

**6** WORLD

**7** NATION

- TMC, BJP workers clash during Baruaipur rape-murder protest rally in Kolkata
- Shah speaks to CMs of Kerala, Maha, Gujarat, J&K on rain situation, assures help
- Funeral procession begins in Najaf for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei
- Israeli strike kills World Cup screening organiser in Gaza just before kickoff

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Nearly 83,000 hectares of Assam land encroached by four states, House told

## Nagaland tops the table: Atul Bora

GUWAHATI, July 8: Almost 83,000 hectares of land belonging to Assam are currently being occupied by Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, the state Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

In a reply to a query by Congress MLA Rekibuddin Ahmed, Border Protection and Development minister Atul Bora said a total of 82,751.86 hectares of Assam land across 18 districts are under the control of four neighbouring states at present.

These states are Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram, he added.

Out of all the occupying states, Nagaland has captured the highest



area of land in Assam -- 59,490.21 hectares. Meghalaya is forcibly owning 3,441.86 hectares of land, the least among the four states, the

minister said. Arunachal Pradesh has encroached upon 16,144.01 hectares of land, while Mizoram has

grabbed 3,675.78 hectares, he added.

The 18 affected districts in Assam are Sonitpur, Biswanath, Lakhimpur, Dhemaji, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Golaghat, Goalpara, Cachar, Kamrup, Kamrup Metropolitan, South Salmara-Mankachar, West Karbi Anglong, Hailakandi and Sribhumii.

"The Assam government has progressed to settle these border disputes with the neighbouring states through dialogues. We have already signed bipartite agreements with Meghalaya and Arunachal Pradesh as per instructions of the Union Home Ministry," Bora said. (PTI)

## Tea Association of India seeks continuation of subsidy schemes, clearance of dues

GUWAHATI, July 8: The Tea Association of India (TAI) has urged the Assam government to continue its various subsidies and incentives for the sector in the next Budget, maintaining that these measures have helped the industry in the state.

The planters' group also called for release of due, eligible subsidies and other payments to the tea companies.

In a memorandum to the state government ahead of the annual Budget for 2026-27, the TAI requested continuation of the Assam Tea Industry Special Incentive Scheme (ATISIS) 2020.

It said that the scheme has immensely benefited the tea industry by way of cost mitigation and sustaining Orthodox production. This has also led to an increase in Assam Orthodox production in 2025 by around 36 per cent over 2024.

Raising certain concerns over the scheme, the TAI claimed that a large number of tea estates have not received subsidy amounts due for past financial years under ATISIS although all requisite documents have been



submitted within the time frame and approved by all other departments such as banks, DICC and Tea Board. "Since boosting Orthodox production was a critical objective of ATISIS 2020 to increase exports, it is apprehended that the already (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## ASDC hits back at MLA Goswami over Karbi Anglong boundary remarks



HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 8: The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) on Wednesday strongly condemned recent remarks made by Barhampur MLA Jitu Goswami regarding the inter-district boundary between West Karbi Anglong and Nagaon districts, asserting that his statements directly contradict official government records and gazette notifications.

The controversy stems from Goswami's visit to the Borapani Reserve Forest on July 3, where he reportedly claimed that the bridge over the Karbi

Langpi (Borpani) River serves as the inter-district boundary. Goswami also allegedly instructed Nagaon revenue and forest officials to install permanent boundary markers near the bridge at Baihalangso. His remarks have triggered widespread protests from political parties and social organisations across Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong, including the Karbi Students' Association.

Addressing a press conference at the party's central committee office in Diphu, ASDC general secretary Jotson Bey pointed to an Assam Government Gazette Notification dated September 3, 1975, which explicitly states that around 30 villages in the Maisam, Punja, and Borpathar areas were officially transferred to Karbi Anglong (now under West Karbi Anglong district).

Bey alleged that a 1951 demarcation error had mistakenly placed several tribal-dominated villages—including those in Maisam, Ram Habe, and Garobinda—under Nagaon district, despite their deep historical and geographical ties to Karbi Anglong. To back the party's stance, Bey cited an official communication from the Hills Areas Department, Government of Assam (Letter No. HAD.05/08/13, dated (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Only 196 of 36,358 declared foreigners repatriated since 2021: Assam govt

GUWAHATI, July 8: Over 36,000 people have been declared foreigners in the five years since 2021, and only 196 of them have been repatriated to Bangladesh so far, the Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply to a query by Congress MLA Mohibur Rohman, Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora said a total of 36,358 persons have been declared foreigners by the Foreigners Tribunals (FTs) since 2021 to May 2026. "Out of them, 196 people have been repatriated to Bangladesh from Assam," he added.

Giving year-wise breakdowns, Bora said 7,151 foreigners were declared in 2021, followed by 9,028 in 2022, 6,859 in 2023, 6,178 in 2024, 5,106 in 2025 and 2036 in 2026 so far. As per legal provisions, only the Foreigners

Tribunals can declare a person a foreigner in Assam, and subsequently, higher courts can be approached if the verdict is not favourable.

According to the Assam Accord, the names of all foreigners coming to Assam on or after March 25, 1971, would be detected, deleted from the electoral rolls, and steps would be taken to deport them.

The Assembly witnessed noisy scenes after Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi asked Bora about the exact number of illegal foreigners living in Assam presently.

When Bora said that no data is available with him to table in the Assembly at the moment, the opposition legislator said why the House should listen to "everything" being uttered by the minister. (PTI)

## 3,000 km of embankments in Assam need repair: Minister



GUWAHATI, July 8: Over 60 per cent of 4,800 km embankments in Assam require repair or complete reconstruction as their carrying or flood resistance capacity has waned, the state Assembly was informed on Wednesday.

In a written reply to a query by BJP MLA Bhupen Roy, Water Resources minister Susanta Borgohain said his department has so far constructed 4,800 km of embankments across the state.

"Out of them, we have strength-

ened almost 1,800 km. We can say the carrying or flood resistance capacity of the remaining 3,000 km embankments has decreased," he added.

However, the Water Resources Department occasionally carries out maintenance work to keep these embankments in a working condition, Borgohain said.

"In the last five years, the Water Resources Department enhanced the height and strengthened almost 863 km of embankment. These works are at the last stages of completion," he added.

"Presently, we are left with repair or reconstruction of the remaining 3,000 km of embankments," the minister said.

He also informed the House that approximately 1,000 km have been handed over to the Public Works Department (PWD) for development of embankment-cum-roads. (PTI)

## 5 held with drugs in Assam's Barpeta

BARPETA, July 8: Five suspected drug peddlers were arrested with heroin, Yaba tablets and banned cough syrup in a series of anti-narcotics operations across Assam's Barpeta district, police said on Wednesday.

The raids were conducted in Barpeta town, Barpeta Road, Howly and Sarthebari, they said.

At Barpeta Road, police seized 0.76 grams of heroin packed in eight vials, 240 Yaba tablets, Rs 42,940 in cash and two mobile phones.

In Barpeta town, officials recovered 0.52 grams of heroin, five Yaba tablets, 63 empty containers and two syringes.

The operation at Howly led to the seizure of 11.84 gram of heroin concealed in a soap box, 0.01 grams of heroin kept in a plastic vial and a mobile phone.

In Sarthebari, police recovered 172 bottles of banned cough syrup suspected to be meant for illegal distribution. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Massive Brahmaputra erosion in Dibrugarh's Mohanaghat area

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, July 8: The Brahmaputra River eroded approximately 70 metres of riverbank in the Mohanaghat area of Dibrugarh over a five-hour period on Tuesday evening, raising concerns among residents of nearby riverside villages.

The erosion occurred between 4 pm and 9 pm. In response, the district administration deployed machinery to the site, while the Water Resources Department began dumping sand- and silt-filled geobags from boats to contain the erosion.

Additional deputy commissioner Deba Narayan Hazarika is overseeing the operation.

Speaking on Wednesday, Hazarika said the erosion had been largely brought under control.

"The erosion has been almost controlled. We are using geo-bags to stem the erosion," he said.

He attributed the erosion to a drop in the river's water level fol-



lowing the recent floods.

Villagers, however, remain on alert as the river continues to flow close to the eroded bank. The administration has asked residents to report any fresh signs of bank slippage. The current containment measures are expected to continue for the next few days until the riverbank is stabilised.

District authorities said they are monitoring the situation round the clock and have kept additional earthmoving equipment on standby.

"We don't know what will happen to us. The erosion caused by the Brahmaputra has become a serious threat to our lives. The government has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Law students need practical exposure: M'laya HC Chief Justice

SHILLONG, July 8: Chief Justice of the High Court of Meghalaya Justice Revati Mohite Dere on Wednesday urged law students to complement academic learning with practical legal exposure, saying there is no substitute for hard work, perseverance and integrity in the legal profession.

Speaking at the third Foundation Day celebrations of the National Law University (NLU) Meghalaya, Dere encouraged students to view the study of law as a lifelong journey of learning and self-improvement.

She advised students to undertake internships with district court practitioners, public prosecutors, defence lawyers and non-governmental organisations to gain first-hand exposure to the justice delivery system and understand legal issues at the grassroots level. "There is no substitute for hard

work, perseverance and continuous self-improvement in the legal profession," she said, urging aspiring lawyers to remain open to new perspectives and pursue their careers with integrity, dedication and a commitment to serving society.

Earlier, the Chief Justice, who is also the Chancellor of the university, inaugurated the institution's new Moot Court Room and participated in a ceremonial tree plantation to mark the occasion.

The celebrations, held at the Dr A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Auditorium, began with a welcome address by Vice-Chancellor (In-charge) Kerpa Meida Lyngdoh Nongbri, followed by the screening of the university's institutional video highlighting its academic initiatives and achievements. The university also launched its Student House System during the programme following a presentation (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Two militants arrested in Manipur

IMPHAL, July 8: Security forces arrested two militants, belonging to proscribed outfits, for allegedly being involved in extortion activities in Manipur, a police statement said on Wednesday.

A 22-year-old cadre of the banned Kuki National Front was apprehended from the Nungkhall bridge area in Jiribam district on Monday. One country-made pistol with a magazine and six live rounds of bullets were seized from his possession, it said.

A 38-year-old member of the outlawed People's Liberation Army was also arrested in Bishnupur district on Monday for alleged extortion activities, the police statement said.

A person was also apprehended for allegedly extorting money from vehicle owners at Tairenpokpi in Imphal West district on Tuesday.

During a visit to the Noney district headquarters on Tuesday, Manipur DGP Mukesh Singh had directed police officers to remain proactive in curbing extortion activities in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## MAC Nojit Kemprai appointed as EM to 13 NC Hills Autonomous Council



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 8: The Assam Governor on Wednesday appointed Member of Autonomous Council (MAC) Nojit Kemprai as an executive member (EM) to the 13 North Cachar Hill Autonomous Council.

The appointment was made

under Rule 20 (1) of the Assam Autonomous District (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 as amended and as applicable to the North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council, Haflong, read with Rule 19(1).

Nojit Kemprai was elected from the 20-Gunjung Constituency in 2019 NC Hill Autonomous Council poll and served as an Executive Member (EM) to the 12th North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council (NCHAC).

He unopposedly won the 13th North Cachar Hill Autonomous Council in 2024 from the same constituency.

Moreover, the Governor under rule 21(3) of Assam Autonomous District remove sitting executive member Amendu Hojai of 23 Harangajao constituency from his position, however Hojai will continue to serve as MAC to the 13th NCHAC. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## The digital registration process is designed to be user-friendly

### Residents urged to actively participate in upcoming digital Self-Enumeration process

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 8: The Office of the District Census Officer, Karbi Anglong, issued an urgent appeal on Wednesday calling on all district residents to actively participate in the upcoming digital Self-Enumeration (SE) process for Census 2027.

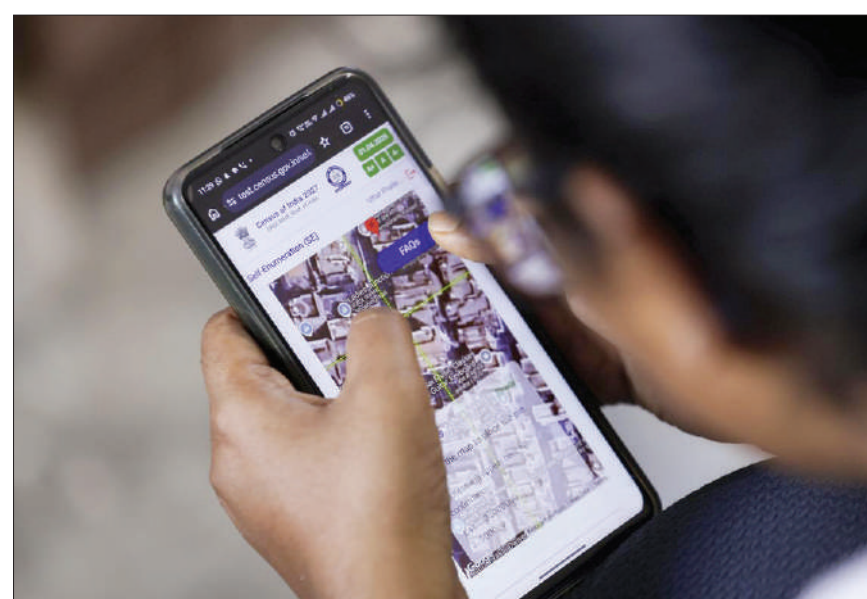
The online self-enumeration window will open on August 2 and run until August 16, 2026, serving as a crucial preliminary phase before standard house-to-house data collection begins.

The self-enumeration facility is part of a broader initiative by the Government of India to modernise the census process. By leveraging digital technology, the government aims to significantly improve the speed, transparency, and data quality of the national census.

Through this portal, residents can securely submit their household information from the comfort of their homes before an official enumerator visits their residence.

The digital registration process is designed to be user-friendly and takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

Residents can complete their filing by following these steps: Log on to the dedi-



icated national census portal at [https://se.census.gov.in]([https://se.census.gov.in]); select the appropriate State/Union Territory and register using a

valid mobile number; complete the online form with the required household details; upon successful submission, a unique Self-Enumeration Identification (SE ID)

will be generated and sent via SMS or email; residents must safely preserve their SE ID.

This ID must be shared with the Census Enumerator during their subsequent physical visit to verify and confirm the online submission.

The 15-day online portal window acts as a soft launch for the broader census timeline in the region. Immediately following the closure of the digital portal, physical field operations will commence.

From August 17 – September 15, 2026 door-to-door house listing and housing census operations across Assam by official Census Enumerators.

Highlighting the massive scale of the operation, the district census officer has formally requested the support of all local government departments, educational institutions, local civic bodies, and community organisations.

Public institutions and local leadership are urged to drive awareness campaigns, dispel misinformation, and encourage maximum neighborhood participation to ensure an efficient, seamless, and fully transparent Census 2027 footprint in Karbi Anglong.

## Aggressively working to combat child exploitation on our apps: Meta

**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Just days after the government issued it a notice, Meta on Tuesday outlined its efforts to combat child sexual abuse material (CSAM) across its apps, highlighting AI-powered detection and large-scale enforcement actions, as the social media giant promised to continue investment in technology and resources to keep young people safe and strengthen its ad review processes.

In a blog published Tuesday, the company termed child exploitation as a "horrific crime" and asserted that it works aggressively every day to fight this kind of abuse on and off its platforms.

"This work is ongoing. Our teams are constantly improving our defences -- developing new technology, blocking violating links, and sharing intelligence across the industry -- but we know there is more to do. We will continue investing in every resource needed to keep young people safe, strengthen our ad review processes, and work with law enforcement to hold criminals accountable," Meta said.

Meta detailed the company's ongoing efforts to combat child exploitation across its apps, highlighting AI-powered detection and large-scale enforcement action.

"We're aware of recent news reports about Instagram ads in India that violated our policies against child exploitation. And we want to be clear: we take these concerns seriously, we never want this content on our platforms, and we're committed to improving our efforts to combat it," it noted.

Meta said it was categorically inaccurate to suggest that it deliberately targets ads featuring children to people based on an inappropriate interest.

"Quite the opposite: we use technology to identify accounts that have shown potentially suspicious activity related to children, and we automatically removed over four million of these accounts last year," Meta said.

Meta said it has strengthened AI-powered enforcement against



child exploitation, with newer systems covering languages spoken by 98 per cent people online.

Last year, it removed over four million suspicious accounts and 36 million pieces of child exploitation content globally. In India, AI tools helped remove 1,60,000 accounts in the past six months for posting suspicious links linked to exploitative activity. It further said before the cases were brought to its attention, its enforcement systems had already identified and disabled several of the violating ads, and the accounts behind them. "Our subsequent investigation led to additional action, including removing further ads, disabling accounts, and blocking URLs linked to policy-violating content," it pointed out.

The Menlo Park, California-headquartered tech giant Meta owns popular social media platforms Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. "We have advanced AI detection tools set up to identify when individuals post suspicious off-platform links in coordination with other signals indicating child exploitative activity. In the last six months alone, this led to the removal of 1,60,000 accounts in India," Meta said.

Meanwhile, government sources told PTI that Meta's official response to Saturday's notice is awaited. The government's focus will be on the corrective

measures and actions taken by the company to address the concerns, they said.

Last week, the government issued a stern notice to Meta on Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM) in paid advertisements on Instagram. MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) ordered Instagram to disable all ads and content promoting and facilitating access to CSEAM, and has also demanded a detailed explanation within seven days.

The action came after IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnav directed MeitY officials to summon Meta over Instagram ads allegedly promoting child sexual abuse material. Regulatory scrutiny from the ministry came amid a BBC report that alleged Meta's recommendation algorithm had been promoting videos containing child sexual abuse material, exposing serious gaps in safeguards.

The BBC investigation had also allegedly found advertisements of this nature appearing on Facebook and Instagram, despite Meta's advertising policies explicitly prohibiting nudity and sexually explicit content.

Instagram is alleged to have shown paid advertisements with terms like 'rape video' and 'child video', which directed users to Telegram channels where such content was reportedly on sale.

