

6
REGION
8
NATION



- Bodoland Territorial Council Assembly passes ₹1,588.31-cr Budget for 2026-27
- Governor surveys flood-hit Sivasagar, Jorhat; reviews relief operations
- 'Rahul Gandhi misleading students over NEET issue', says Tarun Chugh
- Punjab: Opposition turns up heat on 'paper leak'; AAP govt trashes charge



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PAGES 12

PRICE ₹ 8



Government of Assam

Keeping the Word on Income Guarantee Strengthening Grassroots Economy



ORUNODOI 3.0

First Disbursement in FY 2026-27

State-level programme



Chief Guest

Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma
Chief Minister, Assam

August Presence

Shri Jayanta Mallabaruah
Minister, Finance, etc., Assam



1 August 2026



12 Noon

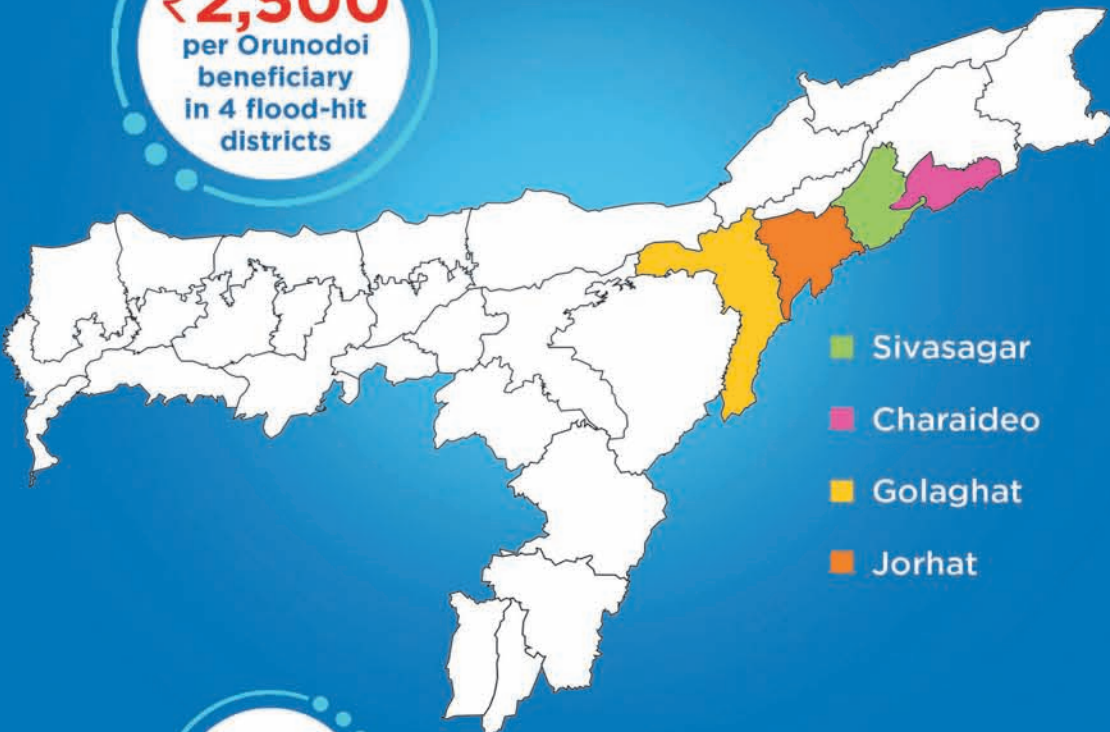


Sri Sri Damodaradeva International Auditorium, Srimanta Sankaradeva Kalakshetra
Panjabari, Guwahati



Special Flood Assistance

₹2,500
per Orunodoi
beneficiary
in 4 flood-hit
districts



- Sivasagar
- Charaideo
- Golaghat
- Jorhat

₹1,100
per Orunodoi
beneficiary

in other districts (for this month)

■ Aadhaar-linked payment

Orunodoi benefit to be credited only to Aadhaar-linked bank accounts of beneficiaries

Simultaneous Programmes in over
3,500 locations across Assam

- Gram Panchayats
- Urban Local Bodies
- Village Council Development Committees
- Village Development Committees
- MACs



Beneficiaries
37 lakh+



Monthly disbursement
₹470 cr



State-level programme to be live-streamed, enabling beneficiaries across Assam to participate



Govt to hold policy, tech discussions with Meta within a week on removal of PM's post

NEW DELHI, July 30: The government will hold discussions with social media major Meta on policy and technical matters within a week over several concerns, including the removal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Facebook post, a senior government official said on Thursday.

The government has summoned Meta's public policy head after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Facebook post, on July 23, addressing India's youth and promising stringent measures against exam paper leaks, was briefly restricted by the US-headquartered social media giant.

While speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the CII conference on semiconductors, Electronics and IT Secretary S Krishnan said that the government has asked Meta to come in at the highest level and explain the issue that led to the glitch.

"They will be coming and explaining what the situation is. We want to have both a policy-level and a technical understanding of the issues, and an adaptation to the kinds of concerns India has in this regard. There are several issues we have, which we will raise with them when they come. I think, within the next week, they will be



coming," he said.

Meta, the owner of social media platform Facebook, is learnt to have written to the government outlining the specifics of enhanced and rigorous safeguards it has now implemented for content posted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other prominent accounts.

While the social media giant attributed the incident to a technical glitch and apologised, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) found the ex-

planation "inadequate".

Meta has now informed the ministry that posts by the Prime Minister and select prominent accounts will be subject to additional oversight on the platform, with multiple levels of checks involving senior company officials, sources said.

Any decision will undergo rigorous checks and require review by at least two senior officials of the company, sources said, citing the social media firm's latest com-

munication to the ministry.

Meta has expressed regret over the incident, and explained the circumstances that led to it, sources said, adding that the company has also outlined the corrective measures it has since implemented, and shared its assessment.

Krishnan said Meta has to give reasons on the cause that led to the incident.

"They have also given us the reasons, their understanding of the reason why it happened. They have also indicated that as of July 28, they have established new protocols relating to accounts of prominent persons to avoid such a situation from occurring," he said.

PM Modi's July 23 Instagram post, later shared on Facebook, marked his first direct selfie video aimed at engaging with the youth and underscoring the government's commitment to crack down on exam paper leaks amid students' protests organised by the Cockroach Janta Party. The Facebook version of the post was briefly restricted by Meta before being restored.

Following the incident, the global head of public policy of Meta (Facebook and Instagram) was summoned by MeitY. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 3...

CM: Setting up of NE

hassle-free support, the CM said.

Besides, a district-wise reconstruction plan for roads, bridges, schools, health, water and power infrastructure and a rapid multi-agency assessment and strengthening of breached embankments on hill-fed rivers before the next monsoon were also demanded from the Centre, he added.

Lastly, the state requested convergence of disaster assistance with national programmes for housing, water, agriculture, health and social protection, along with targeted support for women, children, persons with disabilities and the elderly, Sarma said. "We are confident that the team will keep the ground realities and our best interests in mind and communicate to the Centre accordingly," he added.

The Union Home Minister on Wednesday dialled the Assam Chief Minister to take stock of the flood situation, while the latter said that although floodwaters have receded, many are unable to return as their houses have either been damaged or filled with mud and silt. Shah, who called Sarma for the second time in seven days, assured him of all possible assistance from the Centre for relief and restoration efforts. (PTI)

State flood remains grim

the ASDMA bulletin added.

Meanwhile, the IMD has predicted heavy to very heavy rainfall along with thunderstorms from July 30 to August 1 at isolated places across Assam and parts of Arunachal Pradesh, which may affect the Assam districts of Tinsukia, Dhemaji and Lakhimpur.

The ASDMA urged people of the districts concerned to take all necessary precautions and remain vigilant, and said the status of the situation would be updated on its official website and on all its social media handles from time to time for general awareness. (PTI)

Assam LoP seeks ₹ 2,000 crore

on the ground, at least ₹ 2,000 crore is required to restore the affected areas and help people return to normal life," he said.

Choudhury said he has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking a special package of ₹ 2,000 crore for rehabilitation and reconstruction in the flood-hit districts.

He also criticised the state government for not giving adequate importance to the flood situation during the ongoing Assembly session and alleged that the Opposition's demand for a detailed discussion on the disaster was ignored.

AJP demands 6-month loan

people-centric policy decisions. "The AJP leaders demand that a moratorium of at least six months be declared on the repayment of all categories of loans and EMIs for all eligible borrowers residing in flood-affected areas of Assam," the statement said.

They also demanded that no late payment charges, penal interest or any other additional financial penalties should be imposed during the moratorium period.

Besides, the opposition party called for a special rehabilitation package for farmers, small entrepreneurs, self-help groups and families that have lost their livelihood due to the floods.

"The package should include easy-term credit facilities, concessional loans and special interest relief to enable affected people to restore their economic activities," it said.

The two AJP leaders said that disaster response cannot be confined merely to the distribution of relief materials. "Providing financial relief to families that have lost everything in the floods is equally essential for helping them return to normal life. Ensuring such relief is one of the foremost responsibilities of the government during a humanitarian crisis," they said.

The flood situation in Assam remained grim on Thursday, even as water receded from most parts of the state, with the death toll rising to 78 and over three lakh people continuing to reel under the deluge. (PTI)

ASS confers 'Sangeetsudhakar'

Kapil Thakur, was unable to attend the function because of ill health but conveyed a message expressing his gratitude for the recognition.

Accepting the award, Garima Saikia Garg thanked the Asam Sahitya Sabha for the honour and said the family felt blessed that Zubeen Garg's contribution had received such recognition. Dr Borthakur also expressed gratitude to the Sabha and said the memento presented reflected the ideals and spirit with which her brother had lived.

Sabha vice-president Padum Rajkhowa said the honour was a fitting tribute to Zubeen Garg's enduring artistic legacy.

He also expressed solidarity with flood-affected people in Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat and called for adequate compensation for those affected. During the programme, Garima Saikia Garg also unveiled a book titled 'Zubeen Garg', compiled and edited by Prafulla Barman.

Sanskrit scholar and retired professor Rabindra Dev Sarma spoke on the singer's life and contributions.

Earlier, a portrait of Zubeen Garg, accompanied by members of his family, was ceremonially welcomed with Gayan-Bayan at the entrance of Bhagawati Prasad Baruah Bhawan.

Several individuals were felicitated during the event, while the evening concluded with performances of Zubeen Garg's songs, dance and theatre by artistes from across Assam, paying tribute to his enduring musical legacy.

Pellet guns can't be banned

Mansoori reportedly suffered pellet injuries during the 'Sansad Chalo' march called by the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) on July 20. Grover said as regards the petitioners, metallic pellets were used, and they were recovered from their bodies.

"I am not saying pellet guns should not be in the armoury of the RAF or not. Here it is different. They have used metallic pellets," she said. The bench said it was not averse to examining the use of pellets in a particular incident and the petitioners must show if it was permissible under a "graded approach".

The senior lawyer said she was confining her remarks to metallic pellets.

"There is no standing order of the Delhi Police which permits the use of pellets. That is why my difficulty arises, and I have to rely on BPRD. If there is such a standing order, the Union may place it on record. I am sure the Union and the Delhi Police do not wish to fire pellets on innocent youngsters," she said.

"I could not find any such standing order of the Delhi Police at all," Grover said.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said the government will do whatever is necessary to assist the bench.

Grover said the top court on July 28 directed the preservation of CCTV, drone and body camera footage and wireless logs, and did not specifically refer to the ammunition logs of the RAF.

"Whatever is required for investigation will be preserved," the solicitor general said.

The bench said a bona fide protest may turn violent at any point, perhaps due to the infiltration of anti-social elements, and "graded responses" by law enforcement might sometimes be necessary.

The forces may have to take on the spot decision based on the event, the law officer said.

Yashvardhan Azad approached the top court seeking a nationwide ban on the use of wholly or partly metallic pellet ammunition fired from pump-action or projectile action guns for dispersing civilian assemblies, contending that such weapons are inherently incompatible with constitutional standards governing the use of force.

The petition also sought exemplary compensation, comprehensive medical treatment and rehabilitation for all persons allegedly injured in the incident.

According to the petition, the RAF, deployed to assist the Delhi Police in crowd management during the protests, resorted to tear gas, lathi-charge and subsequently fired pump-action guns loaded with metallic pellets near Connaught Place.

The petitioners alleged that no prior warning or announcement was issued before the escalation in the use of force and that several protesters suffered serious injuries, including eye injuries.

According to the plea, pellet guns, though often described as "less-lethal" weapons, disperse hundreds of projectiles over a wide area, making them incapable of precise targeting and creating a substantial risk of grave injuries to the eyes and other vital organs.

Such weapons fail the constitutional tests of necessity, proportionality and reasonableness governing restrictions on the fundamental right to peaceful assembly under Article 19(1)(b), it contended. (PTI)

18 foreign nationals prevented

district. The Northeast has two other ICPs along the India-Bangladesh border -- at Dawki in Meghalaya and Akhaura in Tripura.

The region also has an ICP in Assam's Darranga along the India-Bhutan border. Following the political turmoil in Bangladesh in 2024, Assam Police had said the state force, along with the Border Security Force (BSF), would take all necessary measures under the law to prevent illegal entry into India from the neighbouring country.

However, all Indian passport holders have been allowed to return from trouble-hit Bangladesh through the entry point in the state. (PTI)

West Pacific warming, western

bringing heavy rains to Maharashtra and Gujarat.

Ramesh said, "These western disturbances are travelling up to Tibet, bringing rains over the eastern Himalayas, eventually triggering floods over Assam. Climate change is reshaping the characteristics of the monsoon, which models are failing to take into account." (PTI)

NHRC notice to Assam govt

entered the tank to rescue him but he also lost consciousness, it said.

The NHRC issued notices to the district magistrate and the police commissioner of Gautam Budh Nagar, seeking a detailed report on it in two weeks. The report is expected to include the status of the investigation, as well as compensation, if any, paid to the next of kin of the victims, the statement said.

According to the media report, carried on July 27, both victims were pulled out by the police and fire brigade personnel and taken to the hospital, where they were declared dead during the course of treatment.

In a separate statement, the NHRC took suo motu cognisance of a media report that a five-year-old boy studying in a private school was allegedly subjected to torture and inhuman treatment by his teacher in the Varanasi district of Uttar Pradesh.

The teacher, enraged after the boy urinated in his pants, reportedly took him to the school kitchen and "branded his private parts with a hot knife," it said.

The commission issued notices to the Uttar Pradesh government's chief secretary and the Varanasi police commissioner, seeking a detailed report on it in two weeks.

According to the media report, carried on July 28, the boy informed his parents about the incident after returning home. Reportedly, the teacher threatened him with more severe punishment if he repeated it, the rights panel said. (PTI)

SBI General launches new motor insurance campaign featuring Pankaj Tripathi

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: SBI General Insurance has launched a new brand film for its motor insurance business featuring actor and brand ambassador Pankaj Tripathi, as part of its integrated campaign, 'Chuniye Bharosa, Apno Sa'.

The campaign aims to reinforce the importance of choosing a trusted motor insurance partner by highlighting that selecting insurance for a vehicle should receive the same careful consideration as purchasing the vehicle itself.

According to the company, the film encourages consumers to look beyond the insurance policy and choose an insurer that offers dependable support during unforeseen situations.

It said the campaign is intended to make insurance more accessible, relevant and customer-centric.

Commenting on the campaign, Naveen Chandra Jha, Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of SBI General Insurance, said customers increasingly seek insurance solutions that are simple, transparent and reliable. He said the latest campaign reflects the company's commitment to providing meaningful protection and support throughout a customer's vehicle ownership journey.

Kathin Lahiri, Head of Marketing and CSR at SBI General Insurance, said the campaign underscores the importance of protecting one of a customer's most valuable assets by choosing a trusted insurance provider.

He added that Pankaj Tripathi's credibility and relatable personality help convey the campaign's message effectively.

Dell expands premium consumer PC lineup in India

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: Dell Technologies has expanded its premium consumer portfolio in India with the launch of new XPS, Dell and Alienware laptops, aiming to cater to a wider range of users as demand for AI-enabled personal computers continues to grow.

The new lineup is led by the XPS 13, alongside the Dell 14S, Dell 16S and Alienware 15, targeting students, young professionals, content creators and gaming enthusiasts.

According to the company, the new XPS 13 is designed as an ultra-portable premium laptop featuring Intel Core Series 3 and Intel Core Ultra Series 3 processors, up to 32 GB of memory, a 2.5K InfinityEdge touch display, Wi-Fi 7 connectivity, Dolby Atmos-tuned speakers and up to 17 hours of streaming battery life.

The laptop also carries ENERGY STAR certification and EPEAT Gold with Climate+ designation.

Dell also introduced the Dell 14S and Dell 16S, powered by the latest Intel Core Ultra Series 3 and AMD Ryzen AI 400 Series processors.

The laptops feature OLED display options, AI capabilities, multiple connectivity ports and recycled materials as part of the company's sustainability initiatives.

For gaming enthusiasts, Dell unveiled the Alien-

ware 15, featuring up to Intel Core 7 Series 2 processors and NVIDIA GeForce RTX 5060 graphics.

The laptop comes with a 15.3-inch WUXGA display with a 165 Hz refresh rate, advanced cooling technology and a range of connectivity options designed for gaming and everyday use.

Commenting on the launch, Chris Cowger, Senior Vice President and General Manager, Global Consumer and eCommerce, Dell Technologies, said India remains one of the company's most important consumer markets and that the expanded portfolio reflects its strategy of offering technology across different price points to meet evolving customer expectations.

Raj Kumar Rishi, Vice President and General Manager, Consumer Business, Asia Pacific and Japan, said the new range is intended to serve a broad spectrum of users, from students and young professionals to creators and gamers, while making Dell's premium technologies accessible to more consumers.

Outlining the company's retail strategy, Anurag Arora, Senior Director and General Manager, Consumer Sales, India, said the new products would be available through Dell's omnichannel network, including Dellstore.com, Dell Exclusive Stores, large-format retail outlets and multi-brand stores across more than 400 cities, with a focus on expanding reach in Tier-II and Tier-III markets.

JLR India posts record first-quarter retail sales

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: JLR India has reported its highest-ever first-quarter retail sales, selling 1,665 vehicles during the first quarter of FY2026-27, marking an 11 per cent year-on-year growth.

The company said its wholesale sales for the quarter stood at 1,694 units, registering a 4 per cent increase over the corresponding period last year.

According to JLR India, the Range Rover, Range Rover Sport and Defender models together accounted for more than 85 per cent of total retail sales during the quarter. The Defender remained the company's best-selling model, reflecting sustained demand for premium luxury SUVs in the Indian market.

During the quarter, JLR India also announced revised pricing for the Range Rover SV and Range Rover Sport SV following the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA), offering benefits of up to ₹75 lakh, depending on the

model. The company said the move has resulted in increased customer enquiries for its SV range and growing demand for bespoke vehicle customisation.

Commenting on the performance, Rajan Amba, Managing Director of JLR India, said the company had begun FY2026-27 on a strong note with its best-ever first-quarter retail sales.

He attributed the growth to sustained demand for the Range Rover, Range Rover Sport and Defender models, as well as rising customer interest in SV and bespoke offerings following the India-UK FTA.

He said the agreement would enable the company to introduce more curated SV products, exclusive Range Rover special editions and bespoke models tailored to the preferences of Indian luxury vehicle buyers. He also expressed confidence that JLR India would maintain its growth momentum during the remainder of the financial year with a strong product pipeline.

Hester Biosciences Q1 profit up multi-fold at ₹96.73 cr

NEW DELHI, July 30: Leading animal health products and vaccine manufacturer Hester Biosciences on Thursday reported a multi-fold jump in consolidated profit after tax to ₹96.73 crore in the first quarter ended June 30, 2026.

The company had reported a profit after tax (PAT) of ₹17.3 crore for the same quarter of the last fiscal, it said in a statement.

Hester Biosciences said that consolidated profitability during the quarter includes an exceptional gain arising from the amendment of the Gates Foundation loan at Hester Africa. During the quarter, the outstanding loan was reduced from USD 12 million to USD 5 million, accrued interest was waived and the revised loan was made interest-free, resulting in an exceptional accounting gain of ₹85.35 crore, it stated. Revenue from operations for the first quarter stood at ₹77.24 crore as compared to ₹84.11 crore in the first quarter of last fiscal. (PTI)

TOPCEM donates ₹50 lakh to Assam CM's Flood Relief Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: TOPCEM Cement Group has contributed ₹50 lakh to the Assam Chief Minister's Flood Relief Fund to support relief, rehabilitation and recovery efforts for people affected by the recent floods across the state.

The cheque was presented to Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma by the group's partners, Kailash Lohia, Ram Avtar Agarwalla, Rahul Lohia and Amit Agarwal at a programme held in Guwahati.

According to the company, the contribution will assist the Assam Government in carrying out relief and rehabilitation measures for families affected by the floods.

TOPCEM stated that it has been a regular contributor to the Chief Minister's Flood Relief Fund over the years, reflecting its commitment to disaster relief, community welfare and the socio-economic development of Assam.

The company noted that, with the state facing recurrent floods, it has continued to extend support to affected communities through humanitarian initiatives.

Representatives of the company reaffirmed TOPCEM's commitment to standing with the people of Assam during times of crisis and contributing towards relief efforts and the long-term recovery of flood-affected areas.

