"It's really a reflection of our beautiful angel of a director, Gary Winick, who died a couple of years later from brain cancer. Judy and I try to keep his memory alive because he had this gift for bringing out nostalgia in people and bringing out just the best in his performers because he so believed in what all of us were doing.

"We really and truly loved him and love to see his legacy going on to stage in a musical and in the reboot. However, it shows up, we're grateful for it," the actor said while remembering the director, who died in 2011 from brain cancer at the age of 49. (PTI)

## I see human life as a combination of good, bad and odd idiosyncrasies: Richard Gadd on 'Half Man'

Long before Richard Gadd became famous with his breakout Netflix series "Baby Reindeer", the Scottish actor-writer was gripped by an idea while travelling on London Underground.

It led him to "Half Man", his new show that has been praised for its searing examination of masculinity, identity and past trauma.

While "Baby Reindeer" was inspired by his experience of facing stalking and sexual abuse, "Half Man" presents a fictional story.

Gadd still remembers how the show's idea came to him.

"You've got these two men in a barn having a weird conversation. One of them is way more masculine than the other, at least stereotypically speaking, and he punches him, and then there is a flashback.

"I got that kind of gust of wind, or creative impulse. I got off the Tube and typed the scene onto my phone. I wrote it out, and the scene remained kind of what it was. From that point on, I couldn't get it out of my head, really," Gadd told PTI in an interview.

"Half Man" is a six-part drama which Gadd has created, written and stars in. It spans 30 years and centers on the destructive, codependent relationship between Niall (Jamie Bell) and Ruben (Gadd), two "brothers" brought together when their mothers form a relationship.

The series, which grapples with harsh themes, including toxic masculinity, homophobia, sub-



stance abuse and unresolved psychological trauma, is currently streaming on Lionsgate Play in India.

With the show, Gadd said he got a "creative impulse" that he felt was compelling enough to follow till the end.

"I feel if you can't get an idea out of your head, then you should follow it," he said.

"All the way through "Baby Reindeer", I was thinking about it and thinking, "What if he did this? What if he did that?" I felt I was going on flights of fancy with the show, and I thought that was a good sign. So once I had that sort of im-

pulse, I just had to follow it all the way through to the end by working as hard as I possibly could."

With his lead protagonists, Gadd presents two opposing embodiments of masculinity.

While Niall is a soft spoken man who self combusts with issues related to his sexuality, Ruben is shown as an alpha male whose unresolved trauma manifests through anger, bravado and self-destruction.

Gadd takes a different lens with the characters by not showing the two as victim and oppressor. The actor said his aim was to embrace the humanity and complexities of these characters, as he believes that this perspective is often missing from stories on screen today.

"I see us all as this sort of combination of good and bad, odd idiosyncrasies, and all kinds of different contradictions, really. I think human makeup is so complicated that all I try to do in bringing my work to the screen is show how complicated it is...

"I've seen a lot of violent people on TV before but the justification for the violence is simply that they're violent, they're sociopathic, or they're psychopathic. But I think a lot of people in life who commit violence do so because it comes from trauma. It comes from difficult experiences. That was something I wanted to bring to the screen."

And this lens is what made his 2024 show "Baby Reindeer" also different from the rest of the dramas that told the story of stalking. (PTI)

## Justin Baldoni and wife break silence after 'It Ends With Us' legal battle with Blake Lively

Justin Baldoni has broken his silence after reaching a settlement in a lengthy and highly publicized legal dispute with Blake Lively.

Baldoni and his wife, Emily Baldoni, presented a united front in an Instagram video the couple shared Wednesday that began, "So we have not spoken publicly for the better part of the last two years, and it's not because we haven't had anything to say, because Lord knows we have."

The "It Ends With Us" actor and director said that although they'd wanted to address the debacle that involved dueling lawsuits with Lively, nearly two years of tit-for-tat fodder and culminated in a confidential settlement, "something was telling us not to."

The couple said they prayed about when to make a public statement. "This feels like the moment," Emily said.

"What does feel important," she continued, "is that we can genuinely say that we are sitting here today feeling immense gratitude for so many things and so many people and so many things that have happened to us."

"Gratitude has saved us," Justin added.

"I also feel that it's important as we say that — in that gratitude — it doesn't negate the injustice and the pain that we have also felt in the last few years, and we've had to wrestle with so many things and try to understand so many things," Emily said. "How could something like this even happen? Let alone disguised as a fight for women. So much to unpack. And the truth is, reality is, is that there's been a lot of trauma for us to move through as a family, which also makes it hard to speak."

"We don't even know this is the right thing to say, but we just know we need to share something," Justin said. "What I will say is that there have been so many painful things that have been spoken into existence —"

"Untruthful," Emily broke in.

"We didn't want to add to the noise, so we just wanted to let the justice system run its course," he said.

"And the truth and the facts have spoken for themselves," Emily said.

The couple's statement comes a year and a



half after Lively filed a bombshell lawsuit against Baldoni alleging sexual harassment, retaliation and several other charges on the heels of a messy "It Ends With Us" summer release

and press tour that fueled rumors of on-set turmoil.

Less than a month after the allegations against Baldoni rallied Hollywood against him, he countersued Lively, her publicist Leslie Sloane and her husband, Ryan Reynolds, for \$400 million in damages, claiming they'd smeared his name in the press and wrestled away his control of the film. His suit was later dismissed.

In May, two weeks ahead of the trial, Lively and Baldoni reached an agreement to resolve their legal dispute, bringing an abrupt end to the contentious battle. "The parties in the Blake Lively and Wayfarer Studios litigation have reached an agreement to resolve the matters," lawyers for both sides said in a joint statement. "The end product — the movie 'It Ends With Us' — is a source of pride to all of us who worked to

bring it to life. Raising awareness, and making a meaningful impact in the lives of domestic violence survivors — and all survivors — is a goal that we stand behind. We acknowledge the process presented challenges and recognize concerns raised by Ms. Lively deserved to be heard. We remain firmly committed to workplaces free of improprieties and unproductive environments. It is our sincere hope that this brings closure and allows all involved to move forward constructively and in peace, including a respectful environment online."