In Tuesday's blog post, Meta said its advertising review process combines automated systems with human reviewers to detect and remove policy-violating ads, while acknowledging that no system can catch every violation. Ads are screened before they run and remain subject to continuous review and re-review, with users also able to report suspected violations, according to the company. Meta said it monitors advertiser behaviour in addition to individual ads, and may reject ads or restrict advertiser business accounts, ad accounts, pages and user accounts found violating its policies.

The social media firm pointed out that it continues to strengthen its ad review systems and enforcement to keep bad actors off its platforms and better protect users.

"We're committed to keeping bad actors off our platforms and are constantly evolving our systems to stay ahead of them. Protecting people who use our platforms remains at the centre of how we build and enforce our advertising standards," it said.

Highlighting its zero-tolerance approach on the issue, Meta said it has detailed and robust policies against child nudity, abuse and exploitation, which include sharing or soliciting of child exploitation imagery, inappropriate interactions with teens, and the sexualisation of minors.

"As noted in our Ad Standards, all ads must comply with our Community Standards on Child Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Nudity. Ads must not contain content that sexually exploits or endangers children," it said.

Meta said it reports apparent child exploitation cases to law enforcement through the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), publishes global and India-specific transparency reports, and has appointed statutory compliance officers (Chief Compliance Officer, Grievance Officer, and Nodal Contact Person) under India's IT Rules. (PTI)

## Vinayak Distributors celebrates 26 Years of Trust with grand anniversary sale

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 8:** Celebrating over two decades of excellence, Vinayak Distributors, one of Northeast India's most trusted names in premium hardware and home interior solutions, has announced its Grand Anniversary Sale, offering discounts of up to 80% on selected products for a limited period.

Located at Dr BK Kakati Road, near Ulubari Flyover, Guwahati, the company's sprawling 10,000 sq. ft. showroom showcases an extensive range of premium products, including architectural hardware, modular wardrobes, sliding partitions, laminates, decorative panels, digital locks, door hardware, and other interior solutions. The showroom has become a preferred destination for homeowners, architects, interior designers, builders, and developers seeking quality products under one roof.

The anniversary celebration is a

tribute to the unwavering trust and support of customers who have been part of Vinayak Distributors' remarkable journey since its inception in 2000.

Announcing the special anniversary campaign, Pawan Sureka, proprietor of Vinayak Distributors, said, "Our journey over the last 25 years has been built on one simple principle—customer satisfaction. We have always believed that selling a product is just the beginning of a long-term relationship. Our commitment to quality, prompt service, and dependable after-sales support has helped us earn the confidence of thousands of customers across Assam and the Northeast. This anniversary sale is our way of thanking them for their continued trust and loyalty."

As part of the celebration, customers can avail discounts of up to 80% on selected products, including kitchen appliances, digital locks, door locks, premium hard-

ware accessories, and other exclusive items. The offer is valid for a limited period and is expected to attract homeowners as well as professionals involved in residential and commercial projects.

Over the years, Vinayak Distributors has earned a strong reputation for delivering premium-quality products backed by reliable after-sales service, quick customer response, and expert product guidance. These values have made the company one of the most preferred names in the hardware and interior solutions industry. Customers are invited to visit the showroom and experience the latest innovations in home interiors while taking advantage of the exclusive anniversary offers.

With its continued focus on quality, innovation, and customer-centric service, Vinayak Distributors remains committed to enhancing modern living spaces and setting new benchmarks in the industry.

## MakeMyTrip launches global rewards program 'OneCircle'

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 8:** MakeMyTrip on Wednesday announced the launch of OneCircle, a global rewards program built around the Indian traveller, bringing together a collaborative network of 13,376 accommodation properties including hotels and alternate accommodations across 1,002 cities worldwide (as of June 30, 2026) onto a single platform.

OneCircle launches at significant scale, covering 868 cities across India, with over 12,330 accommodation properties in India under one rewards program. Inter-

nationally, the program extends to 1046 properties across 39 countries covering 134 destinations, chosen for their salience to outbound Indian travel.

Properties have been onboarded based on consumer ratings, on-ground assessment by MakeMyTrip's supply team, and their interest in joining the program.

OneCircle brings together a diverse mix of accommodation partners, ranging from independent hotels to homestays and villas, across luxury, premium, and budget segments. It offers travellers the flexibility to choose from a wide variety of stays tailored to their preferences and budgets. Travellers stand to earn a minimum of 10% of their accommodation spend back as reward points on every booking, redeemable on their next stay anywhere in the network.

The program is weighted towards the non-metro markets driving India's domestic travel growth: three in four participating properties sit in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities. Gurugram, Bengaluru, and Jaipur have emerged as the top cities by number of properties, while Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Kerala lead by state footprint.

*Contd. from Page 1...*

## Tea Association of India

achieved spurt in Orthodox production in Assam may be hampered if due subsidy is not received by the units," it said. The Association has urged the government to consider and sanction all genuine claims submitted by the respective tea estates during each financial year. It asked for sufficient budgetary allocation during 2026-27 based on the claims submitted by the tea estates during the previous financial year, with a year-to-year increase.

The planters' group requested the extension of the abeyance of the levy of agricultural income tax on tea cultivation. Thanking the government for the exemption for the past three years from 2023, it sought extension of the waiver for the fiscal 2026-27.

It said this waiver had provided much-needed relief to the tea industry at a time when the sector continues to face significant cost pressures, volatile market conditions and sustainability challenges.

"The benefits of the tax waiver have primarily been utilised by tea estates to partially offset operational losses, meet statutory labour obligations, and sustain basic plantation maintenance," the TAI added.

It also sought extension of exemption from levy and payment of tax on green tea leaves for a further three years beyond December 31, 2026.

For the Assam tea industry to remain viable, it is essential that the cost of production is rationalised and to that end, withdrawal of green leaf cess could play a vital role, the Association maintained.

The TAI further requested the state government to provide reimbursement of power subsidy at the rate of Rs 2 per unit consumed for a period of five years by the tea manufacturing units (new as well as old units) of Assam. Pleading for allocation of sufficient budget for tea tourism projects, the TAI said that while the state government has provided limited financial assistance to selected tea estates, the present amount is inadequate to develop this sector on a sustainable and scalable basis. It has also sought granting of reimbursement of 100 per cent SGST paid on the finished product through debit in electronic cash ledger account as per existing provisions for at least five years. The TAI further asked for a subsidy at the rate of 50 per cent on capital cost for setting up effluent treatment plant in the manufacturing units as assistance for environmental compliance. It sought the continued assistance in the form of various existing schemes, which had been withdrawn, to upscale the productivity of land, labour and factory where the future of the industry lies.

TAI has further urged the implementation of VB-GRAMG during the tea industry's lean period from mid-December to mid-March so that the work force engaged by the estates can find proper jobs during the period.

The planters' body also sought the implementation of various schemes of the Agriculture department for the benefit of the tea industry and its workers. (PTI)

## ASDC hits back at MLA Goswami

August 17, 1988). The letter acknowledges that Harsam Gaon and four other villages in the Punja-Borpathar area were legally transferred from Nagaon to Karbi Anglong under Government Notification No. HNP.283/75/12. Bey emphasised that this document serves as definitive proof of Karbi Anglong's legal jurisdiction over the areas.

The ASDC general secretary further revealed that despite the 1975 notification, these specific areas were bundled under the Barhampur Legislative Assembly Constituency during the 2023 delimitation exercise. In response, the ASDC had submitted a memorandum to the Election Commission of India on July 19, 2023, demanding that Tarve Abi, Punja, Borpathar, and Bhoksong be correctly aligned under the Rongkhang Legislative Assembly Constituency. Reflecting on the political history of the dispute, Bey recalled that during ASDC's tenure in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), the party steadfastly opposed holding Nagaon Gaon Panchayat elections in these disputed pockets. However, he alleged that after the Congress party took over the KAAC under former chief executive member Joyram Engleng, election campaigning for Gaon Panchayat polls was allowed to take place there, complicating the issue.

Questioning Goswami's controversial directives, Bey stated that the Barhampur lawmaker should have verified official state records before speaking publicly on such a sensitive matter. He further criticised successive state governments for failing to settle the inter-district boundary line, leaving it gridlocked for over five decades.

The ASDC has urgently appealed to Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to step in and permanently resolve the boundary dispute, warning that prolonged administrative ambiguity only fuels confusion and border friction. Bey concluded by stating that any further failure to settle the border would amount to a direct neglect of the legitimate rights of the people of Karbi Anglong.

The press conference was also attended by ASDC President Sonasing Terang, assistant general secretary Daniel Teron, and finance secretary Singnot Kro, alongside other senior party leaders.

## 5 held with drugs

Five persons were arrested in connection with the seizures, and further investigation is underway, police said. (PTI)

## Massive Brahmaputra erosion

taken measures using geo-bags, but we are unsure how effective they will be in controlling the erosion," said local resident Dev Chouhan. He added that the river has been steadily advancing towards the village over the years and warned that continued erosion could wipe out the entire area if effective protective measures are not implemented at the earliest.

## Law students need practical

by Assistant Director of Sports Rishan Veban Diengdoh. Registrar Prof (Dr) Baharul Islam proposed the vote of thanks. The university said the Chief Justice's visit marked a significant milestone in its continued pursuit of excellence in legal education and institutional development. (PTI)

## Two militants arrested

the state. Singh had also emphasised maintaining law and order, strengthening anti-extortion operations, and ensuring prompt investigation and disposal of pending cases. (PTI)

## MAC Nojit Kemprai appointed

With induction of Kemprai, the executive committee of the North Cachar Hill Autonomous Council, led by CEM Debolal Gorlosa rose to 15 including the CEM and 14 EMs.

## Muthoot Exim to expand gold recycling centres to 200 by FY28



**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Muthoot Exim, one of India's first organised gold recycling companies, on Wednesday said it plans to expand its network of centres to 200 by the end of the fiscal year 2027-28 from 109 currently.

The company, the precious metals arm of Muthoot Pappachan Group, operates through "Muthoot Gold Point" centres that test and value old gold before recycling it, part of an effort to formalise India's largely unorganised gold recycling market.

Muthoot Gold Point has recycled nearly 5 tonnes of old gold from more than 55,000 customers so far, with about 40 per cent returning for repeat transactions, the company's CEO Keyur Shah said in a statement.

"The company now plans to expand the network to 200 centres to increase its annual gold recycling

volumes," Shah said.

The centres source old and unused gold directly from consumers and refine it into 24-karat pure gold for supply to jewellery and coin manufacturers, the company said.

Customers are paid instantly after their gold is recycled.

The push comes as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called for reducing gold imports and strengthening domestic gold circulation. Muthoot Exim said organised recycling could reduce reliance on new mining while supporting India's domestic gold supply chain.

"We recognised the opportunity in organised gold recycling very early and have actively focused on building a transparent ecosystem for customers across India," Shah said. (PTI)

## Gold falls ₹ 800 to ₹ 1.48 lakh/10g amid surging crude, weak global cues

**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Declining for the third straight session, gold prices fell ₹ 800 to ₹ 1.48 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, as weak global trends and a spike in crude oil rates amid escalating tensions in West Asia dampened investor sentiments.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity depreciated by ₹ 800 to ₹ 1,48,450 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from Tuesday's closing level of ₹ 1,49,250 per 10 grams.

However, silver prices remained unchanged at ₹ 2,39,800 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes).

Traders said bullion remained under pressure as surging crude oil prices stoked inflation concerns, lifting US Treasury bond yields and the dollar.

"Gold prices extended their decline on Wednesday, tracking weakness in overseas trade as rising geopolitical tensions and a sharp rebound in crude oil prices dampened sentiment toward pre-

cious metals," said Saamil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities.

In the international markets, spot gold fell USD 49.46, or 1.2 per cent, to USD 4,056.24 per ounce, and silver declined to trade at USD 58.61 per ounce.

"Spot gold has come under renewed downward pressure in the global markets on Wednesday after US President Donald Trump declared the interim peace agreement with Iran was 'over', reigniting fears of a broader Middle East conflict," Praveen Singh, Head of Commodities at Mirae Asset ShareKhan, said. The renewed tensions between the US and Iran have pushed crude oil prices sharply by nearly 7 per cent higher, while Treasury bond yields and the dollar index have also strengthened on expectations that elevated energy prices could fuel inflation and keep interest rates higher for longer, he added. (PTI)

## Heritage Foods says 'Fresh Paneer' label is descriptive, responds to FSSAI notice

**HYDERABAD/NEW DELHI, July 8:** Heritage Foods Ltd said on Wednesday it has submitted a detailed response to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) over a show-cause notice concerning the use of the term "Fresh Paneer" on its product packaging, maintaining that the label accurately describes the product and does not mislead consumers.

The dairy company said "Fresh Paneer" refers to the inherent nature of paneer as a fresh dairy product made from pasteurised milk for refrigerated consumption with a limited shelf life, and is not an exaggerated quality claim.

Clarifying its position on the show cause notice issued by FSSAI concerning certain expressions used on the packaging of its Fresh Paneer product, the company, in a statement, said it has submitted a detailed response to the watchdog, reaffirming its commitment to food safety, regulatory compliance and consumer transparency.

"Heritage Foods stated that the term "Fresh Paneer" is used solely to describe the intrinsic nature of the product and not as an exaggerated or misleading quality claim. Paneer is, by definition, a fresh dairy product manufactured from pasteurised milk for refrigerated consumption within a limited shelf life. It is neither dehydrated, reconstituted, nor frozen," it said. (PTI)

### NAME CORRECTION

I have Changed my name from Mohammed Imdad Uddin to Md Imdad Uddin by swearing a notarial affidavit at Srimanta Sankardevnagar, Hojai (Assam) Md Imdad Uddin S/o-Mohammed Amir Uddin Vill-Swopur gaon, PS.-Murajhar, Dist-Hojai (Assam)

**HDFC BANK** Registered Office: HDFC Bank House, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai - 400 013 and having one of its office as Retail Portfolio Management at HDFC Bank Ltd, 1st Floor, I-Think Techno Campus, Kanjurmarg (East), Mumbai - 400042.

### SALE INTIMATION AND NOTICE FOR SALE OF SECURITIES PLEDGED TO HDFC BANK LTD.

The below mentioned Borrowers of HDFC Bank Ltd (the "Bank") are hereby notified regarding the sale of securities pledged to the Bank, for availing credit facilities in the nature of Loans/Overdraft Against Securities.

Due to persistent default by the Borrowers in making repayment of the outstanding dues as per agreed loans / facilities terms, the below loan / facilities accounts are in delinquent status or classified as NPA (Non-Performing Asset). The Bank has issued multiple notices/loan recall notice to these Borrowers, including the final sale notice on the below-mentioned date whereby, Bank had invoked the pledge and provided 7 days' time to the Borrower to repay the entire outstanding dues in the below accounts, failing which, Bank would be at liberty to sell the pledged securities without issuing further notice in this regard. The Borrowers have neglected and failed to make due repayments, therefore, Bank in exercise of its rights under the loan agreement as a pledgee has decided to sell / dispose off the Securities on or after 16<sup>th</sup> July 2026, for recovering the dues owed by the Borrowers to the Bank. The Borrowers are hereby notified to treat this as a notice of sale in compliance of section 176 of the Indian Contract Act, 1872. The Borrowers are, also, notified that, if at any time, the value of the pledged securities falls further due to volatility in the stock market to create further deficiency in the margin requirement then Bank shall at its discretion sell the pledged security within one (1) calendar day, without any further notice in this regard. The Borrowers shall remain liable to the Bank for repayment of any remaining outstanding amount, post adjustment of the proceeds from sale of pledged securities.

Sr. No.	Loan Account Number	Borrower's Name	Outstanding Amount as on 06 <sup>th</sup> July 2026	Date of Sale Notice
1	XXXXXXXXXX9038	SAJALA AGGARWAL	25,192.00	07-07-2026
2	XXXXXXXXXX2288	NATHU SHAH	7,403.84	07-07-2026
3	XXXXXXXXXX9802	SANTOSH KR TIWARI	42,613.00	07-07-2026

DATE : 09.07.2026 | PLACE : MEGHALAYA Sd/-, HDFC BANK LTD.

### ASSAM POWER DISTRIBUTION COMPANY LIMITED (A Govt. of Assam Public Limited Company)

#### PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public of area of MAILLOO, BELBARI-1, BELBARI-2, WATIZUR NO.1, WATIZUR EKRAHOLA, WATIZUR BENGALI BASTI, DIKHLEM MAJ GAON, WASHAIKONG-1, WASHAIKONG-2, BOROWASHILING, MONBU NEPALI BASTI, JANGPHANGLANGSO NEPALI BASTI, DISMAO-1, CHOTOWASHILING-1 that the newly constructed 21.00 Km, 33kV overhead line from 33kV at Mailloo 33/11kV Sub-Station, West Karbi Anglong district to the newly constructed 33/11kV Block Bazar Sub-Station, Dima Hasao district, Assam under the ADSELR Scheme funded by AIB is ready and proposed to be charged and energized on Dtd. 06-07-2026 at 9:00 AM or onwards at any time. Therefore, all concerned, and the general public are hereby cautioned not to approach, touch, climb or interfere with the said line and its associated equipment and keep safe distance from the 33kV line. Any unauthorized contact with the line may result in serious injury, electrocution, or loss of life. If any eventuality caused due to violation of this notice, APDCL will not be responsible under any circumstances. This notice is issued in the interest of public safety. Sd/- Chief Executive Officer KANCH Electrical Circle, APDCL (CAR), Diphu Please pay your energy bill on time and help us to serve you better!

The delegation later visited the worst-affected areas, including Posa NEEPCO Colony

## Central team assesses monsoon damage in Arunachal's Keyi Panyor

**HT Bureau**

**YAZALI, July 8:** An Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT) led by Ministry of Home Affairs joint secretary Nishtha Tiwari on Wednesday visited Arunachal Pradesh's Keyi Panyor district to assess the damage caused by recent flash floods, landslides and heavy monsoon rains.

The central team, accompanied by State Disaster Management secretary Dani Salu, travelled from Itanagar to Yazali via Kimin, inspecting several landslide-prone stretches and road formation breaches along the route that have disrupted connectivity in the region.

The delegation later visited the worst-affected areas, including Posa NEEPCO Colony and Posa village, where it reviewed the extent of flood damage to public infrastructure and residential areas

and interacted with local officials. Following the field visit, the team held a review meeting with Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti, Superintendent of Police Angad Mehta, district officials and public representatives.