The company said the contribution reflects its corporate social responsibility initiatives and its continued commitment to the welfare and well-being of the people of Assam.

EPOXY FLOORING IN TOILETS OF 50 LHB COACHES

E-Tender Notice No. M-TSK-2026-24, Dated: 28-07-2026, Tender No.: M-TSK-2026-24. Name of work: Epoxy flooring in toilets of 50 LHB Coaches primarily maintained at Coaching Depot Dibrugarh, N.F. Railway. **Location of work:** Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. **Tender Value:** ₹20,66,002/-; **Earnest Money:** ₹41,300/-; **Last date and time for submission of tender:** 19-08-2026 at 13:00 hrs. **Date and time of opening of tender:** After 15:00 hrs. of 19-08-2026. Website particulars where complete details of the tender can be seen and downloaded: www.ireps.gov.in

Sr. DME, Tinsukia

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Serving Customers with a smile

AFFIDAVIT

I Dilshan Hussain, S/O- Abdul Matin, Vill-Dakin Samarali, P.S.- Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam) That, my father's actual and correct name is Abdul Matin. That, in my school certificate, Marksheet and Birth Certificate where in my father's name has been inadvertently recorded as Abdul Motin instead of his actual and correct name is Abdul Matin. That, Abdul Motin and Abdul Matin both are the names of same and one person i.e. my father's name.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Sohian Lal Chauhan son of Late, Ramdhari Chauhan resident of Watipur P.S. Kheroni, West Karbi Anglong would like to mention that in land record No. 50 Dag No. 170/171/172 situated at Pangoan Kissan under Lanka Mouza where my name and my father's name wrongly recorded as sri Chauhan instead of correct name Sohian Lal Chauhan and my father's name wrongly recorded as Ramdhari instead of correct name Ramdhari Chauhan. This is true

EXPRESSION OF INTEREST (EOI) IS INVITED FROM RESOURCEFUL SERVICE PROVIDER FOR PHYSIOTHERAPY SERVICE

Notice No. 01/Medical/Physiotherapy/NTSK of 2026-27
Date: 28-07-2026

Chief Medical Superintendent, N.F. Railway, Tinsukia for & on behalf of President of India invites Expression of Interest (EOI) from resourceful service provider for Physiotherapy service at Sub-Divisional Railway Hospital, New-Tinsukia as per Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Central Govt. Health Scheme (CGHS) Rates with as admissible for Tier III (Z City) vide Office Memorandum No-F.No.516/CGHS(HQ)/HEC/2024 (Part-I) dtd.: 03-10-2025, revision from time to time for two years.

The proposal may be submitted in EOI document with format & schedule available for free download at N.F. Railway's Official website <http://www.nfr.indianrailways.gov.in>. The same can also be collected from the Office of the Chief Medical Superintendent, N.F. Railway, Tinsukia up to 12:00 hrs. of 31/08/2026.

The EOI from interested service providers will be received in sealed envelope up to 15:00 hrs. of 31/08/2026 in the office of the Chief Medical Superintendent, N.F. Railway, Tinsukia, PO-Hijuguri, Dist-Tinsukia-786192 at Sub-Divisional Railway Hospital, New-Tinsukia.

Divisional Medical Officer, New Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
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FRIDAY, JULY 31, 2026

THE HILLS TIMES 3

CM: Setting up of NE disaster risk reduction mechanism sought

State places demand for relief, rehabilitation of flood victims before IMCT

GUWAHATI, July 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the state has demanded a support package from the Centre for relief and rehabilitation of the people ravaged by an unprecedented flood.

The state government placed its demand before the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT), which concluded its four-day tour to flood-devastated districts of Upper Assam on Wednesday.

"The floods this year has been on an unprecedented scale, leaving behind a trail of devastation which our Double Engine Govt will mitigate to sufferings of our people," Sarma said in a post on X.

He said that the state government has placed a demand for recognition of the Upper Assam floods as an "atypical, high-intensity, rapid-onset event" with flexible norms for damage assessment and assistance.

It demanded a "dedicated Central support package" for Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat, covering relief, housing, infrastructure and livelihood restoration, Sarma said.

He, however, did not mention how much money the state has asked from the Centre under the package. Assam also sought the establishment of a Northeast disaster risk reduction mechanism to strengthen regional co-ordination across all phases of disaster management covering Assam and seven neighbouring states, Sarma said. The flood situation in Assam remained grim on Thursday even as water receded from most parts of the state, with the death toll rising to 78 and over three lakh



people continuing to reel under the deluge.

Sarma said that the IMCT visited the state to undertake an on-ground assessment and review the ongoing relief, restoration and rehabilitation efforts as per assurances given by the Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

"During the review, the team was apprised of the extensive damage caused to critical infrastructure, agriculture and livelihoods," he added.

To deal with the situation effectively, Assam sought relaxation of documentation and eligibility norms under Central and centrally-sponsored schemes to enable affected households to access (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IMD predicts heavy rainfall in Arunachal, Nagaland ● Nearly 13,000 flood-hit families in Assam still living without electricity

State flood remains grim; toll mounts to 78

GUWAHATI, July 30: The flood situation in Assam remained grim on Thursday even as water receded from most parts of the state, with the death toll rising to 78 and over three lakh people continuing to reel under the deluge, officials said.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD), however, forecast heavy to very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms at isolated places across the state and neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland over the next three days, raising concerns for districts bordering the two states.

"There was no rain in most of the flood-hit Upper Assam districts. So, water level continued to recede from the inundated villages, giving some respite to villagers," an official of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) said.

The authority's daily flood bulletin issued on Wednesday night said three deaths were reported in the last 24 hours -- two from Sivasagar district and one from Golaghat. With



these, the toll in this year's flood has reached 78.

Altogether 3,00,031 people remained affected, with Charaideo being the worst-hit with 1,37,561 people impacted, followed by

Sivasagar (84,600) and Jorhat (49,911). More than 16,500 displaced people were taking shelter in 71 relief camps. Another 30 relief distribution centres were catering to over 72,000 people.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday dialled Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take stock of the flood situation, while the latter said that although floodwaters have receded, many are unable to return as their houses have either been damaged or filled with mud and silt.

Shah, who called Sarma for the second time in seven days, assured him of all possible assistance from the Centre for relief and restoration efforts.

Multiple agencies, including medical and veterinary teams, remained pressed in rescue operations in the affected areas.

A crop area of 21,523.08 hectares remained submerged. More than 11,000 animals have been washed away, while another 17,000 have been affected.

Damage to various infrastructure, including embankments, houses, roads, schools and other public property, was also reported from various parts, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Schools reopening in flood-hit areas to be decided by district administrations: Ranjo



Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, July 30: Assam Education Minister Ranjo Pegu on Thursday said that the decision on reopening schools after the summer vacation on August 1 in flood-affected districts will be taken by the respective district administrations based on the prevailing ground situation.

Speaking to reporters, Pegu said the Education Department has already held consultations with Deputy Commissioners (DCs) of all districts and sought reports on the condition of educational institutions following the recent floods that severely affected several districts of Upper Assam.

"The Deputy Commissioners will take the decision according to the prevailing situation in their respective districts. The Education Department has already discussed the matter with them," the minister said.

He said preliminary reports indicate that, except for a limited number of schools, most educational institutions, including colleges, are currently not in a position to resume academic activities.

However, the final decision will rest with the district administrations after assessing local conditions.

"Initial reports suggest that barring a few schools, the majority of schools and even colleges are not in a position to restart classes. Nevertheless, I have left the matter to the district level for an appropriate decision," Pegu said.

The minister stressed that the issue falls under the jurisdiction of district administrations as it concerns the management of a natural disaster.

"This is a decision-making matter related to a natural calamity. In such situations, the highest authority to take decisions rests with the district administration. Therefore, the Deputy Commissioners will decide whether schools can reopen in their districts," he added.

Assam is scheduled to reopen schools after the summer vacation on August 1.

However, widespread flooding over the past few weeks has disrupted normal life in several Upper Assam districts, damaging public infrastructure, including educational institutions, and affecting thousands of families.

The state government has been reviewing the flood situation and co-ordinating relief and restoration efforts, while district administrations continue to assess the safety and readiness of schools before allowing regular classes to resume.

Assam LoP seeks ₹ 2,000 crore Central package for flood-hit districts

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, July 30: Leader of the Opposition in the Assam Assembly, Wazed Ali Choudhury, on Thursday urged the Centre to provide a special financial package of ₹ 2,000 crore for flood-ravaged districts in the state, claiming that the scale of devastation requires massive rehabilitation efforts.

Addressing reporters here, the Congress leader said a delegation of party MLAs visited the worst-affected districts of Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat, where unprecedented flooding has claimed around 75 lives and displaced thousands of people.

Choudhury said the Congress Legislature Party divided its legislators into three teams to assess the ground situation.

While Deputy Leader of the Opposition Jakir Hussain Sikdar visited Charaideo, another team toured Jorhat district, and Choudhury himself visited Sivasagar along with other legislators.

He alleged that several of the inundated areas had never witnessed floods in the past, leaving both the administration and local residents unprepared for such a disaster.

"The government never anticipated that these areas would face floods of this magnitude. There were

hardly any boats available for rescue operations, and the number supplied by the government was grossly inadequate. As a result, many people remained stranded in interior areas," Choudhury said.

Expressing concern over the loss of lives, he claimed the death toll could rise further as rescue and relief operations continue.

The Congress leader said the party distributed relief materials worth around ₹ 2 lakh through its district committees during the visits, but stressed that the assistance was only a small contribution compared to the scale of destruction. "From what we witnessed (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ASS confers 'Sangeetsudhakar' title on Zubeen Garg

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 30: The Assam Sahitya Sabha on Thursday posthumously conferred the title 'Sangeetsudhakar' on celebrated Assamese singer, composer and cultural icon Zubeen Garg at a function held at Sangeetacharya Lakshmiram Baruah Sadan in Tezpur.

The programme was organised jointly by the Assam Sahitya Sabha and the Nahar Sakha Sahitya Sabha, Guwahati.

Announcing the honour, Sabha president Basanta Kumar Goswami said all songs written and composed by Zubeen Garg would henceforth be recognised as 'Zubeen Sangeet'.

He also announced that the Sabha would publish the 'Zubeen Garg Rachanavali', a compilation of the artist's literary and musical works, within the next six months.

Describing Garg as one of Assam's most influential cultural figures, Goswami said the title was

being conferred in recognition of his exceptional contribution to Assamese music, literature and culture.

The programme began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp by the Sabha president and members of Zubeen Garg's family, followed by a rendition of Chiro Senehi Mor Bhasha Janani by artistes of the Sabha's Ganeshguri branch.

Delivering the keynote address, Debojit Bora, Principal Secretary of the Sabha, said Zubeen Garg had transformed modern Assamese music and taken it to a national audience.

He described the late artist as a multifaceted personality whose work as a singer, composer, lyricist, actor and filmmaker enriched Assamese culture for more than three decades.

The honour was received on behalf of the family by Garima Saikia Garg, the singer's wife and his sister, Dr Palmi Borthakur. Zubeen Garg's father, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Pellet guns can't be banned as long as existing advisory permits their use: SC

NEW DELHI, July 30: The Supreme Court on Thursday said that pellet guns cannot be banned as long as the existing advisory permits their use for crowd control in exceptional circumstances by security agencies, while making it clear that allegations of specific misuse can be examined on a case-by-case basis.

The top court took note of a plea on the use of metallic pellet guns during the recent students' protests against the NEET paper leak in Delhi and asked the Centre to preserve the ammunition log of the Rapid Action Force (RAF) deployed at the Jantar Mantar.

Observing that police, as per the Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPRD) advisory, are empowered to use pellet guns in exceptional situations, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joydip Bagchi and V Mohana termed "vague" the prayer in the plea seeking a complete ban on



such usage.

"Prayers are not to use pellet guns. In exceptional cases, police regulations permit the use of pellet guns. If you are interested in phasing out pellet guns, you will have to challenge that very provision as ultra vires to Article 21 (right to life)," Justice Bagchi said.

The bench took note of the submissions of senior advocate Vrinda Grover, appearing for the petitioners, and asked the Delhi government to provide the best treatment to

Prashant Kumar, Sheikh Irshad Mansoori and others who suffered pellet gun injuries during the July 20 protest here.

Former Central Information Commissioner and retired IPS officer Yashovardhan Azad and the two victims had moved the court seeking a complete ban on the use of metallic pellet guns to deal with law and order situations.

The bench issued a notice to the Centre and the Inspector General of Police, RAF, on the plea by Azad and the two victims.

At the outset, Justice Bagchi said that the prayer for a ban on the use of pellet guns for civilian crowd dispersal was "vague" without challenging the police regulations, which permit the use of such weapons.

Grover said it was not easy to find such regulations in the public domain, and urged the bench to direct the Centre to place them on record. Singh and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

18 foreign nationals prevented from entering India: CM

GUWAHATI, July 30: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said 18 foreign nationals were prevented from entering India as part of the state's ongoing drive against infiltration.

"Infiltration will not be allowed to undermine Assam's security and identity. As part of our continued action, strict action has been taken against 18 infiltrators," Sarma said in a post on X on Wednesday night.

He, however, did not share details such as where these infiltrators were captured or their nationalities.

"Our vigilance remains uncompromising, with strict monitoring and action continuing 24x7," the CM said. Assam's Sribhumi, Cachar, Dhubri and South Salmara-Mankachar districts share a 267.5-km international border with Bangladesh. An Integrated Check Post (ICP) is located at Sutarkandi in Sribhumi (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NHRC notice to Assam govt over death of 4 workers in explosion at Cachar factory

NEW DELHI, July 30: The NHRC said it has issued notice to the Assam government and police authorities over reports that four workers died and two others were severely injured in an explosion at a metal processing factory in the Cachar district.

Reportedly, molten metal spilled on the workers after the explosion. The families of the victims and locals alleged that such incidents had happened at the factory earlier also, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said in a statement. The NHRC has taken suo motu cognisance of a media report that on July 26, four workers died and two others were severely injured in an explosion at a metal processing factory in the Cachar district of Assam, it said. The commission, on Wednesday, observed that the content of the media report, if true, raises serious issues of violation of human rights.

Accordingly, it issued notices to the Assam government's chief secretary and the superintendent of police of Cachar, seeking a detailed report on it in two weeks. The report is expected to include the status of the health of the injured, as well as the disbursement of compensation to the next of kin of the deceased and to the injured workers, it said.

According to the media report, carried on July 27, more than 100 workers were present at the factory when the explosion happened, the right panel said.

In a separate statement, the NHRC said it has taken suo motu cognisance of a media report that on July 26, a sanitation worker and a security guard died allegedly after inhaling toxic gases inside a sewage treatment plant at a residential society in Noida, Gautam Budh Nagar in Uttar Pradesh.

Reportedly, the sanitation worker entered the sewage treatment plant to clean a tank and lost consciousness. When the worker did not come out, a security guard from the residential society (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

West Pacific warming, western disturbances behind above-normal July rainfall: Analysis

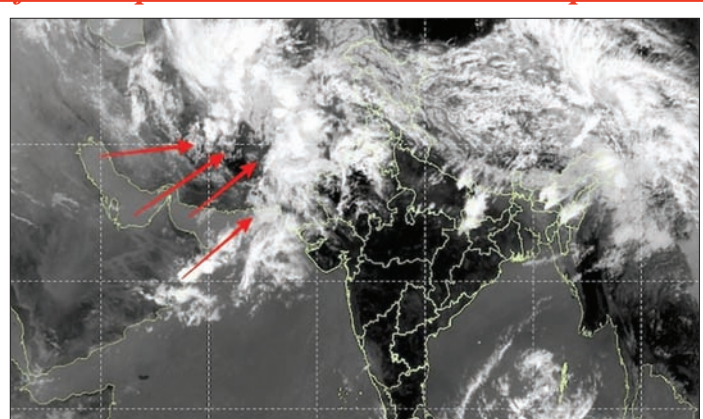
'Rise in average land surface temperatures as well as ocean temperatures due to global warming'

NEW DELHI, July 30: The month of July has been unexpectedly wet, as it witnessed 238.2 mm of rainfall against the normal 233.9 mm between July 1-26, despite the India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasting below-normal rainfall in the month, according to a new analysis.

It has stated that one of the key reasons for above-normal rainfall is the emergence of back-to-back monsoon weather systems, which kept the monsoon current active at regular intervals during the month.

The development has exposed how climate change and changing ocean-atmosphere interactions are making India's monsoon harder to predict, said the analysis, released on Thursday by Climate Trends, a Delhi-based climate research organisation.

In a statement, Dr Akhil Srivastava, scientist-D at IMD's National



Weather Forecasting Centre (NWFC), said, "There has been a rise in the average land surface temperatures as well as ocean temperatures due to global warming. With such persisting conditions, whenever there are favourable conditions such as the presence of multiple monsoon

systems, they would garner more moisture and hence more likelihood of extreme heavy rains."

The above-normal July rainfall has taken place amid El Nino conditions prevailing in the tropical Pacific. These conditions, which have been forecasted to strengthen rapidly

over the coming months, typically bring less monsoon rainfall in India.

Dr KJ Ramesh, former director general of the IMD, in a statement, pointed out that there were two main factors behind excess rainfall.

"Warming of the West Pacific (to the west of the Philippines) is the saviour of the monsoon by offsetting the monsoon rainfall suppressing potential posed by El Nino in July 2026. So far, three cyclonic circulations... have been pushed through Myanmar," said Ramesh. "West Pacific cyclone remnants are entering the North Bay of Bengal and re-intensifying, making the monsoon vigorous with widespread heavy rainfall surrounding their track over the Indian Peninsula," he added.

The other factor is the increased western disturbances during the monsoon season, which have led to greater moisture loading from the Arabian Sea, (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

QUOTE OF THE DAY

A morning-glory at my window satisfies me more than the metaphysics of books.
- Walt Whitman

Climate change and its impact

France holds emergency meetings on the evacuation of Bordeaux, a city of a million, as wildfires sweep ever closer. In Spain families are fleeing the capital, Madrid. The reality of the climate emergency has come to Europe. There were plenty of warning signs — more severe heatwaves by the year, droughts and floods devastating harvests — including in Britain, where three of the five worst harvests on record have been since 2020 — and worsening wildfires. In Britain this summer fires have burnt swathes of the Cairngorms and Eryri (Snowdonia), as well as Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh for the second year running. As summer heatwaves grow longer and drier, we should not imagine our towns and cities are safe. As Fire Brigades Union leader Steve Wright told the Morning Star in May, "In London a suburban street burnt to the ground last year" (in Rainham) "and we had wildfires in Dorset and Wiltshire." Computer scientist Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, argues that addressing the climate crisis requires "World War II-scale mobilisation." That runs up against the abstract nature of the problem in many people's minds — it being hard to imagine what a world 1.5, 2 or 3°C warmer would be like. The events of this summer must be used to change that.

Though outright climate denialism has become more prominent thanks to the Donald Trump presidencies in the US and the associated rise of far-right ideology, the political mainstream in Britain has long accepted the reality of global warming. The issue is the bolt-on nature of any projected action, emissions reduction targets added to long lists of government priorities rather than adaptation and mitigation being built into the whole with all the implications for real estate (building design, retrofitting of houses, hospitals, schools and offices), transport, national infrastructure including water conservation and supply, sustainable agriculture and more. We have even seen deep cuts to fire brigade strength as the planet burns. Whenever another priority arises, climate goes to the back of the queue: the obvious example in Britain and Europe today is militarisation, swallowing resources desperately needed elsewhere to cope with a threat — Russian attack — that, unlike the climate emergency, is fictional.

The extent to which war fever overrides environmental responsibility was demonstrated by the German Greens, who backed reopening coal mines to reduce dependence on Russian energy. Addressing the climate crisis involves radical restructuring — one reason climate activists were, even before Palestine solidarity campaigners, the victims of repressive new anti-protest laws. That, in turn, means getting real about the class power of the forces blocking change. Proposed mechanisms for delivering action like citizens' assemblies are a response to the sluggishness of existing institutions, but do not address its cause — the power of the capitalist class.

Mother Tongue and intellectual development of children

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

After the birth of a child, the process of becoming familiar with the world is not merely through what is seen by the eyes, but through a complex chemical and neurological process of the auditory organs and the brain. When a child is able to hear external sounds while still in the mother's womb, the initial signals of language begin to be engraved in the neurons of its brain, and after birth, when it hears those same tunes and sounds from the mother's mouth, its brain feels the most comfort. This process is not merely emotional; it is a completely scientific biological phenomenon where the mother tongue is the most powerful and primary tool for the development of a child's brain. Just as we cannot run any application on a computer or mobile phone without a core operating system, similarly, in the case of the intellectual development of a child's brain, the mother tongue acts as that core operating system which subsequently builds the foundation for learning mathematics, science, philosophy, or any other foreign language.

However, in the present times, we see that instead of realizing this scientific truth, many guardians try to force an unfamiliar language upon a child at a very early age, which creates a hurdle in the child's natural intellectual development and weakens the creative part of the brain. Neurology research has repeatedly proven that the part of a child's brain that forms concepts works with maximum speed when activated through the mother tongue, whereas it cannot work with the same promptness through other languages, because then the brain has to expend energy just to understand the language, not to understand the actual subject matter.