In June, a federal judge ordered Baldoni and his production company to pay Lively's attorney fees related to his unsuccessful defamation lawsuit against her, but rejected her bid for additional damages.

"So, how are we doing?" the filmmaker said in the Instagram video. "We are healing, and if you've ever been through something traumatic, you know that healing isn't linear. It lives different every day, and we have had to rethink for ourselves what is real. What matters, and it's this. It's our family. It's our friends. It's our community. It's our faith." (AP)



## Conquering the rain odds, TV shoots stick to relentless daily schedule

Come rain, floods or uprooted trees blocking entire roads, the show must go on. And it does, day after day, in the television industry where shows have to come up with fresh content come what may — even in a city battered by relentless downpours. The famed Mumbai spirit is put to the test for the city's residents but most perhaps for the many thousands working in the film and television industry tasked with entertaining viewers each day. The luxury of work from home does not exist, say industry insiders. A recent Instagram video of actor Karisma Kapoor sharing visuals of waterlogging outside the set of "India's Best Dancer Season 5" in Filmcity gave a glimpse into how tough it is to keep shoots going. "Guys, this is outside my (vanity) van, can you imagine what's happening here. See the dedication of 'India's Best Dancer'," Kapoor says in the clip. According to Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) General Secretary Ashok Dubey, 5,000 to 7,000 workers are currently are working on television productions being filmed in and around Mumbai. Mutual understanding with the producers helps navigate monsoon disruptions, he said.

"Keeping the alert related to monsoon in mind, workers plan in advance to ensure they reach the sets on time. However, there are times when things are beyond control and delays occur and producers understand these challenges," Dubey told PTI.

Faced with tight schedules and the need to produce episodes day after day, producers are tweaking shoots, moving them indoors and making sure work does not stop. "This is not the first time we are shooting daily soaps, nor is this the first time Mumbai is facing rains and waterlogging. We take a lot of precautions. During this period, we don't do outdoors or redesign a scene to shoot interiors," noted producer Rajan Shahi, known for hit shows such as "Ye Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai" and "Anupama", told PTI.

We have to be flexible and take into account the fact people will be stuck due to rains. The schedule is planned accordingly," he said. Prior planning ensures that most shoots, particularly for television, go on but with certain revisions thrown in. Daily soaps such as "Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi 2", "Anupamaa", "Tarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashma", "Yeh Rishta Kya Kehlata Hai", and several others are currently being filmed, primarily on indoor sets.

Reality shows, including "Indian Idol", "India's Best Dancer", Netflix show, "Lock Upp 2", have also continued production. According to Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) president BN Tiwari, the impact of the rain on television shoots has been minimal. "Mostly indoor shoots are happening despite the rains. TV serials are generally shot in Filmcity or studios," said FWICE president B N Tiwari. Ensuring a secure shooting environment during the rains is top priority for the team of Colors TV's "Seher Hone Ko Hai". The show's lead actor Bhavika Sharma, who plays the role of Seher, said that adequate safety protocols are followed on set. "The production house and the channel are doing a commendable job to ensure safety and security of not just actors but the entire unit," she said. "Since there's a lot of lighting and wiring work related work being carried out on sets, the concerned people are given gloves and proper shoes to make sure that they are okay," Sharma added. Actor Neil Bhatt from "Mr. and Mrs. Parshuram" said persistent rainfall forced the team to alter their plans for an outdoor sequence. "We had planned to recreate a Manali setting at an outdoor helipad in Mumbai, but after postponing the shoot for four days and hoping the weather would improve, we recreated it indoors. We couldn't keep pushing the schedule, so we recreated the setting using specially designed backdrops and realistic lighting to achieve the same feel," he told PTI. "On a daily show, you cannot afford to stop shooting. While the rains forced us to delay a shift or rearrange our schedule but we did not cancel a day's shoot," Bhatt said. The rains sometimes also work to the advantage of the producers. Actor Madirakshi Mundle, who is shooting for "Sairaab", said the team recently filmed a romantic sequence at Juhu Beach. "Mumbai's monsoon has a charm that's impossible to recreate artificially and we were fortunate to shoot this sequence amidst real rains," Mundle said. "Shooting outdoors during this season is incredibly challenging, especially when the rains are so intense. But our team was committed to capturing the authenticity," she told PTI. (PTI)

# Belgium gets serious for World Cup quarterfinal with Spain after gleefully routing US

CARSON (US), July 9: No more playful dances. No more taunting social media posts. Belgium is done celebrating its victory over the host United States and hard at work on extending its World Cup run on American soil.

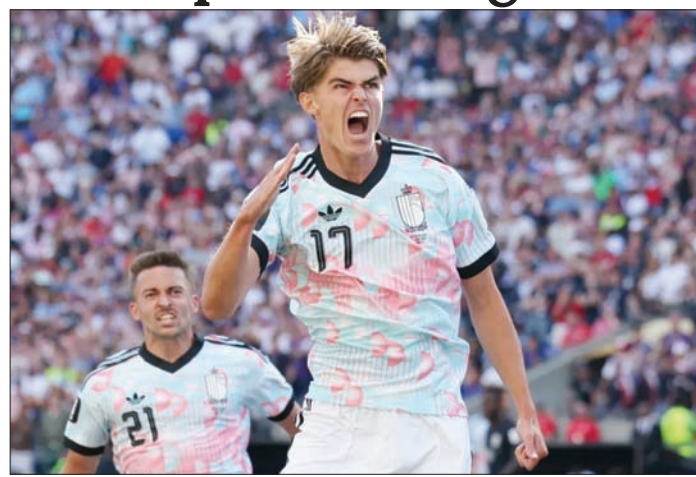
The Red Devils trained in the Los Angeles area on Wednesday with the memory still fresh of their 4-1 thrashing of the Americans in Seattle on Monday. After surviving a test from Senegal with a thrilling comeback and then thoroughly dominating the U.S. in its first two knockout games, Belgium faces its toughest challenge yet against unbeaten Spain in the quarterfinals on Friday.