During the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner gave a detailed presentation outlining the impact of the monsoon on infrastructure, agriculture and public assets, besides highlighting the district's immediate relief and rehabilitation requirements.

Officials said the findings of the on-ground assessment in Yazali and adjoining areas will form part of the IMCT's report to the Ministry of Home Affairs. The report will be used to assess the state's request for additional central financial assistance to support relief, restoration and reconstruction efforts in the affected areas.



Commuters asked to drive with utmost care on NH-29 in Chumoukedima

**HT Correspondent**

**DIMAPUR, July 8:** The Chumoukedima district administration on Wednesday issued an advisory asking commuters to exercise utmost caution while travelling along the NH-29 stretch between Chathe Bridge (Unity Gate) and Tsiedukhu-Khuokhi Bridge (Kuki-dolong) in view of the increased risk of rockfalls and landslides during the monsoon.

In the advisory, deputy commissioner Polan John urged commuters to drive carefully, particularly during heavy rainfall and at night, when the possibility of landslides and falling rocks is higher.

The advisory asked road users to follow traffic diversions and strictly adhere to the directions of officials deployed on the route. It said the left-hand side carriageway of the four-lane highway may be temporarily closed without prior notice whenever required.

The administration also urged commuters not to circulate or rely on unverified information regarding road conditions or incidents and instead follow official updates issued by the competent authorities.

## Entrepreneurship Development Programme under CMAAA 2.0 commences in Kokrajhar

**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, July 8:** A month-long Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP) under the Chief Minister's Atmanirbhar Asom Abhiyan (CMAAA) 2.0 commenced on Wednesday which is being held at Bineswar Brahma Engineering College (BSEC) in Kokrajhar, marking the beginning of an intensive capacity-building initiative for selected beneficiaries across the district.

Organised under the aegis of the District Administration, Kokrajhar, the programme will provide structured entrepreneurship training to 3,196 beneficiaries from the Veterinary, Fisheries, Agriculture & Horticulture, Services, and other sectors in multiple batches throughout the month.

The training is designed to strengthen entrepreneurial competencies through sessions on enterprise planning, financial management, market linkages, government support mechanisms, digital business practices, and sustainable enterprise development.

The inaugural session was attended by Pankaj Chakravarty, ACS, district commissioner, Kokrajhar, as the chief guest; Prof. Kamal Kumar Brahma, principal, Bineswar Brahma Engineering College, as the Guest of Honour; and Kishore Gupta, general manager, District Industries & Commerce Centre (DICC), Kokrajhar, as the Special Guest.

Senior officials of the District Administration, faculty members, resource persons, and

beneficiaries also participated in the programme.

Welcoming the gathering, Prof. Kamal Kr. Brahma emphasised the pivotal role of entrepreneurship in achieving the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, observing that innovation, enterprise, and skill development are fundamental drivers of inclusive economic growth. He encouraged the beneficiaries to make effective use of the training and emerge as successful entrepreneurs capable of generating employment and contributing to the socio-economic development of the region.

Addressing the beneficiaries, DC Chakravarty, highlighted CMAAA 2.0 as a transformative initiative of the Government of Assam under the leadership of chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

"The scheme combines financial assistance with capacity building, institutional mentoring, and continuous handholding support to enable aspiring entrepreneurs to establish sustainable enterprises," he added.

Referring to successful entrepreneurial models from within the state, he encouraged the participants to adopt innovation, discipline, and perseverance in building resilient businesses capable of creating local employment opportunities.

Speaking on the occasion, Kishore Gupta encouraged the beneficiaries to leverage the various government support mechanisms and institutional resources available to them. He

## Land broker racket active again in Kaliabor; couple allegedly duped of ₹ 18 lakh

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, July 8:** A land broker syndicate, which had reportedly gone underground after the BJP-led state government launched a crackdown during its second term, has allegedly become active again in Kaliabor, locals claimed.

According to reports, a section of land brokers has resurfaced and is allegedly operating from within the Kaliabor Revenue Circle Office. As a result, several people are alleged to have lost their hard-earned money.

The latest case has come to light from the Jakhlabandha town area under Chatiyal Mouza in the Kaliabor Revenue Circle.

Two brothers have been accused of cheating a local businessman of ₹ 18 lakh by allegedly attempting to sell land belonging to other people. One of the accused reportedly claimed to be a "main person of RSS in Kaliabor", while the other introduced himself as a journalist associated with a news portal. The case has once

again drawn attention to the alleged land broker racket operating in the area.

According to the complaint, the main accused, Bhaskar Singh, allegedly prepared forged sale deeds for 1 kotha 10 lecha of land under Dag No. 231 of Myadi Patta No. 166 in Chatiyal Mouza, Jakhlabandha town, claiming that the land belonged to Rajeev Rajkonwar and Dipali Borgohain.

The complaint further alleges that he also prepared a forged agreement to sell 1 kotha of land under Dag No. 110 of Myadi Patta No. 126 in Chatiyal Mouza, claiming to hold a Power of Attorney. Using these documents, Bhaskar Singh and his brother, Aditya Singh, allegedly collected ₹ 18 lakh from Ankit Jain, husband of Priyanshi Gogoi of Jakhlabandha.

Ankit Jain, who works at a petrol pump in Jakhlabandha and is also a businessman, had agreed to purchase 2 bigha 10 lecha of land spread across the two plots in

the name of his wife, Priyanshi Gogoi. According to the complaint, Bhaskar Singh received ₹ 18 lakh from Jain and executed the relevant documents at the Jakhlabandha Sub-Registrar's Office on May 2, 2025. He also allegedly prepared agreement deeds through a notary in Kaliabor subdivision.

The alleged fraud came to light when Bhaskar Singh took Ankit Jain to inspect the land, which was found to be in the possession of other patta holders. When contacted, the actual landowners expressed surprise and said they had no knowledge of any proposed sale.

Following the incident, Priyanshi Gogoi lodged an FIR at Jakhlabandha Police Station on June 30. Police reportedly visited the residences of Bhaskar Singh and Aditya Singh but had not arrested either of them till the filing of this report. Both are reported to be absconding.

Police are investigating the case.

## NEDFi opens new branch office in Nagaon

**HT Correspondent**

**NAGAON, July 8:** The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) on Wednesday opened a new branch office in Nagaon to expand its outreach and improve access to financial services for entrepreneurs and businesses in central Assam.

The branch, located on the first floor of Ramchandras Building on Namghar Path opposite the SBI Haibarganj branch, was inaugurated by NEDFi Chairman and Managing Director P.V.S.L.N. Murty in the presence of Executive Director Lemli Loyi and other senior officials.

In a statement, NEDFi said the new branch is part of its ongoing expansion across the Northeast to strengthen access to financial assistance for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), startups and other business ventures.

According to the financial institution, NEDFi has opened 21 branch offices across the region and provides term loans, working capital assistance and microfinance support to enterprises in sectors such as health-care, education, food processing, information technology, tea manufacturing and small-scale industries. It also supports eligible startups through its venture capital subsidiary, North-East Venture Capital Ltd.

NEDFi said the Nagaon branch is expected to serve entrepreneurs from Nagaon and neighbouring areas, including Morigaon, Jagiroad, Samaguri, Lanka, Hojai and Diphu, by providing access to its financial assistance schemes.

Established over three decades ago, NEDFi is a regional development finance institution headquartered at Dispur in Guwahati and operates branch and representative offices across the northeastern states.

## Grant-in-aid distributed under PM-AJAY in Morigaon

**HT Correspondent**

**MORIGAON, July 8:** Grant-in-aid financial assistance was distributed to eligible beneficiaries under the Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyudaya Yojana (PM-AJAY) at a programme held at the District Library here on Wednesday.

The programme was organised by the District Mission Management Unit (DMMU), Morigaon, under the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM) in collaboration with the Directorate of Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, Assam.

District Commissioner Anamika Tewari attended the programme as the chief guest. Co-District commissioner Hriday Kumar Das, additional district commissioner Mayur Pankhi Bora, the State PM-AJAY Project Manager and officials of the district administration and ASRLM were also present.

According to officials, the financial assistance was provided to eligible beneficiaries under the scheme to promote sustainable livelihoods, entrepreneurship and economic empowerment among members of the Scheduled Caste community.

An exhibition of products made by Self-Help Groups (SHGs) was also organised on the occasion.

The exhibits showcased products developed with support received under various livelihood promotion initiatives.

Officials said the beneficiaries were encouraged to utilise the financial assistance for income-generating activities and to strengthen self-employment opportunities.

## Kokrajhar rolls out Census 2027 awareness campaign in educational institutions



**HT Correspondent**

**KOKRAJHAR, July 8:** The District Administration, Kokrajhar, began its Awareness Programmes for Educational Institutions to make effectively implementations under Census 2027 (Phase-I) on Wednesday at St. Ann's College in Kokrajhar.

The program has marked the beginning of a series of awareness initiatives aimed at sensitising students and educational institutions about the significance of the upcoming Census exercise.

The event was held in the presence of district commissioner-cum-principal census officer, Kokrajhar, Pankaj Chakravarty, additional district commissioner Banti Talukdar, assistant commissioners Principal of St. Ann's College, concerned officials, faculty members and students.

The programme commenced with the felicitation of the dignitaries.

Addressing the gathering, Chakravarty expressed his happiness that the awareness campaign had commenced from St. Ann's College. He said he was confident that with the support and active participation of educational institutions and students, the campaign would successfully achieve its objectives and contribute meaningfully to the successful conduct of Census 2027. Explaining the im-

portance of the Census, he said the exercise involves comprehensive enumeration of the population, enabling governments to prepare evidence-based plans for the development of villages, districts, states and the nation. Accurate Census data helps identify strengths, deficiencies and future requirements, allowing policymakers to make informed decisions regarding investments and developmental priorities.

Encouraging the students, the district commissioner remarked that while academic success is important, becoming a good human being is even more significant. He urged them to realise their full potential, stating that in today's interconnected global village, opportunities are no longer limited by geography and that sincerity, dedication and good character can help anyone reach the highest levels of success. He extended his best wishes to the students for their future endeavours.

Resource person Binod Chandra Swargiary, associate professor, Commerce College, Kokrajhar, and Pralip Kumar Narzary, professor, Bodoland University, Kokrajhar, highlighted the objectives and importance of Census 2027 (Phase-I) and encouraged students to actively participate in spreading awareness about the national exercise.

## New NGO Karbi Anglong Frontiers Welfare Society launched in Lahorijan

**HT Correspondent**

**BOKAJAN, July 8:** A new non-governmental organisation (NGO) named the "Karbi Anglong Frontiers Welfare Society" (KAFWS) was officially launched on Wednesday at the PWD Inspection Bungalow (IB) in Lahorijan.

Guided by the motto "Together for a Strong Tomorrow," the inaugural ceremony began at 11:00 AM.

The launch event was spearheaded by social worker Molen Teron along with several local youth leaders. The official proceedings were introduced and anchored by Bisujit Banik.

The ceremony commenced with the singing of the Indian National Anthem, followed by a celebratory cake-cutting ceremony to mark the foundation of the organisation.

Several prominent local figures attended the event as guests of honour, including Bishnu Giri, Jagat Bongrum, Manik Singh, Gunaghar Gatom, and Sunil Bey, among other community dignitaries who offered their blessings and support for the new initiative.

Speaking at the launch, the guests and organisers expressed great joy and optimism, stating that KAFWS aims to foster peace, happiness, and progress.

Later, the founders emphasised that the NGO will operate as a non-sectarian and inclusive organisation, working dedicatedly for the welfare of all communities regardless of caste, creed, or religion.

To mark its first day of service immediately following the launch, KAFWS President Molen Teron led a cleanliness drive along the Lahorijan highway area, setting a proactive tone for the organisation's future community welfare activities.

The ceremony commenced with the singing of the Indian National Anthem, followed by a celebratory cake-cutting ceremony to mark the foundation of the organisation.

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## NFR redevelops historic Haldibari station under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme

The works also covered façade improvement, landscaping and beautification

**HT Bureau**

**GUWAHATI, July 8:** The Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has completed the redevelopment of the historic Haldibari railway station in West Bengal under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS), upgrading passenger amenities and infrastructure while preserving the station's heritage, an official statement said on Tuesday.

As per the statement, NFR said the redevelopment project, completed in March this year, has transformed the station into a modern, accessible and passenger-friendly transport hub.

"The station, commissioned in 1878, has historically served as an important gateway linking eastern and northeastern India and regained strategic significance after the reopening of the Haldibari-Chilahati rail link between India and Bangladesh in 2020," the statement added.

According to the railway, the redevelopment included renovation



of the station building and waiting halls, modernisation of toilets, construction of a 12-metre-wide foot overbridge, installation of additional platform shelters, resurfacing of platforms with granite and Kota stone, installation of two lifts, and development of a larger circulating area with improved drainage and parking facilities.

The works also covered façade improvement, landscaping and beautification through graffiti art.

NFR also said special emphasis had been laid on accessibility through the provision of Divyangjan-friendly facilities, including ramps, tactile pathways, accessible

toilets, improved signage and upgraded passenger information systems. Modern telecommunications and security infrastructure have also been installed to enhance operational efficiency and passenger safety, it said.

The redevelopment has addressed longstanding issues such

as congestion at the station entrance, inadequate parking space, waterlogging and ageing infrastructure, the railway said.

"A new entrance porch, improved traffic circulation, expanded waiting areas, modular toilet facilities, better lighting and upgraded platform amenities would provide passengers with a safer and more comfortable travel experience," it added.

The upgraded station is expected to improve connectivity, support economic activity, promote local products under the 'One Station One Product' initiative and further strengthen the historic India-Bangladesh railway corridor, according to NFR.

NFR said it is redeveloping 92 stations under its jurisdiction as part of Indian Railways' nationwide programme to modernise 1,337 railway stations under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme by providing improved passenger amenities, sustainable infrastructure and enhanced connectivity.

## QUOTE OF THE DAY

*If you don't fail sometimes, you are not daring to dream bigger. — Sundar Pichai*

## FIFA World Cup and India

Despite never qualifying for the FIFA World Cup, India has emerged as one of the largest global markets for the current tournament being co-hosted by the United States, Canada, and Mexico, with matches played across 16 official host cities. In the opening weekend alone, the tournament reached over 100 million viewers across Zee Entertainment's platforms. The FIFA World Cup 2026 is officially broadcast in India in Hindi, English, Bengali, and Malayalam. These language feeds aim to cater to regional football strongholds in West Bengal and Kerala, as well as the broader national audience. India holds the second largest Instagram audience for FIFA globally. It is another matter that India's national men's football team is currently ranked 139th in the official FIFA World Rankings, placing them 26th among Asian Football Confederation (AFC) nations. Viewers in India are consuming the tournament through a variety of digital, television, and social platforms. Live matches are being exclusively broadcast in India by Zee Entertainment Enterprises across their Unite8 Sports network channels. Digital streaming is handled by Zee5, which attracted millions of viewers on its opening weekend, with an average engagement time exceeding 190 minutes per viewer.

Zee Entertainment secured the exclusive television and digital broadcasting rights for the 2026 FIFA World Cup in India for an estimated cost of US\$40 million (over Rs.380 crore). The World Cup Football tournament has generated huge buzz in India, with over 360 million views on social media and a massive 10.21 percent share of FIFA's global Instagram audience. Zee Entertainment holds the exclusive television and digital broadcasting rights for the FIFA World Cup 2026 in India. Football fans are watching the matches live on Zee's newly launched United8 Sports Network on TV and streaming them digitally on the ZEE5 platform. A powerful chain of events is driving the growth of India's media and entertainment (M&E) sector to digital space. Hyper-affordable data and widespread smartphone penetration, a massive shift from traditional broadcasting to digital streaming, a booming live event economy, and the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) are propelling the growth. Over 55 crore smartphone users and the availability of the world's cheapest data costs have transformed mobile phones into the primary entertainment device, where Indians spend the majority of their media time.

With audiences increasingly consuming personalized and regional content, digital media officially overtook television to become the largest segment in the Indian M&E landscape. Lately, the exploding 'concert economy' is being fuelled by a spike in ticketed concerts featuring global artists, large public gatherings, and a massive rise in multi-city domestic tours. The democratization of content creation—powered by a four-million-strong creator economy and AI-enabled workflows—has drastically cut production costs and accelerated the generation of professional-grade audio and video.

## Assam's export potential in global markets

Assam has long been known for its lush tea gardens, fertile agricultural land, rich forests, and vibrant cultural traditions. Yet, despite possessing a remarkable range of natural and human resources, the state has not fully realized its export potential in the global marketplace. As international trade continues to reshape regional economies, Assam stands at an important crossroads. Its strategic location in Northeast India, sharing international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh and lying close to South-east Asian countries, gives it a geographical advantage that few Indian states possess. This advantage, however, has remained underutilized for decades due to historical neglect, inadequate infrastructure, logistical bottlenecks, and limited industrial development. Today, changing economic realities, improved connectivity, and renewed policy attention have created fresh opportunities for Assam to emerge as an important export hub. The state's traditional strengths in tea, petroleum, bamboo, silk, spices, horticultural products, and handicrafts are now being complemented by growing prospects in food processing, organic farming, tourism-related products, and value-added manufacturing. Global consumers increasingly seek sustainable, authentic, and high-quality products with distinctive geographical identities, and Assam possesses precisely these qualities. The challenge is no longer the absence of products but the ability to market them effectively, maintain consistent quality, meet international standards, and build reliable supply chains. The growing emphasis on India's Act East Policy has further enhanced Assam's strategic importance as a gateway connecting India with the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia. Modern highways,



## DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

aircrafts and railway expansion, inland water transport, and improved air cargo facilities have begun to reduce the state's geographical isolation. Digital commerce has also opened new possibilities for small entrepreneurs and rural producers who can now access overseas buyers without depending entirely on traditional trading networks. The recognition of several Assamese products through Geographical Indication tags has strengthened their international identity and improved consumer confidence. From premium orthodox tea and Muga silk to traditional handicrafts and aromatic rice varieties, Assam has products capable of commanding premium prices in global markets. However, achieving sustained export growth requires more than producing excellent goods. It demands investment in branding, packaging, certification, quality assurance, research, and market intelligence. Export competitiveness also depends upon efficient customs procedures, cold storage facilities, warehousing, skilled manpower, and financial support for small and medium enterprises. The coming years will determine whether Assam merely remains a supplier of raw materials or transforms itself into a producer of globally recognized value-added products that generate employment, income, and long-term economic prosperity.