The most important stage of intellectual development is concept formation, which occurs at a very rapid pace during childhood, and during this time the mother tongue acts as the biggest ally. Suppose a child sees a tree in its surrounding environment and everyone at home calls it a tree; then the child's brain establishes a direct connection between the visual of the object and the sound of the word, which becomes permanent. But if that same child is called by one name at home and another at school, the child's brain first has to translate the word and only then can it connect it to the object. This translation process may seem negligible to us, but for a three- or four-year-old child, it appears as an extra mental burden or cognitive load.

When a child's brain has to constantly engage in this translation process, the depth of its thinking or analytical capability naturally decreases. In the contemporary context of Assam, we frequently see that many children studying in English-medium schools have to memorize complex concepts of science or social science because they cannot fathom the real meaning of the subject matter. This rote memory can temporarily bring marks in exams, but it cannot foster the development of the child's fundamental thinking. Scientifically speaking, to master any new concept, the pre-existing knowledge or experience in the brain must be connected with new information, and this task is as easy and spontaneous in the mother tongue as it can never be in another language. Therefore, children who begin their education in their mother tongue have a much sharper and deeper comprehension capacity, reasoning power, and problem-solving skills compared to children who begin their education in another language.

Today, a fatal misconception has taken root among the middle and upper-middle classes of Assam that knowledge of the English language means intellectual superiority, and this notion is slowly pushing our society toward a crippled generation. Guardians think that the sooner they enroll their children in English-medium schools or force them to speak English at home, the brighter their future will be. But in reality, what has hap-

pened as a result is that children can neither master the English language properly nor maintain a grip on their mother tongue. Consequently, a Kichidi culture or what can be termed in linguistics as semi-lingualism has been created, where children cannot think deeply or express thoughts in any single language.

The depth of thought always depends on the command over language; one whose vocabulary is not rich can never have a vast scope of thought. Many students in Assam today struggle to find words to express their own emotions, logic, or complex concepts. When speaking in English, they fear grammatical errors, and when speaking in Assamese, the right word does not come to mind. This linguistic poverty directly strikes their self-confidence, and gradually they fall victim to inferiority complexes or introversion. It is important to remember that the most developed countries in the world, such as Japan, Germany, China, or France, provide primary education to children solely and exclusively in their mother tongue, and it is precisely as a result of this that those countries have made such great progress in science and technology. They learn English only as a medium of communication, not as the sole medium of acquiring knowledge. Here, knowledge and language have been fused together, which will remain a great irony in the history of our intellectual development.

In the context of creativity, the role of the mother tongue is immense, and it is no exaggeration to say that there is no substitute for it. The human brain can create something new only when it is in a completely stress-free state and does not face any linguistic barrier to thinking. We dream in our mother tongue, we talk to ourselves in our minds in our mother tongue, and when we suddenly fall into some great danger or experience extreme joy, the words that spontaneously escape our mouths belong to our mother tongue. This proves that our subconscious mind is so deeply connected with the mother tongue that tearing it apart and inserting another language is unnatural.

The same goes for children—when they write stories, draw pictures, or sing songs in their mother tongue, their imagination gets the entire sky to spread its wings. But when they are forced to think in a foreign language, a large part of their brain is busy just structuring the language, and the actual creative thought is lost. Looking at the contemporary literature or art scene of Assam, it is observed that the number of original writers or thinkers emerging from the new generation is steadily declining. A primary reason for this is that from an early age, instead of letting our boys and girls think originally or fundamentally, we have taught them to copy others' languages and others' ideas. Knowing English is essential in today's era of globalization, but learning it by sacrificing the mother tongue or neglecting the mother tongue can never be a wise act. Research has shown that children whose foundation in their mother tongue is strong can subsequently master English or any other language easily and accurately. Because our guardians fail to understand this concept of linguistic transfer, today we are building a generation that neither belongs to home nor can become foreign.

The aspect of social and cultural alienation is also intricately linked with the mental or intellectual development of a child, which we often fail to give importance to. Language is not merely a collection of words; it represents a culture, a tradition, and a specific geography. When a child becomes alienated from its mother tongue, it also becomes alienated from its roots. Nowadays, many children in Assam do not get the opportunity to get acquainted with traditional folklore or cultural heritage because their school textbooks only contain stories foreign to their immediate ecosystem. As a result, a kind of cognitive dissonance or conceptual discrepancy is created in the child's mind. They find no connection between what they read in books and the real world.

This alienation has a detrimental effect on the child's emotional intelligence or EQ. Respect or love for one's own society, one's own people, and one's own environment develops only when the child understands their language. Children educated in their mother tongue can understand the problems around them better and think realistically to solve them. Conversely, a child confined within the four walls of just English-medium schools starts considering their own society as a distant planet and fails to feel a sense of responsibility toward society in the future. Intellectual development is not just IQ; emotional intelligence or EQ is also associated with it, and the mother tongue builds a bridge between these two types of intelligence. If we search for the root causes of the old-age home culture or family breakdown appearing in our society nowadays, we will see that behind it lies the linguistic and psychological gap growing between generations. The education system and the classroom environment have also repeatedly proved the importance of the mother tongue in building a child's self-confidence. When a teacher teaches in the mother tongue in the classroom, students can ask questions fearlessly, debate, and express their opinions freely. But when the medium is a foreign language, the classroom environment becomes artificial and intimidating. Students remain silent out of fear of speaking incorrect English and nod assent even when they do not understand something. Remaining silent in this manner gradually makes them lose the tendency to ask questions, which is the greatest enemy of intellectual development. The development of scientific temperament or rational thinking is possible only when a child learns to ask why and how. The mother tongue gives a child that courage, that freedom. Government schools in Assam may lack infrastructure, but the environment of linguistic freedom found there cannot be found even in many expensive private English-medium schools, if they strictly force children to speak only English. At present, the importance given to the mother tongue in the National Education Policy is not a political decision, but rather the result of years of research and surveys. Leading educators of the world have acknowledged that if a child's education up to the age of 8 is in the mother tongue, the structure of its brain develops optimally. The sooner the guardians of Assam understand this matter, the more beneficial it will be for our future generation. To abandon the blind infatuation towards English medium and give the true light of knowledge to our boys and girls, there is no substitute for the mother tongue.

In conclusion, it needs to be clearly stated that supporting the mother tongue does not mean opposing English or any other language. Rather, it is a scientific method through which the child's brain is made maximally efficient so that it can easily master any language or any complex subject in the future. To survive in today's competitive world, we do not just need English-knowing clerks; we need scientists, writers, entrepreneurs, and social reformers capable of fundamental thinking. And the source of this fundamental thinking can only be one's own mother tongue. In a multilingual and diverse state like Assam, the importance of the mother tongue is even greater, because it is tied to our identity and existence.

As guardians, our responsibility is not to turn a child into a mere robot that can only memorize data, but to shape them into a complete human being who can think and feel deeply. Therefore, in the interest of a child's intellectual development, for the sake of its mental health, and for the sake of its future creative entity, respecting and using the mother tongue is our moral duty. We must definitely teach our children English, but ensuring that it is not done upon the grave of the mother tongue is our national duty. When a child learns to dream in its own language, only then will it be able to turn the dream of conquering the world into reality.

The Flood Began in the Hills: Rethinking the root causes of Upper Assam's recent flood

By: Hiyanjalee Rangra and Monuhar Pegu

When devastating floods engulfed Charaideo, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat in July 2026, the immediate explanation appeared straightforward. According to the India Meteorological Department, extraordinary rainfall between 18 and 22 July triggered massive runoff across the hill catchments of Nagaland and Upper Assam. Rivers such as the Dihang, Disang, Dhansiri (South), Bhogdoi, Jaji and Kakodonga rose almost simultaneously, inundating large parts of Upper Assam within hours.

washed away, while more than 37,000 displaced people sought refuge in relief camps.

These numbers reveal the scale of the disaster. They do not explain why it unfolded with such extraordinary speed.

Unlike the floods traditionally associated with the Brahmaputra overflowing its banks, this event was largely driven by the rapid swelling of tributaries originating in the hill landscapes of Nagaland. Rivers such as the Dihang, Disang, Dhansiri (South), Bhogdoi, Jaji and Kakodonga rose almost simultaneously, inundating large parts of Upper Assam within hours.

The recent flood was therefore not merely a Brahmaputra flood. It was a watershed flood.

This distinction is critical because rivers respond not only to rainfall but also to the ecological condition of the landscapes through which rainwater travels.

Hydrologists often describe healthy watersheds as natural sponges. Forest canopies intercept rainfall, leaf litter cushions the soil surface, organic matter improves infiltration, and porous soils gradually release water into streams over time. When these ecological processes function well, intense rainfall is moderated before reaching rivers.

When they are weakened, rainfall becomes runoff.

Scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) consistently show that degraded ecosystems, declining soil health and biodiversity loss reduce the capacity of landscapes to regulate water. Extreme rainfall alone does not create disasters; disasters emerge when extreme weather interacts with vulnerable landscapes.

This perspective deserves far greater attention in Northeast India.

Over the past three decades, large areas of the hill landscapes across Nagaland, and Assam and other parts of the Northeast have undergone rapid

land-use transformation. Diverse forest mosaics and traditional farming systems have increasingly been converted into permanent commercial plantations and horticultural landscapes producing rubber, tea, coffee, orange, pineapple, guava, teak and other market-oriented crops. These transitions have undoubtedly improved livelihoods and diversified rural incomes for many households. However, development cannot be evaluated only through economic returns. Equally important is understanding how these land-use transformations influence watershed ecology.

The issue is not any single crop.

The issue is the gradual simplification of entire landscapes.

In this article, I use the term ecological monocropping to describe the progressive replacement of diverse ecological landscapes with simplified, commercially oriented land-use systems that may reduce biodiversity, alter soil processes and change watershed functions. It is not merely an agricultural concern; it is a landscape concern. Traditional Jhum cultivation illustrates this contrast.

For decades, shifting cultivation has often been portrayed primarily as environmentally destructive. Yet recent research from institutions such as ICIMOD, CIFOR-ICRAF, Nagaland University, Niti Ayog (2018) and other researchers working across the Eastern Himalaya presents a more nuanced picture; even. When practiced with adequate fallow cycles, Jhum creates a dynamic mosaic of regenerating forests, secondary vegetation and cultivated fields that supports biodiversity, rebuilds soil organic matter and contributes to ecological resilience and food security of many households in this region.

This does not mean Jhum is perfect or that commercial horticulture is inherently harmful in all aspects.

Rather, it suggests that diversity itself performs important ecological functions and making it more balance.

A landscape composed of forests, bamboo, fallows, mixed cropping and regenerating vegetation behaves very differently from one increasingly dominated by permanent plantations and simplified land-use systems. Such transformations deserve serious scientific investigation for their potential influence on runoff, infiltration and downstream flooding.

Agricultural change is only one part of a much larger transformation.

A young researcher Indukamal Bhuyan from Teok Jorhat says, "Across the Northeast, road construction, hill cutting, quarrying, expanding settlements and other infrastructure projects have accelerated dramatically. While improved connectivity is essential for economic development, mountain infrastructure also alters natural drainage systems. Roads are not simply transport corridors; in fragile hill ecosystems they become hydrological infrastructure. Inadequately designed drainage, extensive slope cutting and fragmented watersheds can accelerate runoff and destabilise entire catchments."

"Another major cause of illegal oil, coal, sand and stone mining in the fragile hills of Nagaland, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, which has never been counted as destruction of such kind of disaster", he added



There is no Natural Resource mining observe here in this google earth map in around 2011. We can see dark green areas cover by trees.

But one of the major influential factors of recent flood is illegal mining of sand, stone, oil, coal etc. and ecological destruction and forest cutting.

These changes are occurring simultaneously with another powerful driver.

The IPCC has repeatedly warned that South Asia is experiencing more frequent and intense extreme rainfall events. However, climate change does not act in isolation. Its impacts are amplified where landscapes have lost their ecological resilience. Extreme rainfall falling on healthy watersheds produces one outcome.

Extreme rainfall falling on ecologically simplified and hydrologically altered watersheds may produce another. This interaction deserves urgent scientific attention.

The recent floods therefore raise questions that extend beyond emergency response.

Why are tributaries rising so rapidly?

How have watershed conditions changed over the past thirty years?

How have roads, commercial plantations, hill cutting and changing land use influenced runoff?

How many wetlands, natural drainage channels and floodplains have been disconnected from their ecological functions?

Most importantly, are our current development policies adequately accounting for the hydrological consequences of landscape transformation?

These are not questions of blame. They are questions of evidence.

Unfortunately, flood management in Assam continues to focus overwhelmingly on embankments, relief camps and post-disaster rehabilitation. While these remain necessary, they address the symptoms rather than the underlying processes that generate flood risk.

Flood management must begin where the water begins.

In the hills.

The rivers that devastated Upper Assam carried

more than rainwater. They carried the cumulative effects of ecological change occurring across entire watersheds.

This calls for a new policy framework.

Instead of treating floods district by district, governments must adopt integrated mountain-river-floodplain planning and landscape approach across Assam, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. Watersheds do not recognise political boundaries. Future policies should prioritise catchment restoration, wetland conservation, biodiversity-rich farming systems, cumulative environmental impact assessments, scientifically informed infrastructure planning and stronger recognition of Indigenous ecological knowledge. Traditional farming systems should not be viewed merely as relics of the past but as living knowledge systems capable of informing climate-resilient landscape management.

"This is not an argument against development, it is an argument for ecological viable development."

Development that values rivers as living systems rather than drainage channels.

Development that recognises biodiversity as infrastructure.

Development that understands that soil, forests, wetlands and mountains provide public services just as important as roads and bridges.

The tragedy of July 2026 should not be remembered only for the rainfall it brought.

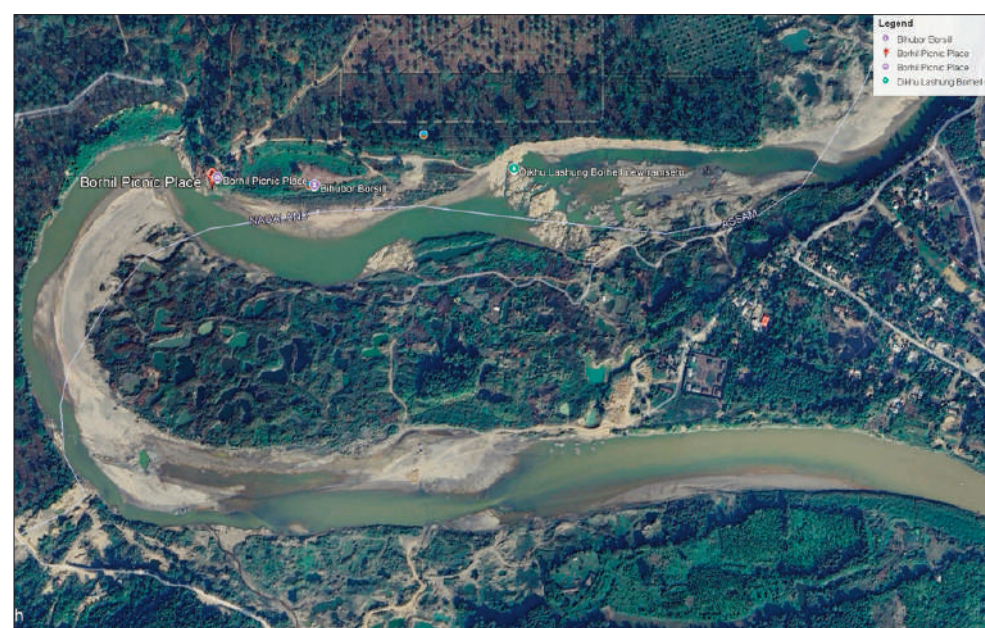
It should be remembered as a warning that landscapes matter.

If we continue to explain floods solely through rainfall statistics, we will continue investing only in disaster relief.

But if we recognise floods as symptoms of changing watershed ecology, we may finally begin addressing their root causes.

Perhaps this flood did not begin in the Brahmaputra.

Perhaps it began much earlier—in the hills.



In this photo we can easily identify the mining areas of Bihubor in Assam Nagaland Border. All the trees have cut down and mining of coal.

Rebuilding agriculture after the floods in upper Assam: Strategies for farmers in Charaideo, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The recent devastating floods in Upper Assam—particularly in the districts of Charaideo, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat—have once again exposed the fragile interface between agriculture and nature. While floods are not new to Assam, their increasing frequency and intensity, compounded by human-induced environmental changes, have made recovery more challenging for farmers. Fields remain submerged for weeks, fertile topsoil is washed away, crops are destroyed, and livelihoods are severely affected.

However, even in the face of such adversity, agriculture must continue. The resilience of Assam's farmers has always been its greatest strength. With scientific planning, timely intervention, and adaptive practices, it is possible to restore agricultural productivity and secure livelihoods. This article outlines practical, field-level strategies that farmers can adopt after floods to revive their agricultural activities.

1. Immediate Post-Flood Measures

Once floodwaters recede, the first step is to assess the condition of the fields. Farmers should:

- Drain out stagnant water as early as possible using available channels or pumps.
- Remove sand and silt deposits, especially where thick layers have accumulated.
- Collect and dispose of debris, including plant residues, plastics, and dead organisms, which may hinder cultivation.
- Allow soil to dry moderately before undertaking any field operations.

It is also important to conduct a basic soil assessment. Floodwaters often alter soil structure and fertility. In some areas, beneficial silt deposition may enhance productivity, while in others, excessive sand deposition may reduce fertility.

2. Soil Health Restoration

Floods can lead to nutrient loss, soil compaction, and microbial imbalance. Restoring soil health is crucial for successful crop production.

- Application of organic matter such as farmyard manure (FYM), compost, or green manure helps improve soil structure and fertility.
- Use of biofertilizers like Azotobacter and

phosphate-solubilizing bacteria can enhance nutrient availability.

- Lime application may be necessary in acidic soils to restore pH balance.
- Deep ploughing can help break compact layers and improve aeration.

Farmers should also consider soil testing through local agriculture offices to determine nutrient deficiencies and apply fertilizers accordingly.

3. Selection of Suitable Crops and Varieties

Crop planning after floods should be based on the remaining growing season and field conditions.

(a) Short-Duration Paddy Varieties

For areas where the main crop has been lost, farmers can opt for short-duration rice varieties such as:

- Luit
- Disang
- Kolong
- IR-64 (where suitable)

These varieties mature within 90–110 days and can help recover some yield within the same season.

(b) Alternative Crops

Where paddy cultivation is no longer feasible due to delayed conditions, farmers can shift to:

- Pulses: Black gram (Urd), green gram (Moong)
- Oilseeds: Mustard, sesame
- Vegetables: Cowpea, okra, cucumber, pumpkin, radish
- Fodder crops: Maize, sorghum, and napier grass for livestock support

These crops require shorter durations and can adapt better to post-flood conditions.

4. Nursery Raising and Replanting

For paddy cultivation, farmers may adopt community-based nursery raising in elevated areas to ensure availability of seedlings.

- Use dapog or mat nursery techniques for quick seedling production.
- Transplant seedlings once fields become workable.

• Maintain proper spacing to ensure better growth under stress conditions.

5. Integrated Nutrient Management

Balanced fertilization is key to achieving good

yields after floods.

- Apply nitrogen in split doses to reduce losses.
- Use phosphorus and potassium to strengthen root systems and improve plant resilience.
- Incorporate organic inputs along with chemical fertilizers for sustainable soil health.

6. Pest and Disease Management

Flood-affected fields are highly vulnerable to pest outbreaks and diseases due to increased humidity and weakened crops.

- Regular field monitoring is essential.
- Use biological control methods wherever possible.

• Apply recommended pesticides judiciously, following expert advice.

- Remove infected plants to prevent spread.

7. Livestock and Fisheries Integration

Floods not only affect crops but also livestock and fisheries, which are integral to the farming system in Assam.

- Ensure proper vaccination and health check-ups for livestock.
- Provide clean drinking water and dry fodder.
- In fisheries, repair damaged ponds, disinfect water, and restock with suitable fish species.

An integrated farming approach can help farmers diversify income and reduce risk.

8. Water Management and Drainage Planning

Long-term resilience depends on effective water management.

- Develop field drainage systems to prevent waterlogging.
- Construct raised bunds to protect fields from future floods.

• Adopt rainwater harvesting techniques to store excess water for later use.

Community-level planning is essential for sustainable water management.

9. Use of Government Schemes and Support

Farmers should actively avail benefits from government schemes such as:

- Crop insurance under Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)
- Input subsidies and relief packages
- Seed distribution programs
- Technical support from Agriculture and allied departments

Timely reporting of crop loss and proper documentation can help farmers access compensation and assistance.



tion and assistance.

10. Climate-Resilient Agriculture Practices

Given the increasing unpredictability of climate, farmers must adopt resilient practices:

- Use flood-tolerant crop varieties
- Practice crop diversification
- Adopt system of rice intensification (SRI) where feasible

- Promote organic and natural farming methods
- Maintain seed banks of local indigenous varieties

These practices not only reduce vulnerability but also enhance long-term sustainability.

11. Community Cooperation and Knowledge Sharing

Recovery is faster when communities work together.

- Form farmer groups or cooperatives
- Share resources such as seeds, tools, and labor
- Participate in training programs and awareness campaigns
- Collaborate with NGOs and agricultural institutions

Collective action can significantly reduce individual burdens.

12. Psychological Resilience and Motivation
Floods take a toll not just on land but also on the minds of farmers. Loss of crops and uncertainty about the future can lead to stress and despair.

- Farmers should remain hopeful and proactive
- Seek support from community and local institutions

• Focus on incremental recovery rather than immediate full restoration

Resilience is as much mental as it is physical.