But this tumultuous World Cup run has sparked something in this Belgian team, goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois believes.

"We gained a lot of confidence, because we knew it was going to be a hard game against America," Courtois said at the LA Galaxy's suburban stadium.

"They're obviously the home team with a full stadium (that's) with them, so it's nice to perform in a good way defensive, offensively, and just play our game."

Belgium went into the U.S. matchup with a world of indignant motivation after star American forward Folarin Balogun's one-game red-card suspension was curiously



lifted by FIFA. The Red Devils took it out on an outclassed American team and then celebrated gleefully, both on the pitch and in the dressing room.

In the most viral moment, many players did the simplistic dance associated with U.S. President Donald Trump and performed by numerous athletes across the sports world in recent months, including American star Christian Pulisic.

Belgium left back Diego Moreira smiled slightly when asked about the meaning of doing the dance after Trump called FIFA President Gianni Infantino to ask for a review of Balogun's red card.

"There are different ways to celebrate different goals," Moreira said through an interpreter. "You can do different dances, and that's what we've done. We just celebrated the win after the game."

Courtois said he wasn't in the dressing room because he was at doping control, so he couldn't comment on the dance. The Red Devils say they've put that cathartic evening behind them after landing for their second game of the tournament to be played at SoFi Stadium in the Los Angeles area.

Belgium was still in a mood to argue with Americans, however: The team moved its training base on Wednesday with FIFA approval

after deciding that its assigned fields at Los Angeles' Loyola Marymount University "did not meet the minimum standards required for our training session," according to a statement from the Royal Belgian Football Association. Belgium will be an underdog against Spain, which has yet to concede a goal in this World Cup. That's fine with the Red Devils, who have played their best soccer of the tournament since their stirring rally from a 2-0 deficit to beat Senegal 3-2.

When asked about facing powerhouse Spain, Courtois' mind immediately went to Belgium's 2-1 victory over Brazil in the World Cup eight years ago in Russia. That upset sent the Red Devils to the semifinals for the first time in 32 years.

"They were favored against us, and maybe they were more individually with more quality in the team," Courtois said. "But I feel we are a great team all together now, and we are fighting. Especially (the match) against Senegal showed our ability to keep believing until the end, and that's also a strength at the World Cup. The important thing is to win games. It's a nice thing to also play well, but the most important thing is to win and to compete, and that's what we did." (AP)

## Dima Hasao inter-school football tournament concludes



**HAFLONG, July 9:** The two-day district-level inter-school football tournament for Under-17 boys and girls and Under-15 boys concluded at the Diham Raji Playground in Haflong on Thursday, with the

winning teams securing berths in the state-level championship.

Organised by the Department of Sports and Youth Welfare, Dima Hasao, the tournament featured 22 teams, including five girls' teams, that had qualified from nine zonal-

level competitions across the district.

The champions in the Under-17 boys, Under-17 girls and Under-15 boys categories earned qualification for the state-level tournament.

Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Dima Hasao Autonomous Council, Debolal Gorgola, attended the closing ceremony as the chief guest. Executive Members, Members of the Autonomous Council and other dignitaries were also present.

Addressing the gathering, Gorgola highlighted the steady development of sports activities in Dima Hasao and encouraged the participants to work hard to become successful sportspersons and bring laurels to the district and the state.

## Gabriel Muresan drowns in lake



**BUCHAREST (ROMANIA), July 9:** Former Romania soccer player Gabriel Muresan has died after drowning in a lake near the town where he was the mayor, local media reported on Thursday. He was 44.

The Romanian soccer federation confirmed the death of a midfielder who played nine times for the national team, including in qualifying games for the World Cup and European Championship from 2007-11.

"The Romanian Football Federation sends its most sincere condolences to the family, friends and all those who knew Gabriel Muresan," it said. Muresan was "a devoted servant of our community," the public authority in Apold said on Facebook. He had been mayor there since 2020. The most successful period of Muresan's career was with Cluj, where he won Romanian league titles in 2008, '10 and '12. Cluj also won three domestic cups in his six seasons there.

In the Champions League, Muresan played in three group-stage campaigns including games against Chelsea, Manchester United and Roma. (AP)

## 'Ferytale' rolls on at Wimbledon as British wild card Fery reaches semifinals after meeting queen

LONDON, July 9: If he keeps playing like this, Arthur Fery might just become Wimbledon royalty.

Fery grew up five minutes from the All England Club and now the 114th-ranked player is a semifinalist at the grass-court Grand Slam.

The 23-year-old British player, who needed a wild-card invitation to enter the tournament, beat ninth-seeded Flavio Cobolli 6-4, 7-6 (4), 6-0 on Centre Court in front of roaring home fans and a Royal Box contingent that included Britain's Queen Camilla on Wednesday.

His run has been dubbed a "Ferytale" and has included a viewing by Kate, the Princess of Wales, earlier in the tournament.

"It gets better and better every match," Fery said in an on-court interview. "I just can't believe it."

The only other wild card to have reached the men's singles semifinals at the All England Club was Goran Ivanisevic in his run to the Wimbledon title in 2001.

Fery earned a standing ovation after winning the first set. The deafening roar that followed Fery taking the tiebreaker to seal the second set was heard over at Wimbledon's other main stadium—No. 1 Court, where Alexander Zverev was in the process of beating Taylor Fritz in straight sets.

Fery sealed his memorable victory with an ace and fell onto his back to soak in the applause.

"That last game, I felt emotions that I hadn't experienced before in my life," he said. A short time later, Zverev wrapped up his 6-4, 6-4, 6-2 win to set up a semifinal against Fery on Friday.