Among Assam's greatest strengths is the extraordinary diversity of products that possess genuine international appeal. Assam Tea continues to enjoy worldwide recognition for its rich flavour, bright colour, and distinctive aroma. While bulk tea exports remain significant, far greater value lies in promoting premium packaged tea, specialty varieties, organic tea, and direct-to-

consumer international brands. Similar opportunities exist in Muga silk, a rare golden silk produced exclusively in Assam, whose uniqueness gives it exceptional value in luxury textile markets. Eri silk, known for its eco-friendly production process, has also attracted growing international interest as consumers increasingly prefer sustainable fashion products. Beyond textiles, Assam's agricultural sector offers remarkable possibilities. Organic turmeric, ginger, black pepper, lemon, pineapple, banana, jackfruit, Joha rice, and various medicinal plants are increasingly sought after across international markets where health-conscious consumers prefer natural products. The state's bamboo resources can support industries producing furniture, handicrafts, decorative items, engineered bamboo panels, and environmentally friendly alternatives to plastic. Assam's traditional artisans possess generations of craftsmanship that can find enthusiastic buyers if modern design, quality control, and international marketing are integrated into production systems. Essential oils extracted from agarwood, citronella, lemongrass, and other aromatic plants also represent promising export sectors with growing global demand. Meanwhile, processed food industries can convert local fruits and agricultural produce into juices, pickles, jams, dehydrated foods, and ready-to-eat products with longer shelf life and higher export value. The rise of e-commerce platforms has significantly reduced barriers that once prevented small producers from reaching overseas consumers. However, global markets demand strict compliance with food safety regulations, environmental standards, packaging requirements, and timely delivery schedules. Many small producers still struggle with certification costs, limited awareness of export procedures, inconsistent production quality, and insufficient access to finance. Strengthening farmer producer organisations, encouraging export-oriented cooperatives, promoting skill development,

and creating modern testing laboratories can help overcome these barriers. Universities, research institutions, industry associations, and government agencies must work together to develop innovative products that combine Assam's traditional strengths with changing international consumer preferences. Instead of exporting primarily raw commodities, Assam should focus increasingly on value addition, product diversification, attractive branding, and intellectual property protection. Such an approach will not only increase export earnings but also create employment opportunities for rural youth, women entrepreneurs, artisans, and small-scale industries across the state.

The future of Assam's export economy ultimately depends upon building an integrated ecosystem where production, infrastructure, innovation, policy support, and international market access reinforce one another. Infrastructure remains the foundation of export competitiveness. Better highways linking production centres with ports, efficient railway freight corridors, expanded inland water transport along the Brahmaputra, modern logistics parks, refrigerated storage facilities, container terminals, and reliable power supply are essential for reducing transportation costs and ensuring timely deliveries. The operationalisation of multimodal transport systems and stronger trade connectivity with neighbouring countries can significantly reduce dependence on distant ports while opening access to emerging regional markets. Equally important is the development of export-oriented industrial clusters where producers receive common facilities for processing, packaging, testing, branding, and certification. Financial institutions should design flexible credit products for exporters, while insurance mechanisms must protect businesses from international market risks. Educational institutions can contribute by introducing specialised programmes in international trade, logistics management, foreign languages, quality assurance, and export documenta-

tion. At the policy level, stable regulations, simplified procedures, digital trade facilitation, and faster customs clearance can substantially improve Assam's competitiveness. Marketing also deserves equal attention. Global consumers increasingly purchase products based not only on quality but also on compelling stories of heritage, sustainability, craftsmanship, and environmental responsibility. Assam possesses all these narratives, yet many remain untold in international markets. Carefully designed branding campaigns highlighting the state's biodiversity, cultural heritage, ethical production methods, and unique geographical identity can differentiate Assamese products from competitors. Climate change, however, presents a serious challenge, particularly for tea cultivation and agriculture. Sustainable farming practices, climate-resilient crops, scientific research, and technological innovation must therefore become central to long-term export planning. Digital technologies, artificial intelligence, blockchain-based traceability systems, and precision agriculture can further improve productivity, transparency, and consumer confidence. Above all, export growth should remain inclusive. Farmers, artisans, weavers, women-led enterprises, tribal communities, and young entrepreneurs should all participate in the benefits created by expanding international trade. When local communities become active partners rather than passive suppliers, export-led growth becomes socially sustainable as well as economically rewarding. Assam possesses the resources, location, cultural richness, entrepreneurial talent, and natural advantages necessary to establish a stronger presence in global markets. With determined policy implementation, strategic investment, technological adaptation, and a commitment to quality and innovation, the state can transform its export potential into lasting economic progress, strengthening both regional development and India's growing role in international trade.

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While he was not an official selector, his influence as captain was immense. He strongly advocated for promising youngsters and insisted they be given extended opportunities rather than discarded after a few failures. Perhaps his boldest decision was promoting Sehwag as an opening batsman in Tests—a move that changed Indian cricket. He also persisted with Harbhajan Singh during difficult patches, and the spinner repaid that faith spectacularly during Australia's 2001 tour of India. Many of these players later became match-winners under MS Dhoni.

Ganguly's statistics underline his greatness. Test Cricket; 113 Tests, 7,212 runs, Average: 42.17, 16 centuries, 35 half-centuries, One-Day Internationals; 311 matches, 11,363 runs, Average: 41.02, 22 centuries, 72 fifties. He also claimed over 130 international wickets with his useful medium pace. For years he formed one of cricket's most prolific opening partnerships with Sachin Tendulkar in ODI cricket.

Under Ganguly, India reached the final of the 2003 Cricket World Cup after a remarkable campaign. Although Australia proved too strong in the final, India had announced itself once again as a cricketing powerhouse. That tournament cemented Ganguly's reputation as one of India's finest captains.

Away from cricket, Ganguly's romance became one of Indian sport's most celebrated love stories. He married his childhood sweetheart Dona Ganguly in 1997. She was a noted classical dancer of her times. So equally famous as Ganguly. Their relationship reportedly faced initial resistance because the two families were long-time neighbours with strained relations.

The couple quietly registered their marriage before later holding a traditional wedding ceremony with family blessings. Dona went on to become one of India's leading Odissi dancers. Their daughter, Sana Ganguly, has largely stayed away from public life while pursuing higher education. Unlike many sporting celebrities, Ganguly has kept his family life remarkably private.

No profile of Ganguly is complete without mentioning his turbulent relationship with Greg Chappell. The dispute led to Ganguly losing both captaincy and his place in the Indian team. Many believed his international career was over. Instead, he staged another remarkable comeback, scoring heavily in Tests before retiring from international cricket in 2008 with immense public admiration. His resilience became one of the defining chapters of his career.

Retirement hardly slowed him down. Ganguly became President of the Cricket Association of Bengal before serving as President of the Board of Control for Cricket in India from 2019 to 2022. During his tenure, Indian cricket navigated the COVID-19 pandemic, hosted major tournaments under difficult circumstances and expanded its commercial reach.

Internationally, he continues to wield influence as Chairman of the ICC Men's Cricket Committee, a position to which he was reappointed. He has also taken on coaching and advisory roles in franchise cricket, including with Pretoria Capitals in South Africa's SA20 league.

Ganguly's greatest contribution cannot be measured solely in runs or centuries. He transformed Indian cricket's culture. He taught Indian cricketers to stare opponents in the eye. He demanded fast bowlers capable of winning abroad. He insisted that young players be backed. (IPA Service)

## Japan as India's most reliable development partner

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

Japan-India relations promising special strategic and global partnership have evolved over decades into one of Asia's most stable, strategic, and future oriented partnerships. At the heart of this relationship lies a blend of civilizational affinity, shared democratic values, and a mutual commitment to peace and development in the Indo Pacific. From cultural exchanges in the early 20th century to deep economic and security cooperation today, the trajectory of ties between the two nations reflects both continuity and transformation. The foundation of modern engagement was laid after India's independence, when Japan emerged from the devastation of World War II. India's decision in 1952 to waive war reparations and instead focus on rebuilding Japan's global standing created goodwill that still resonates. Cultural icons like Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Kakuzō had already built intellectual bridges, and these early connections helped shape a relationship grounded in respect and shared heritage. Over time, Japan became one of India's most reliable development partners, offering loans and technical expertise for infrastructure projects that transformed urban landscapes and transportation networks. Nowhere is that partnership more distinctive than in India's Northeast, where Japan is the only foreign country India has actively invited to undertake socio-economic development.

Japan and India's partnership in developing India's Northeast is driven by the Act East Forum linking India's Act East Policy with Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision. Backed by significant funding from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), this cooperation transforms the region into an economic and manufacturing hub. Japan is funding a substantial portion of the Northeast Road Network Connectivity Improvement Project, including critical missing links and bridges. Notable projects include the Dhubri-Phulbari Bridge across the Brahmaputra River and upgrades to highways connecting Meghalaya and Assam. Substantial funding has been committed to water supply and sewage projects in cities like Guwahati. Sustainable agriculture, irrigation, and biodiversity/forest management projects are active across Sikkim, Tripura, Mizoram, and Nagaland. The Northeast acts as a vital bridge between the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia. Enhancing connectivity through Japanese-funded roads and bridges links India directly to ASEAN trade routes. Japan's engagement aligns with broad bilateral agreements focused on supply chain resilience, artificial intelligence, and energy security.

Economic cooperation has been the strongest pillar of bilateral ties. Japan is among India's largest sources of foreign direct investment, contributing to sectors such as automobiles, electronics, and transportation. The Delhi Metro, a symbol of modern urban mobility, stands as a testament to Japanese collaboration through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail project, India's first bullet train corridor, further reflects the ambition of both nations to push technological boundaries. Japanese companies like Toyota, Honda, and

Sony have become household names in India, while Indian IT firms have expanded their presence in Japan, creating a mutually beneficial economic ecosystem. Strategic and security cooperation has grown significantly in recent decades. As the Indo Pacific becomes a focal point of global geopolitics, both nations share concerns about maritime security, freedom of navigation, and the need for a rules based international order. The establishment of the Quad—comprising India, Japan, the United States, and Australia—has strengthened coordination on issues ranging from disaster relief to emerging technologies. Regular naval exercises, defense dialogues, and agreements on military logistics highlight the increasing trust and interoperability between the two countries.

People to people ties have also expanded. Japanese language education in India is growing, and cultural festivals celebrating anime, cuisine, and traditional arts attract thousands. Indian yoga, Ayurveda, and classical music have found enthusiastic audiences in Japan. Academic exchanges and tourism continue to deepen mutual understanding, ensuring that the partnership is not limited to governments and corporations but rooted in everyday interactions. In recent years, cooperation has extended to digital innovation, climate change, and resilient supply chains. Both nations recognize the importance of diversifying global manufacturing and reducing dependence on single source production. Collaborative ventures in semiconductors, green energy, and startups signal a forward looking agenda. Overall, Japan-India relations today represent a mature, multidimensional partnership shaped by decades of trust, shared aspirations, and complementary strengths. As both nations navigate a rapidly changing world, their cooperation is poised to play a defining role in shaping peace, stability, and prosperity across Asia.

Infrastructure development in Northeast India today represents far more than the construction of roads, bridges, railways, or airports; it marks a profound socio economic transformation of a region long shaped by geographical isolation, ethnic diversity, and historical neglect. For decades after independence, the Northeast remained on the margins of India's development narrative, constrained by difficult terrain, limited connectivity, and recurring conflict. Over the past twenty years, however, the region has witnessed a decisive shift. Infrastructure has become the backbone of a new developmental vision—one that seeks to integrate the Northeast more closely with the rest of India while unlocking its immense economic and cultural potential.

In essence, infrastructure development in Northeast India signals the beginning of a new era. It is transforming a region once defined by remoteness into a rising economic corridor, a cultural treasure house, and a strategic gateway to Southeast Asia. The Northeast today stands not merely as a landscape of mountains and rivers but as a region poised for growth, innovation, and deeper national integration. The journey from isolation to connectivity is reshaping lives, strengthening communities, and laying the foundation for a more inclusive and prosperous future. The geography of the Northeast has always posed formidable challenges.

High mountain ranges, dense forests, powerful rivers, and fragile ecosystems made connectivity both expensive and technically demanding. This isolation contributed to economic stagnation and limited access to markets, healthcare, and education. Recent infrastructural initiatives have begun to break this isolation. Major bridges such as Bogibeel and Dholai-Sadiya have transformed connectivity across the Brahmaputra and its tributaries, reducing travel time and enabling smoother movement of goods and people. National highways have been expanded, four lane corridors constructed, and tunnels carved through difficult terrain, creating a network that links remote districts with major urban centers. These projects have not only improved mobility but also opened new avenues for trade, tourism, and agricultural production.

Railway expansion marks another historic chapter. For decades, many Northeastern states remained disconnected from India's railway grid. Today, new lines such as the Jiribam-Imphal route in Manipur, the Bairabi-Sairang line in Mizoram, and extended rail connectivity to Arunachal Pradesh have integrated the region into the national transport system. Railways have dramatically reduced the cost of transporting goods, enabling farmers, artisans, and small industries to reach national markets. They have also strengthened strategic mobility in a region that shares international borders with China, Myanmar, Bangladesh, and Bhutan.

Air connectivity has undergone a parallel transformation. Airports in Guwahati, Imphal, Shillong, Aizawl, Dimapur and Agartala have been modernized, and new routes introduced under the UDAN scheme. This expansion has made the Northeast more accessible to tourists, investors, and medical travelers. The region's natural beauty—from Kaziranga's grasslands to Tawang's monasteries—has begun attracting larger numbers of domestic and international visitors, creating new employment opportunities in hospitality and allied sectors.

Digital infrastructure has emerged as a silent revolution. High speed internet, fiber optic networks, and expanded mobile coverage have brought the Northeast firmly into the digital economy. Online education, telemedicine, e-commerce, and digital entrepreneurship have flourished. Young people across the region are launching startups, accessing global markets, and participating in India's growing digital ecosystem. This digital leap has also strengthened governance by improving access to public services and enabling transparency.

Infrastructure development has contributed significantly to social harmony and stability. When remote communities gain access to roads, markets, and communication networks, mistrust diminishes and opportunities expand. Development becomes a bridge to peace. Many conflict affected areas have seen improved stability as economic prospects grow and isolation decreases. Connectivity fosters dialogue, reduces misunderstanding, and encourages integration without erasing cultural identity. Japan's role in Northeast India is thus unmatched in depth and longevity and trust. From roads and bridges to water systems it developing into a strategic compact keeping Northeast at the centre of a Bay of Bengal economic zone and a China resilient supply network.

## Former India cricket team captain Sourav Ganguly turns 54 on July 8 in great style

By: T.N Ashok

Few captains have altered the course of Indian cricket as dramatically as Sourav Ganguly. If Kapil Dev gave India belief by lifting the 1983 World Cup, and Mahendra Singh Dhoni transformed belief into global dominance, it was Ganguly who built the bridge between the two eras.

On his 54th birthday, Ganguly remains one of the most influential personalities in world cricket—not merely because of the runs he scored or the matches he won, but because he transformed an often timid Indian team into one willing to challenge Australia, England, Pakistan and South Africa on their own turf. The Prince of Calcutta, Born on July 8, 1972, into an affluent business family in Kolkata, grew up in comfort unlike many Indian cricketers of his era. His father, Chandidas Ganguly, was among the city's successful businessmen, earning the family the nickname "the Royal Family of Behala."

His elder brother, Snehasish Ganguly, played first-class cricket and became Sourav's earliest inspiration. Initially more interested in football—West Bengal's first sporting passion—Ganguly eventually embraced cricket and quickly progressed through Bengal's junior ranks. His elegant left-handed batting, effortless cover drives and fearless attitude soon earned him another title: "The Prince of Calcutta."

A Dream Debut at Lord's. Ganguly's international career had a rocky beginning in 1992 when he played a single ODI before being dropped amid allegations of arrogance. Four years later came one of cricket's greatest comeback stories. In 1996, he made his Test debut at the Lord's Cricket Ground and scored a magnificent 131, becoming only the third cricketer to score a century on Test debut at Lord's. He followed it immediately with 136 at Trent Bridge, becoming only the third player in Test history to score centuries in his first two Tests.

India had found a batting star. The Finest Off-Side Player If there has ever been a batsman who made batting through the covers look like fine art, it was Ganguly. His flowing cover drives, square cuts and lofted shots over extra cover became his trademark. Opposition bowlers knew exactly where he intended to score. Stopping him was another matter. Many former cricketers still regard him as one of the greatest off-side players cricket has ever produced.

The year 2000 was perhaps Indian cricket's darkest. The match-fixing scandal had shattered public confidence. Ganguly inherited a fractured dressing room. He responded with something Indian cricket desperately needed—fearlessness. Instead of merely defending overseas, Ganguly encouraged India to attack. He stood up to opponents. He backed young players. He wasn't intimidated by Australia's sledging or England's aggression.

The defining image came after India's stunning victory over England in the 2002 NatWest Series final at Lord's, when Ganguly removed his shirt and waved it from the balcony—a symbolic declaration that India would no longer be overawed by cricket's traditional powers. It remains one of the sport's most iconic moments. Building India's Golden Generation Perhaps Ganguly's greatest achievement was identifying and backing extraordinary young talent. Among the players whose careers flourished under his leadership were: Virender Sehwag, Yuvraj Singh, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Ashish Nehra, Mohammad Kaif and Irfan Pathan.

# The Spotless Kingdom: What the 'Clean' Countries Conceal

By: Acharva Prashant

I have been travelling through Britain these past weeks, speaking at Cambridge, at Oxford, and in the British Parliament on freedom, self-knowledge, and the climate crisis. Last Friday evening, at the London School of Economics, I sat in a long public dialogue with Professor Jonathan Birch on the question of animal sentience: how does one know whether very small creatures feel anything at all? It is a serious question, and Britain has taken it seriously. Professor Birch's research informed recent animal welfare legislation passed by the British Parliament, and in matters of animal protection, Britain is counted among the leading nations of the world.

