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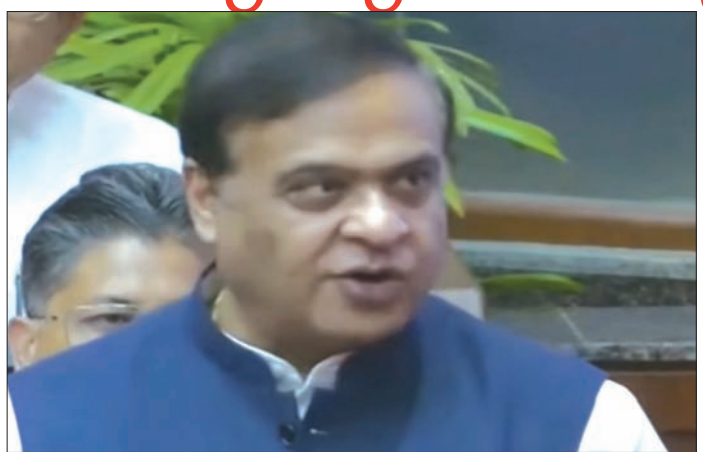
Political parties urged to back the govt's crackdown on drugs

Himanta talks tough against drug peddlers

GUWAHATI, July 7: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday urged all political parties to back the government's crackdown on drugs, saying questions raised over the police's "tough action" against drug peddlers in the Assembly dampen the morale of law enforcement agencies.

Speaking during a discussion on drug abuse and trafficking in the House, Sarma said all members had pledged support to the fight against drugs, but objections were raised whenever police took "tough action" against traffickers.

"All members in the House have today pledged cooperation in the fight against drugs. But when police take tough action against the



criminals, questions are raised in this very Assembly on the police," he said. Maintaining that police resort to force only as a last option,

the chief minister, who also holds the Home portfolio, said drug peddlers transporting contraband worth crores of rupees were often armed and open fire when intercepted.

"Police have to take tough action only when they have no other option left. The Assembly has to understand and appreciate it. It can scrutinise and analyse every case, if need be. But if the cooperation and support for police sustains, they can perform better. Else, their spirit also goes down," Sarma said.

He said coordinated action by the Centre and neighbouring states had strengthened Assam's efforts to curb drug trafficking routed through Myanmar. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Speaker asks ministers to avoid long replies

MLAs told to refrain from quoting expunged words outside Assembly



GUWAHATI, July 7: Assam Assembly Speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass on Tuesday cautioned legislators against quoting expunged words and proceedings outside the House, while urging members to avoid disruptions and ensure smooth functioning of the House.

Addressing the House at the end of Question Hour on the second day of the budget session, Dass said settled issues should not be repeatedly raised, as treasury and

opposition benches traded charges over disruptions. Mentioning the issue of objectionable comments made by an opposition legislator against Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and an MLA on Monday that had been expunged but were referred to again, the Speaker said there was no need to discuss the issue again.

"What has been expunged from proceedings, no one can quote it outside the House. Even the media cannot repeat it," he said.

To ensure that more questions are taken up during the Question Hour, Dass urged the ministers to be brief in their replies.

"I have also started the practice of allowing supplementary questions to be asked together so that the minister concerned can reply at one go and save time," he said. He urged all members to avoid unnecessary commotion in the House to ensure more productivity. On Parliamentary Affairs (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Drug trafficking: BRICS countries adopt 'Guwahati Declaration'



GUWAHATI, July 7: Heads of anti-drug agencies from BRICS countries on Tuesday adopted the "Guwahati Declaration" at the end of a two-day meeting here, reaffirming their commitment to strengthen cooperation to combat narcotics trafficking and related transnational organised crimes.

The declaration underscored the need for timely exchange of information, intelligence and best practices among member countries, in accordance with national laws and international obligations, an official release said.

The declaration also emphasised the promotion of innovative technologies, digital tools and data-driven approaches to strengthen law enforcement

and regulatory efforts against drug trafficking, it added. The BRICS countries expressed concern over the evolving nature of drug trafficking, proliferation of synthetic drugs and New Psychoactive Substances (NPS), the diversion of precursor chemicals, misuse of emerging technologies and virtual assets and exploitation of maritime routes and digital platforms by transnational criminal networks.

"The member countries underlined the need to strengthen specialised initiatives for drug demand reduction, promote healthy lifestyles and safeguard those in vulnerable situations, particularly children and youth, through evidence-based, comprehensive and people-centred approaches," the statement said.

During the high-level closed-door meeting, India called upon BRICS drug law enforcement agencies to build a partnership founded on speed, mutual trust and seamless real-time intelligence sharing that transcends borders and enables decisive action against transnational drug syndicates.

Leading the Indian delegation, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) Director General Anurag Garg said that the country has (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

NSCN-IM denies role in Manipur attack, says committed to peace process

IMPHAL, July 7: Naga group NSCN-IM denied any involvement in the ambush on an Assam Rifles convoy in Manipur's Ukhrul district that left two personnel dead, asserting that it remains committed to the ceasefire agreement and the peace process.

In a statement, the outfit said the attack at the Nungshang Khong area, allegedly "carried out by an armed group suspected to be the breakaway 'Eastern Flank' faction", had "no connection whatsoever" with it.

The organisation said it was "neither involved in nor had any knowledge" of the incident and reiterated that it remains firmly committed to the ceasefire agreement signed with the Centre and continues to uphold its responsibilities under the agreed ground rules.

It said it would "never resort to any action that could undermine, derail or sabotage the ongoing Indo-Naga political negotiations" and reaffirmed that an honourable and peaceful political solu-

tion remains its unwavering commitment.

The NSCN-IM also condemned all actions detrimental to the peace process and the political talks, urging all stakeholders to exercise restraint and responsibility so that the progress towards a peaceful resolution is not jeopardised. Two Assam Rifles personnel were killed and several others injured after suspected militants ambushed a convoy of the paramilitary force in the Naga-majority district on Monday afternoon.

The deceased were identified as Warrant Officer Balwant Singh and Havildar Chandra Mohan Singh.

Assam Rifles Director General Lt Gen Vikas Lakhera paid tribute to the two soldiers, who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty. Following the attack, security forces launched search operations in the area, while the state government vowed strict action against those responsible. (PTI)

More than 1,100 people killed in human-animal conflict since 2016 in Assam: Minister

GUWAHATI, July 7: More than 1,100 people have been killed in Assam in human-animal conflict since 2016, state Environment and Forest minister Jayanta Malabarua said on Tuesday.

Responding to a question by Congress MLA Rekiuddin Ahmed in the Assembly, the minister said over 3.15 lakh hectares of reserved forest or protected area are under encroachment in the state. A total of 1,147 people have died in human-animal conflict between 2016 to 2026, with the highest casualties at 138 reported in 2025, followed by 116 in 2023 and 115 in 2018, Baruah said.

During the same period, 246 elephants have died in the state due to various reasons, including electrocution, train accidents and poisoning. Of these, the highest 42 deaths

of the pachyderms were reported in 2017, followed by 36 in 2025 and 27 in 2024, the minister said.

He further said that the total reserved forest/protected area in the state is 18,33,592.84 hectares. Of these, 3,15,997.1251 hectares are under encroachment as on February 12, 2026.

Sharing figures on forest area cleared through eviction from 2015-16 till 2025-26, Baruah said 25,588.7656 hectares have been cleared. Quoting the India State of Forest Report (ISFR), the minister said total forest cover in 2023 was 28,313.55 hectares, which formed 36.1 per cent of the total geographical area of the state.

It was a marginal increase from 28,105 hectares in 2017, which was 35.83 per cent of the total geographical (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'676 govt schools in Assam don't have power connection'

GUWAHATI, July 7: A total of 676 government schools in Assam do not have any form of electricity, while 283 schools lack boys' toilets, Education Minister Ranju Pegu said on Tuesday.

In a detailed post on X, he said that the government is working to provide all necessary infrastructure by March 2027.

"...676 schools -- representing 1.53 per cent of the total 44,243 government schools in Assam -- currently lack any form of electricity," Pegu said.

The government has already earmarked Rs 4 crore during the current financial year to provide electricity connections to all these schools, he added.

Besides, 643 schools also do not have regular electricity connections, but are powered through solar energy systems, the minister said. "With regard to sanitation, the government (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



MLA Akhil Gogoi staged a symbolic protest against ethanol-blended petrol by arriving at the State Assembly premises in Guwahati pushing a motorcycle mounted on a handcart, claiming that the rollout of E20 fuel had damaged vehicles and imposed an unfair burden on middle-class consumers on Tuesday. HT Photo

IIT-Guwahati study finds blue-green algae can remove lead from polluted water

GUWAHATI, July 7: Researchers at the Indian Institute of Technology-Guwahati have uncovered how blue-green algae can remove lead from contaminated water, it said in a release.

"In a first-of-its-kind study, the IIT-Guwahati research team has identified cyanobacteria, commonly known as blue-green algae, that can be used to absorb lead from contaminated water," the institute said. The research team was led by Debasish Das, a Professor in the Department of Biosciences and Bioengineering.

"A key feature of this approach is the vast availability of these algae in village ponds, lakes, reservoirs, paddy fields and slow-moving freshwater bodies," the release said. Based on the research, the team found that the sticky, sugary material found in algae, called exopolysaccharides (EPS), ab-

sorbed the highest amount of lead from water.

In controlled laboratory experiments, the EPS, produced by blue-green algae, successfully removed up to 66.2 per cent of toxic lead from contaminated water, it said.

The findings are subject to further validation and should not be interpreted as final or ready for commercial application, IIT-Guwahati said.

"In our recent study, we found that EPS organism can remove lead, one of the most toxic heavy metals, from polluted water. EPS can form associations with fungi to form cyanolichens, enrich soil by fixing nitrogen, and act as a natural biofertiliser to boost agricultural productivity," Das said.

To understand how the EPS absorbs lead from water, the researchers used different techniques to examine (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Noted Assamese poet Harvey Kathar passes away



HT Correspondent HOWRAGHAT, July 7: A wave of grief swept across the region following the sudden demise of noted Assamese poet Harvey Kathar on Monday night.

A resident of Diphu, the headquarters of Karbi Anglong district, Kathar was widely regarded as a prominent voice in Assamese literature. Born Chandri Kathar, he became popularly known by his pen name, Harvey Kathar. He earned widespread acclaim for his poetry collection Mor Desh Mor Gaan (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

DHR marks Toy Train Day; June revenue hits record

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 7: The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (DHR) celebrated Toy Train Day at the historic Sukna Railway Station on Tuesday with a heritage-themed painting competition and art workshop for children, while also announcing its highest-ever revenue for the month of June, said an official statement.

As per the statement, the event was organised in collaboration with the North Bengal Painters Association, the event featured a heritage-themed painting competition and an interactive art workshop for children and young artists. "The initiative sought to encourage the younger generation to connect with and preserve the legacy of the UNESCO World Heritage mountain railway through creative expression," the statement added.

Sukna Railway Station was transformed into an open-air art space, where artists from the North Bengal Painters Association mentored participants during hands-on painting sessions. Inspired by the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, the surrounding hills and the region's cultural heritage, the children produced artworks reflecting their interpretation of the iconic narrow-gauge railway.

A key attraction of the programme was a miniature replica of the DHR heritage steam engine, created by local artist Suman Roy. The model highlighted the engineering legacy of the historic locomotive and served as an educational and artistic exhibit for visitors.

The programme concluded with an exhibition of the artworks created during the event. Railway officials said such initiatives are aimed at strengthening ties with local communities while promoting awareness about the preservation of the railway's unique heritage.

Meanwhile, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway also achieved its highest-ever revenue for the month of June, earning ₹ 3.98 crore in June 2026 compared to ₹ 3.25 crore during (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ISRO plans satellite earth station in Assam's Ledo

HT Correspondent

MARGHERITA, July 7: The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is set to establish a Satellite Earth Station near the Ledo Air Strip in Assam's Tinsukia district at an estimated cost of ₹ 81.82 crore.

The proposed facility, located within the 83rd Margherita Legislative Assembly Constituency, will support satellite communication, data collection, and signal transmission and reception.

According to information released by ISRO, the project is scheduled to be completed within 730 days.

The Satellite Earth Station will be constructed near the historic Ledo Air Strip in Margherita Co-District, a site associated with the Second World War. Once operational, the facility is expected to strengthen satellite-based communication and data exchange capabilities in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India's known bat diversity has increased to at least 138 species

SHILLONG, July 7: A team of researchers from India and Hungary has recorded two bat species in the country for the first time during surveys in Mizoram, according to a study.

The study, led by researchers from the Zoological Survey of India, Shillong, in collaboration with scientists from other Indian institutions and the Hungarian Natural History Museum, documented the first-ever occurrence of the 'Glischropus bucephalus' and the 'Myotis indochinensis' in the country.

With the latest discoveries, India's known bat diversity has increased to at least 138 species, further highlighting the global conservation significance of the forests of Northeast India, the researchers said.

Published in the journal Animal Taxonomy and Ecology, the findings significantly extend the known distribution of both species from Southeast Asia into South



Asia and underscore the rich but poorly documented biodiversity of Northeast India.

The discoveries were made during extensive field surveys conducted across Mizoram between 2023 and 2025.

The bats were identified through detailed morphological examinations, molecular genetic analyses

and echolocation studies.

Until now, the Indo-Chinese thick-thumbed bat (Glischropus bucephalus) was known only from Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand and Myanmar. Its discovery in Serchhip district of Mizoram extends its known range by about 670 km westwards from its previously recorded westernmost locality in

Myanmar, the researchers said. Similarly, the Indo-Chinese mouse-eared bat ('Myotis indochinensis'), previously recorded only from Vietnam, Laos and southern China, was found in Reiek, Mizoram, extending its known distribution by nearly 1,300 km westwards.

The researchers also said that a recently published genetic sequence from Bangladesh, currently assigned to another bat species, likely belongs to Myotis indochinensis.

"If confirmed, it would indicate that the species is more widely distributed across South Asia than previously believed," they said.

"Northeast India lies at the junction of the Indian and Southeast Asian biogeographic realms. Continued exploration in this region is revealing species and distribution patterns that were previously overlooked, emphasising the need for more intensive biodiversity surveys," lead (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

IFB Agro warns of headwinds across alcohol, aqua feed businesses

KOLKATA, July 7: IFB Agro Industries Ltd has warned that the current financial year will be "a year of challenges" for its alcohol business, citing excess production capacity, rising input costs and alleged interference by West Bengal excise authorities, even as the company posted a 24.25 per cent rise in consolidated revenue in FY26.

The company, in its latest annual report, also flagged margin pressure in its newly acquired aquaculture feed business and geopolitical uncertainties affecting marine exports.

Consolidated gross revenue from operations rose to ₹ 1,911.57 crore in FY26 from ₹ 1,538.49 crore a year ago.

Despite the improved financial performance, the management devoted much of its outlook to headwinds facing its key businesses.

In the alcohol business, IFB Agro said rapid expansion of ethanol distilleries in West Bengal, many with dual Extra Neutral Alcohol (ENA) production facilities, had intensified competition and eroded distillery margins. Oversupply also depressed prices of ENA. Ordinary Denatured Spirit (ODS) and by-products such as distillers dried grains with solubles (DDGS) and carbon dioxide.

"The current financial year will be a year of challenges for the alcohol business," the company said, attributing the outlook to excess ENA capacity in the state, rising prices of



non-edible grain and continued pressure on by-product realisations.

The company also alleged that production at its distillery was intermittently disrupted as customers were reluctant to lift material because of "illegal methods adopted by the State Excise authorities".

It said repeated representations to the Excise Commissioner and the then chief minister over the alleged actions, including complaints pending since 2020, had not yielded any action.

Its Indian Made Liquor (IML) business also remained under pressure after repeated excise duty hikes, including one effective December 1, 2025, pushed up retail prices and shifted demand towards smaller packs.

The company further alleged "illegal interference" by excise au-

thorities at the district level, saying retailers were being pressured not to lift IFB-branded products.

Chairman Bikramjit Nag echoed those concerns in his message to shareholders, expressing hope that the new state government would act against those allegedly involved and help create a more conducive business environment in West Bengal.

In the 2026 assembly elections, the BJP came to power in West Bengal, defeating the Mamata Banerjee-led TMC which had ruled the state for 15 years.

In the marine business, IFB Agro said exports rose to ₹ 273 crore from ₹ 213 crore despite US tariffs on shrimp imports, aided by its relatively limited dependence on the American market. However, it said non-availability of raw shrimp in

West Bengal for nearly six to seven months each year remained a structural challenge, while geopolitical uncertainties had increased freight costs and shipping delays.

The company also said its recently acquired aquaculture feed business was operating in a challenging environment, with elevated raw material costs and industry-wide margin pressure. It added that the Andhra Pradesh government's refusal to permit higher shrimp feed prices prevented the company from passing on increased input costs and was likely to remain a challenge in FY27.

During FY26, IFB Agro acquired the shrimp and freshwater fish feed business of Cargill India Pvt Ltd for ₹ 110 crore plus working capital.

The company ended FY26 with ₹ 70 crore in debt and ₹ 183 crore in cash.

Meanwhile, IFB said it is evaluating two to three new growth projects in glycerine and biogas and expects to finalise at least one by the third quarter of the current financial year.

The company said its value-added seafood project in Vietnam commenced initial commercial operations during the year, with the first shipment made in April 2026. IFB Agro said it will focus on scaling up the business and achieving break-even in the current financial year. (PTI)

Name any car that faced issues due to ethanol-blended petrol: Gadkari

NEW DELHI, July 7: Amid criticism of the mandate for E20 petrol (20 per cent ethanol-blended) sales and complaints about reduced fuel efficiency of vehicles, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari on Tuesday dared critics to identify a single car that faced problems due to the mixed fuel.

Addressing the 'Viksit Bharat Conclave' here, Gadkari further said that India's dependence on fossil fuels is both an economic burden - as ₹ 22 lakh crore is spent annually on fuel imports - and an environmental hazard, making clean energy adoption crucial for the nation's progress.

"There is no case of any car facing issues due to E20 petrol. Has there been any car in the country that faced issues due to the use of E20 petrol? Just name one."

"...false narratives are being spread about the roll-out of higher ethanol-blended petrol. These are paid campaigns," he said.

India has already achieved 20

per cent blending of ethanol (produced from biomass like sugarcane, corn or rice) with petrol to create a cleaner-burning fuel, reducing reliance on imported crude oil and cutting carbon emissions.

Vehicle owners in India do not have an option to choose different fuels at the petrol pump, unlike their counterparts in Brazil, where customers are presented with a choice of fuels with differential pricing. Under Brazilian law, there has to be a pricing discount for higher ethanol blends.

On allegations that companies owned by his family members are involved in ethanol production, and that is why he is pushing for the roll-out of higher ethanol blended petrol, the road transport and highways minister said his family members own sugar factories, and their companies are not dependent on ethanol production.

The minister stated that since ethanol is surplus in the country, the move to make ethanol from

corn has generated an additional income of ₹ 45,000 crore for farmers of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

"When we decided to make ethanol from corn, the corn's market price was ₹ 1,200 per quintal, and the MSP was ₹ 1,800 per quintal. After the decision, corn's price went up to ₹ 2,800 per quintal.

"Additional ₹ 45,000 crore went into the pockets of farmers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar," he said.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has proposed amendments to vehicle emission rules to widen the scope for higher ethanol blends and alternative fuels, paving the way for flex-fuel and pure bio-fuel vehicles across all vehicle categories. The draft changes to the Central Motor Vehicles Rules, 1989 aim to provide for wider use of fuels, such as E85 (85 per cent ethanol with petrol) and E100 (which would allow vehicles to run on nearly pure ethanol), as well as B100 bio-diesel and hydrogen-CNG combinations. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Himanta talks tough against

"Backend investigations into most drug trafficking cases lead to Myanmar, sometimes through Mizoram or through Manipur. Now the Centre as well as the governments of these two states are taking steps to fight this menace together," he said. Sarma also stressed the need for rehabilitation of drug abuse victims and referred to reports alleging that some rehabilitation centres had supplied contraband to inmates. "I urge good NGOs to come forward to work for rehabilitation of the victims and the government will also come up with schemes to help them financially," he said.

Earlier, initiating the discussion, Congress MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar called for more proactive measures to tackle the growing menace of drug abuse. AIUDF's Badruddin Ajmal and TMC's Sherman Ali Ahmed, among others, also participated in the discussion and stressed the need for intensified crackdown and tough punishment for traffickers. Replying to the discussion, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pijush Hazarika highlighted the Myanmar link to trafficking of contraband through the state.

"Drugs come to the Northeast from Myanmar, and it is mostly meant for Bangladesh. That is why recovery of drugs is high in the Barak Valley districts (which serve as the transit route)," he said.

Asserting that the government had intensified its anti-drug campaign since Sarma assumed office in 2021, Hazarika said the number of drug seizure-related cases had increased from around 150 in 2011 to over 2,200 in 2021 and 3,300 in 2025. Arrests in drug-related cases also rose from over 200 in 2011 to more than 4,900 in 2025, he added. In a post on X, Sarma said drugs worth more than ₹ 3,253 crore had been seized and 26,537 people arrested in the state since 2021.

While 4,175 people were arrested in drug-related cases in 2021, the number increased to 4,901 in 2025. Similarly, drugs worth ₹ 383.64 crore were seized in 2021, with the figure going up to ₹ 473.46 crore in 2025, he said. "Our relentless war against drugs is delivering decisive results. Under Mission #AssamAgainstDrugs, we have seized narcotics worth over ₹ 3,253 crore and arrested more than 26,500 offenders since 2021," he said. (PTI)

Speaker asks ministers

Minister Pijush Hazarika's suggestion that members should not comment before the media within the Assembly premises on issues not raised inside the House, Dass said such a direction could not be issued as it would infringe on freedom of speech. Hazarika said many MLAs raise several issues before the media within the Assembly premises but do not place them in the House officially. He said members wishing to protest over issues without raising them in the Assembly should use the designated demonstration area at Chachal in Guwahati instead of speaking to the media on such matters within the Assembly premises.

However, the suggestion was rejected by Speaker, with TMC legislator Sherman Ali Ahmed also pointing out that it would be an "attack on the freedom of speech". Congress' Abdur Rahim Ahmed, raising a point of order during the discussion, urged the Speaker to ensure that the opposition is given priority for raising issues in the Assembly, as is the tradition. He also requested Dass to ensure "systematic proceedings" by preventing discussions or replies on a single question or issue from continuing for a prolonged period. (PTI)

Drug trafficking: BRICS countries

adopted a zero-tolerance policy against drugs and a three-year roadmap (2026-2029) based on a network-centric approach. "The strategy focuses on dismantling entire criminal networks, preventing drug abuse through mass awareness campaigns and strengthening treatment, de-addiction and rehabilitation measures," the release said.