Conclusion

The floods in Upper Assam have caused immense damage, but they also offer an opportunity to rethink and rebuild agriculture in a more resilient and sustainable manner. By adopting scientific practices, diversifying crops, restoring soil health, and leveraging institutional support, farmers can overcome the challenges posed by floods.

The path to recovery may not be easy, but with determination, knowledge, and collective effort, the fields of Charaideo, Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat can once again flourish. Agriculture in Assam has always thrived despite adversities, and this time too, it will rise—stronger and more resilient than before.

How student protests forced a crisis of educational governance

By: Dipak Kurmi

The resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on July 25, 2026, amid intense, nationwide student-led protests over paper leaks and structural examination irregularities, marks a pivotal inflection point in the narrative of contemporary Indian democracy. Triggered by widespread compromises in high-stakes testing, most notably the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test for Undergraduate medical admissions (NEET-UG), the minister's departure was the culmination of weeks of relentless public demonstrations centered at places like Delhi's Jantar Mantar. What began as scattered student grievances quickly escalated into a national movement that mobilized youth across state lines, forcing the Union executive to confront systemic vulnerabilities in public administration. For a country whose developmental trajectory is closely linked to the ambitions of its vast youth population, this crisis transcended mere logistical oversight. It exposed deep-seated vulnerabilities within national testing frameworks, illustrating how administrative compromises in competitive examinations can reverberate through the socio-political architecture of the nation, shaking public confidence in state institutions and transforming student angst into a formidable catalyst for democratic accountability.

The immediate trigger for this upheaval was the breach of integrity in competitive entrance examinations, exemplified by the NEET-UG paper leak controversy. However, viewing this solely as a single policy failure obscures the cumulative frustration that had been brewing among young aspirants over several years. In India's hyper-competitive educational environment, standardized entrance tests serve as the primary gateways to professional security, social mobility, and economic advancement. When questions are leaked or examination procedures are compromised, the immediate burden falls upon millions of young citizens whose mental well-being is heavily tested by years of intense, isolated preparation. Beyond the students themselves, the broader ecosystem of families, parents, and guardians endures immense hardship. Households frequently liquidate savings, take on formal or informal debt, and make substantial financial sacrifices to afford costly private coaching, study materials,

and temporary relocation. When procedural failures invalidate these collective sacrifices, the resulting disillusionment extends beyond individual academic cycles, eroding the implicit social contract between the citizen and the state, wherein personal effort and merit are promised a fair, uncorrupted evaluation.

For the ruling administration, the ministerial setback and a critical opportunity for institutional recalibration. It represents an explicit acknowledgment that public faith in the state's capacity to run fair, secure, and standardized national assessments had reached a historic low. Repeated administrative breakdowns damage institutional credibility and foster public skepticism toward centralized administrative governance. By accepting moral responsibility and stepping down, the executive attempted to signal high-level accountability, contain political fallout, and demonstrate sensitivity to public sentiment. Yet, political history consistently shows that high-profile personnel changes are fundamentally symbolic unless accompanied by comprehensive structural reform. Replacing the head of a ministry may offer brief political relief, but it leaves the underlying operational flaws, administrative inertia, and security loopholes intact. Without deep-rooted institutional overhaul, public skepticism will inevitably persist, resurfacing whenever another testing cycle encounters operational friction.

Simultaneously, the widespread mobilization around examination integrity highlights a shift in the landscape of Indian political discourse, particularly regarding the role of youth and opposition politics. For opposition parties, the student movement demonstrated that youth-centric issues, often treated as secondary during traditional electoral campaigns, possess immense potential as political mobilizers. By stepping in to support student organizations and echoing campus demands in public forums, opposition actors amplified concerns that might otherwise have been contained within localized educational or legal arenas. This dynamic illustrates how student-led movements can rapidly transition from digital campaigns and localized protests into national policy debates capable of reshaping executive decisions. Crucially, the non-partisan nature of the initial student outrage forced mainstream political entities across the spectrum to realign their priorities, underscor-

ing that youth employment, educational transparency, and meritocratic governance are central to national political stability.

Addressing this crisis requires policymakers to recognize that student demands extend far beyond political symbolism or individual resignations. The core demand of the protest movement was an uncompromised assurance that merit, rather than financial influence or fraudulent manipulation, determines access to higher education and public employment. Restoring public trust demands a complete structural redesign of India's testing infrastructure, starting with testing agencies like the National Testing Agency. Security protocols governing question paper creation, vault storage, transit routes, and center-level distribution must be reconstructed using advanced digital encryption, multi-factor biometric authentication, and strict oversight mechanisms. Furthermore, testing agencies require structural autonomy, professional management independent of bureaucratic delays, and continuous technological upgrades to preempt increasingly sophisticated cyber and physical threats. Third-party security audits, robust whistle-blower protections, and strict oversight protocols should be permanently integrated into the administration of every major national exam.

In tandem with preventive technical measures, the legal and administrative handling of examination irregularities requires immediate systemic modernization. When a paper leak or procedural breach occurs, swift, impartial investigation by independent investigative bodies must become standard protocol rather than an emergency response. Transparency demands that investigative findings, forensic reports, and administrative decisions be promptly disclosed to the public, preventing rumors and uncertainty from taking root. Equally vital is the establishment of legally binding timelines for re-examinations and administrative reviews, protecting students from prolonged legal disputes and academic disruption. While the creation of fast-track courts to prosecute exam fraud represents a constructive legal step, judicial mechanisms alone are insufficient if implemented after the damage has occurred. Legal deterrence must be coupled with preventive digital safeguards, standardized operational guidelines, and strict accountability for administrative negligence at all levels of testing.

Ultimately, the resolution of this crisis is directly linked to India's broader socio-economic trajectory and the realization of its demographic dividend. India's global competitive edge relies heavily on its young population, whose talents, skills, and ambitions are meant to drive economic growth and technological innovation over the coming decades. However, a demographic dividend can only yield positive outcomes if young citizens maintain trust in the fairness and integrity of national institutions. When systemic corruption or administrative negligence undermines meritocracy, it risks breeding widespread cynicism, economic stagnation, and human capital flight. The events surrounding the resignation of the Union Education Minister serve as a clear reminder that maintaining the integrity of competitive examinations is not merely an administrative duty, but a foundational responsibility of democratic governance. By transforming this crisis into a genuine catalyst for structural, technological, and legal reform, India can build an educational system that remains transparent, resilient, and worthy of its youth. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Beyond the streets: The questions India must confront

The most appalling aspect was the way some protesters especially girls expressed their anger, resorting to vulgar gestures and proudly uttering abusive words against the Prime Minister in the process. These could not have been the students aspiring to lead the country tomorrow

By: MR Lulu

In the age of instant opinions, the deeper causes of public unrest are often the first to be overlooked. Can an issue of huge socio-political ramifications be genuinely discussed or analyzed in its entirety over a cup of coffee while examining all the dimensions that led to it? I think it is a sheer impossibility. What we can reasonably do is view it from some selective angles and arrive at a conclusion. This is how almost all issues that have brought about significant change in society are seen and understood.

So was the case with the Jantar Mantar protests and the subsequent violence that the global media highlighted and the Indian media became hysterical about. India, as usual, was projected as the world's most populous nation, unapologetically run by right-wing authoritarianism, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi being placed at the center of the narrative. There were, obviously, hurried discourses vigorously shouting about the desperate youth of India and op-eds written with calculated self-loathing of an India that, according to them, demanded emancipation from a decade of stubborn, unmindful, and indecent administration.

Most of these views emerged as if in a flash flood, waiting to cause devastating damage to the social psyche. And the outcome was anticipated: the minister, his resignation, and the much-awaited fall of an emperor, which the narrative-makers and scriptwriters thought was destined to happen, with violence looming in the background. Half of their dreamy anticipation materialized, while the other half is still awaited.

Injustice of any kind should not be tolerated. Misappropriation of the system at any level should not go unpunished. Perpetrators, whoever they are, should be brought to book. These are genuine war cries, and the nation should stand united behind such movements. There was anger everywhere. But a peaceful protest and the subsequent violence could not legitimately be equated in terms of purpose and strategy.

The main question remains unanswered. Did India under Narendra Modi descend to this level of administrative arrogance and societal anarchy, making a movement of this kind inevitable? Or was it merely for the students, or was it driven by greater and more sinister purposes, probably funded and aided by unknown powers? Why were slogans raised

to topple this civilizational giant called India, following similar tracks and strategies applied in our neighborhood? If this has been a deliberate action plan hatched elsewhere outside this country, why does it enjoy so many supporters here? Does this inevitably tell us that we are a ship waiting to capsize?

It appeared as if the peaceful protest was an attempt to divert attention from the fabricated volcano of violence that was brewing behind it. The vitriolic language directed at the democratically elected Prime Minister of India was, in itself, revealing of the intent. It was not NEET alone. It appeared to be a calculated and well-choreographed movement created to undermine the essence of the country's patriotic spirit by exposing it to the world in the most licentious manner.

Could the students aspiring to crack one of the country's most coveted competitive examinations really descend into such street-level waywardness? However severe the grievances the protesters wanted to project, the way they behaved on the streets of India's capital could not have been the genuine conduct of students. What if students with such instincts become doctors and engineers? How credibly would they render their services to the nation?

The most appalling aspect was the way some protesters especially girls expressed their anger, resorting to vulgar gestures and proudly uttering abusive words against the Prime Minister in the process. These could not have been the students aspiring to lead the country tomorrow. Leaving aside the genuine and peaceful students, the fringe elements that hijacked the protests should not be spared.

A perception that also sounds serious is that a new generation with limited direct experience of what happened during the UPA regime is emerging against the Modi dispensation. Or should it be seen as a failure on the part of the government that it failed to read the emotions of the youngest population, born almost during the second term of the UPA regime? This is a realistic new threat. A generation that is totally unaware of the list of scams, SITs, and resignations in the UPA regime is growing up with the expectation that a reinvigorated configuration of parties, or a single party for that matter, would deliver better than the NDA under Prime Minister Modi does. Most of them may not even possess a voter ID today, but the impact of social media and other sources might have been feeding them calculated

narratives and fabricated inputs.

For those who witnessed the state-imposed Emergency in the 1970s, additional input on authoritarianism is rarely needed. Narratives glorifying the regimes of those days may not go well with such people. Similar is the situation for those who carry vivid memories of political instability from the days of V. P. Singh in 1989 to I. K. Gujral in 1998. It was a decade of crude political turmoil that brought six regime changes in succession, similar to what the erstwhile colonial power, England, recently witnessed.

From Atal Bihari Vajpayee's term in 2004 to Narendra Modi's third term, India witnessed political stability, though all governments in this period functioned under coalition arithmetic. Modi's rise with a credible majority in his first two terms forced many parties to crash-land their prospects. This is where Modi's continuous rise became objectionable to his opposition. But his electoral setback, hitting below the bottom line in his third term, has given them significant hope. More than anything, what matters to his opposition is his complete fall, the much-awaited event that they believe would help stitch their tattered coalitions together once again and return them to power. They are also aware of the humongous support he has enjoyed for more than a decade. As I said before, the continuity of his government after the UPA regime for three consecutive terms would certainly give rise to new assumptions, especially among young minds; that a regime change would do much better, probably under a different umbrella. That would become the new catchphrase.

Similar patterns have been visible in these protests and in the kinds of protests that previously rattled our social psyche. Along with building new institutions like the IITs and IIMs and creating unprecedented infrastructure, the Modi government needs to fight this battle at the level of minds and media. These protests may not directly bring about the anticipated danger of a regime change at present. But such events, at exacerbated levels, if allowed to continue, would definitely push us toward the realization of the other half of their dream.

The government should not only bring in new reforms but also execute them with accountability for the welfare of all. Most importantly, it should ensure that the electorate is educated about its policies and actions with complete clarity and understanding.



Bodoland Territorial Council Assembly passes ₹1,588.31-crore Budget for 2026-27

Budget prioritises education, healthcare, agriculture and infrastructure; expands student welfare schemes



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 30: The Bodoland Territorial Council Legislative Assembly (BTCLA) on Thursday passed the ₹1,588.31-crore Budget for the 2026-27 financial year, with a strong emphasis on education, healthcare, agriculture and infrastructure development across the Bodoland Territorial Region.

The Budget, amounting to ₹1,58,831.32 lakh, was presented by BTC Chief Hagrama Mohilary, who also holds the Finance portfolio.

Members of the ruling bench described it as a people-centric and development-oriented Budget aimed at accelerating socio-economic growth in the region.

The Budget includes ₹90,000 lakh under the Consolidated SOPD Grant to BTC, ₹20,000 lakh for infrastructure development and implementation of the Bodoland Accord, ₹20,000 lakh as special assistance for Centrally Sponsored Schemes, ₹9,757.25 lakh towards infra-

structure grants, ₹2,530.22 lakh for administrative grants, ₹2,794.44 lakh as special grants to the BTC, ₹1,000 lakh as ex gratia for martyrs and ₹1,000 lakh for the construction of a BTC Guest House in Chennai.

Addressing the House, Mohilary said the Budget accords the highest priority to the education and health sectors while also focusing on agriculture, road connectivity and public infrastructure.

He said the BTC Government remains committed to improving educational opportunities and strengthening healthcare services throughout the region.

The Chief announced that the Bodofa Super-50 programme would be expanded to accommodate more than 100 students and renamed the UN Brahma Free UPSC, APSC, NEET and JEE Coaching Programme.

He also announced a cash award of ₹3 lakh for students securing full marks in MIL subjects in the HSLC examination and ₹5 lakh each for the top ten rank holders in

the Higher Secondary examination.

During the Question Hour, Executive Member for Education Rabiram Narzary informed the House that 554 contractual Science and Mathematics teachers, appointed during the previous UPPL-led Council, would continue in service under the present BPF-led government.

He said budgetary provisions had already been made and their remuneration would be released once funds were received.

Narzary further stated that incentives of ₹5 lakh for the top ten Higher Secondary rank holders and ₹3 lakh for students securing full marks in MIL subjects in the HSLC examination would continue under the Martyr Sujit Narzary Merit Scholarship Scheme.

Replying to questions on healthcare, Executive Member for Health Services Derhasat Basumatary said the BTC currently faces a shortage of around 150 doctors and 400 paramedical personnel.

He informed the Assembly that discussions had been held with the Assam Government and 150 GNM nurses were expected to be appointed in the BTC after Independence Day.

He added that future appointments of doctors, nurses and paramedical staff would not be followed by transfers on personal requests to ensure greater stability in healthcare institutions.

Headmaster, wife assaulted in Howraghat robbery; car stolen

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, July 30: A headmaster and his wife were assaulted and robbed by a gang of armed miscreants during a late-night dacoity at their residence in the heart of Howraghat town in Karbi Anglong district.

According to police sources, the incident occurred at around 2 am on Thursday at the residence of Bidyaram Singnar, headmaster of Howraghat Government Middle English School.

A gang of four to five armed dacoits allegedly broke open the grill gate before forcing their way into the house by breaking the wooden door.

The intruders then tied up Singnar and his wife, Sabita Terangpi and assaulted them. Both sustained injuries in the attack.

After overpowering the couple, the miscreants ransacked the house and fled with gold jewellery and other valuables.

They also escaped with the family's Maruti Swift car parked on the premises.

KVK Karbi Anglong concludes month-long agriculture internship

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 30: The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Karbi Anglong, on Thursday concluded a 30-day agriculture internship programme aimed at providing practical exposure to undergraduate students in agriculture and allied sectors.

The training programme, which began on July 1, was attended by five students from the Departments of Zoology and Botany of Pranab Jubilee College, Bokajan.

The internship commenced with an orientation session conducted by Dr Monuj Kumar Doley, Senior Scientist and Head of KVK Karbi Anglong, who introduced the participants to the mandate and activities of the KVK while outlining the objectives of the training.

During the month-long programme, the students received classroom instruction and practical training from a multidisciplinary team comprising Dr Monuj Kumar Doley, Dr Neethi Baruah, Scientist (Plant Pathology), AAU-ZRS, Diphu, Shourav Dutta, Subject Matter Specialist (Horticulture), Dr Lohit Katak, Subject Matter Specialist (Plant Protection), Prakshiya Boruah, Subject Matter Specialist (Agronomy), Priyada Nuniisa, Subject Matter Specialist (Agricultural Extension), Rasinja Englempi, Subject Matter Specialist (Soil Science) and

Monuj Pegu, Farm Manager.

The curriculum covered a wide range of topics, including Assam's agro-climatic zones, field and horticultural crops, cropping systems, soil health management, natural and organic farming, vermicomposting, integrated nutrient and pest management, mushroom cultivation, integrated farming systems, farm mechanisation, agribusiness management, information and communication technology, agro-ecotourism and major government flagship programmes.

To complement classroom learning, the interns participated in hands-on demonstrations on paddy transplantation, millet seedbed preparation, propagation techniques for horticultural crops, vermicomposting unit establishment and preparation of bio-inputs under natural farming.

As part of the concluding assessment, the students delivered presentations on selected agricultural topics and will submit comprehensive reports documenting their learning during the internship.

KVK officials expressed confidence that the programme would strengthen the participants' theoretical understanding and practical skills, providing a solid foundation for future academic pursuits and careers in agriculture and allied sectors.



Flood relief distribution at Dorikapur, Sivasagar district to provide essential supplies to families affected floods affected area. HT Photo

Lakshman Prasad Acharya visits relief camps, distributes aid and calls for sustained rehabilitation efforts

Governor surveys flood-hit Sivasagar, Jorhat; reviews relief operations

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Thursday conducted an aerial survey of the flood-affected areas of Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat districts to assess the extent of damage caused by the current wave of floods and review the ongoing relief and rescue operations.

During his visit to Sivasagar district, the Governor visited the Laxmi Nagar Relief Camp and the Sivasagar High School Relief Camp, where he interacted with displaced families and reviewed the facilities being provided at the camps.

He also distributed relief materials among the inmates and enquired about the availability of food, drinking water, healthcare, sanitation and other essential services.

Interacting with the affected families, Acharya assured them that the government stood firmly by them and that every effort was being made to provide timely relief and restore normalcy.

He also conveyed that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah were closely monitoring the flood situation in Assam and extending all necessary support to the state.

The Governor directed the district administration to pay special attention to the needs of children, women, lactating mothers, senior citizens and students staying in relief camps, ensuring that no affected family was deprived of essential assistance.

He also stressed that relief operations should continue with compassion and efficiency until normalcy



is restored.

Acharya appreciated the efforts of the district administration, disaster response teams, security forces, healthcare workers, volunteers and local communities for their dedicated service during the crisis.

He called for coordinated efforts among all stakeholders to ensure that relief and rehabilitation measures reach every flood-affected person promptly and effectively.

Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Keshab Mahanta, Guardian Minister of Sivasagar Bimal Bora, senior government officials and members of the district administration accompanied the Governor during the visit.

AABYSF distributes relief materials to flood-hit families in Demow

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, July 30: The All Assam Bengali Youth Students Federation (AABYSF) has continued its flood relief campaign in Upper Assam, distributing essential relief materials to flood-affected families in the Lunpuria area of Demow in Sivasagar district.

A team led by AABYSF Central Committee President Bijoy Chanda visited the affected areas recently and distributed relief supplies among families impacted by the recent floods.

According to the organisation, it has been carrying out relief distribution for the past seven days in various flood-hit areas of Upper Assam, where thousands of people have been affected by the floods in Sivasagar, Charaideo and Jorhat districts.

The relief distribution programme was attended by Ashok Nath, Assistant Secretary of the AABYSF Central Committee, Suvradeep Nandy, President of the AABYSF Tinsukia District Committee and Rabindra Ghosh, President of the AABYSF Sivasagar District Committee.

The organisation said the initiative was aimed at extending humanitarian assistance to families affected by the floods and would continue supporting those in need as the relief efforts progress.

NFR cancels, diverts several trains as floods disrupt services at Simaluguri

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced the cancellation, partial cancellation and diversion of several train services following severe flooding caused by incessant rainfall at Simaluguri and adjoining areas in Sivasagar district under the Tinsukia Division.

The railway said the revised arrangements have been made to ensure passenger safety and facilitate restoration work in the affected section.

Two Rajdhani Express services—Train Nos 12423 (Dibrugarh–New Delhi) and 20503 (Dibrugarh–New Delhi)—commencing their journeys on August 1 and 2 will be diverted via Dibrugarh–North Lakhimpur–Ranapara North–Rangiya–Guwahati–New Bongaigaon.

Their return services, Train Nos 12424 (New Delhi–Dibrugarh) and 20504 (New Delhi–Dibrugarh), commencing on July 31 and August 1, will operate on the same diverted route. Several long-distance trains, including the Avadh Assam Express, Kamrup Express, Vivek Express and Dibrugarh–Lokmanya Tilak Terminus Express, have also been diverted via North Lakhimpur, Ranapara North and Rangiya in both directions on specified dates between July 29 and August 2.

The Nagaland Express has been partially cancelled. Train No 15669 (Guwahati–Dibrugarh) will be short-terminated at Mariani on July 31 and August 1, while Train No 15670 (Dibrugarh–Guwahati) will originate from Mariani on August 1 and 2, remaining cancelled between Dibrugarh and Mariani.