Moments before the start of their quarterfinal match, Fery and Cobolli were surprised to meet Camilla in the hallway moments before they walked onto court.

"She came to say hello, she introduced herself to both me and Flavio," Fery said. "It's obviously an honor to play in front of her. Great to meet her. She had some really kind words to me at the end, as well. Playing in front of tennis legends and now the queen, so it's special." Roger Federer had been on hand Monday when Fery ousted Grigor Dimitrov in five sets in a fourth-round match that was also on Centre Court.

A champagne cork popped in the crowd late in the first set and dis-



tracted Cobolli during his service motion. The locals will surely pop a few more with a British player to support in Friday's semifinal.

The 24-year-old Cobolli, who lost the French Open final to Zverev, made 41 unforced errors to Fery's 15 and only broke the British player once — to start the second set, but Fery broke back in the fourth game.

"I felt like I didn't express even 50% of my tennis. But obviously that had a lot to do with him. He was better than me," said Cobolli, who also lost to Fery in the first round at this year's Australian Open.

Friday's other semifinal pits seven-time Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic against defending champion Jannik Sinner.

**Royal encore for Fery**  
Camilla wasn't the only royal rooting for Fery on Wednesday. Princess Kate congratulated him in a social media post that noted his "fantastic achievement that has inspired so many."

The French-born Fery, who said he feels "very British," also exchanged pleasantries with Camilla after his big victory.

"She was waiting for me at the end of the match. She congratulated me. I told her how much of an honor it was for me to play in front of her," said Fery, who turns 24 on the day of the men's final. "She just said, Congratulations, keep going." I told her it was my birthday on Sunday, so it would be great to play the Wimbledon final on my birthday."

**Zverev ready for Fery crowd**  
The second-seeded Zverev, who dispatched Fritz in just under two hours, recalled being impressed by

Fery's win over Cobolli in Melbourne.

"I watched that match. I was very impressed back then already. He has a very clean technique and very clean groundstrokes," said the 29-year-old German, who is also into his first Wimbledon semifinal.

"It's going to be a great atmosphere," he said of Friday's match. "Of course, I know that 99% of the people will be cheering for him. But I also enjoy those kind of atmospheres. I enjoy when the energy is very high."

**Kostyuk to meet Noskova in semifinals**

Earlier Wednesday, Marta Kostyuk beat Jasmine Paolini 6-3, 6-2 to reach her first Wimbledon semifinals.

The 24-year-old Ukrainian also reached the last four at the French Open, losing to Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva, the eventual champion in Paris. Kostyuk raised her hands and dropped to her knees after Paolini secured a shot on her second match point. After shaking hands with the Italian, Kostyuk did a pirouette on court.

Kostyuk will be back on Centre Court on Thursday to face Linda Noskova for a spot in Saturday's final. Noskova beat Elise Mertens 6-3, 7-5 on 101 Centre Court.

It's the first career Grand Slam semifinal for the 21-year-old Noskova, who improved to 10-1 on grass this season.

The other women's semifinal features Coco Gauff against Karolina Muchova, who like Noskova is from the Czech Republic. They're up first on Centre Court on Thursday. (AP)

## Harsh Mehta to lead Indian Pro category charge at Pickleball World Cup

**MUMBAI, July 9:** The Indian Pickleball Association (IPA) on Thursday announced the Indian team, led by Harsh Mehta, for the Pickleball World Cup to be held at Da Nang, Vietnam from August 30 to September 6.

Harsh, a recurring name on the international pickleball circuit, will be accompanied by Arjun Singh, who is also representing and captaining India in the U-18 category at the World Cup. Anish Frolian and Aman Patel also made the cut in the men's category.

Mihika Yadav, Aaliyah Ebrahim, Pearl Amalsadiwala and Naomi Amalsadiwala comprise the women's side.

"Talent wins matches, but unity wins championships. As Team India, our greatest strength is playing for each other and for our country. We are confident that we will perform well to the best of our potential and I expect us to go very far in the cup," said Harsh in a release.

"Extremely happy and grateful to be chosen as the captain for Team India at the World Cup and I look forward to giving my absolute best along with the rest of the squad."

Following corporate backing from Lucknow Leopards, Athletiq, Picklebay, and Electrorush, the Indian contingent enters the 2026 World Cup with renewed ambition after securing a bronze medal in the previous edition.

The selected athletes will participate in a structured high-performance development program featuring intensive training camps focused on technical excellence, physical conditioning, mental resilience, and sports nutrition. Final Squad: Harsh Mehta (Captain), Arjun Singh, Anish Frolian, Aman Patel, Mihika Yadav, Aaliyah Ebrahim, Pearl Amalsadiwala, Naomi Amalsadiwala. (PTI)

## Rafael Márquez named head coach of Mexican national team for 2030 WC

**MEXICO CITY, July 9:** Rafael Márquez is taking the reins of the Mexican national team.

The Mexican Football Federation (FMF) announced Wednesday that the former Barcelona star will succeed Javier Aguirre as head coach leading up to the 2030 World Cup.

Márquez, 47, served as Aguirre's assistant from August 2024 until Mexico's recent 3-2 round of 16 loss to England. While a succession plan had been in place since 2024, rumors had circulated that the FMF might look elsewhere.

"The appointment of Rafael Márquez is part of an orderly transition designed to ensure continuity ... strengthen development, and tackle upcoming commitments," the FMF stated.

While El Tri has no immediate fixtures scheduled, Márquez is expected to make his managerial debut during the FIFA international window in late September and early October.

"I am happy with the growth shown by Rafa," Aguirre said of his successor. "I spoke with Rafa because we are both prominent figures in Mexican soccer — I knew him as a player and a teammate — and he is more than qualified."