In his closing remarks, Garg highlighted the hyper-connected and jurisdiction-less nature of 21st-century drug trafficking and observed that national anti-drug agencies have to create networks to break these transnational trafficking networks. He called upon the BRICS nations to carry forward the spirit of the 'Guwahati Declaration' and work collectively towards the shared objective of a drug-free world and a safer, healthier global community for generations to come.

The NCB DG highlighted India's proposal of setting up a BRICS Virtual Working Group and enhanced cross-border training initiatives. During the two-day meeting, the member nations deliberated on the prevailing drug situation in their respective countries and participated in thematic sessions focusing on pressing and emerging global challenges. The discussions covered key issues, including leveraging digital technology for real-time drug interdiction, countering drug trafficking through the darknet, tackling the growing threat of NPS and reinforcing global supply chains against precursor diversion and chemical leakage.

India's BRICS Chairmanship in 2026 is guided by the overarching theme -- 'Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability' -- and it brought together Brazil, China, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia and the United Arab Emirates in the meeting of BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies in Guwahati.

BRICS, initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, expanded in 2024 to include Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, with Indonesia joining in 2025.

The grouping has emerged as an influential bloc, bringing together 11 major emerging economies that account for around 49.5 per cent of the world's population, about 40 per cent of global GDP and nearly 26 per cent of global trade. In addition to the 11 member nations, 10 partner countries joined BRICS in 2025 -- Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, Uzbekistan and Vietnam. (PTI)

More than 1,100 people

area of the state. The minister further said 2,42,013 trees were felled under the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, from 2016 to 2026, with arrangements made for compensatory afforestation as per set guidelines. (PTI)

'676 govt schools in Assam

has achieved 100 per cent coverage of girls' toilets in all government schools. At present, only 283 schools (0.64 per cent of the total 44,243 schools) do not have a boys' toilet," he added. Action has already been initiated to construct boys' toilets in all these remaining schools during the current financial year, Pegu said.

On digital infrastructure, he said that out of 10,965 schools managed by the Government of Assam, 10,033 schools are already equipped with at least one digital learning facility -- either an ICT laboratory, Tele-Education, or a Smart Classroom. "The remaining schools are yet to receive digital infrastructure. During the current financial year, 328 additional schools will be provided with ICT laboratories, reducing the number of uncovered schools to 608," Pegu said. The state government has already drawn up a plan to achieve 100 per cent saturation by equipping these remaining schools with digital infrastructure in the next financial year, he added. (PTI)

IIT-Guwahati study finds

the material's composition and its interaction with lead. "They found that naturally occurring chemical groups in the material bind lead particles, making it effective at removing lead from contaminated water. The research team also found that blue-green algae naturally changes its chemical composition to capture lead," the release said. The findings have been published in the Journal of Environmental Chemical Engineering.

The research team now plans to evaluate the performance of EPS using real industrial wastewater containing mixtures of toxic metals, as well as work upon recyclability of the biosorbent, and develop a scalable system that can be used for continuous water treatment. (PTI)

Noted Assamese poet Harvey

(verify publication year), which established him as a distinctive literary voice. Born on February 8, 1960, in Nij Hanhara village under Sonapur Mouza, he was the son of late Harakanta Kathar and late Namoni Ronghangpi. He completed his matriculation from Kamrup Academy in 1978 before pursuing higher studies at B. Borooah College in Guwahati. Professionally, he served in the Irrigation Department of the Assam government and retired from service. During the Assam Movement, which began in 1979, Kathar's poetry reflected themes of patriotism, nationalism, human values, resistance to exploitation, and social reform. His writings resonated with readers for their strong social consciousness and humanitarian outlook.

For nearly two decades, he contributed extensively to newspapers and literary magazines, emerging as an influential voice in contemporary Assamese poetry. His works consistently highlighted the struggles of the marginalised and advocated human dignity and social justice.

Kathar made his literary debut in 1973 with the poem *Moi Hom*, published in *Jilingoni*, the magazine of Kamrup Academy. He later wrote for several leading literary publications, including *Monjir*, *Notun Bahi*, and *Agrodoot*, earning recognition in both Assamese and Karbi literary circles.

In 1989, he served as associate editor of the poetry magazine *Angtong*, published from Diphu, and played an important role in nurturing literary activities in Karbi Anglong. His anthology *Mor Desh Mor Gaan* (verify year) contains 20 poems centred on the lives and struggles of the oppressed. Explaining the inspiration behind the collection, Kathar had once said, "The primary source of inspiration for compiling this book of poetry is our exploited and oppressed society." Before his death, he was serving as editor of *Kobi Kosh* (Poet's Directory), which is being published by the Karbi Anglong Zila Kobi Sammilan.

DHR marks Toy Train Day;

the same month last year. According to the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), the record earnings represent the highest June revenue since the heritage railway's inception, reflecting growing tourist interest and sustained efforts to enhance heritage tourism and improve the overall passenger experience.

"The Darjeeling Himalayan Railway will continue to focus on preserving its historic legacy while promoting cultural engagement, community participation and sustainable heritage tourism through similar initiatives," the statement concluded.

ISRO plans satellite earth

the Northeast. The project is expected to enhance services related to remote sensing, disaster management, weather monitoring, scientific research, and other satellite-based applications. It will also contribute to strengthening space-based infrastructure in the region. Officials said Ledo's geographical location, relatively low levels of radio interference, and strategic importance make it a suitable location for establishing such a high-technology facility. The centre is expected to facilitate faster and more secure satellite data reception, transmission, and analysis.

The project is also likely to generate employment opportunities during the construction phase and create demand for technical, engineering, and support services after the facility becomes operational. It is expected to contribute to the development of supporting infrastructure, including roads, electricity, and communication networks in the surrounding area. The proposed centre is also expected to benefit the education and research sectors by creating opportunities for students, researchers, and technical institutions in Assam to engage more closely with space science, satellite technology, and modern communication systems.

While ISRO has not yet announced the detailed construction schedule or implementation plan, the project is expected to strengthen Assam's role in the country's expanding space and digital infrastructure network.

Researchers find 2 new

researcher Uttam Saikia said. According to the study, the discoveries help address what biologists call the "Wallacean Shortfall" -- the lack of adequate information on the geographic distribution of species -- a major challenge for biodiversity conservation, particularly in biologically rich but poorly explored regions. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORK UNDER TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. TSK/Engg/33 of 2026; dated 03-07-2026.

E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work.

Item No.1: Brief Description of item: Provision of 29 Bays PP shed at Mariani Jn. and 16 bays PP shed at New Tinsukia station in connection with Amrit Bharati Station Scheme. Tender Value: ₹17,97,34,402/-; Earnest Money: ₹35,94,700/-.

Item No.2: Brief Description of item: At Tinsukia Division - Construction of new station building at L/O and other structures and ancillary works at Naharkatiya, Dulaijan, Tinsukia and Namrup in connection with ABSS works. Tender Value: ₹11,77,79,903/-; Earnest Money: ₹23,55,600/-.

E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 27-07-2026 and opened at 16:00 hrs. on 27-07-2026. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 27-07-2026 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>

DRM (Work)/Tinsukia

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PUBLIC NOTICE

This is to inform the general public of area of MAILOO, 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 Mailoo 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.

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IIT Guwahati, NEST Cluster forge innovation partnership with LUB, NEDFi

MoUs aim to boost MSMEs, startups and entrepreneurship ecosystem in Northeast

IIT Bureau

GUAHATI, July 7: In a major initiative to strengthen the innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in the Northeast, the NEST Cluster of IIT Guwahati signed Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Laghu Udyog Bharati (LUB), Purvottar Prant, and the North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd. (NEDFi) at NEDFi House in Guwahati.

The programme was attended by Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship Minister Biswajit Daimary as the chief guest, while Additional Chief Secretary of the Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises Department, Dr J. B. Ekka, attended as the guest of honour.

Joint General Secretary of LUB Purvottar Vikash Agarwal outlined the organisation's decade-long efforts in promoting skill development and entrepreneurship across the region.

Speaking on the occasion, LUB Purvottar President Partha Pratim Pathak said the partnership would establish a robust industry-academia platform to facilitate technology transfer, industry-oriented research, skill development, startup promotion, commercialisation of innovations and technology-driven growth of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs). He added that the collaboration would enable industries to access world-class research while providing real-world industrial challenges to drive innovation.



IIT Guwahati Director Prof Devendra Jalihal highlighted the importance of translating research into practical industrial solutions that can contribute to economic growth and technological advancement.

NEDFi Chairman and Managing Director P. V. S. L. N. Murty underscored the crucial role of finance, technology and entrepreneurship in accelerating innovation, fostering startup growth and generating employment opportunities across the Northeast.

The collaboration is expected to strengthen ties between academia, industry and financial institutions, creating an enabling ecosystem for innovation-led development and sustainable industrial growth in the region.

Room for 'technical error' very limited in Wayanad landslide: Dilip Buildcon

NEW DELHI, July 7: Infrastructure company Dilip Buildcon on Tuesday ruled out any technical error that could have led to a landslide at the Anakkampoyil-Kalladi-Meppadi tunnel project site in Wayanad, Kerala, that killed at least three people, while injuring 10 others. Dilip Buildcon, in a regulatory filing, said that the project is being executed in strict compliance with all applicable engineering, safety and environmental approvals and protocols.

"Given its location in an ecologically sensitive region, the project is subject to multiple regulatory oversight and monitoring mechanisms, including supervision by the Supreme Court-appointed Central Empowered Committee, and all excavated material is handled in accordance with the approved methodology," it said.

A video clip showed the mound of mud, accumulated near the Meenakshi Bridge, suddenly collapsing due to the rain, bringing down trees and blowing away the metal and cloth barricades set up at the construction site. "With such additional and strict compliance procedures, the room for technical error remains very limited," Dilip Buildcon said. Meanwhile, Chief Minister V D Saheesan told reporters in Thiruvananthapuram that the contractors had been told much in advance by the Public Works Department Minister P K Basheer and the District Collector to remove the huge quantity of mud accumulated in the area. (PTI)

AKRASU protests land allotment to APDCL in Kokrajhar

Koch-Rajbongshi organisations oppose proposed eviction, demand withdrawal of decision

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, July 7: Hundreds of people, led by Koch-Rajbongshi organisations, staged a massive protest at Basalguri near Malgaon in Kokrajhar on Tuesday against the proposed allotment of land to the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), alleging that the move would displace indigenous families living in the area.

The demonstration was jointly organised by the Kokrajhar District (East) and Dhubri District (East) committees of the All Koch Rajbongshi Students' Union (AKRASU), with participants demanding that the Assam and Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) governments withdraw the decision.

Defying the scorching heat, men, women, elderly residents and children from Greater Malgaon participated in the protest, holding placards and raising slogans such as "Our homestead, our land", "We will shed blood but will not give up our land", "Assam Government beware", "BTC Government beware" and "Stop evicting indige-



nous people." Several women protesters said they would never surrender their ancestral land and urged the government not to evict them from the villages where they have lived for generations.

Some broke down in tears while expressing fear of losing their homes, stating that they had not expected such a situation after supporting the present government.

Addressing the gathering, AKRASU Kokrajhar District (East) president Khanin Dev Barua alleged that the Assam and BTC governments were conspiring to evict indigenous Koch-Rajbongshi families.

He demanded the immediate withdrawal of the proposed eviction, warning that AKRASU would intensify its agitation if the decision was not reversed.

AKRASU Dhubri District (East) president Bitul Kumar Barman alleged that the proposed land allotment to APDCL for a solar power project associated with the Adani Group would result in the displacement of indigenous Koch-Rajbongshi families. He asserted that the organisation would not allow eviction of local residents and questioned whether the government was truly committed to protecting indigenous communities.

Barman suggested that if land was required for the project, the authorities should instead utilise nearby government-owned khas land located about 300 metres away, adding that the organisation had no objection to such an alternative.

According to the protesters, the Assam Government, with the support of the BTC administration, had allotted around 335 bighas of land at Greater Malgaon, Shilgura and Basalguri to APDCL in 2005. Following the recent commencement of a land survey in the acquired area, Koch-Rajbongshi organisations have stepped up their opposition to the proposed project.

Police quiz planning officer in Nagaon DISE-SEBA scam probe

Investigation gathers pace after FIR over alleged irregularities in Inspector of Schools' office

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 7: The alleged DISE Code and SEBA registration scam at the Office of the Inspector of Schools (IS), Nagaon Division, took a fresh turn after Nagaon Sadar Police interrogated the office's Planning Officer, Padmakanta Borah, as part of an ongoing investigation into the alleged irregularities.

The questioning follows the launch of a probe ordered by Education Minister Ranog Pegu on June 25 after allegations of large-scale irregularities in the allotment of DISE Codes and SEBA registrations surfaced.

Subsequently, a one-member inquiry committee headed by Education Department Secretary Krishna Baruah visited the Inspector of Schools' office on June 29 to investigate the allegations.

During the course of the inquiry, Inspector of Schools Mridul Kumar Nath lodged an FIR with Nagaon Sadar Police Station against the Planning Department

of the office.

Based on the complaint, police registered a case and began an investigation.

As part of the probe, Planning Officer Padmakanta Borah was questioned on Monday.

Police sources indicated that he may be called for further interrogation, while other employees of the Planning Department are also likely to be questioned.

Police have not disclosed further details of the investigation.

When contacted by mediapersons, Inspector of Schools Mridul Kumar Nath declined to comment on the matter.

The alleged scam pertains to the processing of DISE Codes and SEBA registrations for educational institutions.

Following media reports exposing the alleged irregularities, questions have been raised over the functioning of the office and the role of several officials.

The names of Inspector of Schools Mridul Kumar Nath and

EDP and Computer Assistant Mridu Plaban Das have also figured in connection with the allegations.

Sources claimed that Nath had initially sought an explanation from Das over the issue before the Education Minister ordered a formal inquiry.

During his visit to the office on June 29, inquiry officer Krishna Baruah reportedly indicated that more time would be required to uncover the full extent of the alleged long-running fraud.

Allegations have also surfaced about the involvement of a broker network in facilitating permissions for private educational institutions, DISE Codes and SEBA Codes through the Planning Department in exchange for large sums of money. Concerned citizens have demanded a thorough investigation into the alleged scam and urged authorities to closely monitor the role of all officials connected with the case. Police are continuing their investigation.

Physical fitness test begins for 157 Forest Department posts in BTC

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 7: The Physical Fitness Test (PFT) for recruitment to 157 posts in the Forest Department of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) commenced on Tuesday under the recruitment drive initiated by the BTC government led by Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary.

The recruitment process is being conducted by the Central Selection Board (CSB), with the physical tests scheduled to continue until July 24.

The CSB has completed all arrangements to ensure the smooth conduct of the tests for the posts of Forester Grade-I and Forest Guard across the five districts of the BTC.

The Physical Fitness Test is being held at Harinaguri Playground near Kokrajhar town.

A total of 52,672 candidates are participating in the recruitment process for 157 vacancies.

CSB Chairman Pradip Kumar Brahma said the recruitment comprises 47 posts of Forester Grade-I and 110 posts of Forest Guard for both male and female candidates.

He said the Central Selection Board has put in place all necessary measures to ensure that the recruitment process is conducted in a fair, transparent and merit-based manner.

Kokrajhar reviews preparations for Census 2027

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 7: A block-level coordination meeting to review preparations for the effective implementation of Census 2027 was held at the Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office in Kokrajhar on Tuesday.

District Commissioner and Principal Census Officer Pankaj Chakravarty, ACS, chaired the meeting and emphasised the need for meticulous planning and coordinated efforts to ensure the successful conduct of the census.

The meeting was attended by the District Census Officer, all Charge Officers, Block Development Officers, census functionaries and the District Project Manager of the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM). Detailed discussions were held to finalise the operational roadmap for all development blocks in the district.

The participants deliberated on identifying suitable venues, preparing block-wise implementation schedules and strengthening field-level coordination to ensure effective public outreach and smooth execution of the exercise.

The District Commissioner stressed the importance of seamless inter-departmental coordination and active community participation for the successful implementation of Census 2027.

He also underscored the need for comprehensive grassroots-level deployment and technical preparedness, particularly in rural areas, to facilitate efficient census operations.

BJP completes Mandal-level cadre training in East Karbi Anglong

District-level organisational programme to be held in Diphu from July 10

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 7: The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) East Karbi Anglong District Committee has completed its two-day Mandal-level Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Training Programme across all Mandals in the district as part of the party's nationwide organisational training campaign.

The programme was conducted under the leadership of district president Roland Killing in accordance with the schedule prescribed by the BJP's National and State Training Departments. It aimed to familiarise party karyakartas with the party's ideology, principles and organisational values through sessions conducted by designated resource persons.

The training programme was organised in phases between June 15 and July 5 across the district, with party workers actively participating in the sessions and gain-

ing a deeper understanding of the BJP's organisational philosophy. The district committee has also announced that a three-day district-level Pandit Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Training Programme will be held in Diphu from July 10 to 12.

The programme is expected to be attended by senior BJP leaders, including Amarsing Tisso, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang, Executive Members, Members of the Autonomous Council (MACs), MLAs, chairpersons of various KAAC development boards, municipal board chairpersons and other senior party functionaries. Meanwhile, the BJP East Karbi Anglong District Committee congratulated Habbey Teron on his unanimous election as the Deputy Speaker of the 16th Assam Legislative Assembly and conveyed its best wishes for his successful tenure in the constitutional post.

Cachar gears up for FIFA Fan Park from tomorrow

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, July 7: The Cachar district administration has completed preparations for the Chief Minister's FIFA Fan Park at DSA Stadium, Silchar, where football enthusiasts will be able to watch live telecasts of FIFA World Cup matches on a giant LED screen from July 9 until the tournament final on July 20.

District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta announced the arrangements during a press conference held at the Old Conference Hall of the District Commissioner's Office on Tuesday.

Additional District Commissioners Devid Kumar Borah and Jagriti Kalwar were also present.

Gupta said the Fan Park has been designed to provide football lovers across the Barak Valley with a safe, vibrant and community-oriented venue to enjoy the World Cup together.

All matches from July 9 to the final will be screened live on a giant LED display, recreating the atmosphere of a football stadium while ensuring adequate public safety and convenience.

"Football enjoys immense popularity in Barak Valley and this initiative will enable thousands of football enthusiasts to come to-

gether and celebrate the spirit of the game. The district administration has made comprehensive arrangements to ensure that families, young people and sports lovers can enjoy every match in a safe, secure and well-managed environment. We appeal to citizens to participate enthusiastically, maintain discipline, cooperate with the administration and make the CM Fan Park a memorable sporting celebration for everyone," the Deputy Commissioner said.

He added that the venue has been equipped with essential infrastructure, including lighting, sound systems, security arrangements and other public amenities.

All concerned departments have been coordinated to ensure smooth management throughout the screening period.

The initiative follows Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma's decision to expand the successful CM FIFA Fan Park concept beyond Guwahati and Dibrugarh.

Following an enthusiastic response at the existing venues, the Government of Assam has extended the initiative to Jorhat and Silchar, allowing football fans in different parts of the state to enjoy the quarter-finals, semi-finals and the final in a public viewing environment.

Bodoland University reviews NEP-2020 implementation

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 7: A review-cum-action meeting on the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 concluded at the Nileswar Brahma Auditorium of Bodoland University on Tuesday, with participants assessing the progress made on recommendations adopted during the earlier Teachers' Conclave on NEP-2020.

The programme was jointly organised by Bodoland University and the BTC Department of Education to review the implementation of the policy and strengthen coordination among the university, its affiliated colleges and the education department.

The meeting was attended by Bodoland University Vice-Chancellor Prof BL Ahuja, BTC Executive Member Augustus Tigga, Registrar (i/c) and Director of Students' Welfare (i/c) Dr Prahlad Basumatary, Academic Registrar Dr Manjil Basumatary, Joint Registrar Dr Birbhung Narzary, Deputy Registrar (Examinations) and Controller of Examinations (i/c) Dr Sanjay Swar-

giary, along with deans, principals and faculty members of affiliated colleges.

The programme began with the ceremonial lighting of the lamp by Prof Ahuja, who stressed the importance of effective implementation of NEP-2020 and urged affiliated colleges to work collectively towards achieving the objectives of the policy.

In his welcome address, Dr Prahlad Basumatary highlighted the need for continuous review and collaboration to ensure the successful implementation of the new education policy.

A major highlight of the programme was the release of the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme Guidelines under NEP-2020. The publication was formally released by the Vice-Chancellor, Registrar, Academic Registrar and the deans, who also handed over copies to the principals of affiliated colleges.

The guidelines are expected to provide a practical framework for implementing various provisions of the policy.

During the technical sessions, Academic Registrar Dr Manjil Basumatary, Joint Registrar Dr Birbhung Narzary and

Deputy Registrar Dr Sanjay Swargiary reviewed the outcomes of the earlier Teachers' Conclave and assessed the progress made in implementing its recommendations.

Participants discussed a range of academic and administrative issues relating to NEP-2020, with principals and faculty members sharing their experiences, achievements and challenges in implementing the policy at the institutional level. Special attention was given to the functioning of the SAMARTH portal, with discussions focusing on data management, student registration, academic record maintenance and other operational issues.

Participants offered suggestions to improve the efficiency of the portal and strengthen institutional preparedness for smoother implementation of academic and administrative processes.

The meeting concluded with participants emphasising the need for sustained coordination between Bodoland University, its affiliated colleges and the Department of Education to ensure the effective implementation of NEP-2020.

PM-AJAY grants distributed to SHGs, entrepreneurs in Sonitpur

Financial assistance extended to 20 self-help groups and 30 individuals under livelihood scheme

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 7: Grant-in-aid financial assistance under the Pradhan Mantri Anusuchit Jaati Abhyuday Yojana (PM-AJAY) was ceremonially distributed to beneficiaries at the Sonitpur District Library Auditorium on Tuesday.

The programme was organised by the Assam State Rural Livelihoods Mission (ASRLM) in collaboration with the Directorate of Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (DWSBC) to promote livelihood-based enterprises among Scheduled Caste self-help groups (SHGs) and individual entrepreneurs.

The District Commissioner of Sonitpur attended the function as the chief guest. Among those present were the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad, the District Welfare Officer for Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes, the Chairman of the SC Board, senior government officials, representa-



beneficiaries establish and expand micro-enterprises, undertake production and service-based activities and generate sustainable livelihoods.

A major attraction of the event was an exhibition showcasing products made by self-help groups.

The assistance is intended to help

Three stalls were set up at the venue, including one displaying information, education and communication materials on ASRLM and PM-AJAY, while the other two featured locally produced food items, handicrafts and other SHG products. The two product stalls recorded sales worth ₹13,680 during the exhibition, reflecting the growing market potential of SHG products and encouraging public response.