NFR has also cancelled several passenger, DEMU and intercity services, including the Jorhat Town–Tinsukia Passenger, Tinsukia–Lumding DEMU, Guwahati–Ledo Intercity Express, Rangiya–New Tinsukia Intercity Express, Rangiya–Ledo Intercity Express, Simaluguri–Dibrugarh Passenger and the Silchar–New Tinsukia Passenger on various dates between July 31 and August 2.

Railway officials said engineering teams, under the supervision of senior officers, are working round the clock on a war footing to restore normal train operations in the flood-affected section at the earliest while ensuring the safety of passengers.

Governor urges Chancellor's nominees to uphold transparency in universities

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 30: Governor and Chancellor of State Universities Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Thursday held a virtual interaction with the Chancellor's nominees to the statutory authorities and bodies of Gauhati University, Majuli University of Culture and Assam Agricultural University, urging them to strengthen transparency, accountability and academic excellence in higher educational institutions.

Addressing the nominees from Lok Bhavan, the Governor said their appointments reflected their competence, integrity and impartiality and called upon them to play an active role in ensuring good governance in the universities.

Stating that universities are centres of learning, research, innovation and character building, Acharya urged the nominees to participate actively in meetings of the statutory bodies and contribute constructively to policy formulation and institutional decision-making.

He emphasised that all decisions should be guided by the provisions of the respective University Acts, Statutes, Ordinances and Regulations, while adhering to the guidelines of the Government of Assam, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and other competent authorities.

The Governor advised the nominees to study agenda papers thoroughly before every meeting to identify procedural or administrative shortcomings at an early stage and offer objective, fact-based suggestions in the larger interest of the institutions.

He also stressed the need to monitor the implementation of decisions taken by university authorities and ensure the timely execution of pending matters.

Programme focuses on value addition, bamboo shoot processing and global market opportunities

KVK Karbi Anglong holds training on export-oriented ginger cultivation

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 30: The Krishi Vigyan Kendra (KVK), Karbi Anglong, on Thursday organised a one-day training programme on export-oriented ginger production and bamboo shoot processing at its training hall in Amlokhi to promote commercial agriculture and value-added agro-processing.

The programme was jointly sponsored by the Assam State Cooperative Federation (ASCOF) in collaboration with the National Cooperative Export Limited (NCEL) and KVK Karbi Anglong.

It aimed to equip farmers, entrepreneurs and cooperative members with modern production, processing and marketing techniques to enable them to access domestic and international markets.

The programme began with a



welcome address by Dr Monuj Kumar Doley, Senior Scientist and Head of KVK Karbi Anglong.

He highlighted the district's natural potential for ginger and bamboo shoot cultivation and urged farmers to focus on quality produc-

tion, post-harvest management and cooperative marketing to enhance export opportunities.

Deputy Commissioner of Karbi Anglong Aranyak Saikia, IAS, who attended the programme as the chief guest, appre-

ciated the collaborative initiative and encouraged farmers to adopt modern technologies and cooperative trade networks to improve farm incomes and strengthen rural livelihoods.

Technical sessions were conducted by experts Ayushi Nayak, Richa Sharma, Ankita Sen and Hunmili Terangpi, who trained participants on agronomic best practices, processing and value addition, packaging standards and export infrastructure.

The programme concluded with an interactive session during which experts responded to participants' queries on market linkages, logistics and processing equipment.

A total of 105 participants completed the training programme and were presented with certificates of participation.

Golaghat marks World Hepatitis Day with awareness rally

HT Correspondent

GOLAGHAT, July 30: The District Health Society, Golaghat, observed World Hepatitis Day by organising an awareness rally to sensitise the public on the prevention, early detection and treatment of viral hepatitis.

The rally, held recently, was flagged off by Dr Ranjit Hazarika, District Nodal Officer of the National Viral Hepatitis Control Programme (NVHCP).

Addressing participants, Dr Hazarika highlighted the importance of creating awareness about the causes of hepatitis and emphasised the need for timely testing, vaccination and the adoption of preventive measures to protect against Hepatitis A, B, C, D and E.

The rally passed through key areas of Golaghat town, with participants distributing awareness leaflets to the public along the route.

Sikkim Lok Sabha MP Indra Hang Subba meets PM in New Delhi



GANGTOK, July 30: Sikkim's Lok Sabha MP Indra Hang Subba on Thursday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Parliament House and submitted a memorandum seeking his early intervention on a series of long-pending developmental, strategic and constitutional issues concerning the Himalayan state.

A statement from the ruling Sikkim Krantikari Morcha (SKM) MP's office said that during the meeting, Subba conveyed the greetings

and gratitude of the people of Sikkim and Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang to the Prime Minister for the Centre's continued support to the Himalayan state. The Prime Minister also enquired about the recent tunnel mishap in Sikkim. The MP briefed him on the state government's response to the tragedy and thanked the Prime Minister for his concern and support for the affected families, the statement said.

It said that the memorandum urged the Cen-

tre to expedite the inclusion of Sikkim's 12 left-out communities in the Scheduled Tribe list and revisit the Representation of the People Act, 1950, to facilitate reservation of Assembly seats for the Limboo and Tamang Scheduled Tribes.

Among the other major demands raised were facilitating the visit of His Holiness the 17th Karmapa to Sikkim, construction of a Greenfield Highway parallel to NH-10 to provide all-weather connectivity, development of a strategic road along the India-Nepal border with connectivity to Border Outposts, restoration of scheduled commercial flights at Pakyong Airport, establishment of an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) or an extension campus in the state, and setting up of a National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) to strengthen Sikkim's handloom and textile sector.

The statement said, "The memorandum reflects the long-standing aspirations of the people of Sikkim. Subba expressed confidence that under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, these important issues will receive due consideration and significantly contribute to the state's inclusive, strategic and sustainable development." (PTI)

Human trafficking in Nagaland taking new forms linked to cybercrime, money laundering: Official

KOHIMA, July 30: Nagaland continues to be a key point of origin, transit and destination for human trafficking, a senior state government official said on Thursday, warning that the crime is increasingly taking new forms linked to cybercrime, financial fraud and forced labour.

Secretary and administrative head of the social welfare department, Limawabang Jamir, also said Mission Shakti centres across the state handled 178 cases of gender-based violence (GBV) and related distress during the first quarter of the current financial year (April-June 2026).

Addressing a training programme for Mission Shakti functionaries and the observance of the World Day Against Trafficking in Persons at the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) here, Jamir said trafficking in Nagaland has historically manifested as child domestic labour, commercial sex trafficking and illegal child adop-



tions under the guise of free education. He warned that trafficking is taking new forms linked to cybercrime, financial fraud, money laundering, commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour, and urged stakeholders to intensify awareness efforts to protect vulnerable women and children.

Highlighting the work of Mission Shakti, Jamir said One Stop Centres (OSCs) attended to 125

cases of gender-based violence, while Women Helpline-181 handled 53 cases involving gender-based violence and information-seeking calls between April and June this year.

He added that Shakti Sadans, operating in six districts, continue to provide shelter to survivors of domestic violence, POCSO cases and other vulnerable women in distress. (PTI)

Arunachal CM hails passage of bill to amend anti-paper leak law with stricter punishment



ITANAGAR, July 30: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu welcomed the passage of a bill to amend the anti-paper leak law with stricter punishment in the Lok Sabha, describing it as a "strong step" toward safeguarding the aspirations of young Indians.

The Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 was introduced in the House by Union minister Jitendra Singh on July 27, days after large-scale student protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party forced Dharmendra Pradhan to resign as the education minister.

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday approved the bill with the government asserting that the measure

was taken as it was "open to learning from experiences".

In a social media post, the chief minister asserted that the legislation reflects the Centre's firm resolve to take the strictest action against those involved in paper leaks, organised cheating, and examination fraud.

"The passage of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026 marks a strong step towards protecting the aspirations of crores of young Indians," Khandu wrote in a X post on Wednesday.

Highlighting the government's commitment, he said, "Under the leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi Ji, the

government has made its resolve clear. Those who compromise the future of our youth through paper leaks, organised cheating, and examination fraud will face the strictest action."

The chief minister emphasised that the amended law reinforces trust in a transparent and merit-based examination framework by enhancing punishments, strengthening deterrence, introducing fast-track mechanisms, and ensuring time-bound justice.

Termining it a decisive move towards building a 'Viksit Bharat', Khandu added that the law establishes a system 'where hard work, dedication, and integrity determine success.'

On Monday, Singh introduced the bill to amend the anti-paper leaks law with stricter punishment of up to 10 years in jail and a ₹ 50 lakh fine amid protests and sloganeering by the Opposition demanding a response from the government over the police crackdown on students during the CJP-led July 20 protest march to Parliament. (PTI)

2 women arrested for 'transporting' explosives, one militant held in Manipur

IMPHAL, July 30: Security forces arrested two women in Manipur's Imphal East district for their alleged involvement in the sale of arms and explosives, police said on Thursday.

A woman cadre of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Nongdrenkhomba) was also apprehended from Khurai Heikhrumakhong area under the Porompat Police Station limits in the district on Wednesday, a police statement said. Two women were arrested from Shanta Bazar under the Andro Police Station on the same day, it said.

They were accused of being involved in the "illegal procurement, transportation and sale of arms and explosives", the statement said.

A hand grenade the two had allegedly brought to Shanta Bazar to sell to a prospective buyer was seized from their possession, an officer said.

Security forces also arrested a member of a youth organisation from his residence at Leimnapokam in Bishnupur district for allegedly extorting money from people, the police said.

Three receipt books and documents containing the details of employees of the health department were seized from his possession, the statement added. Security forces have been conducting search operations and area domination exercises in the fringe and vulnerable localities across all districts of Manipur since ethnic violence broke out three years ago.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

Arunachal records sharp gains in maternal, child health: Khandu

ITANAGAR, July 30: Arunachal Pradesh has registered significant improvements in maternal and child healthcare over the past decade, with institutional deliveries nearing 90 per cent, infant and child mortality declining substantially, and immunisation coverage more than doubling, Chief Minister Pema Khandu said on Thursday.

The chief minister highlighted the state's health sector achievements in the past ten years of his government, through a social media post. Sharing a video, Khandu said the state's healthcare transformation was bringing tangible changes by ensuring safer motherhood, healthier newborns and a better future for children.

"The real story of any change is not in hospitals, but in healthy lives," the chief minister said in a post on X, describing improvements in maternal and child health indicators as one of the most meaningful outcomes of the government's efforts to strengthen healthcare delivery. According to the figures shared by Khandu, institutional deliveries in Arunachal Pradesh have increased from 52.5 per cent in 2016 to 89.2 per cent now, reflecting a dramatic rise in safe childbirths at health facilities.

He said infant mortality has witnessed a sharp decline, with deaths among infants reducing from 22.9 to 12.9 per 1,000 live births. Neonatal mortality has also dropped from 11.8 to 7.7, while the under-five mor-

tality rate has fallen from 32.9 to 18.8, indicating sustained improvements in child survival. Khandu further said antenatal care coverage has improved considerably, with the proportion of pregnant women receiving antenatal check-ups increasing from 36.9 per cent to 64.8 per cent.

The state has also made remarkable progress in immunisation, with complete vaccination coverage among children rising from 38.2 per cent to 93 per cent, the video said.

Highlighting another key social indicator, the chief minister said Arunachal's sex ratio has improved from 958 females per 1,000 males to 1,018 females per 1,000 males.

"Because when the mother is safe, when the child is healthy, when every life gets a better start, only then the society changes," he said.

The chief minister's remarks came amid the state government's continued push to strengthen healthcare infrastructure and expand access to quality medical services.

Earlier this month, the state cabinet approved the CM CARES (Chief Minister's Comprehensive Action for Resilient, Equitable & Healthy State) initiative as an umbrella programme to improve affordable healthcare, strengthen existing flagship schemes, intensify tuberculosis elimination efforts and enhance financial protection for patients. (PTI)

Aadhaar enrolment in Manipur has reached 87-88 pc: Officials

IMPHAL, July 30: Aadhaar enrolment in Manipur has reached around 87-88 per cent, though its reach among children in the 0-5 years age group remains comparatively low, a senior state government official said on Thursday.

The observation was made by commissioner-cum-secretary (Home) N Ashok Kumar while inaugurating the state's first Aadhaar Seva Kendra (ASK) here.

Describing the facility as a significant milestone, Kumar thanked the UIDAI Regional Office, Guwahati, for establishing the Aadhaar Seva Kendra in Imphal.

He said the home department had been pursuing the proposal for the past few years and expressed satisfaction that the initiative had finally materialised.

Highlighting the importance of Aadhaar as a key identity document, Kumar said the state government, in coordination with the Social Welfare Department, Health Department, hospitals and the UIDAI, was working to improve enrolment among children in the 0-5 years age group. (PTI)

Arunachal minister inaugurates Pangsau Pass Border Haat



ITANAGAR, July 30: Arunachal Pradesh Trade and Commerce Minister Nyato Dukam on Thursday inaugurated the resumption of Border Haat at Pangsau Pass along the India-Myanmar border in Changlang district.

The Border Haat at Pangsau Pass at Nampong resumed operations after a six-year hiatus. Addressing the gathering, Dukam emphasised the vital role of commercial activities in driving local economic development and urged stakeholders, including local traders and administrative bodies, to actively engage in transforming cross-border trade into a vibrant, sustainable economic component, an official release said.

Highlighting the historic and strategic importance of Pangsau Pass, the

minister underscored the state government's commitment to strengthening local infrastructure, revealing plans for an upcoming Land Port at Nampong to further boost regional trade and connectivity. The event witnessed participation of Nampong MLA Laisam Simai, Advisor to Trade & Commerce Minister Dr Mohesh Chai, Trade & Commerce Secretary Bullo Mamu, Trade & Commerce Director Toko Togur, and 21 Assam Rifles Commandant Col Amit Mane, along with zilla parishad members.

Reflecting shared bilateral economic cooperation, a delegation from Myanmar was also present during the ceremony. The visiting team included the Town Chairman of Pangsau Town, rep-

resentatives from the Myanmar Army and Police, and leadership from the United Tangshang Committee and the local Bazaar Committee.

The resumption of operations at the border haat is expected to significantly augment local livelihoods, foster cultural ties, and lay the groundwork for expanded commercial exchanges across the international frontier, the report added. The iconic Border Haat at Pangsau Pass along the India-Myanmar border resumed operations on July 20, 2026, after a six-year hiatus.

The market, located at the historic pass in Changlang district, will function on designated dates every month, specifically on the 10th, 20th, and 30th.

The reopening is anticipated to bolster traditional trade relations between India and Myanmar, streamline regulated border commerce, and generate fresh economic opportunities for local border communities.

Prior to its closure, the Pangsau Pass Border Haat served as a vibrant trading point, allowing local villagers from both sides of the international border to exchange locally produced agricultural goods, traditional handicrafts, and daily essentials under barrier and regulated trade protocols. (PTI)

NCW set target of eliminating child marriage across country by 2030: Rahatkar

AGARTALA, July 30: National Commission for Women (NCW) chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar on Thursday said the commission has set a target of eliminating child marriage across the country by 2030, with an interim goal of reducing the incidence by 10 per cent within this year.

Addressing a press conference here, Rahatkar said, "We have set a target to reduce child marriage to zero by 2030 across the nation and achieve a 10 per cent reduction by 2026 to meet the main target," she said.

The national average of child marriage stands at 23.3 per cent, while West Bengal, Bihar and Tripura have among the highest rates, with over 40 per cent of women married before the age of 18, officials said.

Rahatkar, who arrived here on Tuesday, held a series of meetings and awareness programmes on girl trafficking, child marriage, the POSCO Act and women's welfare.

"Today, we had a constructive discussion with Chief Secretary JK Sinha and Special Secretary of Social Education and Social Welfare Tapan Kumar Das at the state guest house on the initiatives taken by the state government for women's welfare," she said.

Describing Tripura as a border state vulnerable to girl trafficking, Rahatkar said she also met Border Security Force (BSF) officials to discuss measures for sensitising personnel to prevent trafficking across the international border.



She described child marriage as a serious concern and said government agencies were working relentlessly to address the issue in the state. The NCW chairperson also lauded the work of women-led self-help groups (SHGs) in the state.

"I met Lakhpati Didis and members of SHGs in Udaipur in Gomati district on Wednesday and was impressed by their growing sustainable income generation," she said.

On Tuesday, Rahatkar met Chief Minister Manik Saha and discussed issues related to women's empowerment, welfare and safety. (PTI)

Nagaland Govt calls for close coordination between Govt depts and civil society



HT Correspondent
DIMAPUR, July 30: Nagaland Governor Nand Kishore Yadav on Thursday called for close coordination between the government departments and the civil society to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.

Interacting with civil society organisations, government departments and beneficiaries of various government schemes at the Chumukedima DC's office complex during his visit to the district, Yadav highlighted the vital role of the civil society in governance, community development and maintaining social harmony, stating that development becomes more

meaningful and sustainable when the government institutions and the civil society work together with a shared sense of responsibility.

"Development should be measured not merely by the number of schemes implemented but by their positive impact on the lives of the people," he stated. He urged all departments to ensure that government programmes are implemented efficiently, transparently and reach every deserving beneficiary.

He called upon the government departments to work with a clear vision, maintain close coordination and remain responsive to public needs. Yadav also appealed to the civil society leaders to continue promoting peace, unity and constructive public participation.

Expressing confidence in the district's future, he said that with commitment, integrity and teamwork, Chumukedima would continue to grow as a vibrant district and truly live up to its identity as the "Land of Opportunities".

Two brothers killed, mother injured in landslide in Nagaland

KOHIMA, July 30: Two teenage brothers were killed and their mother was injured in a landslide in Nagaland's Mokokchung district, police said on Thursday.

The incident occurred at Upper Penli Ward early on Wednesday when a rain-triggered landslide struck their residence, a senior officer said. The bodies of the teenagers were retrieved from the debris by a joint team involving the personnel of SDRF, district administration, police, Penli Ward Colony Council and local volunteers, he said.

Their mother was rescued after being trapped in mud up to her waist, the officer said. The landslide was triggered by overnight rain, causing a retaining wall above the rented house to collapse, he said.

The deceased were identified as Muwalong Sangtam (19) and Thridiba Sangtam (16), both students of Queen Mary Higher Secondary School (GMHSS), Mokokchung, he said. (PTI)

21st NCORD meeting charts stronger roadmap for drug-free Lower Subansiri

HT Correspondent

ZIRO, July 30: The 21st District Level Narco Coordination Centre (NCORD) Committee meeting was held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hall, District Secretariat, Ziro. The meeting was chaired by Assistant Commissioner Radhe Tatung, along with Zilla Parishad Chairperson (ZPC) Hibu Dumi and Deputy Superintendent of Police (DySP) Lod Tari.

The meeting brought together key administrative officials, law enforcement personnel, and representatives from various departments to review recommendations from previous meetings and formulate an actionable strategy to combat drug abuse in the district.

A major focus of the meeting was on strengthening preventive measures to protect young people from substance abuse. The committee recommended providing sports equipment through Zilla



members to encourage youth participation in constructive activities. It also called for mandatory involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and community-based organisations (CBOs) to strengthen community-level efforts against drug abuse.

The committee further highlighted the implementation of the NavChetna awareness module in

local schools to educate students at an early age about the harmful effects of drug abuse.

Financial support for anti-drug initiatives also featured prominently during the discussions. District Medical Officer (DMO) Millo Kunya stressed the need to provide structured financial assistance to grassroots NGOs working in the field. Supporting the proposal, ZPC Hibu Dumi noted that per-

sonal financial contributions have limitations and urged every government department to allocate funds for anti-drug programmes. She also advocated a zone-wise implementation strategy, focusing resources and interventions on one Zilla area at a time to maximise impact.

Addressing the issue from both enforcement and rehabilitation perspectives, Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) Takhe Rinyo emphasised that counselling should not be limited to drug users and victims but should also include drug peddlers to help break the supply chain and reduce repeat offences. The meeting concluded with a collective commitment from all participating departments to conduct weekly awareness campaigns, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and work together towards achieving a drug-free Lower Subansiri district.

'Rahul Gandhi misleading students over NEET issue', says Tarun Chugh

NEW DELHI, July 30: BJP national general secretary Tarun Chugh on Thursday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of trying to mislead students over the NEET issue instead of addressing their concerns, and alleged that he is a "habitual offender" in making anti-India and anti-Sanatana remarks.

The remarks came a day after Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi alleged that Union Home Minister Amit Shah was behind police excesses and "firing" against student protesters, triggering a massive uproar inside and outside Parliament.

"Rahul Gandhi has no concern for the future of students. He made a petty attempt to derive political mileage from their future. He did not speak a single word on addressing the real problems faced by students. Instead, he only tried to spread confusion and complicate the issue," Chugh told reporters in Parliament House complex.

Chugh also alleged that Gandhi



repeatedly indulges in anti-India and anti-Sanatana propaganda, both in the country and abroad, and said the Congress leader should apologise to the nation.

"Rahul Gandhi is a habitual offender who indulges in anti-India propaganda and speaks against Sanatana, whether on Indian soil or abroad. He repeatedly uses objectionable language. He keeps saying he will not apologise, but he has apologised several times in courts and will have to apologise again."

"By becoming part of a foreign toolkit, he abuses Sanatana, Hindu

Dharma, India and its institutions. It has become his habit. He should apologise to the country," the senior BJP leader said.

Welcoming the Uttar Pradesh government's decision to rename Bhadohi as Sant Ravidas Nagar in honour of Guru Ravidas, Chugh said the move is a fitting tribute to the Bhakti saint.