The FMF also expressed its gratitude to Aguirre. While Mexico's campaign ended in the round of 16 — the stage where they have been eliminated in eight of the last nine World Cups — the team showed marked improvement after failing to advance past the group stage at Qatar 2022. (AP)

## FIFA's Infantino targeted by complaint to Olympic ethics body after Trump lobbying on Balogun ban

**GENEVA, July 9:** FIFA's president Gianni Infantino is being referred to Olympic ethics investigators for a possible breach of political neutrality, a human rights group, after U.S. President Donald Trump helped block a World Cup player's ban.

Trump took credit Monday for FIFA's decision — unprecedented in modern World Cup history — to let United States forward Folarin Balogun play Monday against Belgium despite getting a red card in the team's previous game. A Belgium team clearly fired up by the furor won 4-1 in Seattle.

The IOC cites neutrality among "fundamental principles of Olympism" for sports bodies like FIFA, and has jurisdiction over Infantino since he joined its exclusive group of 100-plus invited members in 2020.

"FairSquare will file a complaint to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) regarding FIFA President Gianni Infantino's repeated breach of political neutrality rules," the London-based sports and human rights NGO said in a statement Wednesday.

The pledge to file a formal complaint to the IOC Ethics Commission came one day after the Olympic body's president Kirsty Coventry told reporters none had yet been received.

"Obviously if they do they would look into it," Coventry said Tuesday in an online news conference when asked about the Balogun controversy fueled by the Trump administration lobbying

FIFA and Infantino.

"Yes, we have been obviously watching everything play out," the IOC president had said earlier when asked about interference in field-of-play issues by the World Cup co-host nation, which also will stage the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

FIFA was asked for comment about the complaint to the IOC about its president.

**Infantino-Trump ties**  
Infantino has built close ties to Trump since 2018 when the U.S., Canada and Mexico won a vote to host soccer's World Cup this year.

The FIFA leader has been a regular White House visitor since attending the second Trump inauguration in January 2025 and said in November "we should all support" the president's work as it was "pretty good."

Infantino famously created the FIFA Peace Prize given to Trump at the World Cup tournament draw in Washington D.C. last December. Senior soccer officials said privately creating the peace award was an executive decision by Infantino.

**Ethics case at FIFA**  
FairSquare also formally filed a complaint to FIFA's ethics committee in December about Infantino and political neutrality. That is being supported by the Norway soccer federation and about 50 members of the European Parliament.

FIFA has provided no update in the seven months since on that case. (AP)

## Win in historic Lord's Test will lift gloom of early T20 World Cup exit: Harmanpreet

**LONDON, July 9:** With the historic Lord's Test against England beginning on Friday, India captain Harmanpreet Kaur called it a "very big moment" for her side, saying a victory at the iconic venue would not only help erase the disappointment of their early T20 World Cup exit but also become a landmark achievement in the team's history.

It has taken 142 years for Lord's to stage its first women's Test since hosting its inaugural men's Test, making the landmark fixture a long-overdue milestone. The historic occasion has drawn significant attention in the build-up to the match.

After India's group-stage exit from the T20 World Cup in England and Wales, a victory at the iconic Lord's could provide the perfect morale boost. Harmanpreet acknowledged as much, saying a win at the hallowed venue would be a special moment for the team.

"I think this Test match is a very big moment for us because if we win this Test, it can be very good for the team. Because right now, you know, after the T20 World Cup, everybody was very sad that we couldn't give our best," the skipper said at the pre-match media interaction.

"...in patches we did well, but unfortunately as a team, we couldn't do so well (in T20 WC). But through this Test match, we can cover a lot of things. We can bring that confidence back. Then you feel so strong, you feel, you know, you're the best team in the world," Harmanpreet said, adding that she hopes the Lord's Test will mark a fresh start for the side.

She hoped every player would contribute and back one another to make the historic outing memorable.



"Sometimes, you feel a little low when things don't go your way. So, I think, this Test match is very important for us. If we play together and support each other, and win our team at that time, I think this victory can bring us a lot of confidence back. And along with that, it will also help us a lot in the upcoming tournaments. And this month is going to be a very historic moment," she added.

Harmanpreet said playing at Lord's is a dream for every cricketer, and the entire squad was excited about the historic occasion. She also admitted she was surprised that the iconic venue would be hosting its first-ever women's Test.

"It's a very big moment for all of us. As a captain and as a player, I'm really looking forward to this opportunity. I think, as a kid, we always dream about playing Test matches, and playing in Lord's is one of the

dreams. I'm so happy that we got this opportunity. And other girls are also very excited and as a team, we are really looking forward to this opportunity.

"We were having a discussion that after so many years, this match is going to happen. And it took us so many years to feel that women can also be part of Lord's Test match. So, I mean, I was surprised to know, I wasn't aware of this. But, yeah, I mean, it's a great opportunity. I just look at, you know, maybe it's late, but not too late. Still I'm playing and still getting this opportunity to be part of this historic day," said Harmanpreet.

Harmanpreet admitted that the switch to red-ball cricket would be challenging given the limited number of women's Tests, but said the excitement of playing at Lord's would motivate the team to rise to the occasion.

"Yeah, to be honest, it's a bit challenging because we are not that used to playing red ball. But I think we all are very excited about this game. We had four-five sessions where we all looked really good in the nets. So, I think this is something we are not used to, but we are very excited. I think when you're excited about something, you always give your best," she said.

The skipper also backed the case for more women's Tests in the future, though she acknowledged that the decision ultimately rests with the ICC and respective national boards.

"As cricketers we definitely want to be part of many Test matches. But I think that's a totally high authority's call. But I think till now, I have seen all the highs and lows. And I have seen women's cricket growing all

those years. I think we are in the right hands, and they're (boards) the right ones to take the call.

"But if you ask me, as a player, I definitely want to play lots of cricket and don't want to sit home doing nothing. But I think we are enjoying our time. We are quite busy. And in between, we are getting... last March also, we played one Test. And now, tomorrow also, we're going to get one more Test. I think things are going the right way. And hopefully in future, we'll see many more Test matches," she hoped.