Addressing the gathering, the speakers highlighted the significance of the PM-AJAY scheme and urged beneficiaries to utilise the financial assistance effectively to create sustainable livelihoods, promote entrepreneurship and contribute to the socio-economic development of their communities.

The programme reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development, poverty alleviation and the socio-economic empowerment of the Scheduled Caste community through sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Barhampur Press Club marks 19th Foundation Day

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 7: The Barhampur Press Club celebrated its 19th Foundation Day with a day-long programme at Gomothagaon Primary School on Tuesday, bringing together journalists, educationists, writers and social workers to deliberate on the role of the media in society.

The programme was inaugurated by social worker and Sut Unnayan Parishad Chairman Tarun Chandra Borah, who lit the ceremonial lamp. Press Club president Jatindra Kumar Saikia hoisted the club's flag.

Club members paid floral tributes to legendary singer Dr Bhupen Hazarika and singer Zubeen Garg.

The tribute ceremony was inaugurated by Gomothagaon Primary School Headmaster Rameswar Bora and noted poet Golap Bora.

As part of the celebrations, a tree plantation drive was launched by Kathiatoli Forest Range Officer Girish Kumar Borah, along with poet Golap Bora, retired teacher Dipankar Bhuyan and social workers Kiran Kumar Neog and Chandrakanta Borah.

An exchange of views programme was later held under the

chairmanship of Press Club president Jatindra Kumar Saikia.

The session was conducted by club officer-bearers Jayanta Bora, Nipul Bora and Barunjoyoti Neog.

Among those who addressed the gathering were retired teacher Pushpa Baruah; senior journalists Kanak Hazarika, Hareswar Borah, Nilaranjan Sharma and Debajit Hazarika; teacher Nayanjoyoti Neog; sports organiser Plaban Baruah; bank officer Mayur Ranjan Bora; retired teachers Thuleswar Bora, Ramesh Chandra Hazarika and Mrinal Kumar Bora; litterateur Pradip Saikia; and social workers Madhab Bora, Dilip Das and Ratul Kumar Bora. The speakers discussed the role of journalism in society, emphasising the importance of truthful and accurate reporting, impartiality, ethical responsibility and the media's role in fostering a healthy social environment.

They also reflected on public perceptions of journalists and the challenges faced by the profession.

The programme concluded with a collective call for responsible journalism that upholds truth, strengthens public trust and contributes to the betterment of society.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If you would know strength and patience, welcome the company of trees. - Hal Borland

Normalcy yet to return to Manipur

Ground realities in Manipur do suggest that the Union home ministry and the state ministry headed by Yumnam Khemchand Singh, which is in office since February 4, are yet to succeed in identifying a clear roadmap for reconciling inter-community political differences and restoring normalcy.

The misery of people in Kangpokpi district can be ascribed to its location - it is surrounded by the Naga-dominated Senapati district in the north and the Meitei-dominated Valley districts in the south.

At New Delhi's level, advisors (north-east) in the home ministry have been keeping touch with the major CSOs representing the Meiteis, the Kuki-Zos and the Nagas.

Heatwaves in Assam: Nature's alarming warning

Assam has been witnessing a troubling rise in the frequency and intensity of heatwaves in recent years, sending a clear and urgent warning from nature itself.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The intensification of heatwaves in Assam is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a broader pattern unfolding globally.

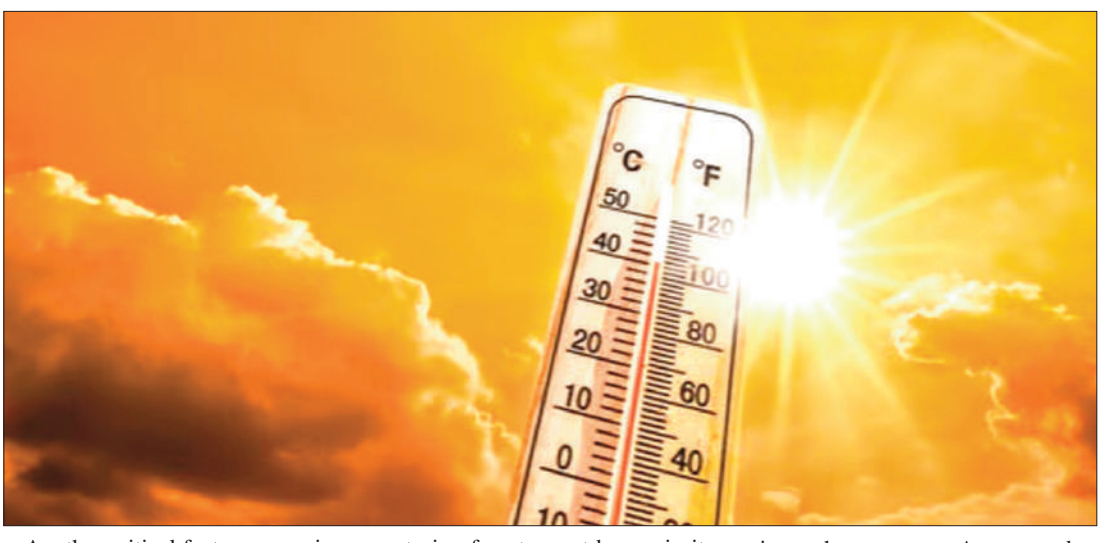
Assam's geographical and ecological characteristics make it uniquely vulnerable to these changes. Traditionally, the state experiences a humid subtropical climate moderated by the Brahmaputra River and its tributaries.

One of the most visible impacts of rising heat in Assam is on agriculture, which employs a significant

portion of the state's population. Heatwaves shorten the growing period of many crops, reduce soil moisture, and increase evaporation rates.

The health impacts of heatwaves in Assam are equally alarming. High temperatures and humidity increase the incidence of heat-related illnesses, such as heatstroke, dehydration, and respiratory problems.

Urban areas in Assam, including Guwahati and Dibrugarh, are not immune to the heatwave threat. Rapid urbanization has led to increased concrete structures, reduced green spaces, and growing vehicular emissions.



Another critical factor worsening Assam's heatwaves is deforestation and land-use change. Forests in the state, vital for carbon sequestration and climate regulation, have been under relentless pressure.

Natural climate variations like El Niño and La Niña also interact with human-induced climate change to influence Assam's weather patterns.

Despite the daunting challenges, Assam has the potential to build resilience against the escalating heatwave threat.

restoring forests must be a priority, as healthy forests act as natural buffers against extreme heat and help stabilize local climate.

Urban planning must incorporate climate-sensitive designs that enhance green cover, improve water management, and reduce heat absorption.

At the policy level, Assam's government, in coordination with national and international efforts, must commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions through the promotion of renewable energy sources.

International agreements such as the Paris Accord provide frameworks for climate mitigation, but their success hinges on implementa-

tion at the grassroots. Assam can become a model for climate resilience by integrating traditional ecological knowledge with modern science, fostering community participation, and ensuring policy coherence.

In conclusion, heatwaves in Assam are far more than transient discomforts; they are symptomatic of a global crisis manifesting locally with profound effects.

No national language, many voices: Rethinking the Hindi debate in Assam

By: Mowsam Hazarika

The belief that Hindi is the national language of India remains widespread, yet it is fundamentally incorrect. The Constitution of India does not assign "national language" status to any language.

Article 343 of the Constitution designates Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union, while also allowing the continued use of English for official purposes.

In Assam, the Assamese language represents far more than a means of communication; it embodies cultural identity and historical continuity.

Any perception of linguistic imposition—real or imagined—often triggers strong reactions in Assam. Historical experiences have shaped a cautious attitude toward the dominance of any single language.

India's strength lies in its pluralism. The framers of the Constitution deliberately avoided imposing a single national language, recognizing the complexity of the country's linguistic landscape.

Assam exemplifies this diversity. Alongside Assamese, languages such as Bengali, Bodo, Karbi, Mishing, and numerous tribal dialects coexist, enriching the state's cultural fabric.



tional role in Assam. It serves as a link language, particularly in urban settings and among diverse communities.

There is a clear distinction between promoting Hindi as a link language and portraying it as a national language.

Education has a crucial role in shaping informed perspectives. Strengthening Assamese as the primary medium of instruction, while also encouraging the learning of Hindi and English, can create a balanced multilingual environment.

Equally important is the need for informed public discourse. Misleading narratives or rhetoric suggesting the primacy of one language can deepen divisions.

In essence, the idea of Hindi as India's national language is a misconception that must be corrected through awareness and education.

At the same time, Hindi does play a functional role in Assam. It serves as a link language, particularly in urban settings and among diverse communities.

The relevance of age limits on social media

By: Lalit Nath

In this era of digital technology, smartphones have become an intrinsic part of children's lives. It is through these devices that most children are introduced to social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Snapchat at a very tender age.

Responding to this collective anxiety, several nations across the globe are taking proactive measures to regulate children's digital access and institutionalise age thresholds.

This global momentum has added a new dimension to the narrative of digital safety for the generation under 16. In reality, this issue transcends a mere intergenerational divide or a transient debate.

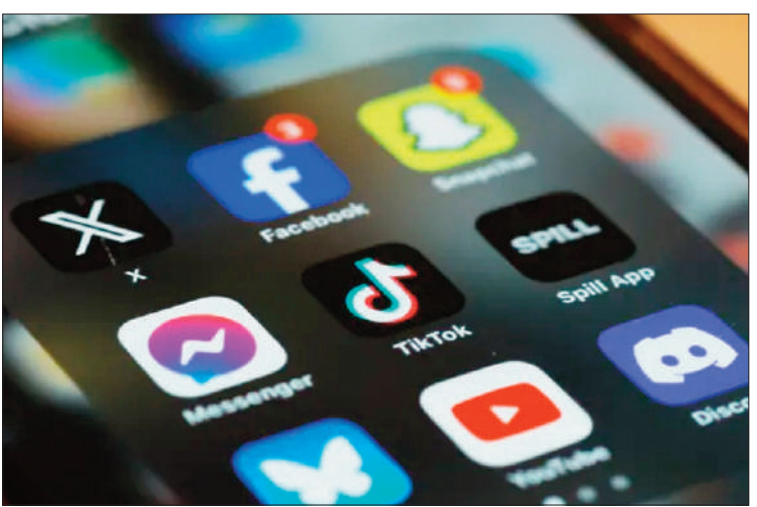
One of the most compelling arguments in favour of enforcing an age limit on social media is its severe impact on psychological well-being.

user preferences and push notifications, children are strategically anchored to their screens. Being emotionally and intellectually impressionable, minors easily succumb to these addictive digital feedback loops.

Furthermore, cyberbullying or online harassment has emerged as one of the most distressing and sensitive social maladies of the contemporary era.

Equally alarming is the inadvertent exposure to toxic and age-inappropriate content. The core business model of social media corporations thrives on user engagement and advertising revenue.

Conversely, a substantial counter-narrative exists that champions the cause of digital equity. Proponents of this view argue that in the modern world, social media is not merely an avenue for recreation, but a vital infrastructure for communication.



ditions, digital platforms offer alternative educational and communicative pathways that may otherwise be structurally absent in their immediate physical environments.

Moreover, critics argue that an absolute prohibition on social media is pragmatically challenging to enforce. Children can circumvent these regulations by falsifying their age or utilizing Virtual Private Networks (VPNs).

Therefore, this socio-technical dilemma cannot be effectively addressed through the binary lens of absolute liberty versus absolute prohibition.

Simultaneously, the role of parents and guardians remains paramount. Parental duty extends far beyond merely rationing screen time, it demands fostering an open, empathetic dialogue regarding internet ethics, online safety, disinformation and emotional well-being.

sumers of technology into responsible, discerning digital citizens.

For a nation like India, which is navigating a rapid and massive digital transformation, the discourse surrounding child online safety and age regulation is critical.

Ultimately, the fundamental question is not whether children should utilize technology, as digital infrastructure is now an irreversible reality of human existence.

While our children must undoubtedly inherit all the constructive opportunities of the digital age, it cannot come at the cost of their pristine childhood or mental health.

Women-led Self Help Groups are fuelling livelihood growth in Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi

By: Surendra Panwar

Women-led Self-Help Groups (SHGs) across the hills and fertile landscapes of Ri-Bhoi district are steadily reshaping the rural economy. With support from government livelihood missions, community institutions, non-profits, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives, these groups are generating sustainable livelihood opportunities in areas such as weaving, livestock rearing, fisheries, poultry farming, turmeric cultivation, horticulture, honey production, and other micro-enterprises.

The success of women-led SHGs and enterprises in Meghalaya can largely be attributed to the region's unique social structure, strong community networks, and economic realities. Among the Khasi and Garo communities, the matrilineal system grants women greater inheritance rights, social recognition, and participation in decision-making. As a result, women entrepreneurs in Meghalaya often encounter fewer social barriers compared to many other parts of India.

Government and CSR support strengthening rural women

Government-backed schemes under the National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM) and Meghalaya's rural development programs have played a major role in strengthening women-led enterprises in Ri-Bhoi. SHGs are receiving support through seed capital, revolving funds, technical training, and access to banks and cooperatives. Recent initiatives in the district have focused on promoting organic farming, handloom, food processing, poultry, piggy, and small businesses.

The Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, CSR and non-profit organisations are also contributing significantly.

K P Rajendran, CEO, Society for Action in community Health (SACH) says that in Ri-Bhoi district, which is predominantly inhabited by the Khasi community, traditions of collective work, village cooperation, mutual support, and clan-based solidarity remain deeply rooted. Women actively contribute to the local economy, while strong community trust and familiarity with collective action create a favourable environment for SHGs to thrive.

SACH has collaborated with HDFC bank under its CSR initiative 'Parivartan' since 2015 and supported hundreds of women SHGs which are gradually becoming the mainstay of livelihoods.

women's participation in economic activities outside the home is socially accepted and encouraged, enabling SHGs to play a significant role in strengthening livelihoods and promoting inclusive rural development", he said.

Most of these initiatives began as small savings collectives and evolved into a strong grassroots movement empowering women economically and socially. Through training, access to credit, market linkages, and skill development, SHGs are helping rural women become entrepreneurs, producers, and community leaders.

The expansion of SHGs in Meghalaya has been significantly supported under the NRLM, which has enabled women to access revolving funds, enterprise support, and financial inclusion programs. Ri-Bhoi has emerged as one of the districts where SHGs are increasingly contributing to livelihood diversification and rural enterprise development.

MOSONIe Socio-economic Foundation, a women-led organisation based in Pillangkata, Ri-Bhoi, has been actively working to strengthen rural livelihoods through initiatives in Eri silk training, agriculture, animal husbandry, and women's entrepreneurship. Through its efforts, the organisation has established training centres and created improved livelihood opportunities for women in rural communities.

Likewise, Diya Foundation has been instrumental in supporting women's SHGs and women-led Farmer Producer Organisations (FPOs) in Ri-Bhoi and neighbouring areas. Its programmes focusing on horticulture, turmeric and ginger cultivation, as well as sericulture, have enhanced women's involvement in rural enterprise and livelihood generation.

In addition, CSR-supported livelihood initiatives are opening up new avenues in beekeeping, piggy, and agro-based enterprises. These projects seek to equip women and farmers in Ri-Bhoi and East Khasi Hills with skills in beekeeping, piggy, nursery development, and sustainable market linkages.

Reviving weaving and Eri silk traditions Weaving continues to be one of the most culturally important livelihood activities for women in Ri-Bhoi. For generations, Khasi women have practiced traditional weaving, and today SHGs are playing a major role in preserving and modernising this heritage craft.

Women-led weaving collectives are producing Eri silk fabrics, handwoven shawls, stoles, and tra-

ditional attire using a blend of traditional knowledge and improved weaving methods. Through government schemes and SHG initiatives, women

farmers enhance productivity and reduce costs.

According to the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), training and extension programmes conducted by institutions such as ICAR-KVK Ri-Bhoi are encouraging SHGs to adopt integrated farming systems that combine horticulture, piggy, and livestock-based livelihood activities.

Mokid Islam, Principal Scientist and Head of ICAR-KVK Ri-Bhoi, emphasised the vital role women play in strengthening families and communities through SHGs. He also noted that ICAR-KVK has been supporting CSR initiatives aimed at improving piggy and livestock value chains through skill development and business planning support for women farmers.

Fisheries and aquaculture emerging as new livelihood options Women-led SHGs in Ri-Bhoi are increasingly exploring fisheries and aquaculture as part of integrated farming practices. Fish pond management and small-scale aquaculture are gradually becoming viable livelihood opportunities in villages with suitable water resources.

Groups such as the Sunshine SHG are promot-

ing agriculture and aquaculture-based enterprises while encouraging environmentally sustainable practices and women's self-reliance.

Fish farming is not only providing additional income but is also contributing to household nutrition and food security. Many SHGs are integrating fisheries with horticulture and livestock farming to create diversified livelihood systems that help reduce economic risks.

Turmeric and horticulture driving market-oriented enterprises Turmeric cultivation has become an important income-generating activity for women SHGs in Ri-Bhoi. Inspired by Meghalaya's growing reputation for premium-quality turmeric, women's groups are cultivating turmeric alongside ginger,

black pepper, and arecanut.

One such example is the laishphrang SHG from Nongdeawsaw village, a collective of 12 women who have been cultivating turmeric for several years. Initially, they cultivated turmeric individually on small plots, making it difficult to expand production and generate substantial income. Their situation improved after receiving support through an HDFC Bank CSR initiative, which provided them with 400 turmeric saplings.

Today, the group has successfully harvested nearly 800 kilograms of turmeric. They are now focusing on drying and processing turmeric into powder, although the absence of their own processing unit remains a challenge. Currently, they depend on private facilities for grinding and processing. Their long-term goal is to expand cultivation, establish a processing unit, and market their own branded turmeric powder.

Organisations supporting women-led FPOs are also helping farmers move beyond selling raw produce toward processing and value addition. SHGs are increasingly involved in turmeric powder production, packaging, and marketing, allowing them to earn better returns.



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Where do women feature in the history of diplomacy?

By: Natalia Núñez-Bargueño

On June 24, the United Nations marks the International Day of Women in Diplomacy. The occasion invites us to celebrate the slow but visible increase of women in foreign ministries, embassies, and international negotiations. Yet it also prompts a deeper question: what counts as diplomacy, and who gets recognised as a diplomatic actor?

That question lies at the heart of the European funded research project TheoFem which explores the international engagements of Catholic laywomen in the decades following the Second World War.

By looking beyond formal diplomatic institutions, the project reveals how women and religion shaped international debates on social justice, development, education, and peace.

Rethinking diplomacy beyond embassies... and beyond secularity

When we think of diplomacy, we usually imagine state representatives, formal treaties, and closed rooms. This narrow definition has long contributed to women's historical invisibility.

A vintage stamp from the Soviet Union of post WWI Russian women's right's activist Alexandra Kollontai led the way for women in diplomacy. As Russia's first female minister, she helped write many reforms such as the right to vote, to equal pay, abortion, divorce and birth control. Manuel Esteban / Shutterstock

For a long time, diplomacy was seen as a male domain, closely associated with state sovereignty and dominant political cultures, including male religious authority. Against this background, multilateral diplomatic practice began to expand, first tentatively during the era of the League of Nations, and then more decisively with the creation of the United Nations, which formally opened diplomatic space to non-governmental organisations and, by extension, to civil-society actors.

Thus, if we shift our focus away from

foreign ministries and towards NGOs and international organisations, a very different picture emerges. One in which women were present from the very beginning.

Women driven by deep religious motives often fall into a double blind spot in history

Religion has also largely been absent from standard histories of the early United Nations, which often present the organisation as a secular project. This omission obscures an important reality: the Cold War (1947-1991) itself was, in many respects, a religious conflict, with moral, spiritual, and ideological worldviews shaping international alignments, intelligence work, soft-power and development agendas. This dimension of religion in politics and everyday life resonates today with broader debates on religion and democracy.

Women driven by deep religious motives often fall into a double blind spot in history. They appear either too confessional for secular narratives, or they are silenced, tamed, or misunderstood in official religious accounts.

Their absence from official stories reflects both Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's observation that "well-behaved women rarely make history" and a phenomenon that Joan Scott has described as secularism: the assumption that the promotion of gender equality belongs only to the secular sphere.

Complex dynamics continue to shape women's relationships with religion, governability and institutions today, as shown by recent discussions on women influencing male-led faiths, debates surrounding the Vatican Synod and women's participation but also the role of indigenous women and spirituality in diplomacy.

From the home to the world at large The end of World War II marked a turning point for the advancement of women's rights and activism. As the Cold War intensified and decolonisation advanced, societies across the world under-



went profound transformations. In Europe, the rise of welfare states and the reconstruction of social systems created new professional needs, particularly in areas traditionally, and stereotypically, associated with women: education, health, and social work. At the same time, as new independent or decolonising nations required educated local elites, including women, to fill roles previously occupied by colonial administrations.

In this context, women were increasingly framed as "experts" in social and moral issues. Women leaders in International Catholic Organisations, in particular, mobilised a language of service, responsibility, and care that made their public engagement appear both legitimate and necessary. They became key intermediaries in these processes: connecting local actors to global debates on development and justice, while also participating as delegates, observers, experts, and presidents of international or-

ganisations that kept the Vatican informed on global issues.

A gender sensitive reading of diplomacy

Recovering these histories requires a gendersensitive approach to archives and historical silences. Official institutional records, whether in Vatican, institutional or governmental collections, tend to emphasise hierarchy and male leadership, often presenting women as auxiliary or marginal figures.

By combining these sources with personal papers and correspondence, and by reading them 'against the grain', we can reconstruct how women actually exercised agency: how they made decisions, built networks, and influenced international discussions, notably during the Cold War, when gender became a central concern.

Catholic women at the birth of the United Nations

Although it may sound surprising,

Catholic laywomen were among the earliest non-governmental actors present at the United Nations' founding conference in San Francisco in 1945.

One of them was Catherine Schaefer, who went on, in 1946-1947, to become the director of the Catholic information office at the United Nations in the United States. In Geneva, Jadwiga de Romer headed its European counterpart. Other leading figures included Christine de Hemptinne, Maria Baers, Françoise de St Maurice, Pia Colini-Lombardi, Marga Klompe, Barbara Ward and Alba Zizzamia.

Most of these women belonged to, or collaborated with, the World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations (WUCWO), which at the time claimed to represent 36 million women worldwide.

WUCWO was one of the first two International Catholic Organisations to gain consultative status with the UN, including ECOSOC (1947) and UNESCO (1948), and later UNICEF (1952) and FAO (1953). Far from being marginal observers, these women were embedded in the emerging architecture of global governance, including the history of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

Humility as a strategy

One of the most striking findings of the TheoFem project is that women's apparent modesty often concealed a sophisticated diplomatic practice.