"Guru Ravidas was a great saint of the Bhakti movement who opposed religious conversion and the caste system, and advocated a classless and harmonious society. His followers are spread across the world and millions regard him as

their ideal.

"Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's decision to rename Bhadohi on Guru Ravidas, establish an educational institution in his name in every district and name roads after him is a welcome step," he said.

Targeting the Samajwadi Party, Chugh alleged the Akhilesh Yadav government had earlier removed the name of Sant Ravidas Nagar and insulted the saint and his followers.

"When the place had already been named after Guru Ravidas earlier, why did the Akhilesh Yadav government erase the name? It insulted the Ravidas community across the world and disrespected one of the greatest revolutionary saints of the Bhakti movement," he alleged.

On Wednesday, in Varanasi, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath announced the renaming proposal during the launch of the BJP's Samasta Sankalp Abhiyan, a Dalit outreach initiative ahead of the 2027 state election. (PTI)

SP, Cong glorified invaders instead of Indian heroes, created identity crisis: Adityanath

GHAZIPUR (UP), July 30: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday accused the Samajwadi Party (SP) and the Congress of creating an "identity crisis" by glorifying foreign invaders instead of honouring Indian heroes. Adityanath, addressing a programme in Ghazipur, asserted that the BJP-led NDA government has restored the district's pride through development and recognition of historical figures.

The programme was held after the chief minister inaugurated and laid the foundation stones of 268 development projects worth Rs 692 crore and distributed sanction letters and certificates to beneficiaries of various welfare schemes.

Adityanath said, "Those who created this identity crisis are the same people who, instead of honouring India's national heroes, glorified foreign invaders."

The BJP government has honoured Maharaja Suheldev, alleging that the SP and the Congress never allowed programmes in his memory and instead promoted fairs associated with Salar Masud, he said.



Adityanath said the BJP government has installed a grand statue of Maharaja Suheldev at Chittaura in Bahraich, built a medical college in his name, established a university named after him in Azamgarh, launched the Suheldev Superfast Express between Ghazipur and Anand Vihar, besides issuing a commemorative postage stamp in his name.

"A country and a society that honour their national heroes move forward. Those who insult their national heroes and honour invaders have no future," he said.

Targeting the previous SP gov-

ernment, Adityanath alleged it had changed the names of institutions named after Maharaja Suheldev, Lokmata Ahilyabai Holkar and Sant Ravidas, saying such decisions reflected disrespect towards great personalities.

The chief minister also claimed Uttar Pradesh has undergone a transformation under the BJP government.

"Today Uttar Pradesh has changed... there is no identity crisis anymore," he said, adding that people from Uttar Pradesh now command respect across the country. (PTI)

Punjab: Opposition turns up heat on 'paper leak'; AAP govt trashes charge

CHANDIGARH, July 30: The opposition parties have been turning up the heat on the AAP government in Punjab, alleging multiple examination paper leaks in the past four-and-a-half years following the detection of a cheating racket in the pharmacy officers' recruitment examination recently.

Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann, however, has stood his ground, claiming that not even a single exam paper was leaked in the state during the AAP's tenure.

The AAP also claimed that the Congress, SAD and BJP are trying to create a fake narrative to mislead people as they do not have any issue against the Mann government.

The opposition parties are cornering the Mann government in poll-bound Punjab ever since police on July 19 unearthed a cheating racket in the pharmacy officers' recruitment exam, pressing for the resignation of Education Minister Harjot Singh Bains and Health Minister Balbir Singh.

On July 19, Punjab Police dismantled a sophisticated, inter-state cheating racket operating during the pharmacy officers' examination and arrested 10 candidates

along with an 11-member gang.

Police detected the use of pen cameras and real-time dictation during the exam. The investigation revealed that the cheating racket charged desperate candidates sums ranging between Rs 3.5 lakh and Rs 13 lakh to guarantee passing marks.

Nearly 7,000 candidates appeared for 454 pharmacy officer posts across 25 examination centres in Faridkot, Kotkapura and Ferozepur. The examination was conducted by Baba Farid University of Health Sciences on behalf of the Health and Family Welfare Department.

The Punjab and Haryana High Court has issued a notice of motion on a plea seeking cancellation of the exam and also directed that the further selection process would be subject to the outcome of the present petition. Following the detection of the cheating racket, the opposition parties alleged that at least six paper leaks had taken place under the AAP in Punjab.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) leader Bikram Singh Majithia has cited the cancellation of the Class 12 English board exam conducted by the state in February 2023, along with the cancellation of the

Punjab State Teachers Eligibility Test in March 2023. Majithia also criticised the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) for adopting "double standards" on the issue of paper leak, stating that if it does not hold the Punjab government accountable for the "paper leak", it will mean it has an understanding with the AAP.

Punjab BJP general secretary Anil Sarin has accused the AAP government of deceiving the people by falsely claiming transparency and honesty, while repeatedly "failing to protect the integrity of government recruitment exams".

Pointing towards the cheating in the pharmacy exam, Sarin claimed it was not an isolated case but part of a systematic failure. He also alleged that the question paper was scanned inside an examination centre, transmitted outside, solved, and the answers relayed back to the candidates through Bluetooth devices, exposing serious lapses in security.

Following a sustained campaign against the state government, Mann on July 28 said that not even a single exam paper was leaked in the state in the past four-and-a-half years. (PTI)

Gehlot alleges scam in plantation drive in Rajasthan under BJP

JAIPUR, July 30: Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Thursday alleged a scam in the state government's plantation drive and demanded an inquiry into the matter. He also claimed that the BJP government has failed to carry forward the legacy of the previous Congress regime in increasing the state's green cover.

Citing figures presented in the Lok Sabha, Gehlot said the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) 2023 of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change showed that Rajasthan's forest and tree cover increased from 26,995 sq km to 27,389 sq km during the previous Congress government's tenure, registering a rise of 394.46 sq km.

The veteran Congress leader also claimed that Rajasthan ranked fourth in the country in terms of increase in forest and tree cover during the period.

The achievement was significant for a state where nearly two-thirds of the geographical area is covered by the Thar desert, Gehlot said.

He also claimed that Rajasthan accounted for more than 27 per cent of the country's total increase of 1,446 sq km in green cover during the period.

Madhya Pradesh, which is ruled by the BJP, recorded the country's largest decline in green cover, while Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab together could not match Rajasthan's increase, the former chief minister claimed. (PTI)

Suvendu second least wealthy among chief ministers: ADR

KOLKATA, July 30: West Bengal Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari is the second least wealthy among the country's chief ministers, with declared assets of ₹ 85.87 lakh, according to an analysis of election affidavits released by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and National Election Watch.

The analysis, based on self-sworn election affidavits of 31 chief ministers of states and Union territories, found that Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah is the least wealthy, with declared assets of ₹ 55.24 lakh.

ADR is a non-governmental organisation that works in electoral and political reforms.

Adhikari ranked second with assets worth ₹ 85.87 lakh, followed by Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma, whose declared assets exceed ₹ 1.03 crore.

According to the report, Adhikari's declared wealth comprises movable assets valued at ₹ 24.57 lakh and immovable assets worth ₹ 61.30 lakh.

At the other end of the spectrum, Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar topped the list with declared assets of over ₹ 1,413 crore. The report said four of the 31 chief ministers analysed, or 13 percent, have declared assets exceeding ₹ 1 billion.

The ADR analysis also found that the average assets declared by the 31 chief ministers stand at ₹ 118.07 crore. (PTI)

VACB finds no evidence against CM Satheesan in Punarjani-FCRA case: Chennithala

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 30: Kerala Home Minister Ramesh Chennithala on Thursday said a Vigilance probe has found no evidence against Chief Minister V D Satheesan in connection with allegations linked to the Punarjani flood rehabilitation project and decided to close all proceedings in the case.

Addressing reporters here, Chennithala said the probe found no material to link Satheesan with the alleged violations of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) or any other irregularity in the project, which was launched for the rehabilitation of victims of the 2018 floods in his Paravur constituency.

"The investigation has found that Satheesan was not directly involved in any financial transaction, nor did the probe find any evidence against him," he said.

Dismissing allegations that the government had given Satheesan a clean chit after the change of regime, Chennithala said the decision was based entirely on the findings of the vigilance investigation and on the basis of the report submitted by the Director of the Vigilance and Anti-Corruption Bureau (VACB).

The minister said the investigation established that Satheesan, who was the Leader of the Opposition when the case was reg-

istered, had no connection with any financial transaction related to the project and that all the transactions were carried out through the accounts of the Manappattu Foundation.

"The investigation found that Satheesan had not committed any offence under the relevant provisions of the Prevention of Corruption Act. No evidence of any criminal offence or wrongdoing was detected," he said. Accordingly, the VACB Director recommended that no further proceedings be required, and the government has accepted that recommendation, the home minister explained.

"There is clear evidence that he was not involved in even a single financial transaction. I have personally examined the entire case file," Chennithala added.

He also alleged that the previous LDF government had recommended a CBI probe into the matter purely for political reasons. In January this year, under the Pinarayi Vijayan-led LDF government, the VACB had recommended a CBI probe against Satheesan, alleging irregularities in raising foreign funds for the Punarjani rehabilitation project.

The vigilance report had alleged FCRA violations, and claimed that Satheesan travelled abroad after obtaining permission

from the Centre for a private visit and collected funds overseas, which were later transferred to accounts in Kerala.

The report had recommended a CBI investigation under Section 3(2)(a) of the FCRA, which prohibits any person residing in India or any Indian citizen residing abroad from accepting foreign contributions on behalf of a political party, sources had then said.

Meanwhile, CPI(M) state secretary M V Govindan criticised Chennithala over the decision and accused him of "hurriedly" giving a clean chit to Satheesan despite "all the evidence" in the FCRA violation case.

Addressing a press conference here, Govindan questioned whether Satheesan had obtained the required permission, as an MLA, for his foreign visits and whether the existing law permitted him to solicit funds from abroad.

"It is clear that funds were collected from abroad and that there was no permission to raise such funds. Even then, it is highly unusual that the home minister himself convened a press conference to give a clean chit to Satheesan," he said.

Govindan further alleged that Chennithala's press conference showed undue haste in winding up what he described as an independent probe. (PTI)

Ex-Speaker Shamseer flags party's own missteps in LDF's Assembly defeat

MALAPPURAM (KERALA), July 30: In a public acknowledgement of the CPI(M)'s internal assessment of its Assembly poll defeat, former Kerala Assembly Speaker A N Shamseer on Thursday said a series of political and organisational decisions had contributed to the LDF's poor performance.

Addressing a meeting held in connection with a Martyrs' Day observance at Kalikavu in Malappuram district, Shamseer publicly endorsed the findings of the party's internal review, which had been approved by the CPI(M)'s state committee and Central Committee.

He said the party had erred in selecting candidates for the Payyanur and Taliparamba Assembly constituencies.

He acknowledged that the CPI(M)'s response to objectionable remarks made by SNDP Yogam General Secretary Vellappally Natesan against the Muslim-majority Malappuram district had not been strong enough.

"Our candidate selection in Payyanur and Taliparamba went wrong. We also concluded through self-criticism that our response was not strong enough when Vellappally Natesan made insulting remarks against Malappuram," Shamseer said.

He further said the party had identified the reading out of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's message during the Global Ayyappa Sangamam as another mistake, saying it "should not have happened."

"Which other party can engage in such self-criticism?" he asked. Shamseer said the party had never expected such a heavy defeat and had hoped to secure a third consecutive term.

"We were leading when the postal ballots were counted, but everything slipped away after that," he said during the speech.

He said the reasons behind the defeat had been identified and that the party had undertaken self-criticism before the people.

"When the people tell us, 'Comrades, you have made mistakes,' we accept that. We will correct those mistakes. We will rectify those shortcomings and return with renewed strength," the leader added.

Shamseer's remarks assume significance as they mark the first public acknowledgement by a senior CPI(M) leader of the conclusions reached in the party's internal review, although the findings had already been endorsed by the party's state committee and Central Committee.

Local media had earlier reported details of the CPI(M)'s review of the Assembly election results, which was adopted at the party's Central Committee meeting held from July 11 to 13.

According to the review, the party's election campaign became excessively centred on the then chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan, allowing the Opposition to turn the contest into a personality-driven rather than a political one. (PTI)

Nadda urges MPs from Bengal to spearhead people's movement to help eliminate TB by 2030

NEW DELHI, July 30: Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Thursday urged MPs from West Bengal to spearhead a people's movement against TB, stressing stronger community participation, early detection and district-level monitoring to help India achieve its target of eliminating the disease by 2030.

Nadda chaired a meeting titled "Parliamentarians Championing a TB-Mukt Bharat" with Members of Parliament from West Bengal on the sidelines of the Monsoon session of Parliament at the Extended Parliament House Annexe here. He was joined by Union Minister of State for Education and Development of North Eastern Region, Dr Sukanta Majumdar.

The meeting brought together MPs of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha from West Bengal across party lines to strengthen collective efforts towards achieving a TB-Mukt Bharat (tuberculosis-free India) through greater



political leadership and community participation, a health ministry statement said. The meeting was part of a series of sensitisation interactions chaired by the Union health minister with MPs from states across the country, including Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and others.

Nadda informed the members that similar consultations have been held with MPs from other states as well, as part of the government's whole-of-government approach to accel-

erate TB elimination, the statement said. The meeting reviewed the progress made under the 100-Day TB-Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan, implemented in two phases to accelerate India's efforts towards TB elimination, it said.

The first phase, launched on December 7, 2024, initially covered 347 high-priority districts before being expanded nationwide and concluded on March 24, 2025.

The second phase, launched on March 24, focused on nearly 1.58 lakh high-risk villages and urban

wards across the country. Addressing the gathering, Nadda described the campaign as "a defining moment in the nation's fight against tuberculosis, built on innovation, compassion and unwavering political will".

He reiterated that the principal objective of the TB-Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan is to achieve the sustainable development goal of eliminating TB by 2030, the statement said. Highlighting India's remarkable progress, Nadda cited the WHO Global TB Report 2025 and said that India has recorded a 21 per cent decline in TB incidence between 2015 and 2024, compared to the global average decline of 12 per cent, making India's pace of decline nearly twice the global average.

He further noted that India's treatment coverage rate has reached 92 per cent, significantly higher than the global average of 78 per cent, reflecting the country's leadership in global TB control efforts, the statement said. (PTI)

Markets shut over Barnala lathi-charge Punjab: Sanitation workers' 'bandh' call hits normal life



HOSHIARPUR/FEROZEPUR, July 30: Normal life was affected at most places in Punjab on Thursday with markets and commercial establishments remaining shut following a state-level 'bandh' call by sanitation workers against the Barnala lathi-charge incident.

Sanitation workers also held protests at several places against the state government, demanding action against police officials involved in the lathi-charge incident.

On July 22, police resorted to a lathi-charge on sanitation workers after they allegedly hurled stones

and garbage bags at police in Barnala in an alleged attempt to thwart a cleanliness drive undertaken by the local municipal corporation and district authorities. Almost all shops and business establishments remained closed in many parts of Punjab. However, hospitals, medical stores, ambulance services and other emergency services remained functional.

Main markets in many places, including Barnala, Hoshiarpur, Sangrur, Tarn Taran, and Samana in Patiala, remained shut due to the 'bandh' call. In Hoshiarpur, workers

of the Municipal Corporation Safai Karamchahi Union, including a large number of women workers, led by the union's president, Karanjot Adiya, assembled at the Municipal Corporation complex before taking out a protest march through the city's main bazaars on two-wheelers.

The protesters carried black flags and brooms, wore black arm-bands and raised slogans against the Punjab government.

The union leaders reiterated their demand for strict action against the police personnel allegedly involved in the lathi-charge, including dismissal of the suspended deputy superintendent of police, registration of a case under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act and relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, besides implementation of the long-pending demands of municipal employees including regularisation of their jobs. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, July 30: Petrol blended with 20 per cent ethanol (E20) can reduce fuel economy by 2 to 6 per cent depending on the vehicle category and vintage, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari informed Parliament on Thursday.

The Union Minister, however, argued that tests for engine durability on a dynamometer and on-road vehicle tests have not shown any failures due to E20.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Gadkari said E20 fuel provides better acceleration, improved ride quality and approximately 30 per cent lower carbon emissions compared to E10 fuel.

Gadkari said a study to evaluate the effect of E20 on BS-III, BS-IV and BS-VI E10 (Gasoline) two-wheelers and four-wheelers was carried out jointly by ARAI, SIAM and Indian Oil Corporation Ltd (IOCL).

He said the study comprised of

standard testing as per the respective certification requirements & customized test protocols developed along with the Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). "The fuel efficiency of vehicles may be reduced by 2 to 6 per cent depending on the vehicle category and vintage. The tests for engine durability on a dynamometer and vehicle tests on road have not shown any failures due to E20,"



the minister said. The rollout of E20 petrol (80 per cent petrol, 20 per cent ethanol) has drawn criticism from opposition parties and some consumer groups, who have raised concerns about its impact on older vehicles not specifically designed for 20 per cent ethanol blends.

Critics have questioned whether all vehicles are fully compatible with E20, flagged the possibility of reduced fuel efficiency and higher

maintenance costs, and sought clarity on liability if engine or fuel-system problems arise.

The government has maintained that the transition has been phased and backed by extensive testing, while automobile manufacturers have said they continue to honour warranty claims for vehicles using E20 fuel. Opposition parties have repeatedly sought greater transparency on vehicle compatibility and consumer safeguards.

The minister explained that the Ethanol blended petrol (EBP) programme has been implemented through a phased, scientifically validated and consultative process involving NITI Aayog, automobile manufacturers, Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs), Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI), Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM), Indian Institute of Petroleum (IIP) and other technical institutions. (PTI)

Bengal: Birbhum cash haul rises to ₹ 28.5 cr

KOLKATA, July 30: Police on Thursday arrested the manager and brother-in-law of absconding stone trader Tullu Mondal, following a night-long search operation during which they recovered ₹ 28.5 crore in cash and 15 kg of gold from his residence in West Bengal's Birbhum district, in one of the state's biggest seizures of suspected illegally amassed assets in recent years.

"We have recovered ₹ 28.5 crore in cash and 15 kg of gold. Tullu Mondal's manager and brother-in-law Minar Mondal has been apprehended. His house has been sealed," Birbhum SP VR Bhundesh told reporters.

Meanwhile, police, accompanied by central forces, reached the residence of Tullu Mondal, where a search operation was likely to be carried out.

Central forces were deployed outside the premises, while a team of police personnel was seen entering the house. He has been absconding since the declaration of assembly poll results in May.

Till Wednesday evening, ₹ 20 crore had been recovered from Minar Mondal's residence.

Several metal trunks were used



to transport the seized cash from the premises after the counting process was completed. The money was initially taken to Mohammad Bazar police station in sealed condition and is likely to be deposited in a bank, police sources said.

Police said they recovered 14 gold bars weighing 1 kg each and 10 gold biscuits of 100 grams each, valued at around ₹ 21.5 crore at current market prices, from Minar's two-storey residence at Deucha village.

Minar, who was detained along with his son during Wednesday's

raid, was formally arrested on Thursday morning and is expected to be produced before a local court.

According to police, Tullu Mondal, alias Mohd Nazibuddin, has substantial interests in Birbhum's stone quarrying business and has been described by Chief Minister Suvenudh Adhikari as a "sand mafia" operator.

The recovery comes amid a wider crackdown on alleged illegal mining and revenue leakages in Birbhum, a district long under the scanner over allegations of illegal quarrying and organised crime linked to the stone trade.

Tullu had figured in the CBI probe into the multi-crore cattle smuggling case. In August 2022, the agency searched several of his properties, office and godown in the Mohammad Bazar area of the district. The Enforcement Directorate later summoned him to Delhi for questioning in November that year.

Police suspect a substantial portion of the cash represented revenue allegedly siphoned off instead of being deposited into government coffers.

The investigation is continuing to trace the source of the money and identify other persons linked to the alleged racket.

Adhikari on Wednesday had hailed the operation as a major crackdown on the "sand mafia" and reiterated his government's "zero tolerance" policy against corruption and organised crime.

He had claimed that intensified enforcement had sharply increased revenue collections from Birbhum's stone quarrying sector after the BJP assumed office in the state.

Responding to the development, Trinamool Congress spokesperson Kunal Ghosh had said that while those responsible for such crimes

should not be spared, the government should also investigate political leaders who had allegedly patronised such activities.

Speaking to reporters, Minar's wife claimed that neither she nor her husband knew what was inside the trunks from which cash and gold were recovered.

She alleged that the absconding stone trader, Tullu Mondal, had left the locked metal trunks at their house a few years ago, telling the family they contained documents.

She claimed that though the keys remained with Tullu Mondal, the family never opened the trunks.

"We came to know about the cash and gold only after police opened the trunks on Wednesday. My husband did not know anything, yet he has been arrested," she claimed.

She also denied that the seized cash belonged to the family, saying they had "nothing" and survived on Minar's modest government pension after he left his job with the North Bengal State Transport Corporation.

The woman said the family's house had been sealed by police and that she would now move to a relative's residence. (PTI)

Concern for farmers in UP over 25% less than normal rain in monsoon

LUCKNOW, July 30: Uttar Pradesh has received 25 per cent less rainfall than normal so far this monsoon, raising concerns about soil moisture and sowing conditions in parts of the state's rain-fed agricultural belt.