That same evening, I went to Richmond Park, the great royal park on the edge of London. Dusk was settling. Deer grazed on the open grass without a trace of fear; rabbits darted out of the undergrowth. At first sight, the park seems to announce something admirable about the society that maintains it. Look, it says, how free these animals are, how protected! Then I learned that every year, roughly two hundred deer are killed in this very park, methodically, as a matter of policy.

The history explains the arithmetic. Richmond Park was enclosed in 1637 by Charles I as a hunting ground, and the deer were brought in for exactly that purpose. They are not native to this ground; they were imported for royal 'sport'. The centuries passed, the hunting stopped, but the deer remained inside the same walls. Now, when their numbers grow, the growth is described as a problem, and the killing is described as management. Consider the sequence: first, uproot an animal from its habitat and settle it elsewhere for your entertainment. Next, declare the settlement you created to be an ecological problem, and offer the killing of the settled as its solution. The killing itself is conducted at night, in silence, so that no visitor strolling through the park the next morning has the faintest idea of what happened there in the dark.

The park photographs beautifully, and that is precisely what should give one pause. A scene can look clean for two very different reasons: because the dirt has been removed, or because the dirt has been hidden. The whole of this article is about learning to tell those two apart, because the difference between them is the difference the developed world has spent decades refusing to examine. The question feels sharper this summer than ever, with Europe scorching under record heat and the climate crisis sitting at the centre of every serious international conversation.

Economics

What the park and its deer communicate is not love of animals but the performance of it. Real affection for these creatures would never have tolerated the arrangement in the first place: brought here for slaughter, kept here for display, killed here for convenience, generation after generation. The welfare legislation is real, the research behind it is rigorous, and the killing continues regardless. The two facts sit side by side without embarrassment, and that ability of a society to hold both without discomfort is the subject that deserves attention.

The developed world speaks a particular vocabulary: clean energy, clean technology, clean growth. Listen to this vocabulary carefully, because it contains a confession its speakers did not intend to make.

The moment a technology is called 'clean' because it emits less carbon, a definition has been established. Cleanliness now means low carbon; dirt now means high carbon. That definition did

not come from the Global South, it was authored and institutionalised by the developed nations themselves. Very well then; let the definition be applied consistently. If it holds for a machine, it must also hold for the society that runs the machine. A nation cannot christen its turbines clean by the carbon standard and then exempt its own way of life from the same standard.

It's worth noticing that nothing in this argument requires a new yardstick. The Global South has not been asked to invent a rival definition of cleanliness, and none is being proposed here. The vocabulary of the wealthy world is simply being taken at its word and followed to where it leads, and where it leads is uncomfortable for its authors. The technology may well be clean; by the very measure that certifies the technology, the country operating it has remained dirty. A metric does not stop at the factory gate out of politeness. Much the same holds for the word developed itself. The labels of the modern world were not distributed by a neutral referee; the nations that call themselves developed are the nations that did the calling, and the nations they call unclean were never consulted about the criteria. That is what makes the carbon vocabulary so useful. For once, the criterion is numerical and public, authored entirely by the accusers, and for once, it convicts them.

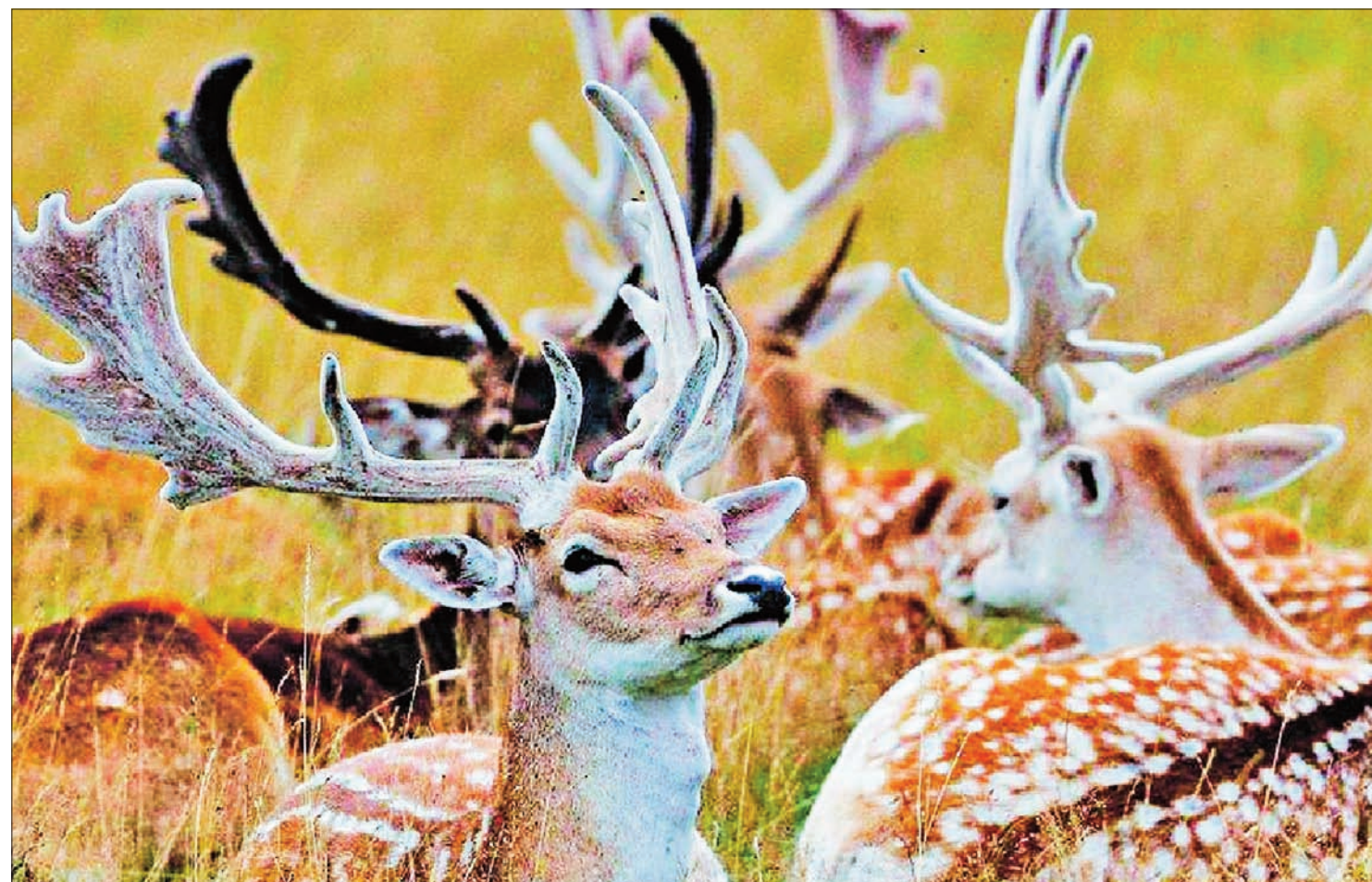
Apply it, and the world's moral geography rearranges itself. The global average for per-capita carbon emissions stands at roughly 4.9 tonnes a year. Saudi Arabia sits near 22.8 tonnes, Australia at 22.3, Canada at 19.8, Russia at 18, the United States at 17.3. These five occupy a band between three and a half and nearly five times the world average, and most of them built their prosperity directly on the oil and gas whose burning manufactured this crisis, which means the wealth and the dirt are, in these cases, the same substance recorded under different names. India's figure is about two tonnes per person, among the lowest of any major economy on earth, and that figure belongs to a country carrying a fifth of humanity. By the developed world's own chosen metric, the country so long dismissed as unclean stands in the front rank of the world's clean nations, and the nations that do the dismissing stand at the back.

One more fact belongs in this ledger: a significant share of India's emissions is generated in producing goods that are consumed elsewhere: the garments, the chemicals, the steel, the refined fuels that leave Indian ports for foreign markets. The smoke rises over Indian cities; the products land on tables in richer ones. India is carrying not only its own carbon but a portion of other nations' carbon as well, and the accounting systems of the world record this burden as India's dirt.

Carbon dioxide is colourless, and its colourlessness has been the greatest public-relations gift the wealthy nations ever received. Had the gas carried even a faint tint, the sky above the world's richest cities would have settled the debate generations ago, and the global list of dirty countries would read very differently than it does in the popular imagination.

Britain's own carbon record sharpens the argument further, and it deserves to be read closely rather than applauded quickly.

Measured within its own borders, Britain's emissions have fallen by about 54 percent since 1990. Stated that way, it sounds like one of the great environmental achievements of the age, and it is presented as exactly that. But national borders are an accounting convention, and the atmosphere keeps no national accounts. Measure the same country by consumption, counting the carbon embedded in every imported car, garment, phone, and beam of steel, and the fall shrinks to roughly 20



percent. The gap between those two numbers is the story, and what the gap records is relocation rather than reduction. The heavy industry left, taking its smoke with it, to Asia and elsewhere; the demand that sustains the industry never left at all. Britain's purchases did not change when its chimneys closed; the chimneys simply reopened elsewhere, in places whose skies never appear in British statistics. On paper, the books of the nation improved dramatically; in the air, where the only ledger that matters is kept, the improvement was a fraction of the claim. The furnace was moved out of the house while the appetite that feeds the furnace stayed home, and the house now congratulates itself on its air quality.

The relocation extends well past industry. The developed world's discarded clothing, rejected and unwanted, flows in enormous quantities toward the Global South; a great deal of it ends up in Indian cities such as Panipat, where the waste is sorted, shredded, and endured by people who never wore the garments, while the sender's own house stays immaculate. He has donated nothing, reduced nothing, changed nothing. He has simply deposited his dirt at someone else's address, and in many cases extracted a price for the privilege of doing so.

None of this prosperity fell from the sky. Behind it lie centuries of colonialism, the extraction of other people's resources, and a pattern of trade between the Global North and the Global South whose scales have never once balanced. A simple metaphor carries the whole argument: suppose a grandmother left the family a great house worth a fortune, and the house is named Earth. If the heir now dismantles that house piece by piece, sells the bricks and the beams, pockets the proceeds, and announces after every sale how much he has earned, no sane accountant would call this income. It is the liquidation of an inheritance, and in plainer language, it is theft from one's own home. What the developed nations enter into their ledgers as profit has very often been the quiet sale of the capital called nature.

Fairness requires acknowledging what deserves acknowledgment, and I do so without reluctance. Europe's efforts at reduction have not been empty. Britain, France, the Netherlands and others have made real attempts, incomplete in execution but not hollow in intent, and the discipline with which these societies plan and implement remains something the rest of the world can learn from. Credit,

however, is one thing; blindness is another. Extending the first need not require the second.

Within this picture, however, one nation stands conspicuously outside every frame of accountability, and that nation is the United States. Since the industrial revolution, the United States has poured roughly 430 billion metric tonnes of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, close to a quarter of all historical emissions from fossil fuels and industry, far ahead of China in second place. Its per-capita emissions today remain around three and a half times the global average. Yet observe its conduct in the climate negotiations. When the Paris Agreement demanded commitment, it walked away, and when binding targets for carbon reduction were proposed, it exempted itself. The country that burned the most answers for the least, and the international order has arranged itself around this inversion so thoroughly that the inversion no longer even registers as scandal.

A clarification is necessary here because the argument invites a misreading. Nothing said so far is an indictment of any particular people, because the tendency being described is universal, and India supplies its own evidence.

Watch an Indian abroad. The same person who tosses litter onto his own street without a second thought becomes, in London or Singapore, a scrupulous follower of every rule. He queues, sorts his rubbish, waits for the signal. His nationality has not changed between the two cities; his circumstances have. And when conduct changes with circumstances, the conclusion writes itself. The change came from outside pressure rather than inner intent: from fear of fines, from surveillance, from the social shame of being seen. Remove the pressure and the old habit walks straight back in. The cleanliness of the wealthy world is, to a large degree, the child of prosperity and enforcement rather than of any inward turning.

Inside India, the same test applies. In the prosperous enclaves of Indian cities, standards of public cleanliness match anything in the West, which confirms that the variable is affluence, not culture or race. And at the other end, where a family's next meal and physical safety are what hang in the balance, demanding attention to public hygiene is a form of cruelty dressed as civic virtue. A person fighting for bread cannot be lectured about litter by a person who has never missed one.

So the matter was never one of nation or race; it is one of circumstance, and beneath circum-

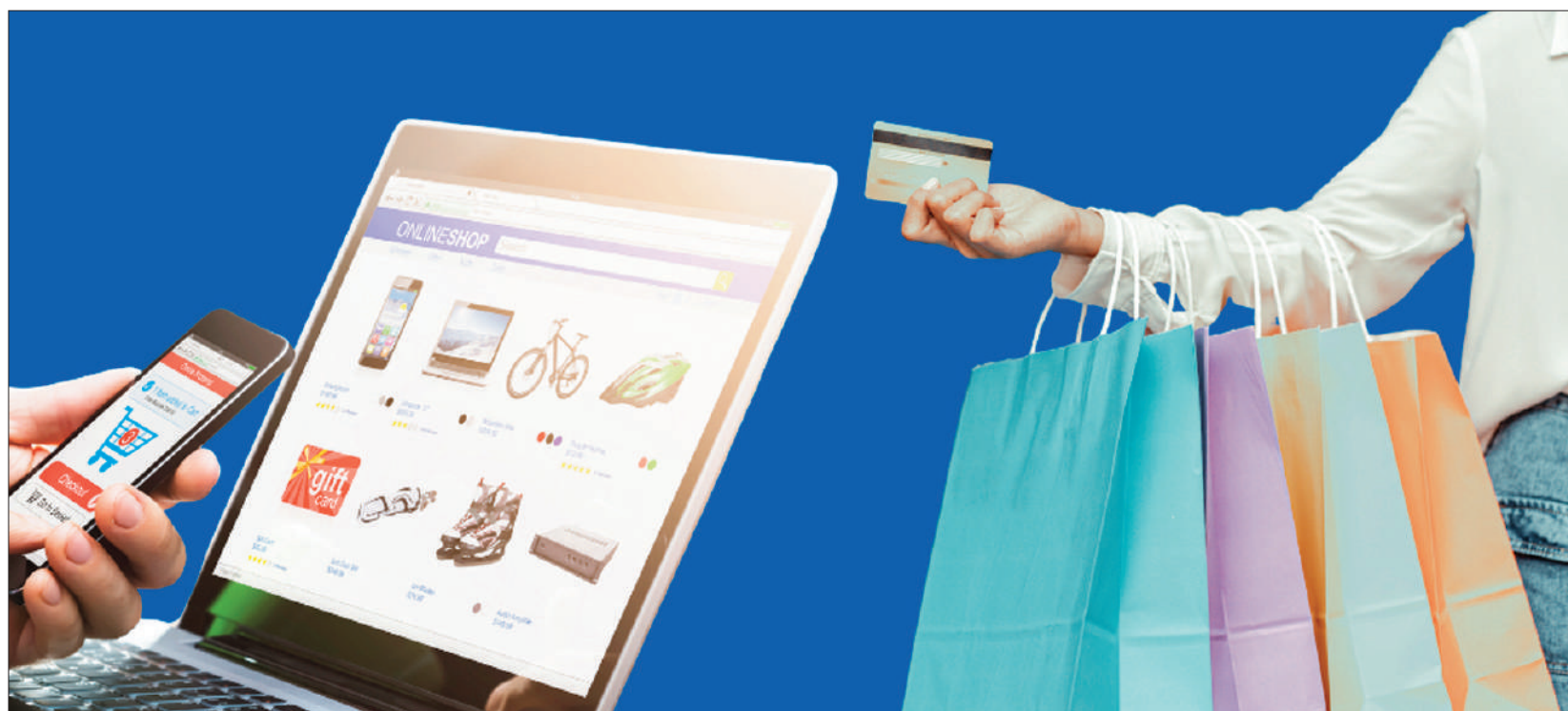
stance, of the ego, which bows readily to external pressure while remaining untouched within. The fine, the camera, and the disappearing glance can all discipline behaviour; none of them has ever reached the one behaving. That is why the discipline travels so poorly, evaporating the moment the enforcement does.

So the real question was never whether the cleanliness exists. Anyone can see that it exists; the laws of London are proof enough. The question is what the cleanliness proceeds from. Cleanliness born of fear departs when the fear departs, and the kind born of law breaks wherever the law cannot see. As for the cleanliness maintained for display, it does not remove dirt at all; it relocates dirt to wherever the audience isn't looking, which is exactly what the emissions data, the waste flows, and the nighttime culls of Richmond Park all describe in their different vocabularies.

Had there been real love of cleanliness, the response to it would have been its removal rather than its concealment. The industry's demand would have been reduced rather than its address changed. The deer would never have needed the darkness. Every one of these arrangements testifies to the same thing, which is that the claim of love remains, so far, a performance of love. So what, then, does real cleanliness actually mean? The ego is the performer. The ego is the dirt within, and the same ego is what dirties the world without; a polluted interior can polish its exterior endlessly and produce nothing except dirt with a better complexion. Whether a cleanliness of another kind is possible, one that does not lean on enforcement or on being watched, cannot be settled by argument, because it would require the cleaner to first look at himself, and that examination cannot be legislated, purchased, or outsourced to anyone.

That evening in Richmond Park stays with me. The deer will be grazing just as calmly tonight, and the city around them will be gleaming just as flawlessly. Somewhere in the coming months, on some scheduled night, about two hundred of them will quietly cease to exist, and the morning visitors will notice nothing. If carbon dioxide ever acquires a colour, the world will discover where its real dirt has been accumulating all along. Until then, the question stands open, unanswered by any summit or statute: who will render the true account of the developed world's cleanliness? (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

## Does shopping feel like a detective work to you?



By: Vyshnavi Mattuvayil

I recently had a "Choice Par Charcha" with my friends and it was great listening to youth perspectives on consumption. At first, their answers seemed to echo a familiar story. Young people might be aware of sustainability through the lens of climate change, but often struggle to translate that concern into a sustained action. It felt like another story of the intent-action gap. However, as we started exploring deeply into the tenets of responsible consumption, they shared many valuable insights and the interaction registered interesting responses.