Many Catholic laywomen adopted a rhetoric of humility, obedience, and service, values strongly promoted by Church discourse at the time. They learned to operate within respectable limits, while quietly and effectively pushing those boundaries outward. There was often a gap between what was officially permitted and what women actually did on the ground, as they often had to rely on more pragmatic and ad hoc methods to advance their agendas. In this sense, religion simultaneously reinforced conservative gender norms while also furnishing moral vocabularies and institutional spaces that women strategically mobilised to articulate claims for social

and gender justice.

Why this history matters today

On a day dedicated to women in diplomacy, looking back matters. First, because it allows us to recognise overlooked pioneers. As the work of Patricia Owens has powerfully shown, women did not wait passively to be admitted into international relations, a point that can be extended to the worlds of international organisations and diplomacy.

An important number of women who shaped international practices were often publicly recognised in their own time, yet many of their contributions have not endured in historical accounts. Revisiting these histories gives us critical tools to question which forms of diplomatic action are recognised, valued, and remembered today.

Second, looking back matters because today's debates on gender parity, representation, and inclusion are shaped by long and diverse histories and lived experiences, often involving creative, indirect, or less confrontational forms of resistance. By acknowledging the diplomatic work carried out by women (including the complex lives of women of faith, long and simplistically dismissed as submissive or apolitical) we can broaden our understanding of diplomacy itself. This matters all the more as women around the world continue to frame their engagement and activism in complex ideological, religious and spiritual terms.

This perspective is particularly important when considering women in the Global South, whose engagement in international relations has often been shaped by faith, spirituality, and moral authority, and whose forms of political action rarely fit secular or state-centred models of diplomacy.

Re-examining the history of diplomacy and international organisations through the lenses of gender and religion is therefore essential, not only to recover forgotten actors, but to better understand how international politics has actually been practised. (Courtesy- The Conversation)

India to arm Indonesia with advanced missiles

Both sides resolve to work towards peaceful Indo-Pacific

JAKARTA, July 7: India on Tuesday agreed to supply BrahMos super-sonic cruise missiles and Astra air-to-air missiles to Indonesia, marking a significant expansion of defence ties as Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Prabowo Subianto held talks to ramp up bilateral relations and ways to ensure a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

The two sides inked 14 agreements to enhance cooperation in a range of areas, including critical minerals and steel supply chain, maritime security, medicines, education, outer space, research and innovation, telecommunication and food security, against the backdrop of increasing geopolitical upheavals.

"A golden era is now at the threshold for our two nations," Modi said at the end of his talks with the Indonesian leader.

Modi landed in Jakarta on Monday to a red-carpet welcome in the first leg of his three-nation tour — that will also cover Australia and New Zealand — to shore up cooperation in sectors such as trade, security and rare-earth minerals under the framework of the India-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of 2018.

In his media statement, Modi said India reiterated his call for navigating "global turbulence" through dialogue and diplomacy, and asserted New Delhi's support for a two-state solution to the Palestine issue.

The pacts sealed after the Modi-Subianto talks included one on supply of an unspecified number of

BrahMos missiles and another on Astra beyond-visual range missiles. It is perhaps the first time that two Indian defence exports deals, worth over USD 600 million, were announced in presence of the prime minister.

Both weapon systems played a major role during Operation Sindoor last year.

The BrahMos missile deal with Indonesia came after India inked similar pacts with Vietnam and the Philippines.

The missile pacts as well as another decision on implementation of an agreement on maritime safety and security came against the backdrop of rising concerns in South East Asia over China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the resource-rich South China Sea and beyond.

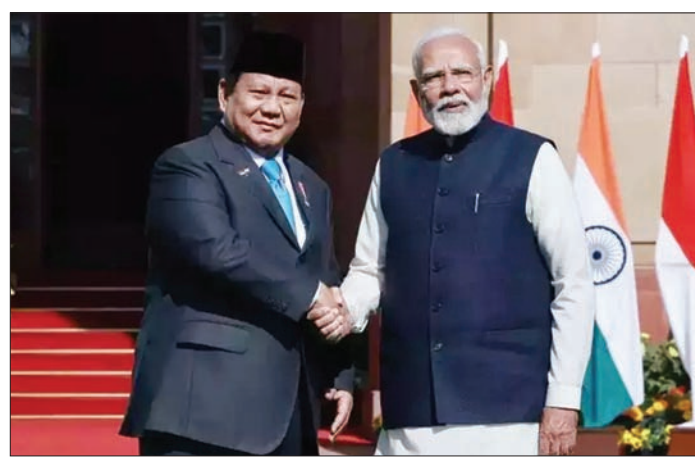
Both sides also deliberated on the overall situation in the Indo-Pacific.

President Subianto underlined the importance of an Indo-Pacific region that is open and transparent, with an order-based international law.

Modi said, "There is strong synergy in our respective outlooks on the Indo-Pacific. India has always attached special importance to ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) centrality."

It was also decided that Indonesia will deploy a Liaison Officer at India's Integrated Fusion Centre — Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR).

Modi said the growing trust between the two countries is strengthening cooperation in defence, security and the maritime domain.



"Today, we agreed to further enhance collaboration in defence electronics, disaster management, and industrial cooperation," he said.

"Our two Coast Guards will now work together to enhance maritime safety and security in the Indian Ocean. As two close maritime nations, we have also decided to deepen our cooperation in the blue economy, port development, and maritime trade," he said.

India and Indonesia also agreed to jointly develop the strategically-located Sabang Port, which overlooks the Strait of Malacca and is 100 miles away from India's Great Nicobar port project.

In another significant move, New Delhi decided to invest in the manufacturing of steel, nickel and rare earth permanent magnets in Indonesia.

"In today's world, supply chain resilience in technology has become critically important. We have

also concluded an important agreement to strengthen supply chain resilience in the areas of critical minerals and steel," Modi said.

"In addition, our companies are embarking on a new phase of partnership in stainless steel and rare earth magnets," he said.

The prime minister said India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) will soon be integrated with Indonesia's payment system and it will further enhance both the ease of doing business and the ease of travel between the two countries.

"Our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, established in 2018, is reaching new heights today. We are making significant strides across every domain of cooperation, including development, security, technology, culture, and education," Modi said.

"I am confident that today marks the beginning of a golden new chapter in the India-Indonesia partnership. This new chapter will have a profound and positive impact on the world of the 21st century and on humanity as a whole," he said.

Modi also announced a decision to set up a campus of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore in Indonesia.

The two sides also decided to enhance cooperation in areas of blue economy, maritime trade and port development.

India and Indonesia also decided to boost cooperation in the space sector. "We have taken important decisions today to advance joint research, technology sharing, and capacity building in the space sector," Modi said.

The prime minister and the Indonesian president also discussed various global challenges including the situation in West Asia.

"In this period of global turbulence, India believes that the role of dialogue and diplomacy has become more important than ever before," said Modi, adding: "On the issue of Palestine, we continue to support a two-state solution and the pursuit of lasting peace."

In his remarks, the prime minister also touched upon people-to-people ties between the two countries.

"Our two countries will also celebrate, with great enthusiasm, the centenary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's historic visit to Indonesia. Indonesia's remarkable journey of nation-building owes much to the visionary educator and his first Minister of Education, Ki Hajar Dewantara," he said. (PTI)

20 killed in heavy floods in China, 900 snakes escape from reptile farm

BEIJING, July 7: At least 20 people died and 331 others injured in one of China's worst floods, which also created a snake scare as around 900 slithering reptiles escaped from a farm which collapsed under the force of surging waters, authorities said on Tuesday.

The extreme weather in several places in China since Monday night caused havoc, they said.

President Xi Jinping on Tuesday called for all-out efforts to organise flood emergency rescue, disaster relief and treatment of the injured, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

He stressed the need to strengthen monitoring, early warning, and emergency preparedness and response. He also urged solid efforts in disaster prevention and relief work to ensure the safety of people's lives and property.

The snakes escaped from a farm in Hengzhou, which experienced heavy thunderstorms and floods on Monday night.

A viral video showed people standing in waist-deep water with bamboo sticks, trying to capture the snakes, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Village official, Wu Zhi, told Red Star News portal that most of the snakes were not venomous and a team of 10 had been organised to capture them with fish nets and stun guns. He warned villagers not to try to catch snakes by hand if they found any in their homes.

Heavy rainfall had caused 62 rivers across the country to rise above flood warning levels, central authorities said, with the Qingshui

River in Guangxi recording the biggest flood in its monitoring history.

Tornadoes, thunderstorms and high-velocity gales hit the eastern part of Hubei Province on Monday night, killing 11 people, with one reported missing, according to provincial emergency management authorities.

The severe weather also injured at least 331 people across three communities. Over 400 residents were evacuated to safe places. The severe weather destroyed 22 buildings and damaged another 4,855, according to the report.

Also, four people died and eight others were missing in record-breaking rainfall and the ensuing floods in parts of Nanning, capital city of south China's Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region.

Over 93,300 people were affected by the disaster and 54,460 evacuated, officials said.

The regional hydrology centre warned that elevated water levels would persist in several river sections over the next 24 hours. The casualties and evacuations were caused by torrential rains due to Typhoon Maysak, the report said.

Separately, a landslide struck a township in Tanchang County, Longnan City, in northwest China's Gansu Province early on Tuesday, in which five people died.

A total of 33 people were buried beneath the debris. Rescuers said 21 people had been pulled out, but five of them died despite treatment, the Xinhua report said.

All-out search and rescue operations are underway for the other 12 missing people. (PTI)

9 policemen killed in Pak's Balochistan

ISLAMABAD, July 7: At least nine policemen were killed in a terrorist attack at a police post in Pakistan's Balochistan province, officials said on Tuesday. The incident took place on Monday night at the police post in Ziarat district's Mangi Dam area.

Ziarat Deputy Commissioner Abdul Qudoos Achakzai confirmed that nine policemen were killed and further added that five remain missing, Dawn newspaper reported. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif condemned the attack and paid tribute to those killed, state broadcaster PTV reported.

Additional personnel have been dispatched to the area, and an operation to recover the missing police officials is underway, Achakzai said.

Those killed included the station house officers of Mangi and Kawas police stations, and Anti-Terrorist Force in-charge Head Constable Saifullah, Balochistan chief minister's aide Shahid Rind said in a statement.

Meanwhile, in a separate statement, Rind said that 15 terrorists of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) were killed in the clearance operation initiated following the attack. (PTI)

Sri Lanka orders probe as prison riot toll rises to 27

COLOMBO, July 7: The death toll in the Negombo prison riots rose to 27 on Tuesday as authorities said the situation had been brought under control.

A number of foreign inmates were among around 700 prisoners evacuated safely during the violence, while the government announced a three-member probe headed by a retired Supreme Court judge to investigate the incident and recommend measures to prevent a recurrence.

Prisons spokesman A C Gajanyake said the clashes, which began between two groups of inmates on Sunday, escalated into an attempted jailbreak on Monday. The inmates attacked jail officials while breakfast was being served.

Seven prison officials and 19 inmates were killed in a gunfire that followed, while several were injured. The death toll rose by one on Tuesday morning to 27, Gajanyake said.

More than 100 inmates and prison officials were admitted to Negombo Hospital, with some later transferred to the National Hospital in Colombo. At least 10 of them underwent emer-

gency surgeries, health officials said.

Harshana Nanayakkara, minister in charge of prisons, told Parliament that a full investigation would identify any lapses that may have led to the violence. "We will carry out a full probe into the incident to identify any lapses that may have led to the situation," said Nanayakkara, who is a former judge. Opposition legislator Ajith P Perera criticised the minister's handling of the crisis. "He didn't do anything to control the situation when it was getting bad yesterday. He was a failure," Perera told reporters.

The opposition has written to the parliament speaker seeking an urgent debate on the incident.

Authorities on Tuesday transferred a known criminal, Katuwellegoda Suresh, to the high-security Boossa prison. Officials believe his links to the prison's internal narcotics distribution chain were the primary cause of the incident.

Negombo Magistrate Shirani Perera visited the prison on Tuesday to conduct the magisterial inquiry, while the Human Rights Commission also inspected the facility. (PTI)

Explosions rock Damascus, wounding 18, as French President Macron visits Syria



DAMASCUS, July 7: Explosions rocked Damascus on Tuesday as France's president met with his Syrian counterpart in a landmark visit, wounding at least 18 people, Syria's Interior Ministry said.

Emmanuel Macron had entered the presidential palace to meet Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa when the explosions happened near the Four Seasons Hotel, where Syrian media report that the French president is staying.

An Elysee official said Macron was safe and that his meeting with al-Sharaa was continuing. He is the first major Western leader to visit Syria since al-Sharaa came to power and his visit comes before he heads to a NATO summit in Ankara, Türkiye. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss Macron's whereabouts and security.

But the explosions are a blow for al-Sharaa, who came to power after leading an insurgency that ousted Bashar Assad in 2024.

He has since pushed to assert full control and bring stability in war-torn Syria, appeal to minorities skeptical of his Islamist-led rule, and win the support of Western governments who were skeptical of his past as leader of the formerly al-Qaeda-linked Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group. His government has promised political and economic reform after decades of autocratic rule.

Macron played a major role in pushing Europe and the United States to drop most sanctions on Syria. He arrived in the country Monday night with an economic delegation, and is scheduled to sign memorandums of understanding

with his counterpart as the battered country tries to lure investors to help it rebuild after 14 years of war.

The Interior Ministry in a statement reported by Syrian state media said that the two blasts in the heart of the capital were caused by explosive devices, one placed in a garbage bin and the other in a parked car. It added that four of the wounded were police officers, and no deaths were immediately reported. An investigation is currently taking place at the scene of the attack.

A large plume of smoke could be seen from the site. The area is on a busy street in Damascus and is near the headquarters of the Tourism Ministry and the Damascus National Museum.

Footage widely circulated on social media showed a van and a motorcycle on fire and blood stains on the street. No group immediately claimed responsibility.

The incident comes days after an explosive device was detonated in a cafe near the Justice Palace in Damascus, killing at least 10 people and wounding more than 20.

While Syria's new rulers have wrestled with violence involving different groups in the country as they work to assert control, the capital has largely been peaceful during the turbulent period.

The conflict in Syria killed nearly half a million people and displaced millions. Syria's infrastructure lies in ruins, and while other nations and businesses have made large investment pledges, the country still needs hundreds of billions of dollars to rebuild and lift millions out of poverty. (AP)

Indian envoy meets China's vice foreign minister

BEIJING, July 7: Indian Ambassador to China Vikram Doraiswami held his "introductory" meeting with China's Vice Foreign Minister Hua Chunying and exchanged views on further expanding bilateral cooperation in trade, economy, and people-to-people exchanges.

Ambassador Doraiswami held his introductory meeting with Hua Chunying, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of China, on Monday, the Indian Embassy in Beijing said in a post on X on Tuesday.

"Both sides agreed to strengthen efforts to fully implement the vision of the leaders of the two countries for stable and mutually beneficial relations that deliver tangible benefits to the peoples of both countries," it said. "They also exchanged views on further expanding bilateral cooperation in trade, economy, and people-to-people exchanges," it said.

"Ambassador also welcomed Vice Minister Hua's assurance of China's support for India's BRICS Presidency," it said.

India holds the rotating Presidency of the BRICS countries and is expected to hold the summit of the 10-member bloc later this year.

On Monday, Doraiswami also met Fu Ying, former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and Founding President of the Centre for International Security and Strategy.

"They shared views on contemporary bilateral, regional, and global developments and its impacts. Discussions also focused on academic and think tank exchanges," the embassy said.

Doraiswami's meeting with Hua is his first with a Vice Ministerial-level official in the Chinese Foreign Ministry. (PTI)

UNITED NATIONS, July 7: Foreign Direct Investment inflows to India increased by 44 per cent in 2025 to USD 39 billion, according to the UN, which said the country continued to strengthen its position as a major investment destination.

The 2026 World Investment Report, released Tuesday by United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), said global foreign direct investment showed resilience in 2025, but the recovery remained fragile.

FDI flows rose by 6 per cent to USD 1.6 trillion. Inflows increased by 11 per cent in developed economies and by 2 per cent in developing countries.

Excluding conduit flows through major European financial centres, global FDI increased 4 per cent after two consecutive years of decline. The outlook for 2026 is affected by significant downside risks owing to trade policy uncertainty, geopolitical tensions and conflicts, it said.

FDI inflows to South Asia rose strongly, from USD 34 billion to USD 46 billion, "driven by investment in India, where FDI inflows increased by 44 per cent to USD 39 billion," the report said.

However, it noted that while total FDI inflows rose to USD 39 billion, project indicators pointed to a more "cautious investment cycle".

Amid an uncertain global environment, the total value of announced greenfield investment in the country declined from more than USD 111 billion in 2024 to about USD 74 billion in 2025, while the number of projects fell marginally.

"India continued to strengthen its position as a major investment destination in 2025, supported by an active policy agenda aimed at broadening its investment base beyond services and accelerating advanced manufacturing," the report said.

It noted that to attract investment into priority industries, such as elec-

Trump arrives in Ankara NATO unveils billions in arms deals to prove its firepower

ANKARA, July 7: President Donald Trump arrived in Ankara Tuesday afternoon for the NATO summit, as the transatlantic military alliance was announcing billions in arms deals in an attempt to appease the mercurial US leader.

Trump was expected to head first to the presidential compound of Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a close ally who is hosting this year's gathering.

Just before Air Force One touched down in Ankara, NATO showcased a series of military projects worth billions of dollars — an investment that the alliance's secretary-general, Mark Rutte, called "money well spent."

An energised Rutte was speaking to government ministers and defence industry officials at a forum billed as NATO's "big reveal," to the thrum of techno music and a slick video display.

NATO as an organisation does not own any weapons — these are the property of the 32 member countries — but it does have a fleet of 14 AWACS early warning radar surveillance planes that are about 50 years old, along with some newer surveillance drones.

A deal to replace the aging planes was announced Tuesday. Swedish manufacturer Saab will be supplying up to 10 new GlobalEye surveillance aircraft for a 10-nation consortium. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson announced.

"It's a moment of great pride," he said, noting that the twin-engine aircraft would be "made within the alliance for all the alliance."

Some of the projects will be paid for with funds from a system of cheap loans for defence purposes set up by the European Union, comprising up to \$170 billion raised on capital markets.

"We need to ensure that we are translating our economic might into military capabilities, putting the cash to work from defence plans to drones, from money to missiles and interceptors," Rutte said.

Trump has branded NATO a "paper tiger" that would cease to function without American arms and leadership. At the forum on Tuesday, Michael Duffy, a US undersecretary of defence, said "the reality is that we need production increases across the board."

"We will be looking to increase our exports to those who are looking to buy our equipment, and we'll also be looking to partner with the expansion of production capacity here in Europe," he said.

Defence sales announced

Representatives from 15 nations shook hands and patted shoulders on a vast podium under the NATO logo as they announced a multinational effort to buy air-to-air refueling and transport planes from Airbus.

Then Rutte announced a four-country effort to pur-

chase as many as five new Triton surveillance drones to add to NATO's small fleet.

"It is genuinely made in NATO, and creating jobs on both sides of the Atlantic," he said.

Rutte told reporters on the eve of the military alliance's two-day summit in Turkey that "we will announce tens of billions in new contracts that will provide the crucial kit we need to deter and defend."

However, at Tuesday's event, no dollar figures were given and the display included some projects long since agreed.

The defence industry splash comes a few weeks after Rutte tried to ease US concerns about military spending at NATO with a new pitch using a chart labelled "The Trump Trillion" — showing \$1.2 trillion in spending by European allies and Canada since 2017.

Far from being impressed, Trump appeared unmoved, saying he was still disappointed at some NATO allies' refusal to join the Iran war, which he had launched alongside Israel without consulting them.

"We don't need their money — we don't need loyalty," Trump said. "I just want loyalty."

Debate over jet sales to Turkey

The summit is being held in President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's sprawling palace compound in Ankara, and Trump has suggested he would come bearing gifts for the Turkish leader.

Speaking Monday on the morning show "Fox & Friends," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu urged the US not to sell F-35 fighter jets to Turkey, saying that Erdogan "calls openly for the annihilation of Israel."

Turkey and Israel have acrimonious relations. Erdogan frequently accuses Israel of committing genocide in his war in Gaza, triggered by the deadly Oct. 7, 2023, Hamas-led attack on southern Israel.

Turkey was barred from the F-35 program in 2019 after it purchased Russian-made S-400 missile defence systems. However, Trump, who has warm relations with Erdogan, has hinted ahead of his planned visit to Ankara that the sales could soon resume.

Netanyahu said selling Turkey F-35s would "upset the power balance in the Middle East, which is ultimately guaranteed by Israeli air superiority and also, I think, by America's posture in the Middle East."

Israel's Air Force depends on hundreds of US fighter jets, including F-35s, F-16s and F-15s.

Turkey beefed up security and banned protests in Ankara during the summit, but a small group of demonstrators gathered on Tuesday in the capital. They were quickly surrounded by police, and a legal association said 22 students affiliated with the leftist Turkish Workers Party and three lawyers had been detained. (AP)

FDI inflows to India increased by 44 percent to USD 39 billion in 2025: UN



foreign investors, while institutional mechanisms such as project development cells and the project monitoring group have aimed to facilitate approvals and project implementation.

"These efforts have contributed to boosting investment momentum, including in manufacturing," the report noted, adding that announced greenfield investment in manufacturing increased sharply from 2021 to 2024, reflecting the country's growing role in selected segments of GVCs, including electronics.

The report also noted that in 2025, however, this trend was interrupted by a more uncertain global environment. Although total FDI inflows rose to USD 39 billion, project indicators pointed to a more cautious investment cycle.

The total value of announced greenfield investment declined from more than USD 111 billion in 2024 to about USD 74 billion in 2025, while the number of projects fell marginally. (PTI)

electronics, semiconductors and related manufacturing activities, India launched programmes such as the Production-Linked Incentive schemes. Make in India, Start-up India and the National Industrial Corridor Development Programme.

"These initiatives have been complemented by reforms aimed at creating a more conducive investment

environment," including the National Single Window System, the India Industrial Land Bank and continued efforts to reduce regulatory burdens, the UNCTAD said citing information from Reserve Bank of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry and World Bank.

It added that the reformed FDI regime has reinforced openness to

Delegate powers to Meghalaya govt to facilitate scientific coal mining, CM urges Centre

SHILLONG, July 7: Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Tuesday urged the Centre to delegate statutory powers to the state to facilitate legal coal mining by thousands of tribal landowners.

During a meeting with Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy in New Delhi, Sangma sought delegation of powers under Section 26 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, enabling the state to grant prior approvals and approve mining plans for coal.

"The step would allow thousands of small tribal coal-holders to obtain lawful mineral concessions and the necessary approvals within the state itself," the chief minister said in a statement.

Sangma said Meghalaya's unique land tenure system under the Sixth Schedule, where land and minerals are owned by individuals, clans and communities rather than the state, makes the existing approval mechanism impractical.