She said India's performance in Tests, and especially against England, also give her hope that her side will do well against the hosts.

"Definitely, our last two Tests have been very, very good for us. And we've always played good cricket against them. I think it's only about giving your best and going with a good frame of mind. As a team, we have all decided that 'let's stay together, let's stick together and just give our best.'"

With left-arm spinner Shree Charani set to make her Test debut after finishing as India's leading wicket-taker at the World Cup, Harmanpreet said she has high hopes from the youngster.

"Charani is one of our key bowlers. No doubt about it. And the way she performed in the T20 World Cup, and she has been doing it even before that. I think she has given a surety to the team, that she is there to bowl all those crucial overs.

"And whenever the team needs a breakthrough, she is always there for the team. So I think it is very important for such players to be in the team. Players like her give a lot of confidence to me also as a captain. (PTI)

# After disappointing WC outing, India look to turn the tide at historic Lord's Test

**LONDON, July 9:** India will be hoping for a change in tide after an underwhelming T20 World Cup campaign when they face hosts England in the first-ever women's Test at Lord's beginning here on Friday.

A pre-mature exit from the T20 showpiece gave India more time to prepare for the red-ball game which takes place at the "Home of Cricket", 142 years after the first men's Test was staged at the fabled ground.

The Indian team trained at the picturesque Wormsley Cricket Ground for its second red-ball game this year, having played a Test in Australia in March.

Head coach Amol Muzumdar said the prospect of taking the field for the first ever Test at Lord's excited the players even before the start of the preceding T20 World Cup.

"It just boggles my mind that it is just the first Test match here at Lords. Having said that, I am really fortunate and would like to extend my wishes to everyone who is involved in this. It is a great occasion and we are looking forward to it," said Muzumdar.

"It is a dream to play a Test match for any Indian cricketer, leave alone playing at Lords. I am sure everyone who would wear those whites tomorrow would be proud of them being there at Lord's to play the Test match," the veteran of 171 first class games added.

Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Varma had opened in India's previous Test Down Under and the same is expected against England. Priya Punia has been drafted into the squad as a replacement for the injured Pratika Rawal who had batted at three in the 10-wicket loss



to Australia.

Test matches in women's cricket take place far and few in between but India have a favourable record against England in the traditional format. India have won last three out of four games against the hosts and are yet

lose a Test in England (two wins, seven draws).

Among the India players who can make their Test debut include Harleen Deol, in-form spinner Sree Charani and pacer Nandni Sharma.

England, on the other hand, have five players who are yet to play Test cricket and they include Alice Capsey, Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Mady Villiers, Grace Potts and Ellie Threlkel.

Seasoned opener Tammy Beaumont has decided to retire from international cricket after the Test.

Beaumont is one of only two English women, and five English players, to have scored an international hundred in all three formats of the game having become the first English woman to score a Test double-century with a memorable 208 at Trent Bridge in the 2023 Women's Ashes.

"This Test match at Lord's – our first ever women's Test at Lord's – feels like the perfect occasion to sign off on a career that I could never have dreamt would be as special as it has been," said Beaumont.

**Squads:**

**India:** Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Varma, Jemimah Rodrigues, Deepti Sharma, Richa Ghosh (WK), Sree Charani, Yastika Bhatia (WK), Nandni Sharma, Harleen Deol, Renuka Thakur, Kranti Gaud, Sayali Satghare, Sneha Rana, Priya Punia.

**England:** Nat Sciver-Brunt (captain), Tammy Beaumont, Lauren Bell, Maia Bouchier, Alice Capsey, Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Sophie Ecclestone, Lauren Filer, Amy Jones, Heather Knight, Emma Lamb, Grace Potts, Ellie Threlkel, Mady Villiers, Issy Wong.

Match starts 3.30 IST. (PTI)

## Egyptian Football Association 'cannot remain silent' about officiating in loss to Argentina



**ATLANTA, July 9:** The Egyptian Football Association (EFA) said Wednesday it "cannot remain silent" after what it believes was unfair and biased officiating in Egypt's 3-2 round of 16 loss against Argentina.

Egypt coach Hossam Hassan and several players criticized the officiating after being left in disbelief as Argentina scored three unanswered goals in 13 minutes to pull off one of the biggest comebacks in World Cup history.

"Defending the rights and interests of the Egyptian national team is not a matter that can be ignored, minimized, or treated as secondary," the EFA said in a statement. "It is a responsibility that we carry with full conviction and determination."

FIFA's chief of refereeing Pierluigi Collina, in a statement issued later Wednesday, said while constructive discussion about decisions would always be part of football, "unfounded allegations have no place in our sport."

"Nobody can question the integrity of the FIFA World Cup match officials," he said. "When this happens, it may provoke reactions that lead to threats against them and their families. This is not right."

The EFA said that the referee failed to use the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system appropriately, leading to the loss to Argentina.

Egypt appeared to have netted its second goal in the 58th minute, but a VAR review determined that Marwan Attia had fouled Argentina defender Lisandro Martínez early in the buildup up to the goal.

"Several key incidents raised serious concerns and left profound questions about the consistency and fairness of decisions that directly influenced the course of the game," the EFA statement read.

Collina said "during a compe-

tion, we prefer not to focus on specific incidents," but he defended the Attia decision.

"If a foul is identified in the build-up and is deemed to have had an impact on the goal, the VAR will recommend an on-field review," Collina said. "There is no defined limit regarding either the distance from goal or the amount of time between the incident and the goal."

He said in the disputed case, Attia "clearly treads on the foot of Argentina No. 6 Lisandro Martínez."

"We believe that a foul is a foul," Collina added. "Regardless of whether the foul appears obvious, if the referee did not see it on the field of play, the VAR can intervene."