However, the weather department forecast a revival of monsoon activity in early August. According to the recent data released by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), the state recorded 258.6 mm of cumulative rainfall between June 1 and July 29 against the normal 342.8 mm, leaving an overall seasonal deficit of 25 per cent.

The rainfall deficiency has been far more pronounced in East Uttar Pradesh, which received 252.8 mm rainfall against the normal 370.4 mm, a deficit of 32 per cent. Several districts have reported rainfall shortages of more than 50 per cent, including Bhadohi, Deoria, Jaunpur, Kanpur Dehat, Kaushambi, Kushinagar, Rae Bareilly, Sant Kabir Nagar and Sitapur, indicating a prolonged dry spell over large parts of the region.

West Uttar Pradesh has fared comparatively better, recording 267 mm rainfall against the normal 304.2 mm, a deficit of 12 per cent.

However, rainfall distribution has remained uneven, with districts such as Meerut, Muzaffarnagar and Sambhal receiving excess rainfall during the season, while Gautam Buddha Nagar, Pilibhit, Shamli and Amroha continue to face substantial deficits.

Agriculture experts say July is a crucial month for paddy transplantation and the sowing of crops such as maize, pulses and oilseeds in Uttar Pradesh.

"Continued rainfall deficiency, particularly in eastern districts where a large part of cultivation depends on monsoon rains, could affect crop growth, increase dependence on irrigation and raise costs for farmers if the dry spell persists," Ramendra Kushwaha, In-charge of Krishi Vigyan Kendra here.

The weather department, however, said monsoon activity is likely to pick up again in the first week of August. It said the deep depression that formed over the northwest Bay of Bengal has moved inland over central Chhattisgarh and adjoining north interior Odisha, shifting the main monsoon activity towards central India. (PTI)

SC permits Muslims to offer Friday prayers on dargah land near Bhojshala complex at Dhar

NEW DELHI, July 30: The Supreme Court on Thursday permitted Muslims to offer Friday prayers at the premises of a dargah adjacent to the disputed Bhojshala complex at Dhar in Madhya Pradesh.

The top court directed the state government to ensure that Muslims are allowed to offer namaz at the site between 1 and 3 pm on Fridays.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana, however, said that the instant direction does not preclude the state government and the Muslim side from exploring another site for Friday prayers with mutual consent.

On July 14, the bench had directed that a separate open space be provided adjacent to the disputed site in Dhar for namaz on Fridays between 1 and 3 pm till the case is decided.

Later, the Muslim side led by Haji Muneer Ahmad moved the top court alleging non-compliance with its directions to provide an alternative site, saying that the Dhar administration was providing the place which was 1.3 km away

from the disputed Bhojshala complex. They said that the site should be close enough from where Muslims can sight the mosque while offering prayers. After hearing arguments from senior advocate Huzefa Ahmadi, appearing for the Muslim side, and Additional Solicitor General K M Natraj, on behalf of the state government, clarified its earlier order of July 14.

"The earlier order is clarified to the extent that the Muslim community be permitted to offer namaz on Fridays between 1-3 pm at the land being Khassra No. 596 which is stated to be Dargah land. Copy of the site plan produced shows that it has an independent and separate access road and therefore the said site appears to be suitable. It is adjacent to the subject premises," the CJI said in the order.

"This order shall not preclude both sides to opt for any other site with mutual consent," the bench added. During the hearing, Ahmadi said that although an application had been made to the Collector for allotment of land, the authorities had identified a site that was not sufficiently close to the Bhojshala complex. (PTI)

J-K Police attaches properties of 5 LeT terrorists operating from Pakistan

JAMMU, July 30: Jammu and Kashmir Police on Thursday attached the immovable properties of five alleged Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terror handlers in Reasi as part of an ongoing investigation into a terror-related case, officials said.

The accused exfiltrated to Pakistan several years ago to receive training in handling arms and ammunition, they said.

"They are now working for Lashkar in Pakistan and supplying arms, ammunition and money to fuel terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir," a senior official said.

The action was taken during the investigation of a case registered at Mahore police station under relevant provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) in 2024, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and the Enemy Agents Ordinance (E&IMCO), they said.

The attachment proceedings were carried out by a police team led by Mahore Sub-Divisional Police Officer (SDPO) Parul Bhardwaj in the presence of the Executive Magistrate and local witnesses, they said. The attached properties include seven kanals of land belonging to Alaf Din, 10 kanals and 11 marlas owned by Ghulam Mohammad alias Gamma, 17 marlas belonging to Mohammad Asraf, seven kanals and three marlas owned by Shabir Ahmad, and eight kanals and one marla belonging to Bahar Din, the officials said.

The investigation also found that the attached properties were liable to be alienated, with the proceeds allegedly intended to finance and sustain terrorist activities, the officials said. (PTI)

SC to hear plea for pre-arrest bail plea of ex-minister Senthil Balaji in fresh corruption case

NEW DELHI, July 30: The Supreme Court has agreed to hear on Friday a plea of former minister and DMK leader V Senthil Balaji seeking anticipatory bail in a corruption case pertaining to alleged irregularities in the functioning of the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation (TASMAC).

Earlier in the day, the Madras High Court dismissed the anticipatory bail petition of Balaji in the fresh FIR lodged by the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) in the TASMAC scam case.

Soon after the denial of pre-arrest bail by the high court, the top court bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant was urged by senior lawyers Kapil Sibal, Mukul Rohatgi and Amit Anand Tiwari on behalf of the DMK leader that his plea be listed for urgent hearing as he faces imminent coercive action.

The bench, also comprising Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana, said that it will be listed on Friday.

Balaji represents Coimbatore South in the Tamil Nadu Assembly.

According to the fresh FIR, a large-scale scam took place in TASMAC in the allotment of shops and bars.

Balaji alleged that the FIR quoted verbatim the affidavit of the Enforcement Di-

rectorate (ED) and the petition filed by the anti-money laundering probe agency before the Supreme Court.

In fact, the FIR itself at various places says that it is from the counter affidavit and petition of the ED, the plea said.

"Our contention is that the FIR is for the incident said to have been committed between 2021 and 2025. I am at no flight risk; no custodial interrogation required. I was the minister of the department and TASMAC is a corporation independent in existence and functioning," said senior advocate Tirwari.

He also said there was no direct role or connection and it was political vendetta.

"Also, it is interference with the pending proceeding before the Supreme Court, inasmuch as the petition filed by TASMAC and the state of Tamil Nadu in which the ED has filed the said counter-affidavit, which is the basis of the FIR, there is a stay of investigation against TASMAC and no coercive action order. Reliance on such an affidavit of a pending matter is interference with the judicial proceeding," the senior lawyer said.

The plea said it was diametrically opposite to the earlier stand taken by the state government in the matter.

The high court, while rejecting the pre-arrest bail plea of the leader, referred to

the prosecution's allegation of causing loss to the exchequer against Balaji and said that custodial questioning was necessary.

The DVAC in its FIR said that Balaji entered into a criminal conspiracy to manipulate TASMAC's functioning by rigging bar and transport tenders, favouring a few select liquor manufacturers, resulting in overpricing of liquor, and causing financial loss to the public exchequer.

The DVAC registered an FIR against seven accused.

The FIR against Balaji, former TASMAC managing director S Visakan and five others was for alleged misappropriation, manipulation of procurement and tender processes in allotting bar licences, transport tenders, and bogus and inflated transactions by certain distilleries and bottling firms.

Balaji's close associates Rathesh Raj Shanmugavel and S Karthik, also known as Mulanor Karthik, his former personal assistant Bhaskar and former TASMAC officials R Ramadurai Murugan and R Paaneelselvam were the five other accused persons.

The FIR highlighted the operation of an alleged organised syndicate known as the "Karur gang", allegedly controlled by Karthik. (PTI)

'Technology delayed is technology denied': IAF chief for greater self-reliance in defence tech

NEW DELHI, July 30: IAF chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh on Thursday pitched for achieving greater self-reliance in building unmanned aerial systems and other critical defence technologies, as he emphasised that "technology delayed is technology denied" and there is no point having something which comes after others have already got it.

In his address at an event here, he also said there are "discussions happening between us and the Ministry of Civil Aviation, and other ministries involved" so that "we finally should be able to recognise a drone, whether it is a bona fide drone or a rogue drone."

"We should be able to have no fraticide, in terms of we shooting down our own drones or taking down something that is meant for us," he said. At a workshop hosted here by the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers (SIDM), and



attended by various defence military and industry experts, the air chief marshal also spoke about integration of manned platforms and drones and other unmanned aerial systems (UAS), which would share the same airspace.

"Integration is very important. We have manned platforms and long-range vectors which will con-

tinue to use the same airspace where the drones are going to come in. I am talking about a whole range of drones, from a small micro or mini drone to a UAS which is like a full aircraft, but unmanned.

"Everybody is going to use the same airspace. So man, whether in the loop, on the loop, at least in

planning, in terms of control, feedback system, situational awareness, we need to know each other's positions, and understand how an airspace is going to be used, whether it is procedural control or active control," he said.

The IAF chief added that if drones are to be miniaturised, and if their weights would go down, even the payloads to be used, whether a weapon or a camera or any other payload, also has to be miniaturised.

"And while doing this, we have to get down to the absolute... I mean to say, every brick has to be made in India. Actually every brick should be developed in India, then only we can say, we are fully Atmanirbhar. If there are some components for which we are still relying on some other country then obviously we can be fall prey to that country, throttling those supplies," he said. (PTI)

Over-speeding caused 82,124 road accidents in 2025: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, July 30: Over-speeding caused 82,124 road accidents in India in 2025, accounting for around 16 per cent of all road accidents, Parliament was informed on Thursday.

In a written reply to the Lok Sabha, Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said driving on the wrong side and lane indiscipline caused 4,089 accidents, followed by jumping red lights (276) and the use of mobile phones while driving (136).

The number of road accidents in India rose by 5.3 per cent to more than 5.13 lakh in 2025, with road crashes claiming the lives of 21 people every hour, according to government data.

On average, 59 road accidents occurred every hour in the country.

"A total of 5,13,563 road accidents have been reported by police departments of states and Union Territories in the country during the calendar year 2025, claiming

1,83,382 lives," Gadkari said.

The minister also said that police departments in states and Union territories reported a total of 2,85,770 road accidents across the country during the first six months of 2026. Among the states, Tamil Nadu reported the highest number of road accidents at 71,387, whereas Uttar Pradesh reported the highest number of accident fatalities at 27,550 in 2025.

Responding to a separate question, Gadkari said electric vehicles are increasing due to their lower operational costs and zero tailpipe emissions compared to Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) vehicles.

"VAHAN data indicates that EV penetration in India has grown from 0.71 per cent in financial year 2019-20 to 8.26 per cent in FY 2025-26," he said, adding that as per data, the total number of EVs (as of July 26, 2026) is 1,00,23,396 for all categories of vehicles.

Responding to a separate question, Gadkari said assets worth Rs 1,72,898 crore have been monetised to date through Toll-Operate-Transfer (TOT), Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT) and project-based financing.

"A total of 317 projects under Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) and Build-Operate-Transfer (BOT) mode, with a length of 11,711.81 km and total capital cost of Rs 4,57,547.46 crore, have been awarded during the Financial Year (FY) 2021-22 to FY 2025-26," he added.

Replying to another question, Gadkari said development and maintenance of National Highways (NHs) is a continuous process.

"Poor/damaged condition of NHs has been reported for about 11,500 km length during the last three years and current year, which have been attended for immediate maintenance," the minister said. (PTI)



'Anupamaa' made me a star, will never leave the show: Rupali Ganguly

Popular television star Rupali Ganguly says she never saw herself as a star despite a long career and hit shows like "Sarabhai vs Sarabhai", "Parvarish" and "Kkavyanjali" but "Anupamaa", with its unprecedented popularity, changed the way people perceived her.

Ganguly, whose other popular shows include "Baa Bahoo Aur Baby", and "Aaah", plays the titular character of a middle-class homemaker who embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. The Star Plus show has been a major hit since it debuted in 2020.

"I was never a star before 'Anupamaa'. I was just an actor until then, but people realised that I was doing my work well, that's about it. Even when 'Sarabhai vs Sarabhai' was telecast, it had low TRPs, and that show became big later.

"Suddenly, after 'Anupamaa' people realised that I was fantastic in 'Sarabhai...'. So, 'Anupamaa' has been the catalyst. Even in award functions, I was made to sit behind but today if I'm sit-

ting in the front row, it is because of 'Anupamaa'," the actor told PTI in an interview.

The actor, 49, attributed the popularity of the show, made by Rajan Shahi and Deepa Shahi under their banner, Director's Kut Productions, to its relatable storytelling and its focus on homemakers, who are often overlooked.

"I've stayed at home for over six years, I know we are important for our family. In the show, we are talking about the housewives. We are the voice for the voiceless," the actor said, adding that the show is equally popular among men.

Ganguly said "Anupamaa" has also helped challenge long-held industry perceptions about lack of roles for women in TV after a certain age.

"There was a belief that women after a certain age will get only certain roles, like a mother's role but 'Anupamaa' came and changed the perception that industry had towards older actresses. It has shown that strong, meaningful stories with women at the centre, work. A lot of them (actors) came and thanked me and said, 'You've changed things'. But it was not me, it was Rajan ji, who had the courage to bring a show like this."

Reflecting on her long career in the industry, the actor said she faced her share of struggles and had to consistently prove herself despite coming

from a film background. Her father, Anil Ganguly, was a national-award winning director, best known for women-centric films like "Kora Kagaz", "Tapasya", and "Humkadam", among others.

"If my father wouldn't have hit a roadblock in his career, I wouldn't have learned to value things. I completed my studies and did all kinds of odd jobs like working as a sales girl in a boutique, catering job, etc. Every job that I've done, I'm proud of it," Ganguly said.

"I did Telugu, Bhojpuri films, and TV shows and some people would laugh at me saying, 'You are the daughter of Anil Ganguly, who has won national award twice, and you are doing TV, and that I failed to make an impact in films'."

Ganguly said she kept herself busy with TV shows and theatre. The offer to send a self-audition clip for "Anupamaa" came to her while she was in Indore performing a play, "Patte Khul Gaye" with actor Rakesh Bedi in 2019. Bedi, another major TV and film star, has found his moment in the limelight with his role of Jameel Jamali in "Dhurandhar".

Ganguly bagged her first title role after being selected in her audition and look test. She later found out that Shahi was the producer. She started her television career with Shahi on the 2000 show "Dil Hai Ki Manta Nahi".

"I can never forget that excitement of playing the title role. I was like after many years, I've got this kind of a (big) opportunity and I didn't want to let this go away," Ganguly recalled.

"He (Shahi) told me that we will see for three months how the show performs but it clicked. I never thought in my wildest dreams that it is going to be a cult show, and it is going to be something that has changed my life completely," she added.

The actor is familiar with all the love and some hate that "Anupamaa" gets.

"I would only choose to see the love rather than anybody trying to pull me down. I try and ignore it, I remove the negativity and focus on the positive and move forward and keep working. Whether you like it or hate it, you can't ignore it (show)."

Ganguly, who acted in Bengali films "Saahab" and "Balidan", said she has been receiving film offers but her work in "Anupamaa" will always be her "priority".

"I see 'Anupamaa' going on for years and years. I'll not leave 'Anupamaa' because it is my second home and the unit is my family... I'm getting these (film) offers because of the show. So, whatever I can do alongside 'Anupamaa', like brand shoots, I do it." (PTI)

NETFLIX UNVEILS FIRST LOOK OF MAITREYI RAMAKRISHNAN'S 'BEST OF THE BEST'



Mumbai, July 29: Streaming giant Netflix has unveiled the first look of its upcoming coming-of-age dance comedy "Best of the Best", headlined by "Never Have I Ever" star Maitreyi Ramakrishnan and Priyanka Kedia.

Directed by Lena Khan, the movie is set in the competitive world of collegiate Bollywood-fusion dance in the US. It will premiere on the OTT platform on September 18.

Written by Prashanth Venkataramanujam and comedian Hasan Minhaj, "Best of the Best" follows childhood friends Maya (Ramakrishnan) and Anjali (Kedia), who join UCLA's Bollywood-fusion dance team with dreams of winning the US Championship, according to the official logline.

Their friendship, however, is put to the test as they navigate fierce competition, ambition and the pressures of chasing the coveted title.

The ensemble cast also includes Ankur Rathee, Janina Gavankar, Chaneil Kular, Becky Alex, Shreya Navile, Minhaj, Lilly Singh, Nihar Duvvuri, Nico Greetham, Amrith Khurana, Tanishq Joshi, Saara Chaudry and Sasha Bhasin. Khan, whose previous credits include "The Tiger Hunter" and episodes of "Never Have I Ever".

Venkataramanujam and Minhaj have co-written the screenplay and are also producing the film, with Jonathan Eirich producing for Rideback. Ellen H Schwartz and Ryan Halprin serve as executive producers.

Ramakrishnan rose to fame with the Netflix series "Never Have I Ever", created by Mindy Kaling and Lang Fisher, while Kedia makes one of her biggest screen appearances with the film. (PTI)

Ranbir's Ram and Yash's Ravana prepare for an epic battle in trailer of 'Ramayana'

The trailer of "Ramayana", touted to be one of the most expensive productions to come out from India, released on Thursday with the promise of a theatrical extravaganza that will combine cutting edge special effects with the age-old story of the war between good and evil.

The four minute trailer opens with Ravana, played by south superstar Yash, before moving on to Ram, portrayed by Ranbir Kapoor in his most ambitious role yet.

Made on a reported budget of Rs 4,000 crore, the two-part saga is directed by Nitesh Tiwari of "Dangal" fame and has been produced by Namit Malhotra's Prime Focus Studios and eight-time Academy Award-winning VFX studio DNEG, in association with actor Yash's Monster Mind Creations.

The trailer opens with Yash's Ravana fighting his way to become as one of the most powerful kings on Earth before cutting to Dashrath, the king of Ayodhya.

Ranbir's Ram enters the frame as a blindfolded archer practising his target. He is announced as the next king and wins Sita's (Sai Pallavi) hand in a 'swyamvar', but the celebrations take a turn when his step-mother Kaikeyi (Lara Dutta) demands that he be exiled for 14 years.

The trailer then cuts to Ram, Lakshman (Ravie Dubey) and Sita's years in exile as they encounter all kinds of monsters and have a run-in with Suparnakha, Ravana's sister who is played by Rakul Preet Singh.

After her fight with Lakshman, Ravana promises to avenge her by kidnapping Sita. The trailer ends with Ram declaring that he will defeat Ravana and bring back his wife.

Sunny Deol plays Hanuman but he is not shown in the trailer. He will probably make an appearance either at the end of the first part or in the second part of the

movie. "Ramayana: Part One" will release worldwide on Diwali 2026, with global distribution by Sony Pictures and North India distribution by Dharma Productions.

The other cast in the movie include Ajinkya Deo in the role of sage Vishwamitra; Kunal Kapoor as Lord Indra.

The movie is written by Shridhar Raghavan, who is known for hits such as "Pathaan", "War" and "The Night Manager". The music is composed by Oscar-winning music



composers A R Rahman and Hans Zimmer, known for his work on Hollywood blockbusters such as "The Lion King", "The Dark Knight Trilogy", "Inception", "Dunkirk", "Interstellar" and the "Dune" series.

"The Ramayana is not just one of our greatest epics; it is part of how we live, celebrate and pass on our values from one generation to the next. Every year, Dussehra and Diwali remind us that its message continues to guide millions through the triumph of light over darkness and righteousness over evil.

"Very few stories continue to shape everyday life thousands of years after they were first told. The Ramayana does," Malhotra said in a statement.

Malhotra said he always believed that India's greatest stories deserve to be experienced on the world's biggest stage.

"Today, we finally have the artists, the technology, the craftsmanship and the collective ambition to present this extraordinary cultural legacy to audiences everywhere with the authenticity, scale and cinematic excellence it deserves. This is not simply the beginning of a film. It is the beginning of a journey to celebrate India's cultural richness with the world. India has always lived this story. It is now our privilege to share it with the world."

Tiwari said as a director his responsibility was to approach the story with complete honesty. He said it was a privilege of a lifetime to work alongside some of the world's finest artists, technicians and storytellers on the movie.

"The Ramayana is one of the greatest stories ever told, not because of its scale, but because of the timeless values it represents. As a filmmaker, I never felt the responsibility to make it universal, it already is. My responsibility has been to approach it with complete honesty, authenticity and reverence.

"Every creative decision we have made - from the writing and performances to the production design, music, visual effects and every frame on screen, has been guided by a single thought: to honour this extraordinary legacy with the dignity and respect it deserves while presenting it through the finest cinematic craftsmanship possible."

At a Delhi event recently, Malhotra said over 10,000 people have contributed to the making of the film from different parts of the world. (PTI)

'SPIDER-MAN: BRAND NEW DAY' ADVANCE BOOKINGS EXCEED EXPECTATIONS: PVR INOX'S KAMAL GIANCHANDANI

Superhero film "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" has generated exceptionally strong demand among fans with advance bookings surpassing expectations, Kamal Gianchandani, Chief Business Planning & Strategy, PVR INOX Limited, said on Wednesday.

Gianchandani also forecast a "massive" year for Hollywood films in India, saying their contribution to exhibitors' business is expected to be 60-70 per cent higher than last year.

"Brand New Day", the fourth installment in the Tom Holland-led "Spider-Man" franchise, will be released across the country on Thursday.