During these conversations, many of my friends continued to ask why we are marketing sustainable products as premium lifestyle choices, not basic necessities. For young people on a tight budget, price often trumps intention. They talked about buying expensive

branded clothes, only to discover that the item was largely polyester or other synthetic fibres making me realize how serious these issues were.

Terms such as green, eco-friendly, natural, and conscious now appear on ads, shopping sites, and product packaging. But many expressed that they had a hard time telling the difference between real sustainability and green marketing. Some common experiences reported were of ordering clothes with eco-friendly material claims, but receiving the complete opposite of that too from renowned sites. One of them actually took time to browse and find me a beverage marketing package that projects an image of health, naturalness, and being hundred percent real while careful scrutiny of ingredient labels revealed something else.

But what surprised me most was not the discussion about environmental sustainability. It was the muddle that

emerged when I asked about social sustainability.

Many stopped. A few confessed that they had never really thought about it. Others asked what that even meant.

The reply of almost everyone was the same dilemma.

"How are we supposed to know?" Majority had the opinion that most products simply do not tell consumers this information. While nutrition labels or customer ratings are always visible, it's seldom straightforward for consumers to know if a product was produced with fair labour conditions, or whether workers along the supply chain were treated ethically. People who wanted to make socially responsible decisions felt limited by the information that brands were willing to share.

Therefore, trust emerged as a recurring concern. Some participants pointed out that consumers can only choose from

what is made available to them. Meaningful choice is very difficult if products do not present credible information about labour standards, ethical sourcing, or broader social impacts. The problem, they said, was not necessarily reluctance, but invisibility.

"Why does buying responsibly feel like an investigation? We scrutinise labels, compare materials, search for hidden supply chain information, and question every sustainability claim, only to discover that the information is often incomplete, inconsistent, or difficult to verify. Most of us don't have the luxury and awareness of becoming detectives every time they shop."

These conversations definitely have revealed something larger to me. They highlight the blind spots of our consumer culture. Young consumers increasingly feel responsible for making sustainable decisions, yet they are expected to navi-

gate complex environmental claims with limited information, background, transparency and little independent verification.

The challenge is no longer convincing young people that sustainability matters. They already know it does. Challenging task would be to implement and build in transparency into the system.

Is consumption defining us and our identities?

The conversation changed, however, the moment sustainability demanded a sacrifice. They repeatedly described the difficulty of making environmentally responsible choices when they compete with affordability, convenience, belonging, or identity. Fashion was put forth as a great example:

"Clothes are not just about fabric anymore. They tell people who you are, how confident you are, that you belong."

Social media trends, influencers, and peer culture have a much stronger impact on purchasing decisions than sustainability labels. One of the participants said laughingly that resisting fast fashion is often like stepping outside the conversation everyone else is having. They said that clothes are no longer just cloth. They tell people who you are, how confident you are, that you belong. Sustainability labels are a far less important driver of purchase decisions than peer culture, influencers, and social media trends. These conversations made me pause and look at this issue in a very anthropological way:

If identity today is increasingly performed through how many different kinds we wear, buy, upgrade, and post online, then an unsustainable lifestyle feels like participation in modern youth culture, and consumer culture has quietly redefined who we believe we need to become.

The same tension came up in conversations about gadgets and cosmetics. They talked about being under constant pressure to own the latest phone, follow viral beauty trends, and keep up with an ever-changing market. Some deliberately checked for cruelty-free certifications, ingredient lists, or whether brands had been criticised for their environmental or

labour practices. However, many admitted that these efforts often felt insufficient, as sometimes sustainable alternatives were either expensive, hard to identify, or simply not on the market.

Why Sustainability Shouldn't Feel Like a Choice?

People I met were not apathetic. In fact, many of them were contributing to sustainability without necessarily thinking of themselves as "sustainable." They took the Delhi Metro, which was cost-effective and efficient. They brought along reusable water bottles for practicality. By habit, they refused unnecessary plastic bags. They exchanged clothes, thrifted outfits, brought tote bags, recycled books, and devised creative ways to cut waste. To them, none of these things seemed out of the ordinary. Sustainability had quietly blended into their everyday lives. The goal should be intertwining sustainability into the aspirational complex of youth.

That made me wonder—perhaps the greatest success stories of sustainability are written when it becomes so seamlessly woven into our routines through the system itself. Ironically, the same force driving overconsumption could also become our greatest opportunity: peer influence (social proof) is the fastest way to break a person's inertia. What if sustainability became aspirational? What if buying less but buying better became the new measure of status?

Today, sustainable products are often separated into special collections or dedicated marketplaces. These initiatives undoubtedly improve visibility. Yet, they also raise an important question: should sustainability remain a separate category, or should it quietly become the standard against which every product is designed, marketed, and sold? The future of sustainability may, therefore, depend less on asking individuals to try harder and more on redesigning systems so that the sustainable choice becomes the easiest choice. Perhaps sustainability should never have been a choice at all—and that is my greatest take away from this activity. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

## Israeli strike kills World Cup screening organiser in Gaza just before kickoff



**DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP), July 8:** An Israeli strike on Gaza just before the kickoff of the Egypt-Argentina World Cup match killed a top Palestinian aid official who helped organise public screenings of the game across the enclave, according to local health officials. The blast turned what was supposed to be a moment of celebration — the live screening of a potential Argentina upset by an Arab team — into a reminder of how the near-daily Israeli strikes across Gaza are continuing to kill civilians despite a truce reached in October.

The bomb hit a car in the Sabra neighbourhood of Gaza City at dusk Tuesday, killing passersby Mohamed al-Wahidi, an official at the Egyptian Committee in Gaza,

10-year-old boy Hamza al-Deri and his 8-year-old brother Fari. Ahmed Daghmush, 33, the driver of the car, was also killed. That's according to Dr Mohamed Abu Selmiya, the director of Shifa Hospital which received the four bodies. The Israeli military said that al-Wahidi, who helped organise the soccer screenings, was not a target of the strike. It said the strike was aiming for a Hamas militant and that it was checking if Daghmush was the target of the strike.

Daghmush is a taxi driver not known to be affiliated with any militant group, Abu Selmiya said. An Israeli strike hit the same street half an hour earlier, causing no casualties. The Egyptian Committee for which al-Wahidi worked is the relief arm of the Egyptian

government, which provides food, shelters and other assistance to Palestinians in Gaza. The committee also organised the initiative to put up screens across Gaza to watch soccer matches, it said.

Many in the Palestinian diaspora live right across the border in Egypt, which was a key mediator of the Israel-Hamas ceasefire. Team Egypt's Gaza fanbase has only grown since the start of the tournament, as coach Hossam Hassan has spotlighted the plight of the Palestinian people in press briefings and on the pitch. He dedicated his team's victory over Australia on Friday to both Egyptians and Palestinians and waved a Palestinian flag on the pitch. In a Monday briefing before the match against Argentina, Hassan urged the world to do more for the Palestinian people.

"I urge you, I urge all media officers, all athletes worldwide, regardless of their identities, maybe we can convey a collective message that is as follows, let the Palestinian people be, let them exist, let them live a life of their own," he said. Israel's military says its strikes target militants and it regrets harm to civilians. At least 1,027 people, including 258 children, have been killed since the truce took effect in October. Five Israeli soldiers have been killed in that time. (AP)

## 'We, the people of Iraq, will remain a thorn in the eyes of the enemies' Funeral procession begins in Najaf for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei

**NAJAF (IRAQ), July 8:** Funeral processions for Iran's late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei began Wednesday in the Iraqi city of Najaf with thousands of mourners present.

The Islamic Republic's dayslong funeral for Khamenei began Saturday, with authorities shutting down streets, airspace and daily life in Tehran as mourners commemorate the life of the man who led Iran for decades with an iron fist while confronting the West.

His body will later be taken from Najaf to the city of Karbala before returning to Iran.

Khamenei was killed in late February in wide-scale US and Israeli strikes on Iran. He was among several senior Iranian leaders killed in strikes during the war. He was 86.

Talks between the United States and Iran appear to be on hold until after the burial. However, strikes from both sides in the Persian Gulf Tuesday and into Wednesday raised risks that the interim agreement to end the monthslong war that engulfed the Mideast could break down.

The US military attacked Iran early Wednesday after it said



Tehran struck three ships in the Strait of Hormuz, before Iran launched retaliatory strikes on Kuwait and Bahrain.

Khamenei's body arrived Tuesday in Najaf, considered one of the holiest of cities for millions of Shiite Muslims worldwide. Mourners holding portraits of the late supreme leader welcomed the body and senior officials escorting it, including Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi.

The body was placed in a casket draped in the Islamic Republic's flag and encased in glass.

Some supporters performed self-flagellation on the streets, while others waved Iranian as well as red and black flags symbolising mourning and revenge.

Muhammad Taqi al-Hakim, a senior scholar at the Najaf seminary, led the funeral prayers at the Shrine of Imam Ali, the Prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. As the coffin was carried into

the shrine, large crowds of mourners pushed and shoved their way to get close to it. Some threw themselves onto the casket, as the al-Hakim struggled to control the crowd, urging the pallbearers to carry it closer to the ground for fear it might fall.

"We, the people of Iraq, will remain a thorn in the eyes of the enemies," said Jaafar Jawad, a funeral attendee. "(His body arriving here) is the greatest possible honour, and God willing, we will be loyal and repay a little of his debt in the holy city of Najaf."

The body is expected to arrive later Wednesday in Karbala, a holy city for Shiite Muslims where the Imam Hussein, the grandson of the prophet, was killed in 680 AD. Abdul Mahdi al-Karbalaee, a representative of Iraq's top Shiite religious authority, will lead the prayers at the Imam Hussein Shrine.

Iran's new supreme leader, Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, has yet to make an appearance in the funeral ceremonies, which are unfolding over several days. He is believed to be in hiding after reportedly being wounded in the airstrike that killed his father. (AP)

## Iran targets Bahrain and Kuwait after US launches strikes

**DUBAI, July 8:** The US launched strikes on Iran early Wednesday, hours after it revoked a license authorising the sale of Iranian oil in retaliation for what it said were Tehran's attacks on ships in the Strait of Hormuz. Iran hit back with strikes on Bahrain and Kuwait.

US President Donald Trump said later that the interim agreement with Iran was "over" but he would allow talks to continue. That raised concerns that the wider conflict in the Middle East could resume — and oil prices shot up.

"For me, I think it's over," Trump responded when asked about the status of ceasefire. He added that US representatives can continue negotiations but he cast doubt on the outcome. "They can talk, but I think they're wasting their time," he said.

The attacks on shipping threatened efforts to resume fuel shipments in the strait that are crucial to the global economy.

The crossfire came during the dayslong funeral for Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was killed Feb. 28 in the war's first moments. The funeral, which ends Thursday, was supposed to be a period of lower tensions — though mourners have repeatedly called for the killings of Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Negotiations to reach a final deal had been due to start after Khamenei's burial and focus on the toughest matters, including fully reopening the strait and rolling back Tehran's disputed nuclear program. But the new attacks throw that into question, though neither country immediately signalled they'd walk away from the negotiating table.

"The era of bullying and extortion is over," Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf wrote on X. "It leads nowhere. We don't fold."

The US military's Central Command said American forces launched strikes "to impose heavy costs for targeting and attacking commercial shipping crewed by innocent civilians in an international waterway."



It said it hit Iranian targets including air defense systems, radars and over 60 small boats used by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard.

Those boats have been key to threatening ships in the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and natural gas passed before the war. Iran's ability to bring shipping in the waterway to a near halt during the war proved its greatest strategic advantage as rising prices for energy supplies, fertilizer and food put pressure on the US to make a deal. On Wednesday, the price of Brent crude, the international standard, spiked over 5% after Trump's comments.

The US military remains "prepared to hold Iran accountable when the agreement is not adhered to or obeyed," it added, saying this round of attacks had ended.

Iranian state media reported explosions in several locations, including in Bandar Mahshahr, where a Guard member was killed. It also reported attacks on Bushehr, home to Iran's nuclear power plant complex.

On Wednesday morning, both

Bahrain, home to the US Navy's 5th Fleet, and Kuwait, home to US Army forces, sounded missile alerts. The Guard issued a statement acknowledging targeting US military installations in both countries.

A similar spate of Iranian attacks on shipping and US retaliatory strikes occurred late last month — which similarly drew Iranian attacks on Bahrain and Kuwait. Wednesday's strikes came as Trump was in Turkey for a summit of the NATO military alliance.

Anwar Gargash, a senior diplomat in the United Arab Emirates, called Iran's attacks on Bahrain and Kuwait "a clear indicator that Tehran remains incapable of committing to the requirements of de-escalation and turning the page on war."

Before the strikes, the US revoked a license that authorized the sale of Iranian oil as part of the interim deal. That paused US sanctions and allowed Iran to conduct oil sales openly for US dollars for the first time in years. Iran long had been suspected of selling sanctioned crude at below-market prices to China.

The decision came after the strikes on shipping. One tanker was off the coast of Oman when it was hit and caught fire, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. Iranian state television said the tanker came under attack after ignoring warnings but did not directly claim the assault.

Majed al-Ansari, a spokesperson for the Qatari Foreign Ministry, said the tanker was carrying Qatari natural gas and called the strike an "unacceptable attack" on international navigation and global energy security. He said Qatar, which has been a key mediator alongside Pakistan in the talks, holds Iran "fully legally responsible."

The other two ships sustained some damage, but no one was injured, and both continued on their way, the UK agency said.

Iran and the United States agreed as part of the interim deal to allow ships to pass through the strait without paying charges for 60 days. But Tehran has insisted it must control the vessels' routes and vowed to later charge fees for passage. That would upend decades of practice in the waterway. The ships attacked Tuesday all appeared to be using a route close to Oman's shore, rather than one ordered by Tehran.

The US and many Gulf Arab states say they will not agree to Iran charging for passage through the strait.

Funeral ceremonies for Khamenei were held Wednesday in the Iraqi city of Najaf. Attending the services are Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and other Iranian as well as Iraqi officials, including Prime Minister Ali Falah al-Zaidi. There will be funeral prayers later at the Imam Hussein shrine in Karbala as well.

Khamenei's son, Iran's new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, has yet to make an appearance at the ceremonies, which began Saturday in Tehran. He is believed to be in hiding after reportedly being wounded in the airstrike that killed his father.

Khamenei's body will then be returned to Iran to be buried Thursday at the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, his birthplace. (AP)

## Pakistan navy, AF joins search for cargo aircraft that disappeared over Arabian sea

**ISLAMABAD, July 8:** Pakistan has deployed the Navy and Air Force to search a Boeing cargo aircraft that disappeared from radar over the Arabian sea, about 300 kilometres west of Karachi, officials said Wednesday.

The K2 Airways B737 Pakistan Cargo flight en route from Sharjah, UAE, to Karachi that went off radar late on Tuesday evening after reporting a navigational system issue had five crew members on-board.

The Rescue Coordination Centre was activated and a coordinated Search and Rescue operation at sea was launched through various agencies to locate the missing aircraft, according to a statement by the Pakistan Airports Authority (PAA). Geo News reported that the search for the cargo aircraft has widened significantly, with the Pakistan Navy and Air Force now deploying additional ships and aircraft to the search zone.

The Pakistan Navy has dispatched the warship PNS Zulfiqar



to join the search and rescue effort, while a Pakistan Air Force Saab surveillance aircraft is also taking part in the operation, sources told Geo News.

A Navy ATR aircraft has flown out from Turbat to assist, joining the wider search from the air while PNS Hunain has also been dispatched to the affected area to take part in the search and rescue operation, sources said.

Commercial vessels operated by

the National Shipping Corporation have likewise been deployed to help scan the waters, bringing together military and civilian resources in the hunt for the missing plane, sources added.

Earlier on Tuesday night, when the K2 Airways B737 flight reported a navigational system issue at 2118 PST on Tuesday, it was promptly guided by Karachi Area Control Center (ACC), the PAA statement said. (PTI)

## Sri Lanka former president Wickremesinghe awaits indictment

**COLOMBO, July 8:** The next hearing in the case of misusing public funds against former president Ranil Wickremesinghe will take place on September 30, a Sri Lankan court announced Wednesday.

Wickremesinghe became the first president to be arrested after he was accused of misusing public funds to attend a graduation of his wife Maithri Wickremesinghe at the Wolverhampton University in the UK in 2023.

The former president now awaits indictment as the CID officials told the Colombo Fort magistrate on Wednesday that investigations have been completed and the report forwarded to the Attorney General for further action.

The magistrate then fixed the next hearing of the case to September 30.

Wickremesinghe was arrested and remanded in August last year. He was released on bail after a week.

The prosecutors have argued that the former president attending his wife's graduation was a personal issue and therefore using public funds to attend it was an abuse of state resources.

Wickremesinghe's secretary at the time Saman Ekanayake is also an accused for his action to approve the expenditure amounting to LKR 16.6 million. (PTI)

Russian attacks kill 3 across Ukraine, strikes Kyiv for second consecutive night

KYIV, July 8: Three people were killed across Ukraine on Wednesday in overnight Russian attacks, including one in Kyiv, where powerful explosions hit for

the second night in a row.

Several explosions were heard shortly after midnight, before authorities issued an air raid alert. It was an unusual sequence of events because warnings typically precede strikes, giving civilians time to find shelter.

In Kharkiv, two people were killed and 20 others were injured in a series of overnight strikes, according to Mayor Ihor Terekhov.

Ukraine's Air Force says Russia fired 169 long-range strike drones and seven missiles, including five ballistic, at the country last night.

Air defences shot down or jammed 139 drones, and two anti-radar missiles didn't reach their targets. All five ballistic missiles and 20 drones struck targets at 15 locations, the Air Force said, underscoring the continued strain on Ukraine's air defences. (AP)

## Danish PM says her country is 'ready to defend' Greenland

**ANKARA, July 8:** Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on Wednesday rejected President Donald Trump's renewed demands that the U.S. should take control of Greenland from NATO ally Denmark, saying that "Greenland is of course not for sale."

"We hope that all, including all allies, will respect the Greenland people's right for self-determination," Frederiksen said ahead of a meeting of the leaders of NATO member countries in Türkiye.