Mostafa Ziko netted later to give Egypt a 2-0 lead, but all momentum shifted onto Argentina's side when Lionel Messi assisted Cristian Romero in the 79th minute — the first of three consecutive goals.

Hassan held his arms up in an "X" shape to signal racial abuse after Argentina's game-winner two minutes into stoppage time. After the game, Hassan said his team was the victim of a soccer establishment that favored Messi and Argentina.

In the dramatic climax to the game Egypt's goalkeeping coach Saafan Elsayhig was red-carded and several yellow cards were dished out to Egyptian players. The EFA's statement said that a number of experts and analysts have defended Egypt, underlining the importance of integrity, fairness and transparency in officiating on soccer's biggest stage.

The EFA statement expressed the frustration among Egypt players, staff and supporters.

"Every player who wears the Egyptian shirt, and every supporter who stands behind the team, deserves fairness, respect, and equal application of the laws of the game." (AP)

## Jordan Henderson returns to England camp after wrist surgery following freak injury in Mexico



**KANSAS CITY, July 9:** England midfielder Jordan Henderson rejoined The Three Lions at their World Cup training base after undergoing surgery on his left wrist following a freak injury that he sustained while celebrating their Round of 16 triumph over Mexico last weekend.

The 36-year-old Henderson posted a photo on social media of his left arm wrapped after the procedure at the Kansas City Orthopaedic Institute, which is about a 10-minute drive from their team hotel in the suburb of Prairie Village, Kansas.

"Surgery done!" Henderson said. "Now let's get ready for the big one Saturday."

Henderson, who has been ruled out for the remainder of the World Cup, had been an unused substitute for Sunday's match against Mexico at Azteca Stadium in Mexico City. The Three Lions had just survived a 3-2 thriller to advance to a quarter-final against Norway when Henderson hurt his wrist while climbing over an advertising billboard.

Henderson was taken from the field on a stretcher and remained in Mexico City while the rest of England's players returned to their base camp in Kansas City, Missouri. He later returned to the United States and underwent surgery on the wrist.

"I think you'll see him on the side there in one way, shape or form," England midfielder Morgan Rogers said after Wednesday's practice at Swope Soccer Village. "He'll be

there and contribute to us playing and being involved. That's the kind of person he is, and the kind of player he is. He always puts his ego to the side and puts us first and tries to help us in the best way possible."

Midfielder Declan Rice and defenders Marc Guéhi and Reece James also were not with the rest of the team for its training session ahead of the quarterfinal round. The Football Association said the trio was working on "individual programmes elsewhere."

Rice and Guéhi played the entire match against Mexico, but James has been out since hurting his hamstring against Ghana in the group stage. It's an injury that looms even larger with Jarell Quansah serving a red-card suspension against Erling Haaland and Norway.

"A few players have played a lot of minutes and are just resting their legs," Rogers said, "but I'm sure they'll be raring to go."

Henderson's only World Cup appearance this year came in the group stage, when he came off the bench against Panama. It was his 91st career cap and made Henderson the first player from England to have appeared in four different tournaments.

"Time goes very quickly," Henderson said that day in East Rutherford, New Jersey. "It's very special to represent my country in four World Cups, so, yeah, I'm just delighted to be a part of this team. It's still as special now as when I made my debut in 2010." (AP)

## Never imagined I would play 100 T20Is, says Axar dedicating feat to teammates, coaches and family

**BRISTOL, July 9:** An emotional Axar Patel has admitted that he had never imagined to complete a century of T20 Internationals for India, and dedicated the milestone to his teammates, coaches and family.

The all-rounder reflected on his journey from his T20I debut in 2015 to becoming one of India's most dependable white-ball players, and acknowledged the lessons that he has learnt over the past decade.

Axar, who completed 100 wickets in the second T20I against England in the ongoing tour, will play his 100th match in the format in the fourth match of the series here on Thursday.

"When the first time I played T20, I never imagined I would play 100 matches. This tour of England will be very special for me because, like in the second T20, I completed my 100 wickets and in the fourth T20, it's my 100th match. So it's a very special day for me and I am really enjoying the moment," Axar said in a video posted by bcci.tv.

"It really feels good. Basically as a player when you achieve a milestone, I feel it's not about me, I am not achieving this alone. You know that along with me, my



teammates, my coaches, my family...So I think everyone has played a role in this journey of mine.

"When you start, when you debut for the first time that's a completely different feeling. Back then you don't know how much you will achieve, but I am going to play my 100th match and that feeling you really can't express. Even if you play a single match for India that is huge for you because it's a player's dream," he added.

Recollecting his journey, Axar termed it a roller-coaster ride and full of learnings.

"When you play for such a long time that journey is obviously like a roller-coaster, sometimes up and sometimes down. In the first 5 or 6 years, I played only 15 or 16

matches and then from 2021 till now I think I have played continuously.

"We have the last two T20 World Cups with us. We won for the first time in 2024 and for a second time in 2026, so when you play your 100th match all of this journey and those memories come together and I think those special memories have been made," he said.

For Axar individual milestones hardly matters, and these feats are only a reflection of the hard work he has put over the years.

"Milestones doesn't matter that much to me but yes sometimes it does feel good that you are taking 100 T20 wickets. It's a milestone, all the hard work we have put in over the years and after that whenever things went well or went badly, we have learned from the mistakes, we focussed on how we could get better. I feel we focussed on our process, we kept getting better day by day," he said.

Axar said he has become more calm, composed and matured as a human being over the last decade.

"I know this much that in my first match I was man-of-the-match. I took three wickets, giving away nine runs or may 18 or 20 runs." (PTI)

## Franchise leagues will give youngsters much-needed exposure: Radhika

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Franchise-based leagues can transform Indian volleyball by giving youngsters the match exposure they desperately need and creating a stronger pathway to the national team, believes Indian women's assistant coach Radhika Paruchuri.

According to Paruchuri, leagues can help bridge the gap created by the lack of international exposure and strengthen India's talent pipeline.