"The national model does not fit Meghalaya's ground reality. Coal deposits here are thin and scattered and are held in small family and clan parcels



rather than large mining blocks," he said. He said the minimum concession area of 100 hectares prescribed under the 2021

Standard Operating Procedure has effectively excluded most genuine tribal coal holders from obtaining mining leases.

"It is neither practical nor affordable for a small holder to travel repeatedly to Delhi and the Indian Bureau of Mines office in Kolkata to obtain approvals for a modest deposit," he said.

Sangma said that since the National Green Tribunal restrained rat-hole coal mining in April 2014 over environmental and safety concerns, thousands of families dependent on small-scale coal mining have lost their primary source of livelihood, while the state has suffered substantial losses in royalty, cess and tax revenues.

The ban followed concerns over rampant unscientific "rat-hole" mining, environmental degradation and fatal accidents in coal mines across the state.

While permitting scientific mining subject to statutory clearances, the tribunal prohibited unscientific extraction and transportation of freshly mined coal.

In July 2019, the Supreme Court of India upheld the rights of tribal landowners over coal and other minerals in Meghalaya but ruled that mining activities must comply with the provisions of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act and environmental

laws.

The apex court also allowed the transportation and auction of inventoried coal extracted before the NGT ban under a regulated mechanism.

The issue has also been periodically monitored by the Meghalaya High Court, which has passed a series of orders directing the state government to curb illegal coal mining and transportation, ensure strict enforcement of environmental norms and act against unauthorised extraction while facilitating lawful mining in accordance with court directions.

Sangma submitted a formal representation to the Union minister, recalling that the Ministry of Coal had, in principle, agreed to Meghalaya's request for delegation of powers in 2015.

He urged the Centre to issue the necessary notifications under Section 26 of the MMDR Act and related rules.

At the end of the meeting, Reddy suggested constituting a committee to examine the proposal, a suggestion welcomed by the chief minister.

A committee is expected to be constituted shortly to study the matter, the statement said. (PTI)

Protesters in Imphal demand special Assembly session, scrapping of SoO pact

IMPHAL, July 7: Hundreds of demonstrators on Tuesday staged a protest here demanding that the Manipur government convene a special session of the Assembly to discuss measures for restoring peace and abrogate the Suspension of Operations (SoO) agreement with Kuki militant groups.

The protest was jointly organised by the Naga People's Union Imphal, Imphal Naga Business Association, Imagi Meira and several other organisations, with participation from members of the Naga and Meitei communities.

Addressing the gathering, Kshetrimayum Shanti, a women leader from Khwairamband market, said the joint participation of hill and valley communities in the protest was a positive step towards restoring peace.

"The conflict cannot be resolved unless the SoO agreement with Kuki militant groups is withdrawn," she said.

Claiming that several rallies had been held and memorandums submitted to the authorities, Shanti alleged that the government had failed to respond adequately.

The demonstrators also urged the state and central governments to take immediate steps to restore lasting peace and fulfil their responsibilities toward the people of the state. (PTI)

Prisoner escapes from Arunachal jail

ITANAGAR, July 7: A prisoner escaped from a jail in Arunachal Pradesh's West Siang district, following which a massive manhunt was started, police said on Tuesday.

Dorik Doji, 29, managed to escape from the jail around 8.30 pm on Monday, they said.

The prisoner, a resident of Doji Jeko village, was sentenced to five years of imprisonment recently after being convicted of sexual assault of a minor, they added.

He is also undergoing trials in two separate drug-related cases registered at the Aalo police station, police said.

A lookout notice has been issued, and all police stations, outposts, and check gates across the region have been asked to maintain a strict vigil, they said.

Police said Doji is of medium build and wheatish complexion, and was last seen wearing a white half-sleeve collared T-shirt. (PTI)

Manipur gov Bhalla visits Dzukou valley



HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, July 7: Manipur Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla visited Dzukou valley in Kohima district, a premier trekking destination of the Northeast, best visited during the monsoon on Tuesday.

Bhalla, who also held additional charge as Nagaland governor for a brief period, was accorded a traditional welcome at Viswema enroute to Dzukou valley.

He was received by Kohima DC B Henok Buchem, SP Krodhi Rhetso, other officials, office bearers of the Southern Angami Public Organisation (SAPO), and members of the Viswema Village Council.

After the reception, Bhalla, accompanied by his official delegation, proceeded to Dzukou valley.

The Kohima district administration and security agencies ensured the smooth and safe conduct of the visit.

Welcoming Bhalla, SAPO president Tepul Hopovi described his visit as a symbolic convergence of stewardship and landscape, and of governance and guardianship.

He highlighted Dzukou valley's ecological significance, noting that the Southern Angami people have served as its traditional custodians since time immemorial.

Emphasising that the valley is a treasured natural heritage of Nagaland, Hopovi said it belongs to all nature lovers and called for a collective effort to protect, preserve and promote its rich biodiversity.

Hopovi further urged that the valley should serve as a model for climate-resilient, community-led conservation, where indigenous knowledge and government initiatives work together to safeguard the environment for future generations.

He invited Bhalla to experience the valley's pristine landscape, unpolluted environment and the famed Dzukou Lily, symbolising the unique ecological wealth.

As a mark of respect, SAPO presented him a traditional memento. The organisation also expressed gratitude to the Nagaland government, particularly Kohima DC, SP and all officials involved for coordinating and facilitating the visit.

Tripura CM demands raising cap of externally aided projects to ₹ 10,000 crore

AGARTALA, July 7: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday pitched for increasing the annual cap on externally aided projects from ₹ 4,000 crore to ₹ 10,000 crore, saying the existing limit hampers the execution of large infrastructure projects in small states.

The chief minister said the Centre has fixed a maximum limit of ₹ 4,000 crore per annum for externally aided projects in Tripura, which often falls short for undertaking mega development works.

Addressing a government programme at Bardowali, Saha said development activities have gathered pace under the "double-engine government" to meet people's expectations.

"Massive infrastructure building is taking place in the northeastern state over the past few years, from implementation of the Smart City Mission to the Lighthouse project, strengthening the power sector and beautification of urban amenities," he said.



"I have categorically demanded an increase in the maximum cap for externally aided projects from ₹ 4,000 crore to ₹ 10,000 crore in the presence of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during the last NEC plenary session in Shillong. I hope the Centre will consider our

legitimate demand for development," he said.

Saha said he had inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of development projects worth ₹ 1,500 crore in the past year to accelerate infrastructure creation.

The state has rejuvenated water bodies in Agartala for ₹ 137 crore and spent ₹ 581 crore under the Smart City Mission to improve civic amenities, he said.

Claiming that investors and entrepreneurs are showing keen interest in Tripura, the CM said projects worth ₹ 8,000 crore out of investment proposals valued at ₹ 15,000 crore received during last year's investment summit have already been grounded.

He said the state has set a target of attracting MoUs worth ₹ 1 lakh crore during the 'Destination Tripura: Business Conclave 2026', scheduled to be held on July 9 and 10 at the International Fair Ground in Hapania in West Tripura district. (PTI)

CM to visit Delhi for consulting Centre

Nagaland to convene special assembly session for FNTA law

KOHIMA, July 7: The Nagaland cabinet decided to convene a special session of the assembly to enact a law for the proposed Frontier Nagaland Territorial Authority (FNTA), while seeking the Centre's approval for conferring legislative powers on the body.

The cabinet, which held an emergency meeting with members of the Eastern Nagaland Legislators' Union (ENLU) and senior officials on Monday, also resolved to urge the Centre to enhance the proposed development package for the region from ₹ 5,000 crore to ₹ 10,000 crore.

The decisions were announced in a statement issued by the Home Department amid concern over delays in implementing the Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) signed on February 5 among the Centre, the Nagaland government and the Eastern Nagaland People's Organisation (ENPO) for creation of the FNTA.

The decisions were taken as the ENPO announced a public rally and shutdown in the eastern districts on July 10 over the delay in the implementation of the accord.

The government said the proposed leg-

islation would incorporate provisions to confer legislative powers on the FNTA over transferred subjects and departments in the districts under its jurisdiction, subject to consultation with and approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and in conformity with the Constitution.

It said the state had earlier drafted and introduced the FNTA Bill during the Budget session, but its passage was deferred after the MHA informed the government that constitutional issues relating to granting legislative powers to the authority were still under examination.

The cabinet also reiterated that the safeguards under Article 371(A) were "sacred and sacrosanct" and would not be diluted or altered.

A delegation led by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, along with ENLU members, will visit New Delhi to seek the Centre's advice, approval and guidance on the matter, the statement said.

The government also appealed to the ENPO to reconsider its proposed public rally and shutdown in the eastern districts on July 10 in view of the steps being taken to establish the FNTA. (PTI)

'Singing of national song, anthem made compulsory at all schools in Tripura'

AGARTALA, July 7: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday said the School Education department has made the singing of the full version of the national song 'Vande Mataram', along with the national anthem 'Jana-Gana-Mana', compulsory in all schools of the state.

The chief minister in a Facebook post said the Ministry of Home Affairs has issued exhaustive directive regarding the respect, decorum, and official versions of the national song of India, 'Vande Mataram'.

"The guidelines specifically mandate that proper protocol must be observed across all formal, semi-formal, and

educational forums to instil national pride and maintain the rich cultural heritage associated with the national song", he wrote. Saha said, "In pursuance of the aforementioned national directives and to promote national integration and cultivate unconditional respect towards national symbols among the youth, the Education (School) department proposes to enforce uniform implementation of these guidelines in all government, government-aided, and privately managed schools, including all government-aided and un-aided recognised Madrasa operating within the administrative jurisdiction of the state. (PTI)

Sikkim CM launches initiative to protect oak trees

GANGTOK, July 7: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Tuesday launched an initiative to protect Himalayan oak trees to strengthen water security, biodiversity and environmental sustainability.

The initiative, 'Mission: Million Oak Trees by 2047', was unveiled during a programme organised by the Forest and Environment Department as part of 'Sikkim Paryavaran Parva 2026' at Lagyap Reserve Forest along J N Road.

Launching the mission by planting the first oak tree sapling, the chief minister released the Oak Forest Restoration Manual, flagged off a safari vehicle for Barsey Rhododendron Wildlife Sanctuary and nine forest patrol vehicles. (PTI)

2 minors among four militants nabbed in Manipur

IMPHAL, July 7: Four militants, including two minors, have been held in Manipur on charges of extortion and possession of illegal arms, police said on Tuesday.

A cadre of the banned UNLF (P) was arrested from Wangkhei in Imphal East district, they said.

The accused was identified as Moirangthem Naoba Meitei (32), they said, adding that a single-barrel gun and two mobile handsets were recovered from his possession.

The UNLF (P) had signed a peace agreement with the Centre in 2023. However, its cadres have continued to be arrested in cases related to extortion and illegal arms trafficking.

In a separate operation, a member of the proscribed NRFM was apprehended from Luwang-sangbam in Imphal West district on Monday. (PTI)

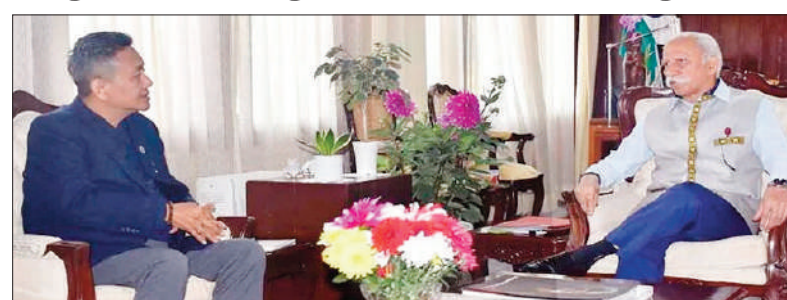
Arunachal gov reviews education sector, stresses strengthening of law college

ITANAGAR, July 7: Arunachal Pradesh Governor KT Parnaik on Tuesday reviewed the state's education scenario at a high-level meeting with Education Minister PD Sona and top officials at Lok Bhavan here.

According to a statement by Lok Bhavan, the meeting focused on strengthening higher education institutions, particularly the state's lone government law college, Jarbom Gamlin Government Law College, at Jote.

The governor emphasised the urgent need for measures to address existing challenges and elevate academic, administrative, and infrastructure standards to meet the aspirations of students and faculty members.

As the only government law college in the state, the institution carries a special responsibility and must evolve into a model centre of legal education, the governor said.



The education minister assured the governor that corrective measures are already being initiated by the department to streamline the functioning of the college.

The governor also expressed concern over issues related to the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) and underscored the need for sustained efforts to strengthen the premier technical institute.

He further advised the education de-

partment to explore setting up Common University Entrance Test (CUET) examination centres in the state to provide greater convenience and equal opportunities to students from the state.

The governor appreciated the department's reform-oriented approach and lauded Sona for implementing a rationalised teacher transfer system through the newly introduced Teachers' Registry Portal. (PTI)

DISTRICT HEALTH SOCIETY, KARBI ANGLONG NATIONAL HEALTH MISSION Karbi Anglong, Diphu

No: NHM/K-Ang/Free USG under JSSK/Part-1/17722

Date: 06/07/2026

SHORT NOTICE INVITING QUOTATION FOR PROVIDING USG SERVICE

Sealed quotation affixing court fee of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees Eight and Twenty-five Paise) only of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council, cash receipt of Rs. 10.00 (Rupees Ten) only are invited for providing USG service to the pregnant women of Karbi Anglong district at Manja, Bokajan, Bokolia & Chokihola area from the supplier/firm having PCPNDT certification.

The quotation will be received in the drop-box at the office of the DPMU, NHM, Karbi Anglong, Diphu up to 5.00 P.M. on 15th July 2026 and if the office is closed due to Government Holiday or other bandh, the next working day will be the date of receiving and opening of quotation.

The undersigned reserves the right to reject any or all the quotation. Quotation with any deviation in specification will be straight away rejected. Incomplete and late submission of quotation are liable to be rejected summarily.

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Ram temple row: Cong accuses BJP-RSS of 'whitewashing theft', says PM must break 'silence'

NEW DELHI, July 7: The Congress on Tuesday accused the BJP-RSS of "whitewashing" the theft of donations at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya in order to protect the "real culprits", and demanded that the details of all donations be made public as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi break his "silence" on this issue.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the "theft" of donations at the Lord Shri Ram Temple in Ayodhya is a "grave betrayal of the faith" of crores of people of the country.

"The people of the country believe that through resignations and limited action, an attempt is being made to cover-up the entire matter and protect the real culprits and big players," Ramesh said in a post in Hindi on X.

Reiterating the demands of the Congress, he said the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust be immediately dissolved and a new trust be formed including Shankaracharyas, Dharmacharyas, saints, and religious representatives.

"The public has no faith in the Uttar Pradesh government's SIT. The investigation of the case should be conducted independently under the supervision of a



Supreme Court judge," he said.

Ramesh further demanded that a complete account of the cash and material donations received for the Ram Temple be made public.

He said Prime Minister Modi should break his silence on this issue.

Earlier, senior Congress leader and former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot accused the BJP-RSS of having "captured" the administration of the temple in an "unauthorised manner".

Addressing a press conference here, Gehlot reiterated the party's demands that the the Trust should be dissolved, a probe under the supervision of a sitting judge of the Supreme Court be carried out, and the details of the donations made

to the Ram temple by the people be made public to ensure transparency.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi should come forward on this issue but is not doing so," he said.

Gehlot said the BJP-RSS ran the Ram temple movement for decades and it is because of that they were able to come to power.

"There is a sentiment of betrayal among the people due to the events that have happened," he said.

"You have the double engine government and then you say it is mere negligence. First they stated nothing happened, then they formed an SIT, then lodged an FIR, then there were resignations. There are attempts to whitewash the whole issue," Gehlot said.

"Their real face has come to the fore, their 'chaal, charitra and chehra' is before the people. The BJP-RSS have captured the temple administration in an unauthorised manner," he alleged.

His remarks came a day after the Ram temple trust on Monday accepted the resignations of Champat Rai as its general secretary and member Anil Mishra in the wake of the donation theft row. Trustee Krishna Mohan has been named as interim general secretary.

Promising to overhaul the donation system and restore the faith of devotees, the Trust also announced the formation of a three-member search committee to identify a chief executive officer (CEO) for the temple trust.

The panel comprises retired judge Pramod Kohli, retired Lieutenant General Vishnukant Chaturvedi and trustee Suresh Haware.

Trust treasurer Govind Giri stated this on Monday after an over three-hour meeting of the temple body in Ayodhya to discuss the issue that has sparked widespread outrage and a political firestorm, with the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, which led the Ram temple movement, struggling to control the damage. (PTI)

SP, Cong 'attacking' Sanatan faith, keep mum on Waqf issues: Adityanath

PRATAPGARH /SULTANPUR (UP), July 7: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday accused the Congress and Samajwadi Party of "attacking" Sanatan with their statements on the Ram temple donation theft row and asked why their mouths were "glued shut" when it came to Waqf issues.

"Even a chameleon must be feeling ashamed as SP and Congress change their colours faster than it does," the chief minister said, adding that the two opposition parties which had opposed the Ram temple were now claiming that faith is being undermined in Ayodhya.

Adityanath was addressing a gathering after inaugurating and laying foundation stones of 111 development projects worth more than ₹ 384 crore in Pratapgarh and 99 projects worth ₹ 819 crore in Sultanpur.

"The Samajwadi Party and the Congress, which are attacking the Sanatan faith over alleged theft of offerings at the Ram temple, were silent on the Waqf land issue. Why are SP and Congress leaders' mouths glued shut with Fevicol when it comes to Waqf matters?" the BJP leader said.

Adityanath said he wanted to ask the Congress and the SP



whether they ever spoke even once about thousands of hectares of land allegedly sold in the name of Waqf in Uttar Pradesh and across the country.

"But why do the Congress and the SP fall silent when it comes to alleged irregularities involving Waqf properties? Why did they never speak when donations made by Hindus were allegedly diverted to build graveyard boundary walls?" he asked.

He asked if Hindu faith was not hurt "when illegal slaughterhouses operated, when cows were slaughtered and allegedly sold to smugglers?"

"Was Hindu faith not hurt when Ram devotees were fired upon or lathi-charged? Was it not hurt when Lord Ram and Lord Krishna were described as imaginary, when

Kanwar Yatras were restricted, or when Janmashtami celebrations and Durga Puja pandals were stopped?"

"Will the Congress and the Samajwadi Party answer these questions?" he said.

His remarks came as the opposition tried to corner the BJP and the RSS over the Ram temple donation embezzlement case, accusing them of betraying Lord Ram and the faith of crores of people of the country.

That a grand Ram temple now exists at the site of the Babri structure pains them, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said.

He referred to the land allotted to the Muslim community for the construction of a mosque under the directions of the Supreme Court in its verdict on the Ayodhya title dispute, saying that even the foundation for the mosque had not yet been laid.

Adityanath also criticised these parties for opposing the Waqf (Amendment) Act.

"They want the plunder in the name of Waqf to continue, the land of the poor to keep being encroached upon, and temples to continue being defamed while Hindu faith is repeatedly hurt. This double standard should not be accepted," he said. (PTI)

Wayanad landslide was 'man-made', caused by unscientific dumping: Kerala ministers

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, July 7: Kerala ministers Ramesh Chennithala and T Siddique on Tuesday said the incident at the Kalladi tunnel project site was not a natural landslide but a "man-made" one caused by the "unscientific dumping" of excavated earth.

Addressing reporters, Siddique said the injured persons admitted to WIMS Hospital were in stable condition.

"This is not a natural landslide. It is a man-made one. It occurred due to the unscientific dumping of excavated earth," he said.

The minister said concerns over the manner in which excavated earth was being dumped at the site had been raised earlier after heavy rains in Wayanad. He said directions had been issued to assess the situation, remove the accumulated earth and stop work if necessary.

"The government will examine why this happened and why the earlier directions were not fol-

lowed," Siddique said.

He said that excavated earth had been dumped similarly at the Wayanad Township project, where houses are being constructed for survivors of the 2024 landslide. Siddique said Wayanad had received 256 mm of rainfall in the last 24 hours.

He said an NDRF team from Meenangadi had reached the site and another team from Kozhikode had also been asked to proceed to Wayanad. Fire and Rescue Services personnel had already begun rescue operations.

The minister said the Wayanad district collector had reached the spot and that Kerala State Disaster Management Authority chairman Sekhar Kuriaakose had been asked to coordinate the rescue operations at all levels.

He added that authorities had begun efforts to ascertain whether more people were trapped under the debris. Siddique said Revenue Minister A P Anil Kumar and he

were proceeding to Wayanad to oversee the situation.

Chennithala also termed the landslide at Kalladi in Wayanad a "man-made disaster".

Speaking to reporters in Kollam, Chennithala said the tragedy could have been avoided if the construction firm had removed the huge quantity of earth excavated during the tunnel work, in line with directions issued by the district administration.

"It is certainly a man-made disaster. If the company had removed the dumped earth, this incident would not have occurred. It is an ecologically sensitive area prone to natural disasters," he said.

"When a tunnel project is undertaken in such a place, the excavated earth should be removed without delay," he added.

The minister said the construction company should explain why the excavated earth from the tunnel project had not been cleared from the site. (PTI)

ED searches in TMC bank accounts funds case

KOLKATA/NEW DELHI, July 7: The Enforcement Directorate on Tuesday conducted searches at multiple locations in Kolkata as part of an investigation linked to routing of alleged suspect funds in the bank accounts of the Trinamool Congress, officials said. They said about five premises are being covered in the capital city of West Bengal. Preliminary probe suggests that funds worth more than ₹ 150 crore have been routed through aviation and travel companies, they said.

Premises of Carewell Aviation and its directors and a purported electoral trust has been covered in the searches, the ED officials said.

Last month, the Kolkata Police had frozen debit operations of three bank accounts of the party following complaints by rebel party MLAs seeking a probe into the source of the funds even as the bitter internal battle over control of the opposition party's financial war chest continues.

These accounts are estimated to hold around ₹ 440 crore. The Calcutta High Court on July 2, while hearing a petition filed by the Mamata Banerjee-led faction of the TMC, challenging the debit freeze of the party's bank accounts, directed the private bank authority to disclose the corpus held in those accounts.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will take decisions on the deferrals in the Trinamool Congress before the start of the Monsoon session of Parliament on July 20, sources had told PTI recently. (PTI)

SC pulls up DMK, says court can't regulate Tamil Nadu CM's visits

NEW DELHI, July 7: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C Joseph Vijay is not an accused in the Karur stampede case and the court cannot regulate his visits, the Supreme Court on Tuesday said as it pulled up the DMK for its plea questioning the visit and alleging that ministers were influencing witnesses in the matter.

A partial working day bench of Justices KV Viswanathan and Alok Aradhya refused to entertain the DMK's plea and asked how can the court regulate the visit of the executive head.