"We are sovereign states and we need everybody to respect our territorial integrity and our sovereignty."

Trump reopened old wounds over Greenland on the eve of the meeting by insisting that the United States should control the semiautonomous island. NATO is founded on the principle that its 32 members will defend each others' territory, not threaten to seize it.

Frederiksen said Denmark is "ready to defend every inch of NATO including our own territory" in the event of an attack, and would rely on NATO allies to honor their commitment to defend each other.

Iceland's Prime Minister, Kristrún Frostadóttir, said Greenland "belongs to the people of Greenland," and called for unity among the NATO allies in the face

of external dangers.

"We have threats coming from outside the alliance," Frostadóttir said. "Russia is their biggest threat when it comes to these NATO allies. We need to focus on us and how we stick together."

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte said from Ankara on Wednesday that he believes the United States is fully committed to the military organization, and praised Trump for taking forceful action against Iran overnight.

"I think it was absolutely necessary because when you have a ceasefire and Iran is basically violating a ceasefire, we see what happened yesterday," Rutte said of the series of US strikes on Iran after Tehran struck three merchant ships in the Strait of Hormuz.

"I think it is totally crucial that the US forcefully react," Rutte said.

The US strikes on Iran, as well as the revoking of a license allowing it to sell its oil on global markets, were retaliation, and underscored the fragility of an interim deal to end months of fighting between the two countries.

Trump launched the attacks shortly after leaving a dinner hosted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and so far has not spoken about the strikes.

It is rare for US presidents to launch



military action while outside the US, though in 2011 former President Barack Obama authorised strikes in Libya while on a trip to Brazil.

The meeting in Ankara of NATO's 32 member countries was meant to focus on progress made toward meeting the alliance's spending targets.

Rutte said US demands for all allies to spend the same in terms of gross domes-

tic product "is completely fair," and noted that Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Denmark and Greece are already investing more.

"The commitment is there, no doubt," Rutte said before chairing the summit of NATO leaders, but noted that the Trump administration expects "the Europeans and Canadian will equalize their spending with the United States."

## TMC, BJP workers clash during Baruipur rape-murder protest rally in Kolkata

**KOLKATA, July 8:** Workers of the BJP and the TMC youth wing clashed here on Wednesday during a protest march by the Mamata Banerjee-led party over the rape and murder of an 11-year-old girl in Baruipur, prompting police personnel to baton charge to control the situation.

The rally, which was organised by youth workers of the Mamata Banerjee-aligned TMC after securing a green signal from the Calcutta High Court, was repeatedly obstructed by BJP workers who raised "thief" slogans and even tried to set up human barricades along the protest march route along the Hazra Road.

During the course of the rally which originated from Ballygunge Phari in southern Kolkata, agitated workers from both sides were seen getting engaged in fist fights, with security forces intervening with a baton charge to disperse and disengage the brawlers.

The agitating BJP workers maintained that the TMC had "no



right" to organise a protest rally on the Baruipur incident, alleging that the erstwhile Mamata Banerjee government "shielded criminals perpetrating crimes against women, shamed victims" and often trivialised them as "minor incidents", charges that were refuted by the protesters.

The clashes, which began from the rally's originating point and continued in phases all through the roughly three-kilometre rally route, reached a climactic high at its termination point at Hazra Crossing, not far from the former

chief minister's residence, with police having a tough time in stopping the chaos from spiralling out of control. Condemning the attack on TMC workers, Banerjee alleged that the BJP carried out a "planned rampage", assaulting men and women alike, with "the city police standing by as mute spectators".

An animated Banerjee was seen trying to disperse an excited crowd in front of her house on Harish Chatterjee Street. She even slapped a worker whose political identity could not be ascertained.

"We had the court's permission

to conduct this rally. Even then, they assaulted our women. Many of our workers are bleeding badly, and I had to come out of my house to rescue them. They took out a bike rally in the morning near my residence and threatened me. They kept playing DJs all through the rally route and even snatched our hand mics for which we had the court's leave," she said.

"Police are acting like BJP cadres, I am sorry to say," she alleged. The TMC supremo accused the BJP of "hiring lumpen forces" to unleash chaos on the rally and maintained this wasn't the change Bengal people wanted.

"I am accusing the police of failing to shoulder the responsibility of ensuring the rally was conducted peacefully when there was a court order permitting it. Instead, they allowed the BJP to attack our rally, permitted them to set up a stage on our rally route and play DJ music," Banerjee said, calling the police behaviour one that was tantamount to contempt of court. (PTI)

### Donation 'theft' at Ram temple has tarnished India's image, says Akhilesh Yadav

**LUCKNOW, July 8:** Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday said the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple has "angered" the followers of Sanatan Dharma worldwide, particularly those who made the contributions, and accused the BJP of tarnishing India's image abroad. Yadav claimed the news of the embezzlement has spread across the world.

"The news of theft of offerings, donations and contributions from the Ayodhya temple has spread across the world. Followers of Sanatan Dharma living in different countries are ashamed because of the disrepute caused by the BJP and its associates. They are also hurt because many of them had donated to the temple or personally offered contributions," he said in a post on X. (PTI)

date's home," he claimed.

Without naming anyone, Adityanath said, "There was a leader in Uttar Pradesh who had said that copying is our birthright. If cheating itself is considered a birthright, what can one say?"

The remark is widely seen as a reference to the late Samajwadi Party founder Mulayam Singh Yadav, who had strongly opposed the anti-copying ordinance introduced by the BJP government led by Kalyan Singh in 1992 and withdrew it after he became chief minister in 1993.

Adityanath said the culture of organised cheating had created an identity crisis for the youth of Uttar Pradesh.

"We must remember that no one has the right to play with the future of the country and its unity and integrity," he said. (PTI)

Their examination centres were not allotted in Varanasi, Lucknow, Gautam Buddha Nagar or Gorakhpur, but in Ballia, Ghazipur, Azamgarh and Mau. We wondered if these districts had become exceptionally advanced in education. We realised something was wrong, launched a campaign, and shut down all the cheating syndicates and their centres," he said.

The chief minister said investigations revealed that candidates would hand over contracts to cheating rackets instead of appearing for the examinations themselves.

"The candidate who filled out the examination form would not even come to take the test. The cheating mafia took care of everything, and the pass certificate would eventually reach the candi-

## SP took cheating in exams as birthright, plunged youth into identity crisis: Adityanath

**VARANASI (UP), July 8:** Taking an apparent swipe at the opposition Samajwadi Party, Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said those who described copying during board exams as a birthright had pushed the state's youth into an identity crisis.

Speaking after launching the Chief Minister Teachers' Cashless Medical Scheme in Varanasi, Adityanath said cheating was prevalent during the previous Samajwadi Party government, and examination centres in Ballia, Ghazipur, Azamgarh and Mau districts had become hubs for organised malpractice.

"Earlier, candidates from Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and other states used to register for the Uttar Pradesh Board examinations.

## Rain triggers waterlogging in Delhi, disrupts traffic

**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Rain soaked Delhi on Wednesday, leaving several parts of the city waterlogged and slowing down traffic. The India Meteorological Department issued 'red' and 'orange' alerts, warning of thunderstorms and more rain over the next few hours.

Safdarjung, the city's base weather station, recorded a minimum temperature of 25.4 degrees Celsius. It received 14.2 mm of rainfall in the last 24 hours that ended at 8.30 am, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said.

It said thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and heavy rain were very likely over a few districts and thunderstorms with light to moderate rain were likely over the other districts in the next few hours. Wind speeds are expected to reach 40 kmph.

Several areas, including Sadar Bazar, Nasirpur, Greater Kailash, Badarpur, Teliwara, Mahavir Bazar, Swarup Nagar and Kushak Road, among others, were waterlogged.

Pedestrians were seen wading through knee-high water in some places.

Long queues of vehicles were seen on Rohtak Road, where traffic was almost brought to a standstill between Punjabi Bagh and Shadipur for several hours. The situation worsened as sev-



eral two-wheeler riders took shelter from the rain under the elevated metro corridors, creating bottlenecks.

The ITO intersection also witnessed traffic congestion.

Commuters faced delays on Ring Road, Outer Ring Road and National Highway 48, particularly near Dhaura Kuan, Mahipalpur and Rajokri, due to reduced visibility and waterlogging.

Vehicular movement was also affected on Mathura Road near Ashram, Delhi-Gurgaon Expressway, Zakhira flyover, Moti Nagar, Patel Nagar, Naraina, AIIMS, South Extension, Lajpat Nagar, Moolchand, Azadpur, Mukarba Chowk and stretches of the Delhi-Noida Link Road.

Mahesh Palawat from Skymet Weather had said on Tuesday that the

continuous rainfall over Delhi was caused by the interaction of a western disturbance over northern Pakistan, an intense low-pressure area over central Madhya Pradesh and moisture-laden monsoon winds from the Arabian Sea.

Rainfall intensity would gradually decrease over the next two days as temperatures rise slightly, he had said.

Several commuters took to social media to share videos of vehicles wading through waterlogged roads and stuck in long queues.

A social media user said, "Just a little rainfall has exposed the poor condition of the roads -- severe waterlogging, damaged roads, overflowing drains, and unsafe conditions are causing inconvenience and putting commuters at serious risk. Immediate action is needed."

Another person said, "This is what few hours of rain does to the roads in Delhi."

Traffic police personnel were deployed at major intersections to regulate traffic and clear congestion, while civic agencies worked to drain water from affected stretches.

Authorities advised commuters to avoid waterlogged routes, maintain a safe distance between vehicles and check traffic updates before heading out. (PTI)

## Shah speaks to CMs of Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, J&K on rain situation, assures help

**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday spoke with the chief ministers of Kerala, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Jammu and Kashmir to take stock of the situation arising from heavy rains there and assured them of all possible assistance from the Centre, officials said.

The home minister called Kerala Chief Minister VD Satheesan, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, they said.

During the separate phone conversations, Shah assured them of all possible assistance from the Centre in dealing with the rain-related situation, they said.

Speaking to Satheesan, the home minister expressed satisfaction over the rescue and relief operations carried out by the Kerala government following the Wayanad tragedy, in which three people were killed after a rain-soaked mound of excavated earth collapsed at the site of a multi-crore tunnel project in Meppadi panchayat on Tuesday.

Shah also asked the chief minister to order a high-level inquiry into the incident.

Satheesan informed him that the state cabinet, which met earlier in the day, had already decided to conduct an inquiry. Ten people were injured, and five remained missing in the incident, which has been described as a "man-made disaster".

In Maharashtra, the capital Mumbai witnessed torrential rain on Wednesday, delaying local train services and causing inconvenience to office-goers. The city was battered by rain over the weekend and had a brief respite on Tuesday.

Long-distance train services towards Gujarat remained disrupted due to waterlogging on the Vasavi-Virar section in neighbouring Palghar district and at several locations in south Gujarat.

Operations on the Mumbai-Pune route were also yet to be fully restored following landslides in the Bhor Ghat section on Monday.



According to civic officials, the Tuls Lake, one of the seven reservoirs supplying drinking water to Mumbai, started overflowing late at night due to heavy rainfall in its catchment area.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast intermittent light to moderate rainfall in Mumbai and the suburbs during the day.

In neighbouring Gujarat, the southern part received "extremely heavy" rainfall on Tuesday, with the worst affected being Surat district, where five people died in rain-related incidents, while 2,100 people were shifted from flooded areas to safe locations, officials said. Kamrej taluka in Surat recorded a whopping 305 mm rainfall in 10 hours ending 4 pm on Tuesday, they said. Schools and colleges in the Navsari district and Surat remained shut on Tuesday in view of the downpour.

"Extremely heavy rainfall occurred at isolated places in the districts of South Gujarat region, namely Surat, Valsad, Dadra & Nagar Haveli in the last 24 hours," the IMD said in its midday state forecast on Tuesday.

Talking to reporters, M Nagarajan, Commissioner of Surat Municipal Corporation (SMC), had said around 2,100 people have been relocated from across differ-

ent zones to safe shelters.

An official from the district disaster management office had said that a total of five deaths were reported in rain-related incidents over the past two days.

"Two deaths due to electrocution were reported today, while another person died in the Kamrej area. On Monday, two individuals died from electrocution in the Rander area of Surat," the official had said.

In Jammu and Kashmir, flash floods triggered by heavy rainfall struck the upper reaches of Thathri town in Doda district on Tuesday, partially damaging several houses, shops and vehicles. It was the third such incident in the twin districts of Doda and Kishtwar this week, following heavy rainfall that has battered the mountainous region.

Officials said heavy rain in the upper reaches had triggered flash floods, bringing boulders, mud and debris into Thathri town.

The Doda-Kishtwar highway was also blocked at Thathri following the flash floods, disrupting vehicular movement in the region.

The incident came a day after heavy flash floods triggered by incessant rainfall damaged the Doda-Kishtwar highway near the under-construction 540 MW Kwar Hydroelectric Power Project. (PTI)

## ED freezes TMC's ₹ 440-cr worth bank deposits under PMLA

**KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, July 8:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday said it has frozen three bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress (TMC), holding deposits worth ₹ 440 crore, under the anti-money laundering law following searches in an alleged funds misappropriation case.

There was no immediate response from the political party.

The central agency said in a statement that the orders were issued under Section 17 (1A) of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA). This section authorises an ED officer to freeze an asset (like a bank deposit) when it is not practicable to seize such a property and it is essential that the asset is not transferred or otherwise dealt with.

Such an order has to be confirmed by the adjudicating authority of the PMLA within a fixed time period.

An amount of ₹ 440.42 crore is held in the three HDFC Bank accounts of the TMC, the ED said.

In a related development, the private bank, where these accounts of the TMC are held, filed a report before the Calcutta High Court as directed to disclose the corpus held in these accounts.

The court did not open the report and the hearing was adjourned till Thursday.

The ED on Tuesday raided five premises in Kolkata including those belonging to a

private jet and charter hiring company named Carewell Aviation India Pvt. Ltd.

The agency undertook this action after taking cognisance of an FIR filed by Kolkata police (Bidhannagar cyber wing) regarding allegations of dishonest financial dealings, unlawful money collection, and routing suspected funds through certain bank accounts of the TMC, which was recently ousted from power in West Bengal by the BJP.

A response from the Kolkata-based non-scheduled aircraft operator to a PTI query was awaited at the time of filing this story.

According to the agency, its preliminary investigation found that about ₹ 160 crore was transferred from the TMC's bank accounts to Carewell Aviation and its related entity between April 2023 and June 2026.

"Carewell Aviation routed an amount of ₹ 82.96 crore during 2023-2026 to another newly incorporated related entity for purchasing an aircraft Embraer Legacy 600 and a chopper Agusta 109 GrandNew.

"An amount of ₹ 112 crore was used for making the said purchases," the ED said.

The agency said that an amount of USD 1.7 million was arranged as "unsecured" loan in 2023 from a Cayman Islands-based entity to purchase the said helicopter. These two flying assets were "rented" to the TMC, even though they were purchased from the corpus of the party, the ED alleged. (PTI)

## Govt turning blind eye, sleeping soundly despite repeated 'scams' in NEET, NET: Rahul



**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday attacked the Modi government over alleged irregularities in the UGC-NET exam, saying it continues to turn a blind eye and sleep soundly despite repeated "scams" as years of hard work put in by lakhs of students hold no value for it.

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

In his post in Hindi, Gandhi said, "The serious allegations that

have surfaced regarding last week's UGC-NET exam are utterly shocking. Just a few weeks after the NEET paper leak, reports are now emerging that a 100-page PDF was circulated right before the UGC-NET exam.

"This PDF pertains to the question paper setting, which is available only with the NTA. Nearly 90 questions in the PDF match those from the actual Sociology question paper," he said.

Gandhi further alleged that the question paper was being sold for ₹ 2.25 lakh in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi, and Rajasthan, and that the same network had claimed it could provide question papers for upcoming exams such as CSIR-NET, HTET, and ADA, Gandhi alleged.

"Even after the repeated scams in NEET and NET, the Modi government continues to turn a blind eye and sleep soundly, because the years of hard work put in by lakhs of students -- who burn the midnight oil -- holds no value for them," the former Congress chief said.

There was no immediate response to the allegations from the NTA that conducts national-level higher education entrance exams. (PTI)

## Child rights activists flag rising online risks to children, seek stronger safeguards

**NEW DELHI, July 8:** Child rights activists have called for stronger safeguards against online child sexual exploitation as children face growing risks of grooming, sextortion and exposure to child sexual exploitative and abuse material (CSEAM) on digital platforms.

Last week, the government issued a stern notice to Meta on CSEAM in paid advertisements on Instagram. MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) ordered Instagram to disable all ads and content that promote and facilitate access to CSEAM, and also demanded a detailed explanation within seven days. The action came after IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw directed MeitY officials to summon Meta over Instagram ads allegedly promoting child sexual abuse material.

Speaking to PTI, Bhuwan Ribhu, child rights lawyer and Founder of Just Rights for Children (JRC), said one of the biggest challenges is society's failure to recognise the scale of online abuse.

"The biggest threat that children face online is a lack of recognition

of the vulnerability... and a lack of recognition of the abuse, which is pervasive," he said.

Describing online child sexual abuse as a "borderless crime", Ribhu said people sitting in one part of the world can abuse thousands of children elsewhere with impunity and highlighted the absence of globally accepted norms and legal frameworks dealing with such crimes.

"...There is a lack of globally accepted norms, policies and international legislation that deals with extraterritorial jurisdiction in cases like this", he said.

Ribhu emphasised that poor reporting of cases, social stigma and gaps in implementation further compound the problem. "People are not reporting these cases. There is a lack of reporting...parents will more often than not blame a child for sharing a picture if the child is being threatened," he told PTI.

He also flagged the limited accountability of intermediaries and internet service providers in curbing the spread of child sexual abuse material.

"There is very little accountability of intermediaries and internet



service providers for the spreading of such content," he said.

Welcoming the MeitY's direction to Meta to disable content allegedly promoting or facilitating access to CSEAM on Instagram, Ribhu termed it a positive development but said more comprehensive action was needed.