"Franchise-based volleyball leagues will be very helpful for future generations, allowing them to play as many matches as possible and increase their exposure," Radhika, an FIVB Level III coach, told PTI on the sidelines of the launch of the Volleyball Champions League.

"The league will provide budding players a platform to showcase their talent, compete alongside foreign players, learn from them and improve their game."

Paruchuri, who recently guided India's U-18 women's team as head coach at the AVC Girls' U-18 Volleyball Championship in Thailand, said franchise leagues are vital for identifying and nurturing young talent.

"These leagues provide a big platform for youngsters to perform. Only then will we be able to identify talent. The league will raise the standard of Indian volleyball at both the national and international levels. Indian players will also

get the opportunity to play alongside top foreign players."

Paruchuri, however, lamented the decline of Indian women's volleyball, attributing it to inadequate international exposure and the absence of a strong domestic competition structure.

"When I represented the Indian women's volleyball team, our ranking was consistently among the top 10 in Asia. Today, it has dropped significantly. The main reasons are the lack of international exposure and the absence of a domestic structure that enables women players to improve their game and progress to higher levels," she said.

Having coached successful domestic sides such as Kerala, Southern Railways and Indian Railways, Paruchuri believes both the men's and women's national teams have the potential to make significant progress.

"Over the last decade, there have been several issues. Proper volleyball tournaments were not conducted, and young players missed out on crucial match experience. Now, they have an opportunity to gain that exposure through leagues like this," she observed.

The inaugural Volleyball Champions League, scheduled for October this year, will feature 10 city-based franchises competing against one another. Several Arjuna and Dronacharya Awardees have also been roped in to support the league. (PTI)

## Newcastle signs Ajax teen Steur

**NEWCASTLE (ENGLAND), July 9:** Newcastle sealed a deal to sign 18-year-old Ajax midfielder Sean Steur on Thursday and is reportedly moving in for World Cup breakout star Johan Manzambi.

Ajax said Steur will join Newcastle for a transfer fee that could reach 27 million euros (\$31 million).

Newcastle is getting younger after high-profile sales of Anthony Gordon and Sandro Tonali this off-season by the Saudi Arabia-owned club. The 20-year-old Manzambi has impressed for World Cup quarter-finalist Switzerland, until suffering a knee injury in training, after a strong season for Europa League finalist Freiburg.

Another 20-year-old from the Bundesliga, winger Bazoumana Touré, joined Newcastle this week from Hoffenheim for a reported 42 million pounds (\$56 million). (AP)

## Yuvi paaji, Ricky sir have played major role in getting me here: Prabhsimran on India call-up

**NEW DELHI, July 9:** Prabhsimran Singh was in the middle of a gym session when he got to know about his selection in the India squad for the three T20Is in Zimbabwe later this month.

When PTI reached out to him, the 25-year-old from Patiala could not express in words how much the national call up meant to him.

Recalling the moment, he said he cut short his gym session and rushed home to share his unbridled joy with his family.

The prolific Punjab Kings opener was hoping to get that special piece of news having scored 500-plus runs in the last two IPL seasons. His recent outing for India A in Sri Lanka also fuelled that hope.

Prabhsimran was part of India's Asian Games in 2023 but did not get to play. If he gets to play in Harare, the soft-spoken batter knows he will have to make it count considering the intense competition in the shortest format.

He has been picked as the second wicket-keeper batter in the side after

Ishan Kishan with Sanju Samson surprisingly left out of the squad.

"You do feel good when something you are working towards all your life happens. The Asian Games experience back then was good but I didn't get to play, so I can't really talk about the nerves that you usually feel when you debut for India," Prabhsimran told PTI in an interview.

"Now in my heart, if I am going there (to Zimbabwe), I don't want to come back (without playing). I have always thought that I have to represent the country but, I have to sustain there too. That is the only thing in my mind. If I get a chance, I will do my best so that I don't go out of the team."

What has stood out for Prabhsimran over the past year is his consistency. The 20s and 30s now often get converted into substantial scores, a testament to that are his six fifty plus scores in the latest IPL. He and Priyansh Arya have developed into one of the most destructive opening pairs in the IPL.



For someone who has played age group cricket alongside Punjab teammates Abhishek Sharma and Shubman Gill, Prabhsimran doesn't have to look beyond them for added motivation.

Abhishek and Prabhsimran have the same mentor in World Cup-winning all-rounder Yuvraj Singh.

"I have not had a session with Yuvi paaji post the IPL but I did call him after the India selection. It was a long phone call. He shared his experience of playing at the highest level. He always tells me to stay one step ahead of the bowler," said Prabhsimran.

What about the contribution from PBKS head coach Ricky Ponting, the other cricketer great in his life?

"Both are different personalities but have the same mentality. Ricky sir has contributed a lot to my success. He was the one who called and told me about my retention (in 2024). He told me that he will make me a better player and he did."

"When you see the results, you want to keep learning from him. I am thankful to both Yuvi paaji and Ricky sir," said Prabhsimran, who duly acknowledges the immense role IPL and his franchise

PBKS have played in his growth.

"It was my eighth season with the franchise and I am glad that I have got the India call-up with them."

Not only has Prabhsimran become a lot more consistent in the high-risk T20 format, he can also bat in different gears relying on conventional strokeplay.

Asked what he has done to evolve in the ever-changing T20 game, he said: "In today's world, you have to play high risk cricket. It used to be difficult to chase 160-170. Now even if a team gets 220-240, it doesn't feel safe. You have to play high risk cricket and yet be consistent. That is what I focus on."

"Also, whenever I get free time, I don't go out much. It is important to switch off from cricket but I can only do that for one or two days. I love to bat long even in training."

"If I get to play with 7-8 bowlers in the nets, I like each of them to bowl at least 10 overs to me. If you want to stay relevant, you have to add something new every year." (PTI)