Vijay is scheduled to meet families of the stampede victims on July 10.

"The chief minister is not an accused in the FIRs registered in the case. Today, to make this court a political forum...how is that possible?" Justice Viswanathan told senior advocate Ranjit Kumar, appearing for DMK secretary RS Bharati. Kumar submitted that the TVK ministers were making public statements which were creating a narrative regarding the stampede case in violation of the last year's judgment where the apex court transferred the investigation to the CBI. Justice Viswanathan then asked, "You want the chief minister's visit to be regulated by the Supreme Court and fix his itinerary? How can this be done?"

Kumar submitted that the DMK may be filing a contempt petition against TN minister

Aadhav Arjuna over some comments made by him regarding the case and for deliberately violating the directions imposed by the apex court last year. He added that the party was seeking to restrain comments being made by the chief minister and other state ministers regarding the merits of the case.

Justice Viswanathan asked Kumar, "So you want us to impose an injunction on free speech? You counter their speech with your speech. How can a political rival implead themselves in a matter where the Supreme Court has transferred the matter to the CBI."

Kumar replied, "No, I am not. My prayer is that, pending completion of the CBI investigation, there shall be no public statements removing criminal liability, speaking to political opponents, or commenting on the merits of the pending investigation in a manner likely to prejudice or interfere with a fair and independent investigation."

He said the party wants free speech to be used with more responsibility. Justice Viswanathan then questioned Kumar as to how the distribution of ₹ 10 lakh ex-gratia compensation and orders of compassionate appointment for the family members of the stampede victims, which was already announced, will affect the investigation in the case. (PTI)

Will take legal route to protect Central Ridge: Amit Shah

NEW DELHI, July 7: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that the government will take the legal route to protect the biodiversity, soil and water of the Central Ridge here.

Shah, after inaugurating the mega plantation drive here, said trees such as Jamun, Mango, Arjun and Neem, that survive for 100 years, will be planted at the Ridge.

The mega plantation drive targets the plantation of 70 lakh saplings in the city.

He said that the Delhi government will provide green cover to 6,300 hectares of Ridge area through the plantation of one crore local tree species, 23 lakh big tree species and 65 lakh shrubs and medicinal plants in the next four years.

Shah also cited a "grand masterplan" to convert the Ridge into a "Green Ridge", which will have 100 water bodies, restaurants, as well as small gardens like "Nakshatra Van", "Tirthankar Van", "Vanan Van" to achieve the target of a green and pollution-free Delhi.

He said legal protection will be used to ensure conservation of biodiversity, soil and water of the Ridge.

The Union home minister also flagged off 300 e-buses, and digitally laid the foundation stone of a high-security prison in Narela, inaugurated three bus depots and an automated vehicle testing station in Nand Nagri.

He also announced that in the next week, an agreement will be signed with the National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) to ensure that not even one kg of cow dung from dairies in Delhi will be washed down to the Yamuna River. (PTI)

Reviewing situation across Karnataka amid prospect of drought in several parts: CM Shivakumar

KALABURAGI (KARNATAKA), July 7: Karnataka Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Tuesday said he was reviewing the situation in various parts of the state amid the prospect of drought in several regions.

The CM, however, remained non-committal on the demand for a farm loan waiver in view of the drought-like situation, saying, "Let us examine it".

"I have come here to review the drought-like situation. I am meeting people and public representatives. In a couple of days, I will also visit the Belagavi region," Shivakumar told reporters here.

"There is a legal framework for declaring an area drought-affected and for addressing the issues arising out of the situation," he added.

When asked about a farm loan waiver, he said, "How much is the loan, and where? Let us examine it



and speak later."

During the visit, people submitting petitions seeking solutions to their problems.

To hear and address such grievances, the government has set up a new 'Praja Seva' Department. The department will examine citizens' petitions and provide relief wherever possible.

Earlier, at the Government Guest House in Kalaburagi, Shiv-

akumar received petitions directly from members of the public regarding their grievances.

Later in the day, the CM chaired a review meeting of the Kalaburagi division and warned that strict action will be taken against officials who show negligence in managing the drought situation affecting the state.

"Our government's primary objective is to provide clean, inclusive governance, promote development, and ensure that even the last person in society receives their civic rights. To achieve this goal, officials must work proactively, responsibly, and in a people-centric manner," he told the officers present at the meeting.

Deputy CM G Parameshwara, Home Minister Priyank Kharge, several ministers, public representatives of the region and officials were present. (PTI)

BJP's politics of religion, money has come to end: Akhilesh

LUCKNOW, July 7: Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Tuesday alleged that the BJP's "politics of religion and money has come to an end", accusing the ruling party of denying consumers the benefit of falling global crude oil prices while favouring companies.

In a post on X, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister said that although petrol and diesel prices had fallen in several countries following a decline in global crude oil prices, the BJP-led central government had not reduced retail fuel prices and was instead benefiting companies.

"The BJP government's politics of both 'religion' and 'money' has come to an end," Yadav said.

Alleging corruption in fuel pricing, the former Uttar Pradesh chief minister claimed that prices in India were driven not by demand and supply but by the BJP's alleged commission-based politics linked to corporate profits. Yadav further alleged that inflation, including the rising cost of fuel, transport and essential commodities, was the result of the ruling party's alleged nexus with companies, asserting that "the BJP government belongs to companies, not to the people."

Referring to the alleged irregularities in Ram temple offerings, he claimed that even the supporters of the saffron party had begun to realise that "for BJP leaders, money is above religion".

The SP chief further alleged that the BJP would now focus only on the "politics of money" as its "politics of religion" had ended, and claimed that corruption and inflation would continue to rise.

In a swipe at the ruling party, Yadav ended his post with the slogan: "Jo BJP ka saathi, woh Ramghati (Those who are supporting BJP are betraying Lord Ram)." (PTI)

Ladakh LG approves interim land-use norms, eases rules for small plots within municipal limits

LEH, July 7: Ladakh Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena on Tuesday approved an interim land-use regulatory framework allowing the use of plots up to two kanals within Municipal Committee limits for residential, commercial, industrial or mixed-use purposes without prior approval.

However, prohibited activities without prior approval include Red and Orange category industries in commercial areas; Red, Orange and Green category industries, slaughterhouses, commercial animal rearing, stone quarries, storage of inflammable materials, and burial grounds or crematoria in residential and mixed-use areas, an official spokesperson said.

The approved framework was aimed at removing long-standing uncertainty over land use and ensuring that citizens do not face hardship in obtaining building permissions, in the absence of notified Master Plans in Ladakh, he said.

He said the decision addresses a major regulatory gap that existed due to the absence of notified Master Plans and Zonal Development Plans, under which there was no clearly defined distinction regarding the nature of activities – residential, commercial, industrial or mixed-use – that could be undertaken on land within municipal areas.

This often resulted in uncertainty for cit-

izens seeking building permissions and undertaking legitimate developmental activities, the spokesperson said.

Recognising the inconvenience being faced by the people, the Lt Governor intervened to establish a transparent, demand-driven interim framework that enables development while ensuring proper regulation, until statutory planning instruments are notified.

"Planned urban development is essential for the long-term growth and sustainability of Ladakh. At the same time, the absence of notified Master Plans should not become a hurdle for citizens seeking to construct homes, establish businesses or undertake legitimate developmental activities.

"This interim framework balances developmental needs with environmental safeguards and provides much-needed regulatory clarity until the Master Plans are finalised," the Lt Governor said.

The officials said presently, there are no urban development authorities in Ladakh, which is a statutory prerequisite for the preparation and notification of Master Plans and Zonal Development Plans.

Consequently, urban development and building permissions in Ladakh are presently regulated through the Ladakh Building Bye-laws, 2025. (PTI)

Kejriwal to seek written assurances from automakers on E20 fuel

NEW DELHI, July 7: Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday said he would write to three major automakers seeking written assurances that using E20 fuel does not damage engines or reduce mileage.

Kejriwal, who has opposed the 20 per cent ethanol-blended petrol (E20) programme, alleging that it adversely affects vehicle mileage, also said he would write to Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the "strong protest" by people against ethanol blending and demanded that the fuel be made optional.

The government last week issued a detailed rebuttal to what it described as misinformation circulating on social media about the country's E20 ethanol blending programme, rejecting claims ranging from engine damage to insurance invalida-

tion and environmental harm.

Addressing a press conference on Tuesday, Kejriwal named Maruti Suzuki, Toyota Kirloskar and Hero MotoCorp, alleging that their public statements contradicted the guidance in the owner manuals of their vehicles.

"I will write letters to all of them that they have lied. I will tell them that your owner manual says one thing, but you are saying something else. Give in writing that if the mileage of your vehicle drops by more than 10 per cent, will you compensate the customer," Kejriwal said.

"If using E20 ethanol in your vehicle damages the vehicle or causes wear and tear, will you compensate for the replacement of those components?" Kejriwal added. There was no immediate response from the three companies.



Kejriwal said that around 30 crore vehicles in India are at risk as they are not E20 compliant.

"There are 22 crore motorcycles in India that are not E20 compliant. They cannot use E20. There are eight crore cars that are not E20 compliant. Because of the government's insistence, 30 crore vehicles are at risk; 31 crore vehicles could become

scrap," the AAP chief said. Kejriwal further alleged that the government was misleading the people by claiming that India was not the first country to adopt ethanol-blended fuel.

"This is only half the truth. In those countries, the ethanol blend is generally below E10. Ordinary vehicles can use up to E10, but not beyond that," he said.

He urged the Centre to "give a choice" to people to choose from different types of fuel.

Companies had favoured E20 blending.

Last week, industry executives sought to allay concerns over the use of 20 per cent ethanol-blended petrol (E20), saying the fuel has undergone rigorous scientific testing, is safe for both new and older vehicles, and is critical for reducing India's dependence on imported crude oil.

At a news conference organised at the government's National Media Centre On May 4, Maruti Suzuki India Senior Executive Officer (Corporate Affairs) Rahul Bharti said there was no reason for owners of vehicles manufactured before 2023 -- when E20-compatible vehicles became mandatory -- to worry about using the higher ethanol blend. (PTI)

Rain takes break in Mumbai; 2 boys drown in last 24 hours



MUMBAI, July 7: After two days of relentless downpours that battered Mumbai, the rains eased on Tuesday, offering residents a welcome respite as local train services and road transport returned to normal.

Two minor boys drowned, while two women suffered injuries as cement sheets collapsed at a garden in Mumbai during heavy rains and winds during the last 24 hours, officials said on Tuesday.

Across the city, civic authorities reported 428 incidents of trees and branches crashing down and 28 complaints of wall and house collapses, underscoring the scale of disruption on Monday during heavy showers.

Railway officials said one of the three lines damaged by landslides in the Bhor Ghat section on the Mumbai-Pune route is expected to be restored by Tuesday night, a welcome sign of relief after the disruption brought train services to a standstill on Monday.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an 'orange' alert, warning of intermittent showers with heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated spots, along with gusty winds reaching 60-70 kmph.

All government, private and civic-run schools and colleges in Mumbai remained closed on Tuesday as a precautionary measure, officials said.

Heavy showers brought Mumbai and neighbouring districts to a near standstill on Monday. Many roads were submerged, trees were uprooted, and several incidents of wall and billboard collapses were reported.

The Virar-Vasai section in the neighbouring Palghar district had been inundated since Monday morning, though the water level gradually receded after the intensity of rainfall reduced by evening.

The first local train departed from Virar for Churchgate in south Mumbai at 3.57 am on Tuesday, a Western Railway spokesperson said.

Suburban services on all four corridors of the Central Railway were operating with some delays.

The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation said it received 428 complaints of tree and branch falls, including 111 in the city, 126 in the eastern suburbs and 191 in the western suburbs. It also recorded 28 incidents of partial wall or house collapses during the same period.

Two boys, aged 17 and 14, drowned in flood waters in Malad and Govandi areas on Monday evening, it said.

Two women were injured after cement sheets from an adjoining structure collapsed while they were practising yoga at a private garden in the Lokhandwala area in Andheri. They were admitted to the hospital and reported to be in stable condition, the BMC said.

Twenty-four complaints of short circuits were also reported from different parts of Mumbai, though there were no injuries, it added.

The Santacruz observatory, representative of suburbs, recorded 90.4 mm of rainfall in the 24 hours ending at 8.30 am on Tuesday, while the Colaba observatory in the island city recorded 57.2 mm.

The next high tide of 3.93 metres is expected at 4.34 pm on Tuesday, while another

high tide of 3.41 metres is forecast at 5.43 am on Wednesday. The low tides are expected at 11.02 pm on Tuesday and 11.07 am on Wednesday, the BMC said.

Traffic on the Mumbai-bound carriageway of the Mumbai-Pune Expressway's 'Missing Link' bypass section resumed on Monday night after remaining shut for more than 18 hours following a landslide triggered by overnight heavy rains, officials said.

The Mumbai-bound carriageway had been closed after a landslide near the exit of Tunnel 2, the longest tunnel on the Missing Link - which cuts through the Sahyadri mountains - at around 4 am on Monday.

Heavy rainfall triggered 22 landslides in Pune district over the last two days, officials said.

Lonavala, a popular hill station in Pune district, recorded a whopping 670 mm of rainfall in the 24 hours ending at 7 am on Monday, as per official data.

Restoration work on the affected railway tracks in the Bhor Ghat section is being carried out on a war footing, and the middle line is expected to be restored by Tuesday night, Central Railway's Chief Public Relations Officer Swapnil Nila told PTI.

Located 75 km from Pune, Bhor Ghat - one of the toughest ghat sections in India - has three railway lines, up, down and middle, between Khandala and Palasdhar railway stations.

"Since early morning, the rain intensity has significantly reduced, giving us a window to restore the damaged railway tracks on a war footing. One line will be restored by tonight, and we will attempt to restore the second as well. However, the third line might take some time," Nila said.

Train services on the Mumbai-Pune route remained affected on Tuesday after landslides between Thakurvadi Cabin and Monkey Hill Cabin in the Lonavala-Karjat ghat section extensively damaged tracks on Monday. (PTI)

Officials say those living in nearby areas were being evacuated Three killed, five missing in landslide at Wayanad tunnel project site

WAYANAD (KERALA), July 7: At least three people were killed, 10 injured, and five remained missing after a rain-soaked mound of excavated earth gave way at the site of a multi-crore tunnel project in Meppadi panchayat in this hill district, with two state ministers describing the landslide as "man-made".

According to officials, the landslide occurred near Meenakshi Bridge at Kalladi, where work on a tunnel road project connecting Kozhikode and Wayanad districts was under way.

The accident site is close to the Mundakkai-Chooralmala villages, where a devastating landslide claimed many lives in 2024.

A video clip showed the mound of mud, which had accumulated near Meenakshi Bridge, suddenly collapsing in the rain, bringing down trees and sweeping away the metal and cloth barricades set up near the tunnel construction site.

In a statement, the district administration said a total of 18 persons were affected by the disaster.

Of them, three were killed, 10 are undergoing treatment at Meppadi

WIMS Hospital, and the search is on for five others who are still missing.

Officials said those living in nearby areas were being evacuated.

A senior government official told reporters that there were no workers at the site and that those feared trapped under the mud were engineers and security staff.

"If work had been going on there, it would have been a bigger tragedy," she said.

A private bus reportedly used to ferry workers, which was parked at the site, was pushed into the nearby river by the landslide and was lying half-submerged as water flowed through it.

Sniffer dogs of the state police have been deployed at the site to trace those trapped under the thick mud, the statement said.

It also said facilities had been made available at the Mundakkai Forest Station and the Chooralmala church hall to shift locals, including members of tribal communities, stranded on both sides of the bridge.

"It is an unfortunate incident. Rescue efforts are under way," Chief



Minister V.D. Satheesan said.

He added that the necessary rescue forces were reaching the area and that police as well as fire and rescue personnel had already been deployed at the site.

Additionally, a defence team was on standby in Thrissur and could be deployed at the site if required, the CM said.

All necessary systems for search and rescue would be put in place as soon as possible, he assured.

Satheesan said the contractors had been told well in advance by Public Works Department Minister P K

Basheer and the district collector to remove the huge quantity of mud accumulated in the area.

"However, the contractors did not abide by the directions," the CM told reporters after reviewing the situation with officials of the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority at their office in Thiruvananthapuram.

Responding to a query, Satheesan said the non-issuance of an appropriate weather alert was not the reason for the landslide and that it was caused by the heap of mud not being cleared in time despite directions from the authorities. (PTI)

Search for 2 LeT terrorists enters fourth day in J-K's Shopian

SRINAGAR, July 7: The search operation to track down two local terrorists of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba entered its fourth day in Jammu and Kashmir's Shopian district on Tuesday, with security forces resuming combing operations after an overnight pause, officials said.

The searches resumed at daybreak after being suspended overnight. The two terrorists were first spotted by surveillance cameras on July 3 in a dense orchard in the Meemandar area, which comprises seven villages.

A joint team of several columns of the Army, Jammu and Kashmir Police, and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) has maintained a tight cordon around the area. Security forces had cleared four villages by Monday evening.

The trapped terrorists, identified as Latif and Zakir, allegedly opened fire at the Army personnel as they closed in, triggering an exchange of fire, officials said.

The Army's specialised counter-insurgency unit, Victor Force, has deployed additional personnel to seal all possible escape routes through the thick orchard foliage, besides lighting up the area. (PTI)

Builder among five held in Paharganj extortion-firing case

NEW DELHI, July 7: Delhi Police has arrested five people, including a local builder and hotelier, for allegedly conspiring with an interstate gang to extort ₹ 30 lakh from a Paharganj-based builder and opening fire at him after he refused to pay, an officer said on Tuesday. The prime accused, identified as Pawan Kumar alias Pawan Pehelwan, was arrested after an exchange of fire near the Kabristan area in IP Estate, he said.

According to the officer, the accused allegedly fired at the police team while attempting to flee. Police retaliated in self-defence, injuring him in both legs before overpowering and arresting him. He was admitted to a hospital for treatment.

The others arrested were Shakti Singh, Vishal Bhati, Pawan Kumar alias Pawan Chetli and Rajesh Sachdeva alias Sonu Mota.

A senior police officer said, "The firing incident took place on



June 29 when an armed man entered the office of private builder Mahesh Chand at Arya Nagar in Paharganj, and allegedly demanded an amount of ₹ 30 lakh, including ₹ 5 lakh immediately."

When the builder refused, the assailant opened fire with the intention of killing him before escaping, he said.

A case was registered at the Nabi Karim police station, following which multiple police teams

were formed to investigate the incident. During the investigation, police analysed CCTV footage, call detail records, hotel records, electronic evidence and human intelligence to trace the accused.

"The first breakthrough came with the arrest of Vishal Bhati alias Bhanja, whose interrogation helped investigators identify the remaining conspirators and unravel a planned interstate extortion conspiracy," the officer said. (PTI)

Delhi riots 2020: HC denies bail to Athar Khan in UAPA case

NEW DELHI, July 7: The Delhi High Court on Tuesday refused to grant bail to Athar Khan in a case under the anti-terror law UAPA concerning the "larger conspiracy" behind the February 2020 riots in the city's northeastern parts.

A bench of Justices Prathiba M Singh and Madhu Jain dismissed Athar's appeal challenging the trial court's January 29 order that denied him relief in the case, stating that he was but "one of the main conspirators who conspired to cause deaths during the riots" and not a "mere local-level operator".

Athar's counsel sought bail on the grounds that he was a "local-level facilitator" who had been in custody for six years, and that similarly placed co-accused had been granted bail by the Supreme Court.

The bench considered the Supreme Court's findings on the bail pleas by the co-accused and held that Athar's role was "clearly distinguishable" from those given relief by the apex court.

It said that the material, including a protected witness statement, showed that while others on a WhatsApp group chat suggested



non-violent protests, Athar "persisted with his objective of engaging in violent protests, to the extent of even causing death".

"The fact that deaths were caused during the said riots cannot be, therefore, a mere matter of coincidence... Despite his teammates repeatedly asking him not to engage in violence, the Appellant refused to obey the same.

"The Appellant, therefore, cannot be held to be a mere local-level operator but one of the main conspirators who conspired to cause deaths during the riots," observed the court in the judgment.

The court was of the opinion

that since Athar's role in causing deaths and destruction of private and public property was prima facie established, his case did not pass the strict test for bail under Section 43D(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), 1967.

It further said that Athar was also a flight risk and was likely to adversely influence the witnesses whose evidence is yet to be recorded.

"Thus, even if the normal conditions of bail are applied, in this case, the Appellant, owing to his role and the protection that needs to be given to witnesses, is not entitled to bail. Accordingly, this Court is not inclined to grant bail to the Appellant.

"The impugned order is, therefore, upheld, and the present appeal stands dismissed," concluded the court. Athar, a former call centre employee, is accused of being one of the main conspirators and organisers of the protest at Chand Bagh in northeast Delhi and allegedly delivering inflammatory speeches there and instigating violence. (PTI)

2008 AHMEDABAD SERIAL BLASTS HC upholds death sentence for 38 IM operatives, life term for 11



AHMEDABAD, July 7: The Gujarat High Court on Tuesday upheld a special court order that pronounced death sentences for 38 operatives of the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen (IM) and life imprisonment for 11 others in the 2008 Ahmedabad serial blasts, which claimed 56 lives.

The special court's February 2022 order marked the first time that so many convicts had been handed down the death sentence by any court so far.

The convicts include Safdar Nagori, former leader of the banned outfit Student Islamic Movement of India (SIMI), and his associates. The high court also directed the state government to pay compensation of ₹ 10 lakh to the kin of those who died in the serial blasts and ₹ 5 lakh to those who were grievously injured.

A division bench of justices A Y Kogje and Samir Dave rejected all appeals against the

order of the lower court and upheld its verdict confirming the sentences to members of the terror outfit Indian Mujahideen in the case.

On July 26, 2008, a series of 21 bomb blasts ripped through different areas of Ahmedabad in a span of 70 minutes, killing 56 persons and leaving more than 200 others injured. Explosions also struck hospitals in the city as blast victims from other places were being rushed in for treatment - marking the first time medical facilities were targeted in such an attack.

Seventy-eight persons were put on trial before the special court, and of them, 49 were convicted in February 2022. The trial was conducted after merging 35 different police cases, 20 FIRs lodged in Ahmedabad for 21 blasts and 15 in Surat city, where the terrorists had placed bombs, but they did not detonate.

The special court in February 2022 sentenced 38 IM members to death and 11 others to life imprisonment. Among those convicted were former SIMI leader Safdar Nagori and his associates from 11 states, including Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Kerala and Uttar Pradesh.