The cinema chain, which operates 1,779 screens across India, has allocated about 70 per cent of its showcasing to the movie, a level Gianchandani described as unprecedented for a Hollywood release.

"We were always confident that 'Spider-Man' would be a big film. But surprisingly, the advance sales and the momentum has been so strong that we are also surprised with the demand that we are seeing. We were always confident this will do well, but this is exceeding our expectations by a big mar-

gin," Gianchandani told PTI.

"We've allocated about 70 per cent of our showcasing tomorrow to 'Spider-Man'. This is unprecedented. We've never allocated this level of showcasing to a Hollywood film," he added.

According to Gianchandani, "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" has registered almost twice the advance bookings of 2021's "Spider-Man: No Way Home" and will have a longer run in theatres.

"At the start of every financial year, we make targets for each film. And for big films, of course, you have aggressive targets. So our sense is the total box office or admission target for this film, whatever exhibitors have made or the distributor has made, this will be double of that," he said.

Gianchandani said "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" will not screen in IMAX as Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey" continues its exclusive run in the premium format, driven by sustained audience demand.

"So next whole week will be 'The Odyssey' in IMAX. Shows are not being split between the two. But other premium format screens like PXL, 4DX, ScreenX and ICE, the majority of the showcasing is with

"Spider-Man", he said.

Hollywood films have enjoyed a phenomenal run in Indian cinemas this year, with titles such as Nolan's "The Odyssey", Ryan Gosling's "Project Hail Mary" and indie thriller "Obsession" drawing strong audiences across multiplexes.

The release calendar for the remainder of the year also remains packed with high-profile releases, including Denis Villeneuve's "Dune: Part Three", Marvel Studios' "Avengers: Domsday" and Tom Cruise's action thriller "Digger".

According to Gianchandani, 2026 is turning out to be a stellar year for Hollywood releases in India with the market expected to exceed last year's box office.

"The Hollywood films' contribution this year will be at least 60-70 per cent more than



what we had last year as exhibitors. So this year is turning out to be a massive year for Hollywood films," Gianchandani said.

Directed by Destin Daniel Cretton, "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" releases in India in English, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam across 2D, 3D and premium large formats. (PTI)

LUCKNOW FILM-MAKER'S 'DETECTIVE METER DOWN' WINS BEST SHORT FILM AWARD IN GERMANY



"Detective Meter Down", a 30-minute short film written by Lucknow's Ghazal Javed and directed by Devansh Agarwal, has won the Best Short Film award at the Indisches Filmfestival Stuttgart, one of Europe's leading festivals dedicated to Indian cinema.

The award was presented on Tuesday, Javed told PTI.

The detective comedy follows Rajesh Yadav, an autorickshaw driver from Bihar who moves to Mumbai with dreams of becoming a detective. Through the protagonist's journey, the film explores the lives, aspirations and struggles of migrants in the country's financial capital with a blend of humour and emotion.

"Mumbai's autorickshaw drivers are mostly migrants from other states. We felt every migrant has a story. Through Rajesh, we have tried to capture the emotions and aspirations of everyone chasing their dreams in Mumbai," Javed said.

She said the idea behind the film was to place a person from a marginalised section of society at the centre of the story.

"I wanted to present someone from the margins as the hero because such characters are usually portrayed only through their helplessness and are rarely shown as protagonists," she said.

According to Javed, the film conveys the message that every individual has value and a unique place in the world.

"Detective Meter Down" marks Javed's debut as a short film writer. She is the granddaughter of noted Lucknow-based writer and freedom fighter Shakeel Siddiqui. (PTI)

From crutches to Commonwealth Games silver: Sreeshankar's remarkable second act



GLASGOW, July 30: Two years ago, Murali Sreeshankar was told by the surgeons attending to him after his career-threatening injury that he might never run again, leave alone competing in a long jump event.

His father S Murali was "scared" as his son suffered a left patellar tendon rupture in a freak incident during a routine training session in Palakkad in April 2024.

Forget medals. Forget 8m jumps. Forget the 2024

Paris Olympics. The father and coach of India's premier long jumper only wanted his son to walk again without crutches.

"I just wanted him to get off the crutches and walk like a normal person," Murali told PTI, recalling the difficult days after his son's devastating knee injury. On Wednesday, those memories felt a world away as Sreeshankar stood on the Commonwealth Games podium with his second successive silver medal.

Four years after finishing runner-up in Birmingham, the 27-year-old produced an 8.09m jump to win his first international medal after a comeback few thought was possible.

"It is a miracle that he is back and not only competing but winning medals. No one else would have been able to do that after such an injury," Murali said.

Surgery followed the injury, along with months of rehabilitation that ruled him out of the entire 2024 season, including what would have been his Olympic debut in Paris.

For more than 650 days, he did not compete. Recovery itself was a series of small victories. "He started jumping little by little. He jumped three metres after one year, in April 2025," Murali

said. "I couldn't watch him. I was so scared."

Every landing reminded them how fragile the comeback was. Every training session came with uncertainty.

But Murali never doubted his son's resolve.

"He is mentally very strong. Like Shiva, he focused only on his comeback."

Sreeshankar, though, prefers to look at it differently.

"I won't say it was a miracle. But yes, I am grateful to be back representing my country."

He dedicated the medal to everyone who stood by him through the toughest phase of his career.

"This medal is for everyone who supported me during my tough time over the past two years. And everyone who said I would never jump again in my career... this is for you."

What has impressed as much as the comeback itself is the consistency.

Sreeshankar has crossed the 8m mark in every competition this season. In Glasgow, 8.09m earned him silver behind the three-time world championships medallist Tajay Gayle of Jamaica.

He has been working with renowned South African strength and conditioning coach Wayne

Lombard, who has worked with Indian hockey players in the past.

"I have Dr. Wayne Lombard also in my team. So he's a piper who changes things around for me. His inputs have been incredible and amazing too."

He credits that consistency to understanding his body better than ever before.

"I started understanding my body a lot more compared to before," he said.

"Even now, I can't train full-fledged every single time. I have to carefully put the training volume up and manage the intensities accordingly."

His daily routine has changed completely.

"A lot of planning and a lot of strategies go into every single day. From the moment I wake up to the moment I sleep, every single thing has to be carefully planned and charted out."

"To jump with a surgically repaired tendon, it's not that easy," he said.

"I have three anchor screws on my tendon. And there's a wire that goes around my kneecap which is holding my tendon together. So I have to respect that and I have to train according to that."

The metal inside his knee is a permanent reminder of what he went through.

A team effort in testing conditions

If recovering from injury was one challenge, adapting to Glasgow's weather was another.

Persistent rain, gusty winds and low temperatures were a far cry from the hot and humid conditions the Indian athletes had experienced at the National Inter-State Championships in Bhubaneswar just weeks earlier.

Instead of figuring it out alone, the Indian athletes leaned on each other's experience.

"Sarvesh (Kushare) bhaiya, TJ (Tejaswin Shankar) and Tejas (Shirse) all of us were sitting at dinner discussing how we can cope with the conditions here," Sreeshankar said.

"In India, in Bhubaneswar last month, the conditions were hot and humid. It is totally opposite to what we have here."

"Sarvesh bhaiya asked me to carry a sleeping bag and a thermos. He gave me the sleeping bag and all the jackets."

He also sought advice from fellow jumper Tejaswin Shankar, especially after watching high jumper Pooja Singh struggle in the rain a day earlier.

"I was taking inputs from TJ about the tricky conditions. Yesterday it was really rainy and Pooja had to struggle a lot." (PTI)

Kovai Kings announces VIDA as title partner



CHENNAI, July 30: TNPL team Kovai Kings has announced VIDA as their title partner for the upcoming 2026 season. The franchise unveiled its brand-new official jersey, marking the team's first public appearance under its new identity, VIDA Kovai Kings, a release here on Thursday said.

Led by M Shahrukh Khan and prolific batter B Sai Sudharsan, the team will take the field in their new jersey under this refreshed identity for the 2026 season of the Tamil Nadu Premier League, it said.

"While VIDA Kovai Kings continues to set new benchmarks in sporting across the TNPL, this collaboration seamlessly unites high-octane performance, cutting-edge innovation, and sustainability under one bold banner," it said.

As VIDA Kovai Kings, the team will carry the integrated identity of VIDA across all primary touchpoints throughout the tournament, including match jerseys, helmets, training kits, travel gear, official digital platforms, and stadium assets. (PTI)

Sprinters Gavita, Basil complete historic 1-2 in men's 100m T47

GLASGOW, July 30: India's para-athletes remained an inspiring and unstoppable force at the Commonwealth Games as sprinters Dilip Mahadu Gavit and Mohammed Basil scripted another story of grit with a gold-silver finish in the men's 100m T47 final here.

Gavit clocked a Games record and his season's best time of 10.71 seconds to take the top spot, while Basil produced his season's best of 10.83 seconds to finish second in a closely-fought race on Wednesday.

England's Kevin Santos completed the podium taking 10.85 seconds to win bronze. The men's 100m T47 is a para athletics sprint event covers arm impairment or absence, affecting strength, movement or coordination on one side.

Gavit's gold was India's third at the Games, following Mirabai Chanu's victory in the women's 48kg weightlifting event and Sharmila Dhankar's triumph in the women's shot put F57 para athletics category.

The 40-year-old Sharmila, who was afflicted with Polio at two years of age, survived the trauma of an abusive marriage to come this far.

Against all odds
Behind Gavit's gold medal lies a journey shaped by adversity, limited facilities and a chance discovery by his coach.

Born in the small village of Toran Dongari near Nashik in Maharashtra, Gavit was just about six years of age when he lost his right



Indian shining in Para CWG

arm after an injury from falling off a tree turned into gangrene due to lack of timely medical care.

The amputation of his arm below the elbow was a devastating blow to him and his family of farmers with limited means. However, he refused to let that define his life and turned his focus to running.

With limited access to training infrastructure in his hometown, it seemed like an unlikely path until coach Vajjanthale Kal spotted his potential.

"I saw him at school and then I convinced his parents for training," Kale said after the triumph.

"He did not know anything about para competitions. He was competing in able-bodied events and was doing well," he recalled.

The 21-year-old Basil, on the other hand, was born with limb deficiency. The Kerala youngsters is supported by his parents and two brothers.

Aiming Higher
After his historic win, Gavit admitted that the start was not ideal but he grew stronger through the race.

"The start was a bit slow, but then I gradually picked up pace and it felt great to win," Gavit said. The final was held on a rain-soaked track, making conditions difficult for the sprinters.

Despite the success Gavit is not ready to relax and is already looking ahead to the 2028 Los Angeles Paralympics.

"I am not thinking about doing a job now, my target is to win

medals. I am sure I will do better at the upcoming Para Asian Games in September-October in Japan and then the Paralympics," he said.

Kheolo India medalist
Before moving into para athletics, Gavit had already made his mark against able-bodied competitors, winning two medals at the Kheolo India Youth Games in Pune and another medal at the Under-18 level.

Kale believes Gavit's talent was evident from the beginning.

"He would do well in able-bodied meets. The problem in rural areas is that there are no facilities. He did not get proper medical facilities, which led to his left hand being amputated," he said.

Training in Nashik helped Gavit take his career forward, eventually bringing him to the biggest stage.

Sagar, Devender miss podium
India's para discus throwers Sagar Thayat and Devender Kumar missed out on medals, finishing sixth and seventh respectively in the men's F42-44/F61-64 final.

Competing in the F43 category, Sagar produced an Asian record and his season's best throw of 51.79m, while Devender, in the F44 category, registered a season's best effort of 48.20m in the 10-man field.

The F42-44 and F61-64 classifications are for athletes with lower-limb impairments in field events.

Athletes in the F42-44 classes compete without prostheses, while those in the F61-64 classes compete using prostheses. (PTI)

Teenage para cyclist Lisha Das finishes last in 4000m individual pursuit qualification



GLASGOW, July 30: Teenage Indian para cyclist Lisha Das bowed out after finishing sixth and last in the women's C4-C5 4,000m individual pursuit qualifying event at the Commonwealth Games here on Thursday.

The 16-year-old, the youngest athlete in India's contingent and the country's only para-track cyclist to qualify for the Games, clocked 6:58.000 in the qualification round, averaging 34.450 kmph. Her time was well off the pace set by the leading contenders.

Australia's Tara Neyland topped the qualification standings in 4:45.796, while England's Morgan Newberry secured the second spot in 5:06.470 to book a place in the

gold medal race.

New Zealand's Nicole Murray (5:06.878) and Australia's Erin Normoyle (5:24.264) qualified for the bronze medal contest.

Under the event's qualification format, the two fastest riders advance to the gold medal race, while the third and fourth fastest riders compete for bronze.

The gulf in performance was evident in the average speeds. Neyland, the fastest qualifier, averaged 49.716 kmph compared to Lisha's 34.450 kmph.

Before departing for Glasgow, Lisha, who hails from Assam, had voiced concerns after neither personal coach nor a female support staff member was initially included in the Indian contingent.

The teenager, who competes in the C5 classification and has a deformity in her right hand, had requested a three-member support team comprising her personal coach, a female physiotherapist and a technician.

The C5 category is for cyclists with the least severe eligible physical impairments, including riders with mild monoplegic spasticity or a unilateral arm amputation (above or below the elbow) who meet the minimum impairment criteria. (PTI)

Pargat questions 'saffronisation' of Indian hockey jersey, Dhanraj says blue is team's identity

NEW DELHI, July 30: Former India captain Pargat Singh on Thursday questioned the decision to make saffron the Indian hockey team's primary jersey colour ahead of the upcoming World Cup, alleging that "everything in the country is being saffronised", while legendary forward Dhanraj Pillay said the blue jersey has been the sport's identity for decades.

The controversy erupted after Hockey India unveiled saffron as the primary jersey for the men's and women's teams for the World Cup, beginning August 15 in the Netherlands and Belgium.

While former India captain Viren Rasquinha has also expressed reservations over the move, Hockey India has maintained that the decision was taken considering both the technical feedback received from the coaches and players and the symbolic value associated with the colour being part of the National Flag.

Dhanraj, who represented India in 339 international matches, including four Olympics, four World Cups and four Champions Trophy tournaments, said the blue jersey has generated synonymous with Indian hockey for generations.

"The blue jersey has become the identity of Indian hockey. Being one of the colours of our national flag, saffron is important and auspicious but it has never been the traditional colour of Indian hockey. I don't understand why this has suddenly changed after so many years," Dhanraj told PTI.

"From the 1928 Olympic team to the eras of Dhyan Chand, Balbir Singh Sr., Mohammad Shahid, Zafar Iqbal and even the 1980 Moscow Olympic gold medal-winning side, everyone played in the blue jersey. I played for nearly 15 years and throughout my career our jersey remained blue."

He said players associate themselves with the traditional colours of the national team.

"This is not a franchise tournament like the IPL or Hockey India League where teams wear different colours. The Indian team's identity has always been the blue jersey," he said.

Recalling the only exception he remembered, Dhanraj said India wore a yellow shirt with blue shorts in one match against Argentina during the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

Rejecting the argument that the change was necessitated due to blue astro turf, he said, "The team has been playing on blue turf for several years and I have never seen any problem because of the jersey colour. Is there any direction from the FIH regarding a blue jersey creating difficulties?"

Pargat, one of India's greatest defenders who later



entered politics and is currently a Congress MLA in Punjab, was more critical of the decision.

"Everything in the country is being saffronised - education, history and now sports too. This is worrying. Sports unite people and rise above religion, caste and politics. It is unfortunate if such thinking enters sports as well," he said.

He also rejected Hockey India's explanation that the move was aimed at improving visibility on blue turf.

"I have never experienced any such issue. Even if visibility was a concern, why choose only this colour? Were there no other options?" he asked.

Pargat also dismissed the contention that the decision was based on feedback from players and coaches.

"Players and coaches do not normally make such recommendations. The FIH already has our jersey colours registered. The Indian hockey team's identity has always been the blue jersey," he said.

He pointed out that generations of Indian players, from the country's greatest legends to the current stars, have represented the nation in blue.

"In every iconic photograph of Indian hockey, our players are seen wearing blue. Even during our playing days we trained in blue. It has become the identity of Indian hockey," he said.

Pargat added that while India traditionally had a white change kit, the saffron jersey has now been registered as the primary strip.

"I don't see any logic behind this decision," he said. (PTI)

In Glasgow at his own cost, Jaiveer by his famous ward Chopra's side during qualification round

GLASGOW, July 30: Neeraj Chopra's personal coach Jaiveer Chaudhary was in tow inside the Scotstoun Stadium on Thursday to help his superstar ward qualify for the Commonwealth Games final round, as he travelled here at his own cost after he was not included in the Indian contingent for the multi-sport event. The 32-member athletics squad, headed by Chopra, was accompanied by five coaches, two physios and one doctor along with two medical professionals. The support staff, cleared by the sports ministry and led by head coach Radhakrishnan Nair, did not have Chaudhary as one of the members.

But sources in the Indian contingent here said that Chaudhary, who is Chopra's formative coach, is here at his own cost. He travelled here from Bienne in Switzerland where Chopra was training before the Games.

Chaudhary was seen sitting at the area earmarked for the coaches, along with Nair,

at a little distance from where the javelin throwers started their run-ups.

"Yes, he (Jaiveer) is here at his own cost. He was not in the list of contingent (cleared by the Ministry). The Indian Olympic Association arranged for his accreditation and access to Field of Play," a source in the Indian contingent told PTI. Olympic hero Chopra, along with Rohit Yadav and Yashvir Singh, advanced to the men's javelin throw final after finishing among the top 12 in the qualification round as strong, shifting winds foiled every athlete's attempt to achieve the automatic qualifying mark.

The 28-year-old Chopra, who won the javelin throw title in 2018, was fifth with a best effort of 79.61m, while Rohit (78.37m) and Yashvir (78.36m) ended the qualification in ninth and 10th positions respectively to ensure a full Indian contingent in the medal round. (PTI)

Rahane brought assurance, calm in moments of pressure and led by example: BCCI

MUMBAI, July 30: The BCCI on Thursday said Ajinkya Rahane brought assurance to the national side while being calm in moments of pressure, and led by example, as the senior batter announced his retirement from international cricket.

Rahane, who played 85 Tests, 90 ODIs and 20 T20Is over 12 years since making his debut in 2011, announced his retirement on Thursday saying it was the right time for him to move on.

"Across his international career, Rahane scored more than 8,000 runs. Yet, numbers alone cannot define his contribution. He brought assurance to the Indian team, calm in moments of pressure and led by example through his dedication to the game," the BCCI said in a statement.

"Over nearly a decade and a half, Rahane became one of India's most trusted performers. His calm presence, resilience and ability to deliver in the toughest situations earned him the respect of teammates, opponents and cricket lovers alike."

The BCCI said Rahane was one of the most dependable batters while playing overseas.

"At a time when India estab-



lished itself as one of the strongest Test teams in the world, Rahane emerged as one of its most dependable batters, particularly in overseas conditions," the BCCI said.

"Elegant at the crease and technically sound, he possessed the temperament to succeed when the conditions were at their most demanding."

"His centuries at Lord's, Wellington, Melbourne, Kingston and Durban remain among the defining overseas hundreds by an Indian batter, each reflecting his ability to adapt, absorb pressure and rise to the occasion," it added.

The BCCI said Rahane, as other senior members of the team, was respected for his humility among other qualities.

"As one of the senior members of the dressing room, he was respected for his humility, professionalism and willingness to put the team before himself," the Board said.

"He led by example and earned the admiration of teammates, opponents and cricket fans through the way he carried himself both on and off the field," it added.

The BCCI termed India's Border-Gavaskar Trophy win in 2020-21, a series in which a heavily

depleted team came from behind to win 2-1, as Rahane's "finest chapter".

"His finest chapter came during the 2020-21 Border-Gavaskar Trophy in Australia," the BCCI said.

"Rahane took over the captaincy at a time when India was facing one of its toughest moments after being shot out for 36 in the pink-ball Test in Adelaide."

"With the squad navigating the challenges and restrictions brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, expectations were firmly against India. He led from the front with a magnificent century at the MCG that levelled the series."

"Under Rahane's calm leadership, India overcame injuries, inexperience and adversity to secure a memorable series victory, capped by the historic win at The Gabba, where Australia's 32-year unbeaten record came to an end," the Board recalled.

Mithun Manhas, BCCI president said Rahane's career was a fine example of a player putting the team first.

"Ajinkya Rahane's career is a fine example of what it means to put the team first," Manhas said. (PTI)

Mandaviya assures continued support to shooters Neeru and Esha

NEW DELHI, July 30: Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Thursday assured history-making trap shooter Neeru Dhand and pistol ace Esha Singh of the government's continued support in their pursuit for excellence.

Neeru made history earlier this month by becoming the first Indian woman trap shooter to win a gold medal at an ISSF World Cup, achieving the milestone in Lonato, Italy.

Esha, a multiple medallist at the Asian Games and ISSF World Cups, continued her impressive rise on the international stage by winning the women's 25m pistol gold medal at the recently concluded ISSF World Cup in Hangzhou, China. The triumph marked her second World Cup gold in the event this year, further cementing her status as one of India's brightest shooting talents.

"The government is pushing hard and leaving no stone unturned to ensure you don't stay behind by any means in giving your best from every tournament," Mandaviya told the two athletes.

Neeru, 26, from Haryana's Jind district, also set a new national qualification record by scoring 121 out of a possible 125 before defeating former world champion Carole Comenier of France in a thrilling World Cup final. (PTI)