"I welcome this move by MeitY... but it is a welcome first step. Much more needs to be done. This is a wake-up call for the government in India that any company doing business in India should be brought to book under Indian laws," he added.

Ribhu asserted that merely re-

moving abusive content from platforms was insufficient, as the harm caused to victims continued long after the material was taken down.

Calling for stronger legal and international cooperation mechanisms, Ribhu said, "Because this is a borderless crime, this requires a borderless response."

Soha Moitra, National Programme Head and Regional Director (North)- Child Rights and You (CRY), told PTI that children's online safety extends far beyond cybercrime and has become a critical child rights issue.

"Children are increasingly vulnerable to online grooming, sex-

toration, Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM), image-based abuse and exploitation through social media, gaming platforms and AI-enabled technologies," she said.

Quoting CRY's analysis of NCRB data for 2024, Moitra said 1,238 cyber crimes against children were registered under the Information Technology Act in 2024, and nearly 89 per cent, or 1,099 cases, involved publishing or transmitting material depicting children in sexually explicit acts.

"Every image or video represents the abuse of a real child, and each time that content is viewed, shared or redistributed, the child is re-victimised," she told PTI.

Moitra noted that removing content after it has been uploaded is "not enough" and platforms should adopt a preventive approach.

"Platforms must adopt a preventive, 'Safety by Design' approach by proactively detecting grooming behaviour, strengthening child-friendly reporting systems, improving age-appropriate privacy settings and working closely with law enforcement and child protection organisations," she said. (PTI)

# Lionel Messi leads Argentina to 3-2 comeback victory over Egypt and spot

ATLANTA, July 8: Lionel Messi did it yet again at this year's World Cup. The Argentina great scored another goal — his eighth of the tournament — and led his team to an improbable 3-2 victory over Egypt on Tuesday despite trailing by two with only 11 minutes of regulation time to play.

The defending champions will next face either Switzerland or Colombia in the quarterfinals on Saturday in Kansas City, Missouri.

Messi, who was in tears after the final whistle, scored his record-extending 21st goal at the World Cup in the 83rd minute to level the score at 2-2.

Enzo Fernandez scored the winning goal in stoppage time to complete one of the great World Cup comebacks. Cristian Romero started the rally in the 79th minute.

"This is a phenomenal group that never gives up," Fernandez said. "Four years have passed since Qatar, and we've come to enjoy another World Cup — and we want to win it again. That's what we're aiming for."

Argentina had trailed 2-0 on goals from Yasser Ibrahim and Mostafa Zico.

Messi also missed a chance in the first



World Cup quarterfinals

half when his penalty kick was saved by Egypt goalkeeper Mostafa Shobeir. He later hit the post when the score was 1-0.

Argentina is bidding to become the first team to win back-to-back titles since Brazil did so in 1958 and 1962.

"I'm so emotional," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "What a group of play-

ers, brother." For much of the game, it looked like it would be a painful exit for the 39-year-old Messi in what might be the last of his six World Cups.

Egypt took a surprising lead in the 15th minute when Ibrahim got ahead of Lisandro Martinez to meet Marwan Attia's cross and

head the ball into the bottom corner.

Argentina was quickly given the chance to level the match when Haissem Hassan tripped Nicolas Tagliafico in the box moments later. Referee François Letexier pointed to the penalty spot and Messi stepped up with an expectant crowd waiting for him to score.

Shobeir had other ideas, diving to his left to block the shot for Messi's second penalty miss of the tournament after also failing from the spot against Austria in the group stage.

Despite being the all-time leading scorer at World Cups, Messi has now missed four of eight penalty kicks at the tournament.

After Messi hit the post later in the half, Shobeir pulled off another great save to stop Julian Alvarez from close range.

Egypt thought it had doubled its lead in the second half when Mostafa Zico finished off a sweeping attack. But the wild celebrations were cut short when a foul earlier in the move was confirmed on video review and the goal was disallowed.

That second goal for Egypt did come in the 67th from a similar break, and this time Zico's effort counted. It just wasn't enough. (AP)

## World Cup quarterfinals feature soccer powerhouses from Argentina and Spain to France and England



NEW YORK, July 8: Eight teams are left in the World Cup, and the quarterfinals feature the top four countries in FIFA's pre-tournament men's world rankings plus two others in the top 10.

France looks like a juggernaut and is the betting favorite at just under 2-1, followed by Spain and defending champion Argentina at 7-2 and England at 9-2. Norway is 14-1, while Belgium, Switzerland and Morocco are 28-1.

**France vs. Morocco**  
Where: Foxborough, Massachusetts

France dominated in group play, outscoring opponents 10-2, an impressive showing even considering Norway rested Erling Haaland and almost all its starters, and rolled over Sweden 3-0 at the beginning of the knockout stage. Kylian Mbappé scored his 19th career World Cup goal in a hard-fought, 1-0 victory against Paraguay. Four years removed from reaching the semifinals, Morocco tied Brazil in its opener, knocked out the Netherlands on penalty kicks and bounced back from a rough start to beat co-host Canada to reach the quarterfinals. France is favored to advance.

**Spain vs. Belgium**

Where: Inglewood, California  
A surprising draw against Cape Verde early only seemingly prepared Spain for handling tight games. It eliminated Uruguay 1-0, and after cruising past Austria 3-0 in the round of 32 got past Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal thanks to Mikel Merino's goal in stoppage time. Belgium rallied from down two with five minutes left in regulation time to beat

Senegal, then blew out the U.S. in Seattle after FIFA let Folarin Balogun play despite his automatic red-card suspension. Spain is favored.

**Norway vs. England**

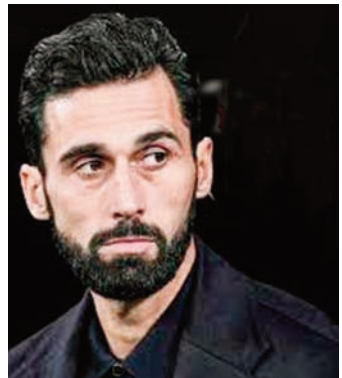
Where: Miami Gardens, Florida

The underdog story of the tournament is Norway, with Haaland leading the way and fans and players doing the Viking Row all over the U.S. and giant crowds celebrating back home. Haaland scored his sixth and seventh goals to upset five-time champion Brazil and get the Scandinavian country into the World Cup quarterfinals for the first time. England endured a raucous crowd at Estadio Azteca to beat Mexico in a round-of-16 thriller but lost veteran midfielder Jordan Henderson to a wrist injury from a postgame celebration. England is a slight favorite.

**Argentina vs. Switzerland**

Where: Kansas City, Missouri  
Lionel Messi leads all players with eight goals this year and set the World Cup record at 21 — and counting — in his illustrious career. Messi's latest trick was scoring to complete a rally from down 2-0 against Egypt in an instant classic Tuesday that Argentina won 3-2. Switzerland has scored just nine goals through five games, relying on defensive style to get through. It took penalty kicks to defeat Colombia in the round of 16 after neither team scored in regulation or extra time. The Swiss are in the quarterfinals for the first time since 1954. Argentina is favored. (AP)

## Fulham hires Alvaro Arbeloa as coach after departure from Real Madrid



LONDON, July 8: Fulham hired Alvaro Arbeloa as manager in an overnight announcement Wednesday that completed a coaching merry-go-round involving Real Madrid and Benfica.

Arbeloa left Madrid at the end of last season, with Jose Mourinho taking over at the Spanish giant. Mourinho arrived after leaving Benfica, which has since appointed Marco Silva — who moved there after five years at Fulham.

The 43-year-old Arbeloa has signed a three-year deal at Fulham after being interim coach at Madrid for the second half of last season following the departure of Xabi Alonso. Before that, he was a youth coach at Madrid, and a former player there.

"I am really looking forward to experiencing the atmosphere at Craven Cottage with Fulham fans and beginning pre-season with the players next week," Arbeloa said. "I am sure we are going to enjoy an incredible journey together."

Fulham chairman Shahid Khan said Arbeloa "built an exceptional case through our meetings in June" to become the team's next coach.

"Alvaro is, by his own admission, very ambitious," the chairman said. "He has spent quality time around the best players, clubs and methods in the game, experiences which will serve him well here at Fulham." (AP)

## Kremlin hails 'important step' as IOC eases Olympic restrictions on Russia

MOSCOW, July 8: The Kremlin has welcomed as an "important step" the International Olympic Committee's decision to remove many of its restrictions on Russia, a big step closer to letting it field a full team when Los Angeles hosts the 2028 Games.

The IOC provisionally lifted a suspension of the Russian Olympic Committee and advised Olympic sports bodies they no longer need to be vetting its athletes for permission to compete as neutrals.

"It is an important step toward reinstating our athletes' legitimate rights to participate in international competitions," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Wednesday.

"Work will continue through our sports authorities. They are conducting this work constantly and consistently, this work will continue."

Peskov added that "now, it's very important that all our athletes have the opportunity to compete in major international events." The IOC's guidance to reintegrate Russians in international events is not binding for the governing bodies of individual sports. (AP)

## Ganguly 'surprised' by India's slump, stays mum on Sanju Samson omission

KOLKATA, July 8: Former India captain Sourav Ganguly on Wednesday expressed surprise over India's recent white-ball slump but backed the world champions to bounce back, even as he refused to comment on the shocking omission of World Cup-winning star Sanju Samson from the playing XI.

India suffered a crushing 125-run defeat against England at Trent Bridge — their biggest ever in terms of runs after being bowled out for 76 while chasing 202. The loss leaves India trailing 0-2 in the five-match series.

Shreyas Iyer, who was appointed captain ahead of the UK tour, replacing T20 World Cup-winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav, is still searching for his first victory as T20I captain after India suffered a humiliating 0-2 series defeat to Ireland, which got the tour off to an ominous start.

"I am a bit surprised by India's performances. They have been such a strong white-ball side, and this appears to be a temporary dip in form," Ganguly told reporters on the sidelines of his 54th birthday celebrations.

He, however, backed the team

to recover. "They have not looked at their best, but India have plenty of quality players and I am sure they will bounce back. Their only option now is to level the series. Every good team goes through difficult phases and finds a way to recover."

The biggest selection shock came when the Gautam Gambhir-led Indian think tank omitted Samson from the second T20I to accommodate teenage prodigy Vaibhav Sooryavanshi at the top of the order.

When asked about the controversial decision, Ganguly played it safe: "That is a call for the team management (to make). It would not be appropriate for me to comment on it."

He also spoke about Argentina's incredible win over Egypt in the FIFA World Cup last night.

An avid football lover, Ganguly also revealed he has been keeping a close eye on global sporting action, and was highly impressed by Argentina's incredible 3-2 comeback win over Egypt to qualify for the quarter-finals.

Down 0-2, the reigning champions scored three goals in the span



of 13 minutes to snatch victory. "I have watched Argentina's and India's matches side by side," Ganguly said.

"Whenever Messi got the ball, I felt a goal was coming... and it did. That is what great players do when given an opportunity. In major tournaments, good teams progress in this manner; not every match is one-sided."

"I haven't followed the tournament too closely because of the late timings, but I have heard a lot about Spain, Norway, and especially France," he added.

## Prime Volleyball League gets FIVB recognition; Season 5 from Nov 30

NEW DELHI, July 8: The Prime Volleyball League has received world body FIVB's recognition as India's first division league for the sport and will return for its fifth season from November 30, the organisers announced on Wednesday.

The season 5 players' auction will be held in Goa on August 17 where franchises will assemble their squads for the upcoming season from a pool of India's top volleyball talent.

"In a significant endorsement of its sustained growth and impact over the past four years, the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball (FIVB) has officially recognised PVL as India's first division professional volleyball league," stated a press release from the league owners.

In addition, the clubs participating in Prime Volleyball League will be eligible to compete in international tournaments under the Central Asian Volleyball Association (CAVA), Asian Volleyball Confederation (AVC), and FIVB club competitions, subject to applicable regulations and qualification criteria.

"This pathway creates new opportunities for Indian clubs to test themselves against top teams across Asia and globally." (PTI)

## AIFF hands ISL commercial rights to clubs, 2026-27 season to be full-fledged one

NEW DELHI, July 8: The All India Football Federation (AIFF) and Indian Super League (ISL) sides on Wednesday reached a landmark agreement, allowing the clubs to run a full-fledged top-tier competition of the country for at least two years.

The AIFF handed over the commercial rights of the ISL to the clubs for four years. But there is an option for the clubs to exit it unilaterally after two years.

The development brought an end to the uncertainty over the fate of the ISL. The 2025-26 edition of the ISL was delayed and curtailed to just 13 matches per club played in a single leg for just over three months after the Master Rights Agreement between the AIFF and its then commercial partners FSDL ended December last.

"We have agreed on certain things with the clubs. We are giving them the commercial rights of the ISL and as usual the AIFF will hold on to the administrative and all the important aspects of running the league," AIFF Deputy Secretary-General M Satyanarayan said at a press conference here.

However, there was no formal signing of a written agreement.

Nonetheless, the AIFF has accepted the club-led model of running the ISL while the administrative and regulatory functions remain with the national federation.

The CEOs of FC Goa, Northeast United and Sporting Club Delhi — Ravi Puskur, Man-

dar Tamhane and Dhruv Sood — were present as representatives of the ISL clubs.

"From our side, we are committed to making this league one of the best in Asia at least and we have been receiving a lot of cooperation from the clubs...who are one of the biggest investors and who have stood by this league for over 10 years through thick and thin. "Now with the relegation (of the bottom finisher to the second tier IFL) also being implemented, it is going to get more exciting."

Satyanarayan said the AIFF will send out a letter to all the clubs in the next 24 hours and give them 15 days' time to confirm their participation in the 2026-27 season.

"In another 15-20 days, once we know all of them have confirmed, we go forward with other aspects of it."

The 2026-27 ISL is scheduled to start on September 4.

**Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to be formed to run ISL**

A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) will be formed as a private limited company to run the ISL with each club contributing Rs 1.1 crore in two instalments as administrative fees to be given to the AIFF.

If all the 14 clubs take part in the upcoming season, the AIFF will receive ₹ 15.4 crore to cover the costs associated with the regulatory functions such as refereeing, legal, integrity and anti-doping support.

## Beleaguered India look to stay afloat in T20I series against rampaging England

BRISTOL, July 8: Faced with selection dilemmas and struggling to adapt in hostile conditions, the Shreyas Iyer-led India have their task cut out when they take on England in the series-deciding fourth T20I International here on Thursday.

The biggest selection conundrum surrounds Sanju Samson, who was dropped from the second and third T20I in favour of 15-year-old swashbuckler Vaibhav Sooryavanshi.

The teenager has not done any worse or better than the rest of the team so far and given that the side is trailing 0-2 right now, India head coach Gautam Gambhir has not ruled out Samson's return.

In a matter of four months, Samson's career has swung from darkness to dizzying heights, only to return to square one.

While it would be unfair to blame skipper Iyer, who is chasing his first victory since being elevated to captaincy in a surprise decision during his comeback series, the onus lies heavily on the

coaching think-tank led by Gambhir and Ajit Agarkar's selection committee.

It remains to be seen if they can avoid the ignominy of another series loss.

The tactical calls made by the team management have not gone down well with the fans too. Chants of "We Want Sanju" echoed outside Trent Bridge stadium as the Gambhir-led contingent proceeded to the team bus following their crushing 125-run defeat in the third T20I on Wednesday.

If sidelining their T20 World Cup-winning skipper Suryakumar Yadav immediately after the historic triumph drew immense criticism, the decision to ignore hero of the same tournament, Samson, has now fuelled another public backlash. The shocking capitulation at Trent Bridge has also laid bare the team's flaws and the management's lack of a clear vision.

The batters failed miserably against a fast and furious pace attack led by Jofra Archer and Josh

Tongue, who blew India away by sharing seven wickets between them, including the entire top five.

Axe on Tilak?

Now, in order to accommodate Samson without unsettling the opening partnership and thereby granting Sooryavanshi an unhindered, pressure-free run to find his flair, the middle order may have to be rejigged.

While wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan is likely to retain his place as the management trusts his glovework and batting flair, it is vice captain Tilak Varma whose spot may come under intense scrutiny. Known for his finishing ability, the Mumbai Indians batter has struggled alongside his teammates.

Apart from a gritty 55 against Ireland that went in vain during a narrow one-run defeat, Varma has been found wanting, failing to convert his starts with scores of 13, 24 not out, and 3 in the matches in England. (PTI)



The AIFF will also receive 10 per cent of the net profit from the ISL while the remaining 90 per cent goes to the clubs.

The clubs, on their part, agreed to the AIFF appointing an auditor of their choice to audit the ISL SPV.

"We are very excited about the league, it has been a long drawn out process. The 14 clubs have come forward and presented a league that we hope will be sustainable, viable and effective year on year. We hope to build on it," Puskur said.

"It will be structured and run in a simple way by a professional team which will run the day-to-day operations of the league. We will have advertisements for positions

going out in next couple of days, possibly weeks where candidates will be interviewed transparently.

"The professional team will make independent decisions of the league. There will not be any sort of direct influence from the clubs, barring the fact of course that this professional team does report into the Governing Council which will obviously try to ensure that the sustainability of the league is maintained."

The CEO of the ISL and other officials will be appointed soon, Puskur said.

"What happened last season was unfortunate for Indian football but hopefully this time that will not be the case and we will

have a full-fledged season where every team will play their respective home-and-away games in a full quota rather than having to play a truncated format," Puskur said.

"From a commercially broadcast-driven model, we are going ahead to a club-led model. From a financial sustainability point of view, we as clubs and the AIFF believe that this is the way forward. This is how it's followed everywhere globally in established leagues.

"So, this is a big change as far as we are concerned in Indian football, where the club-driven commercial model will be there... we are entering into that."

**Uncharted territory**

The ISL club representatives admitted that they are entering "uncharted territory" and they have to move forward carefully, taking all the stakeholders in mind.

"It's also our responsibility as clubs to help and contribute to the national team set up in various categories, men's and women's. The league should be sustainable in terms of financial capability. We need to monetise the league.

"It's our intention to put out a Request for Proposal (RFP) to try and bring potential broadcasters on board as soon as possible. We also need to go to the market to work with potential sponsors, potential corporates in the country who might be interested in investing in this sport." (PTI)