All the persons convicted by the lower court had challenged the order in the High Court. The state government had approached the HC for confirmation of sentences to the convicts. (PTI)

CBI files first chargesheet in ₹ 4,097-crore RCFL case

NEW DELHI, July 7: The CBI on Tuesday filed its first chargesheet in the Reliance Commercial Finance Limited (RCFL) case against five former senior executives of the company for allegedly causing a loss of ₹ 4,097 crore to a consortium of 13 public sector banks through diversion of funds, officials said. Two companies, namely Reliance Infrastructure Ltd and Reliance Home Finance Limited (RHFL), have also been named as accused in the chargesheet filed by the agency before a special court in Mumbai, they said.

"Five former senior executives of RCFL, namely Devang Pravin Mody (Director & CEO), Ravindra Somayajula Rao (Director), Dhyananjay Bhagwanprasad Tiwari (Director), Rajesh Krishnamoorthy (Executive Risk Officer) and Lav Chaturvedi (Chief Risk Officer), have been chargesheeted for offences of criminal conspiracy and cheating with intent to cause huge losses to public sector banks," a CBI spokesperson said in a statement.

The agency said its investigation showed that the funds borrowed by RCFL were diverted through intermediary and conduit entities to various Reliance ADA Group companies, in violation of the terms and conditions governing such borrowings, thereby causing wrongful loss to the lending banks and corresponding wrongful gain to the accused persons and related entities.

"It may be recalled that the CBI had registered the case based on complaints received from Bank of Maharashtra and other PSU banks of the consortium. The total loss caused to 13 public sector banks is ₹ 4,097 crore," the spokesperson said. (PTI)

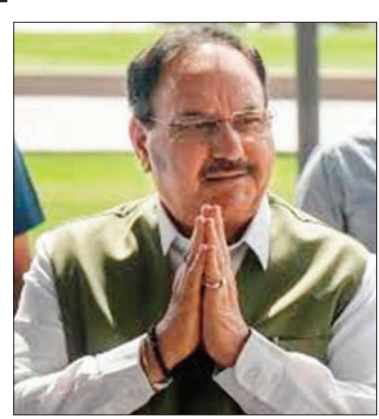
Nadda calls for turning TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan into people's movement with help of youth

NEW DELHI, July 7: Union Health Minister J P Nadda on Tuesday called for harnessing the power of India's youth to turn the TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan into a nationwide people's movement.

Chairing a high-level inter-ministerial meeting with Union Minister for Youth Affairs and Sports and Labour and Employment Mansukh Mandaviya and Minister of State for Defence Sanjay Seth, he urged greater participation of volunteers, educational institutions, workplaces and defence personnel in the country's tuberculosis elimination drive.

Nadda stressed that eliminating tuberculosis requires a "whole-of-government and whole-of-society" approach.

Referring to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent remarks during a PRAGATI review meeting, Nadda said the active participation of young people and institutions would be critical in accelerating awareness, early de-



tection, treatment adherence and patient support.

"The power of India's youth must be leveraged to make the TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan a nationwide people's movement," Nadda said, according to an official statement.

He asked the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to expand the engagement of MY Bharat volunteers and

National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets in the campaign by strengthening the existing TB Mukta Bharat Toli model, mobilising volunteers for screening camps and intensifying awareness programmes in schools, colleges and communities.

The health minister also sought greater involvement of the Ministry of Defence in community awareness campaigns, household contact education, nutrition support drives for TB patients and integration of TB awareness activities into NCC training camps, Republic Day and Independence Day events, adventure camps and rural outreach programmes.

Mandaviya proposed greater institutional convergence by involving medical colleges more extensively in the campaign, noting that the country has nearly six lakh undergraduate and around two lakh postgraduate medical students who could contribute to TB elimination efforts.

He also suggested engaging officers

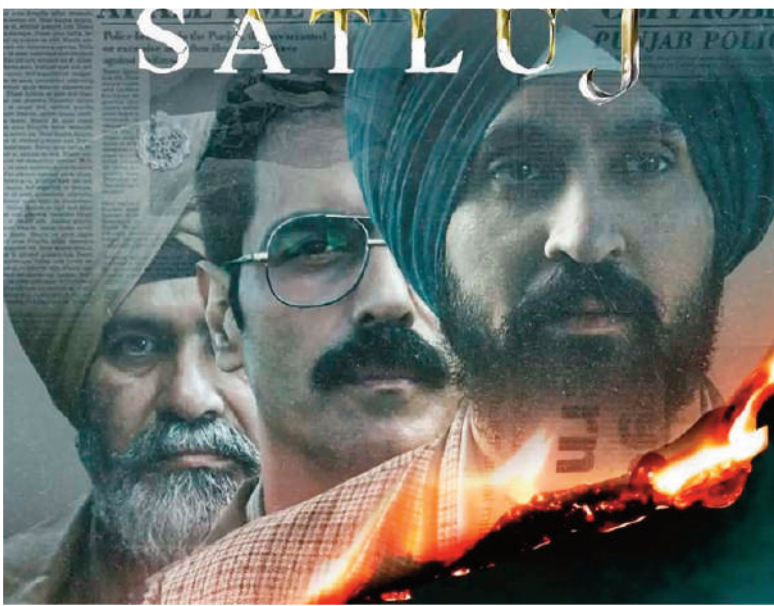
under the Pratibha Setu programme in District TB Coordination Committees to improve planning, implementation and monitoring at the district level. He called for bringing the Ministry of Education on board to widen participation through educational institutions.

According to the government, more than 28 crore vulnerable individuals have been screened under the TB Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan since its launch in December 2024.

The screening has resulted in the notification of over 39 lakh TB patients, including 12.93 lakh asymptomatic patients identified through active case finding using chest X-rays, enabling earlier diagnosis and treatment.

The government said over 5.7 lakh Ni-kshay Mitras have registered under the initiative and distributed 38.9 lakh nutrition baskets to TB patients, while more than 20 lakh patients have received individualised support under the programme's differentiated care approach. (PTI)

'Satluj' dropped from OTT: parties and SGPC slam 'censorship', Dosanjh says bound to happen



Diljit Dosanjh's "Satluj", which details the life of an activist in Punjab in the turbulent 1990s and has been taken off OTT, was at the centre of furious debate on Monday with political parties and the SGPC pushing for the release of the film and the actor-singer asking people to watch it wherever and however they can.

The film, which was stuck with the censors for more than three years, was released uncut on ZEE5 on Friday and removed on Sunday evening. While Dosanjh said this was bound to happen and the film had already been downloaded by many, ZEE5 issued an appeal asking people not to support piracy.

The matter quickly gained political traction with the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), Congress and the state's ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) condemning the film being dropped from the OTT platform and saying Punjab must confront its past

People should know what happened during those days in Punjab, said Kulwant Singh Manan, chief secretary of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee.

"The film should not have been removed from the platform. The government should ensure that people see this film. What is wrong if reality is shown and public come to know of what happened during those days in Punjab," Manan told PTI over phone.

The Honey Trehan directed film, originally titled "Punjab '95", features Dosanjh as human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra who was abducted in 1995 and never seen after that. The director and actor refused to release it with the 127 cuts suggested by the Central Board of Film Certification.

On Friday, the movie quietly arrived on ZEE5 without any cuts but with a different title and zero promotions, which Dosanjh said was because they didn't want to spoil whatever little chance the film had.

Criticising the removal of the film, SAD president Sukhbir Singh Badal said, "This is not mere censorship, it is an assault on our collective memory, truth, and freedom of expression... Punjab deserves to confront its past with honesty, not suppression."

Senior Congress leader Sukhpal Singh Khaira echoed him. "I strongly condemn the removal of Satluj film enacted by Diljit Dosanjh about police brutality in abducting and eliminating Prof Jaswant Singh Khalra, Human Rights activist in 1995."

AAP leader and MP Malvinder Singh Kang said censorship becomes its most dangerous weapon when a nation begins to fear its own history.

AAP's Baltej Pannu said, "The younger generation wants to know what happened in Punjab during 1978, 1984, the 1990s and other crucial periods. If they are denied books and documentaries, films become an important way of preserving historical truth."

When asked to comment on the film's OTT removal, Punjab BJP chief Kewal Singh Dhillon said, "I am finding out the reason. We are taking up the matter."

In an expansive session on Instagram Live from the US where he is on tour, Dosanjh expressed his anguish.

"I had a feeling on Friday that

something like this will happen. This was already on my mind. It is not something to be shocked about (the ban). I thought that it will be banned on Monday when the offices open..."

"But I did not have an idea that it will happen on Sunday evening itself. We did not even promote the film, we released it just like that. If we had promoted it, it would not have lasted even two days. But I am satisfied that people have seen the film, it has reached them," Dosanjh said in Punjabi.

A day after ZEE5 issued a statement to inform viewers that it's no longer available in India, Dosanjh said he is happy many people have seen the film or downloaded it.

"It was very important that it should reach you and that has happened... I am thankful that what we wanted to say and the way we wanted to say, it has been conveyed. It is your film and you can watch it the way you want to," he said.

"This was the only way to release the film... without saying anything because this was bound to happen," he said, adding that the more one tries to stop the film, the more popular it will become as nothing disappears from the internet, not even a voice note sent on Whatsapp.

ZEE5 had a slightly different take.

"We are doing our bit to bring 'Satluj' back. Please do yours - don't support piracy. We remain committed to exploring every possible avenue to bring 'Satluj' back to you," it said in an Instagram post.

On Sunday night, it said, "In light of the current developments, 'Satluj' will be unavailable in India until further notice..."

The streamer did not specify what it meant by "current developments", but said the response to the film had been overwhelming and they fully back the creative conviction behind the movie.

"Satluj" delves into the life of Khalra who investigated the cremation of thousands of unidentified bodies in Punjab during a 10-year period from 1984 to 1994. He disappeared in 1995.

In 2005, four Punjab Police personnel were convicted for his abduction and murder and sentenced to seven years in prison.

Two years later, the Punjab and Haryana High Court enhanced their sentence to life imprisonment. In 2023, the movie was scheduled to have its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) but was removed from the line-up without any official statement

from the organisers.

"Punjab '95" was slated for worldwide release on February 7, 2025, without any cuts, except in India. But that release also did not happen.

The film is produced by Trehan, Abhishek Chaubey and Ronnie Screwvala, under the banners MacGuffin Pictures and RSVP.

It also features Arjun Rampal, Kanwaljit Singh, Suvinder Vicky and Geetika Vidya Ohlyan in key roles.

The matter found echo on social media.

Comedian Kunal Kamra was one of those who commented, tagging former CBFC chief Prasoona Joshi and saying Khaira had been abducted again, "this time by CBFC".

Filmmaker Onir questioned the film industry's silence on the film's removal from OTT.

"And once again the industry at large is silent about what should alarm us all and it affects us all. How can we surrender our right to tell stories... especially such powerful sensitive stories," Onir wrote.

Filmmaker Anurag Basu said on X that he never imagined that Trehan would face something similar to what Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi faced in his country. (PTI)

PHANTOM STUDIOS SAYS IT DIDN'T CONSENT TO 'QUEEN' SEQUEL, DRAGS JIOSTAR TO COURT

Days after actor Kangana Ranaut announced that she had wrapped shooting for the sequel to her 2014 box office hit "Queen", Phantom Studios has moved the Bombay High Court alleging that it is being made without its consent.

The suit filed against JioStar India Private Limited sought an injunction against the release of the film and also damages of Rs 250 crore. It would come up before a single bench of the high court in due course.

Phantom Studios claimed in the suit that when the "Queen" was made, there was an agreement between the plaintiff and respondent (JioStar) that in future if any sequel or prequel was to be made, then both the parties would have 50 per cent rights on the same.

It had not consented to any sequels, adaptations or derivative works of the film, Phantom Studios added.

The 2014 film "Queen", written by Anvita Dutt, won National Awards for the best feature film and for best actress. (PTI)

Prajakta Koli, Rohit Saraf begin shooting for final season of 'Mismatched'

The fourth and final season of Netflix's coming-of-age romantic drama series "Mismatched", starring Prajakta Koli and Rohit Saraf, has gone on floors, the streaming platform announced on Tuesday.



Produced by RSVP Movies, the final instalment will see Koli and Saraf reprise their roles as Dimple Ahuja and Rishi Shekhawat,

whose relationship has been at the centre of the series since its debut in 2020.

The makers said the cast and crew have reunited to bring the concluding chapter of Dimple and Rishi's story to the screen.

"Coming back to the 'Mismatched' set for one final season feels incredibly emotional. Dimple has been such a huge part of my journey, and getting to tell the last chapter of her story on Netflix is something I'll always be grateful for. I can't wait for our paglus on Netflix to experience what we've been cooking," Koli said in a statement.

Saraf said returning to the show feels "really special".

"'Mismatched' has given me some of my favourite memories, and returning for this final season on Netflix feels really special. Being back with this team, slipping into Rishi's world again, and creating new memories together already feels magical," he said.

Created by Akarsh Khurana and based on Sandhya Menon's bestselling novel "When Dimple Met Rishi", "Mismatched" premiered on Netflix in 2020.

The series follows aspiring app developer Dimple and hopeless romantic Rishi as they navigate love, friendship, family and career aspirations after meeting at a summer coding programme.

The third season, released in December 2024, ended on a cliffhanger with Dimple calling off her engagement to Rishi, leaving the future of their relationship uncertain.

The final season will also feature returning cast members Tauruk Raina, Muskaan Jafari, Ahsaas Channa, Vihaan Samat, Lauren Robinson, Abhinav Sharma, Rannvijay Singha and Vidya Malavade. (PTI)

MADHUR BHANDARKAR CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF CORPORATE: 'GRATEFUL FOR THIS JOURNEY'



Filmmaker Madhur Bhandarkar, on Tuesday, took to social media to celebrate 20 years of his acclaimed film "Corporate."

Marking the milestone, the filmmaker shared a heartfelt note expressing gratitude to the producers, actors, technicians, and viewers whose support and appreciation have kept the film alive over the years. Taking to X (formerly known as Twitter), Madhur expressed his gratitude for being part of a journey that continues to be remembered even two decades after its release.

Sharing posters from the movie, Madhur wrote, "#20YearsOfCorporate Time flies! A huge, heartfelt thanks to all the producers, brilliant actors, talented technicians, & most importantly, the amazing audience. Your love and appreciation for the film #Corporate have kept it alive all these years. Grateful for this journey. @ShailendraS7 @bipsuvvurself @kaykaymenon02 @mrjatkapoor @shamirTandon @RajBabar23."

Released on 7 July 2006, "Corporate," written and directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, featured Bipasha Basu, Kay Kay Menon, Payal Rohatgi, Minishha Lamba, and Raj Babbar in key roles. The story explored the intense rivalry, ambition, and power struggles between two influential industrialists and their business empires.

Meanwhile, last month, Madhur Bhandarkar made headlines after he congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on becoming India's longest-serving Prime Minister. The filmmaker praised PM Modi's leadership and said that the country was in "safe hands."

Bhandarkar told Agencies: "I am very happy that PM Modi has been in office for so many years and has done very good work. Since 2014, we have seen a very remarkable journey. He is a very popular world leader. Wherever we go outside India, people speak highly of him and admire him. People are very fond of him."

"It feels great that he has completed such a long tenure of 12 years and has become the longest-serving Prime Minister. Very nice. Whenever I have met him, it has always been a very good experience..." (Agencies)

IT WAS BOUND TO HAPPEN, NOT SHOCKED: DILJIT DOSANJH AFTER 'SATLUJ' REMOVED FROM ZEE5

Actor-singer Diljit Dosanjh says the ban on his film "Satluj", which was quietly released on ZEE5 without any cuts on Friday and removed just two days later, was bound to happen and he was expecting it -- but on Monday when offices open.

The Honey Trehan directed film features Dosanjh as human rights activist Jaswant Singh Khalra who was abducted in 1995 and was never seen after that. The film, originally titled "Punjab '95", was stuck with the censors for more than three years. The director and actor refused to release it with the 127 cuts suggested by the Central Board of Film Certification.

"Today is Sunday but it must be Monday in India. It is Sunday evening at my place. I had a feeling on Friday that something like this will happen. This was already on my mind. It is not something to be shocked about (the ban). I thought that it will be banned on Monday when the offices open," Dosanjh said on Monday in an Instagram Live from the US where he is currently on tour.

"But I did not have an idea that it will happen on Sunday evening itself. We did not even promote the film, we released it just

like that. If we had promoted it, it would not have lasted even two days. But I am satisfied that people have seen the film, it has reached them," Dosanjh said in Punjabi.

On Monday, a day after ZEE5 issued a statement to inform viewers that it's no longer available in India, Dosanjh said he is happy many people have seen the film or downloaded it.

"The youth today is talking about the film. I saw a lovely video about the film being shown at a gurdwara, possibly in Rajasthan. I am satisfied that the film has reached you," he added on Instagram Live, his preferred

mode of communication these days.

The hard work done by the film's team has reached people, Dosanjh said, encouraging people to share "Satluj" and watch it wherever and however they can.

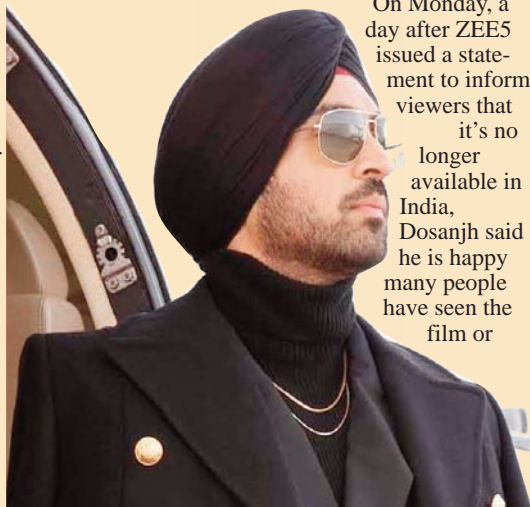
"It was very important that it should reach you and that has happened... I am thankful that what we wanted to say and the way we wanted to say, it has been conveyed. It is your film and you can watch it the way you want to," he said.

"This was the only way to release the film... without saying anything because this was bound to happen," he added.

The more you try to stop the film, now re-titled "Satluj", the more popular it will become, Dosanjh said, adding that nothing disappears from the internet, not even a voice note on Whatsapp.

On Sunday night, he shared a scene from the movie where Khalra says, "I challenge the darkness", to react to the removal of the film from the OTT platform.

Hours earlier, ZEE5 put out a statement saying, "In light of the current developments, 'Satluj' will be unavailable in India until further notice. We remain committed to exploring every appropriate avenue through due process to bring the film back to our audiences at the earliest opportunity."



Cobolli performs Ronaldo celebration

LONDON, July 7: On his first match point, Flavio Cobolli stepped up and unleashed a 135 mph first serve down the T that landed on the line and sent a puff of chalk into the air on No. 1 Court at Wimbledon.

Fifth-seeded opponent Alex de Minaur could barely touch the serve and the Australian's weak return didn't even go past his own service line.

Cobolli reacted by leaping into the air and pumping his fist. He launched a ball into the crowd before moving forward to shake hands with De Minaur.

Then the Italian moved on to the performance he'd been waiting for.

Cobolli put his racket down and went back out into the center of the court and launched himself into the most iconic celebration in soccer: twirling in mid-air like Cristiano Ronaldo, he then landed on the grass with his feet planted wide and jerked his arms down by his side.

The mostly English crowd knew just what was going on and shouted "Siuuu" along with Cobolli.

"I love his celebration. I love him," said Cobolli, who was once a promising soccer player himself in Roma's youth system.

"I will cheer for Portugal (against Spain at the World Cup) tonight because of Ronaldo."

In his previous match, Cobolli performed a surfing celebration borrowed from Brazil striker Matheus Cunha.

Paolini wins before Federer on Italy's big day at Wimbledon

While four-time champion Italy failed to qualify for a third consecutive World Cup, the country has no lack of sports stars and a few of them were in the spotlight at the grass-court Grand Slam on Monday.

Cobolli's 7-5, 7-6 (4), 6-3 victory over a fellow top-10 player to reach the quarterfinals was a statement win as he attempts to back up his run to the French Open final.

At the same time over on Centre Court, Jasmine Paolini ended the run of rising Filipino player Alexandra Eala with a 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 victory to return to the last eight at a Grand Slam for the first time since back-to-back runs to the Roland Garros and Wimbledon finals two years ago.



Watching Paolini from the Royal Box was Kimi Antonelli, the 19-year-old Italian driver who leads the Formula One standings for Mercedes.

"I met Kimi afterward," Paolini said. "I've been following him a lot lately. I'm becoming an F1 fan. He seems like a real nice kid and very down to earth."

Coinciding with Italy's troubles in soccer, Antonelli and defending Wimbledon champion Jannik Sinner — who plays

Jan-Lennard Struff on Tuesday for a spot in the semifinals — have become the country's most popular athletes.

Cobolli, too, is rapidly gaining attention after his run to the Paris final, where he pushed Alexander Zverev to five sets.

De Minaur led 5-2 in the second set and was up a break twice in the third. But Cobolli wouldn't be deterred.

"Alex is a stratospheric player. So beating him three sets to none makes me feel like I'm ready," Cobolli said when asked

if he's ready for another deep run. "This gave me a lot of answers, and I think it provided a lot of answers to my opponents, too."

World Cup and gelato

After the victory over De Minaur, Cobolli's grandfather had to go and find a new house for their team in the Wimbledon village since they had only reserved through the first week.

Now they can maintain Flavio's nightly routine during the fortnight: dinner cooked by his father and coach, Stefano, and shared with his best friend, Watford midfielder Edoardo Bove, before watching a World Cup match and downing a tub of gelato (pear and white chocolate is Cobolli's flavor for the tournament).

"An Italian family give us all the house here in Wimbledon," Cobolli said. "So it's really cool."

Cobolli's quarterfinal opponent will be Arthur Fery — the 23-year-old British player who grew up just five minutes from the All England Club.

Paolini doesn't let Federer distract her. Besides the challenge presented by the 21-year-old Eala, who eliminated defending champion Iga Swiatek in the previous

round, the 5-foot-4 Paolini also had to try and not to let the presence of Roger Federer in the Royal Box distract her.

At one point, Antonelli sat right next to Federer, the owner of a men's record eight Wimbledon singles titles.

"He is my idol," the 30-year-old Paolini said of Federer in an on-court interview. "I was like during the match, Please stay focused, stay focused. Don't think about he's here." I was watching all the finals and all the tournaments he was playing here."

Paolini's next opponent will be Marta Kostyuk, the Ukrainian player who reached her first Wimbledon quarterfinal by beating American qualifier Ashlyn Krueger 6-4, 6-4.

It was the hottest day of the tournament so far, as the temperature rose to 32 degrees Celsius (90 Fahrenheit), prompting players to place bags of ice around their necks on changeovers.

Another women's quarterfinal will feature Linda Noskova against Elise Mertens.

The strong performance by Italian players follows similar results at the French Open, where three men reached the quarterfinals despite Sinner's second-round meltdown in a Paris heat wave. (AP)

Greaves bats West Indies back into 2nd test against Sri Lanka on day 4

NORTH SOUND (ANTINGUA), July 7: Justin Greaves' dogged innings of 180 from 325 balls against Sri Lanka on Monday played West Indies into a strong position to claim its first test cricket series victory in four years.

Greaves was the last batter out when West Indies was dismissed for 499 on Day 4 of the second cricket test in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings of 549-9, reducing the deficit to only 50 runs.

Sri Lanka lost first-innings century-maker Lahiru Udara to a four-ball duck and Nishan Fernando for 20 before reaching 92-2 at stumps, increasing its overall lead to 142 with a day remaining.

Dinesh Chandimal was 40 and Kamindu Mendis was 30 not out in a partnership worth 60 runs by close of play.

Sri Lanka scored at more than four runs an over through the last 22 overs of the day and would have to continue at that rate to have any chance of playing itself into a winning position. It can only do so only by putting up a defendable total and then bowling out West Indies on a pitch which might deteriorate late



on the final day.

West Indies won the opening match in the two-test series by an innings and 217 runs and needs only a draw to claim its first series win in the World Test Championship since beating Bangladesh in the Caribbean in 2022.

On a pitch on which only 21 wickets fell on the first four days and 1,140 runs were scored, the odds are in favor of the home team.

Greaves achieved his third test century and second-highest score in a fifth-wicket partnership of 242 with Shai Hope, who made 112. The stand was reminiscent of the 196 pair put on against New Zealand in December when Hope made 140 and Greaves 202 not out to claim a draw.

Their latest partnership guided West Indies from 144-4 to 386-5 and toward a position from which a

draw could be secured. Greaves then did his best to marshal the lower order, enabling West Indies to add 113 for the last five wickets.

The Sri Lanka bowlers kept up pressure throughout the day, making good use of short-pitch bowling to limit the scoring. Asitha Fernando took 5-130 from 40 overs, his third five-wicket haul in tests, and Prabath Jayasuriya returned 3-131.

Hope was out stumped in bizarre fashion close to lunch. He tried to pad away left-arm spinner Sonal Dinusha's length ball down the leg side but missed and in the process came out of his crease. Wicket-keeper Kusal Mendis couldn't collect the ball cleanly but it ricocheted onto the stumps from his gloves.

Hope hit 10 boundaries and dominated not only the pacers but also Jayasuriya by using his feet well against the spinner.

The West Indies had resumed Monday on 318-4 and Hope should have been out without adding to his overnight score of 86 when he edged Milan Rathnayake's second ball down the leg side. However, Sri Lanka didn't review the on-field umpire's not out decision. (AP)

Alexandra Eala provides a 'ray of hope' for the Philippines despite Wimbledon exit

LONDON, July 7: Despite falling short of reaching the quarterfinals, Alexandra Eala still made a lasting impact at Wimbledon.

The 21-year-old Filipina had ousted defending champion Iga Swiatek but couldn't solve Jasmine Paolini on Monday, losing 6-4, 4-6, 6-3 on Centre Court.

For Filipino fans — both at watch parties back home and at the All England Club — it's not always about wins and losses.

"She's like a ray of hope for the Philippines," fan Roberto Ocampo Jr. said Monday at Wimbledon. "Especially at her age. She made history. That's one thing that we can tell to the next generation."

Eala, who lost in the first round a year ago in her Wimbledon debut, became the first player from the Philippines to reach the fourth round of a Grand Slam singles tournament in the Open era, the women's professional tour said.

"Setting foot here is already a big achievement," said Ocampo, a London-based nurse.

The left-handed Eala talked this week about Filipino pride and being a role model for kids back home. But she also made it clear that she



has big plans for her tennis career.

In dissecting her loss to Paolini, she pointed to problems with her serve. "But I have days like that. Everyone has days where they don't play their best tennis," said Eala, who trained at the Rafael Nadal Tennis Academy in Spain as a teenager. "I understand that's part of the job. I don't think I'm going to be playing the best tennis of my life every single day. "With that being said," she added, "I'm really proud of how I handled things. I just have to kind of move forward and continue with my progress."

Eala, who made a breakthrough in March 2025 by reaching the

Miami Open semifinals, has elevated her stardom at Wimbledon, both on and off the court.

Eala met Kate, the princess of Wales, and took a photo with her. A photo of Eala diving for a ball in the match against Swiatek also has made the rounds, with edits showing Eala wearing a cape and "Superwoman" outfit.

The Philippines Embassy in the U.K. has tracked her progress and posted congratulatory notes.

Filipinos love their sports stars. Eala spoke earlier in the tournament about her childhood memories of boxing great Manny Pacquiao.

"When he would have fights, it would really be like holidays in the Philippines," she said. "We would gather and we would watch his fights. People would go off work. It would really be an event. He is someone super inspiring as an athlete."

Filipino Olympic champions are treated as national heroes. Gymnast Carlos Yulo, who won two gold medals in the Paris Olympics, returned home to pledges of cash and gifts, including a house. Eala also cited champion weightlifter Hidilyn Diaz. (AP)

Hitaashee returns to take on Vani and Ridhima in 9th leg of WPGT

HOSUR (TAMIL NADU), July 7: Hitaashee Bakshi will return to the 9th leg of the Women's Professional Golf Tour here at the Clover Greens, hoping to regain the form that made her one of the stars.

Hitaashee, who has faced challenges on the Ladies European Tour, has decided to return to her home Tour where she will lock horns with Vani Kapoor, Ridhima Dilawari, and Amandeep Drall.

Hitaashee will also get to play with young players including Anvitha Narendar, Mannat Brar, Riya, Lavanya Jadon, and amateur Mahreen Bhatia.

It will be Hitaashee's first start on the domestic Tour this season, as she has been playing on the Ladies European Tour.

The field, as has become the norm of late, is strong with the numbers consistently above 50, including the amateurs. This week there are 58 players including 10 amateurs, and the purse is of ₹ 17 lakhs.

With the competition becoming intense, not even the top stars like Vani, Ridhima or Hitaashee could have it easy with the younger lot presenting a tough challenge.

With three wins, Ridhima has been the most successful this season while Jasmine Shekar, Tvesa Malik, amateur Lavanya Gupta, Anvitha Narendar and Mannat Brar have won once each.

The current Order of Merit leader is Ridhima, with Jasmine and Amandeep trailing her in second and third places. (PTI)

Liam Rosenior back in French soccer as coach of Paris FC



PARIS, July 7: Liam Rosenior is back coaching in French soccer after Paris FC hired him on a two-year contract on Tuesday. Paris FC announced Rosenior's arrival in a statement on X and the 41-year-old Englishman spoke in a brief video message.

"I'm so happy to be the coach of Paris FC, I can't wait to get started with the new players," he said. "It's a fantastic project."

Rosenior was coach of Ligue 1 side Strasbourg until he left midway through last season to take charge of

Chelsea, which handed him a six-year deal but then fired him less than four months into the job amid poor results in the Premier League. Chelsea was also crushed 8-2 by Paris Saint-Germain in the last 16 of the Champions League.

He replaces Antoine Kombouaré at Paris FC. The veteran coach, who did well when taking charge in late February, reportedly fell out with the club over the terms of a new contract.

Paris FC plays at Stade Jean-Bouin, which is literally across the street from Champions League winner PSG's home, Parc des Princes — 44 meters away according to Paris City Hall. Last season saw the first capital city derby in French men's league soccer since 1990.

Rosenior also experienced Jean-Bouin as coach of Strasbourg.

"I was in this stadium not long ago," he said. "There was a great atmosphere when I had head coach of Strasbourg and I can't wait to sample the atmosphere as the home head coach."

Clash of big backers PSG has been bankrolled by Qatari investor QSI since being taken over in June 2011. France's richest family, the Arnaults of luxury empire LVMH, bought Paris FC two years ago.

After winning promotion from the second tier, Paris FC finished 11th in Ligue 1 last season and beat French champion PSG twice at home; once in the French Cup and on the last day of the league. (AP)

Bryan brothers criticise ATP's proposal to slash doubles prize money and fields



LONDON, July 7: Doubles icons Bob and Mike Bryan say the ATP Tour should be expanding opportunities in the discipline instead of pushing for a reduction that they argue will cost jobs for young players.

The identical twins, who were inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame last year, responded to the ATP's proposal on Tuesday ahead of playing in the invitational doubles event at Wimbledon.

The men's tour wants to reduce prize money and tournament sizes for doubles starting in 2028. The proposal would give doubles players just 10% of the prize money at tournaments — down from 20% — while cutting the size of the doubles fields in half.

"If it passes, this will kill the doubles dream for any young players or college players that want to pursue doubles," Bob Bryan said. "The pathway will be blocked to come up and make a living."

"The tour, from a financial standpoint, it looks like it's the healthiest it's ever been. They should be creating more opportunities for doubles players."

Together, the 48-year-old brothers won 119 ATP titles, including 16 Grand Slams, and an Olympic gold medal. At their induction ceremony in 2025, Martina Navratilova credited the brothers for keeping the doubles disciplines from being forgotten.

Jamie Murray, a two-time Grand Slam doubles champion, said the tour underestimates the popularity of doubles.

"The ATP really has done like zero in terms of marketing that side of the sport over the years," said Murray, the older brother of Andy Murray.

A big gap in prize money also leads to pullouts from doubles, he added.

"If you are playing a match for 20 grand but the next day you've got a singles for 300 (thousand), of course you are going to put your efforts into that," Murray said. "They play until it becomes an inconvenience for them, and then they pull out, which I understand because it's set up that way. I don't think it's right. They could improve that a lot. The scheduling of a lot of the doubles matches is poor."

Earlier, the ATP said it was "assessing the doubles product, draw sizes and player compensation distribution with the aim of creating a more sustainable long-term model while maintaining doubles' important role on the tour." It added that changing the doubles model could help increase early round singles prize money.

The proposal does not affect Grand Slam tournaments. In 2023, Wimbledon joined the other Grand Slam tournaments in shortening matches from five to three sets. (AP)

Father's dream lives on as Nagpur's Yash Thakur earns maiden India call-up

NEW DELHI, July 7: When Vidarbha pacer Yash Thakur steps into the Indian dressing room for his possible national debut during the upcoming tour of Zimbabwe, it wouldn't exactly be the story of a fresh-faced rookie.

It would be a tale of perseverance built over nearly a decade of domestic grind, fuelled by a father's ambition who tragically did not live to see the dream finally coming true.

The 27-year-old Thakur received perhaps the most important phone call of his professional life so far while waiting to collect his baggage at the Nagpur airport after returning from India A's tour of Sri Lanka recently.

It was to inform of his maiden India selection for the tour of Zimbabwe tour that will feature three T20 Internationals from July 23 to 26.

"Honestly, I wasn't expecting anything because I had only just come back from the Sri Lanka tour. I never thought I would get a call so soon," an emotional Thakur told PTI in an exclusive interview.

His List A debut was back in 2017 and he is nearing 100 wickets after 57 appearances in the circuit. He has showed up in 74 T20s, including 22 IPL games for two different franchises. Add to that familiarity with Indian bowling coach Morne Morkel during his IPL stint with Lucknow Super Giants. Thakur can hardly be considered a greenhorn.



He is actually a perfect product of the Indian system having played Ranji Trophy, Duleep Trophy, Irani Cup, and Vijay Hazare followed by inclusion in BCCI's Targeted 'Fast Bowlers List'. Regular India A assignments convinced him that the dream was getting closer.

A dream that wasn't his alone. His father, Ravisingh Thakur, was deeply invested in it but it is not around to witness its accomplishment owing to a fatal cardiac arrest in 2023.

However, Thakur's mother Kajal and his elder sister stood firmly by his side after the massive loss, helping him stay on course.

The emotions, Thakur admitted, are still

difficult to process.

"It still doesn't feel real. I am still not able to process it. It will take some time to sink in. Everyone at home is happy and all those emotions are still playing out," the bowler said.

"His dream was to see me represent India. This call-up is the fulfilment of that dream."

Opening up about the toughest phase of his life, Thakur recalled how his father's sudden demise left him devastated.

"I was in Nagpur at that time. It was a very difficult time for me. Initially, it took me a long time to cope with the loss."

"(But) My father always told me that whatever happens in life, I should never lose sight of our dream. He would always tell me that nothing should affect that dream. Those words stayed with me and helped me move forward," an overwhelmed Thakur said.

Thakur has no qualms admitting that he owes his cricketing journey to his parents, who backed him despite financial constraints of being mid-level business family.

"They never told me not to play or stopped me from pursuing cricket. Whatever decision I took, they stood by me. I give them full credit. I come from a humble background."

"My father was a middle-class businessman and business always has its ups and downs. But he never stopped me because of financial reasons. Whatever I needed, he al-

ways tried to provide. I will always remain grateful to him."

Thakur had toured England for India U-19 with current Test and ODI skipper Shubman Gill but missed out on an U-19 World Cup berth that year. However, he has gone through the grind over the last eight years without many complaints.

"Since I started getting regular opportunities for India A, I felt I was one step closer to playing for India. But I also knew that whether it was domestic cricket or India A, I had to keep performing consistently if I wanted my dream to come true."

"IPL made me tougher"

Having played 22 IPL games till date for LSG and Punjab Kings with 27 wickets including a five-for in his kitty, Thakur believes the tournament transformed him into a mentally stronger bowler.

"The IPL helped me develop the right mindset. It teaches you to be fearless because you are bowling to the best batters in the world. You plan against international players and compete with them regularly. That gives you confidence and prepares you for international cricket."

He also credited current India bowling coach and former LSG support staff Morne Morkel for broadening his understanding of fast bowling. (PTI)

Cristiano Ronaldo's World Cup career comes to a halt

Mikel Merino's late goal sends Spain to quarterfinals

ARLINGTON, July 7: Mikel Merino scored in the first minute of second-half stoppage time, and Spain beat Portugal 1-0 on Monday to end the World Cup career of superstar Cristiano Ronaldo.

Merino had just been knocked down, and a foul was called. While Portugal's Bernardo Silva argued, Merino played the ball back in, ran toward the goal and easily beat goalkeeper Diogo Costa after taking a pass from Ferran Torres.

Spain advanced to the quarterfinals for the first time since winning its only World Cup title in 2010. La Roja will play either the United States or Belgium on Friday in Inglewood, California.

Ronaldo was trying to get Portugal to the quarterfinals in a second consecutive tournament for the first time. Instead, the career on soccer's biggest stage is over for the all-time leader in international goals (146) and appearances (233).

Merino didn't enter until the 85th minute, and his heads-up play showed some of the versatility that helped Arsenal win its first Premier League title in more than 20 years this spring. He had been doubtful to make Spain's squad because of



injuries that also impacted his Premier League season.

The latest meeting of Iberian Peninsula rivals that first played in

a friendly in Madrid 105 years ago was quite the contrast to their most recent World Cup match.

It was eight years ago that

Ronaldo had his only World Cup hat trick in a 3-3 draw with Spain in a group stage opener that is considered one of the tournament's

best games.

The 41-year-old superstar scored three times in this tournament, but didn't have many chances against Spain's Unai Simón, who extended his World Cup record to 609 minutes without conceding a goal. Spain became the first team to record six straight shutouts at the World Cup.

The best chance was Ronaldo's nifty backward kick in the 37th minute when Joao Felix's header deflected off Simón's left shoulder and popped in the air to Ronaldo. He flicked the ball with his right foot, but it was soft enough to give Simón time to recover and make a leaping grab.

Portugal desperately pushed for an equaliser in the final eight minutes of stoppage time. Silva had a header that went just over the top of the net.

The defensive struggle came just two days shy of a year since Portugal beat Spain in a riveting UEFA Nations League final that went to penalty kicks following a 2-2 draw.

The other World Cup meeting was Spain's 1-0 victory — also in the round of 16 — when La Roja won the title in South Africa. (AP)

Belgium beats US 4-1 to reach World Cup quarterfinals

Taking advantage of defensive lapses



SEATTLE, July 7: The United States' hopes for a deep World Cup run at home ended when Charles De Ketelaere scored twice and assisted on another goal, helping Belgium expose the Americans' defensive liabilities in a 4-1 win Monday night that earned a quarterfinal berth.

While the U.S. was boosted by the presence of star forward Folarin Balogun, whose one-game red-card suspension was controversially lifted by FIFA, American defenders were at fault in a pair of first-half goals and goalkeeper Matt Freese's gaffe gave the Red Devils a third early in the second half.

Second-half substitute Romelu Lukaku added Belgium's final goal in the third minute of stoppage time after Chris Richards' give-away.

"Everyone saw from the beginning we didn't connect with the game," said U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino, who showed his frustration after Belgium's second goal by kicking a rack in front of the bench, sending four water bottles flying. "It's a process to learn. We need to assess that game and we need to see why we didn't approach the game in the same way that (we approached) the rest of the World Cup."

Seeking its first World Cup title, Belgium knocked the U.S. out in the round of 16 for the second time in 12 years and extended its unbeaten streak to 18 games. The Red Devils play 2010 champion Spain on Friday at Inglewood, California, for a semifinal berth against France or Morocco.

Malik Tillman tied the score 1-1 midway through the first half with his second free kick goal of the tournament, but the Americans conceded just 61 seconds after the ensuing kickoff.

American star Christian Pulisic could only watch from the bench after injuring his right foot when he hit a boot of Belgium captain Youri Tielemans on a 52nd-minute shot attempt. Pulisic favored his foot after that and was replaced seven minutes later.

After winning three games in a World Cup for the first time in this expanded 48-nation tournament, the U.S. failed in its quest to reach the quarterfinals for the first time since 2002 and lost to Belgium for the seventh straight time since a victory at the initial tournament in 1930. The Americans have dropped 11 of their last 12 games against European opponents, winning only their round of 32 match against Bosnia-Herzegovina.

A heralded generation led by Pulisic, Weston McKennie and

Tyler Adams only partially accomplished their goal of lifting soccer's stature closer to that of the NFL, MLB and the NBA.

De Ketelaere put Belgium ahead in the eighth minute, the first time in this year's World Cup the U.S. conceded first.

Tillman's goal in the 31st minute energized a largely red-white-and-blue crowd of 66,925 at Lumen Field, but De Ketelaere damped that and assisted on Hans Vanaken's 57th-minute goal after Freese lost control of the ball in front of his net.

All six CONCACAF nations have been eliminated, with the co-hosts U.S., Mexico and Canada falling in the round of 16. All quarterfinalists will come from Europe, Africa or South America, reinforcing the weakness of CONCACAF and Asia.

Belgium, which left stars Jérémy Doku and Kevin De Bruyne on the bench, pressed from the start and exposed a defense that was regarded as the Americans' weak spot.

Dodi Lukébakio made a long diagonal pass to the opposite corner, leading to the opening goal. Leandro Troussard controlled the ball and his cross was blocked by Alex Freeman and popped into the air.

Freeman headed the ball into the penalty area and Timothy Castagne charged after it and hooked a centering pass around Richards. De Ketelaere split Tim Ream and Antoine Robinson and with his right foot redirected the ball into an open net.

Pochettino held out his arms, as if to ask: What was going on?

Tillman scored after Brandon Mechele knocked down Balogun about 25 yards from goal. Tillman's kick deflected off Vanaken's head and deflected to the left of goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois, who had dived right.

Troussard got around Sergiño Dest for a cross and De Ketelaere outjumped Ream and headed the ball past Freese in the 33rd minute for his eighth international goal.

Belgium built a two-goal lead when Mechele lofted a long ball that Freese chested after two hops. Freese hesitated with a touch, then scrambled and kicked the ball off De Ketelaere. Vanaken one-timed a shot from 35 yards that deflected in off Ream, who tried for an off-balance clearance.

Lukaku entered in the 67th minute and scored his 93rd international goal.

Vanaken replaced midfielder Amadou Onana midway through the first half after Onana suffered what coach Rudi Garcia feared might be a serious knee injury. (AP)

FIFA praises World Cup referee who held red card for Balogun

MIAMI GARDENS (FLORIDA), July 7: FIFA has defended the reputation of World Cup referee Raphael Claus in rare push-back on comments by U.S. President Donald Trump, who questioned his integrity for sending off Folarin Balogun. Trump suggested on Monday at the White House, without elaborating, that the 46-year-old Brazilian was "a little bit suspect if you check his past."

Claus red-carded Balogun against Bosnia-Herzegovina last week, setting off a furor that saw Trump intervene with FIFA to ensure the United States forward could play against Belgium late Monday. FIFA praised Claus, who is working at his second World Cup, in a statement published before the U.S. 4-1 loss that sent Belgium to the quarterfinals.

"Throughout his career, he has consistently demonstrated the highest standards of professionalism and integrity," FIFA said, calling Claus "one of the world's leading professional referees and a valued member" of its team of World Cup match officials. (AP)

Balogun has little impact in US World Cup loss

SEATTLE, July 7: Folarin Balogun's presence on the field for the United States against Belgium had a seismic impact on the world of soccer, but he ultimately played a forgettable role in the Americans' 4-1 loss in the World Cup round of 16 on Monday.

The 25-year-old striker, who had three goals in this World Cup, was shown a red card during the U.S. victory over Bosnia-Herzegovina, but FIFA lifted his suspension for Monday's match after U.S. President Donald Trump intervened on Balogun's behalf.

FIFA's decision prompted soccer leaders to question the integrity of the World Cup, with European soccer body UEFA saying FIFA "crossed a red line" and Belgium's soccer federation contesting Balogun's eligibility.

"I accepted the decision when I was given the red card, and I accepted the decision when I was told I was allowed to play," Balogun said. "I didn't have any involvement in the process, and that's not something that has anything to do with me personally."



Balogun did not score on Monday. He helped set up Malik Tillman's goal in the 31st minute when he was fouled by Belgium defender Brandon Mechele roughly 25 yards outside the Red Devils' goal.

Tillman scored on the ensuing free kick. Just before the goal, Ba-

logun waved his arms and pumped up the American fans.

The U.S. tried to set up Balogun multiple times. He made use of his speed on several runs but could not get past Belgium goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois. His best chance came in the 82nd minute, when Courtois got in front of a left-footed attempt. Balogun was replaced by Haji Wright in the 92nd minute.

To a suggestion that Balogun wasn't a major presence on the field, U.S. midfielder Tyler Adams responded: "Was anyone a major presence on the field today?"

"We were happy that we had the opportunity for him to play," Adams said. "He tried today to be a presence and a nuisance, and at times he was — getting the ball in behind and doing what he does. Just didn't have too many opportunities."

Balogun said it was difficult to understand why the U.S. didn't play with the intensity the team brought to its earlier games.

"Today we didn't give the

crowd a lot to cheer for," he said. "That's the most disappointing thing, and that's the part that hurts the most for me personally."

Last Wednesday during the Americans' 2-0 win over Bosnia-Herzegovina, Balogun was shown a red card by Brazilian referee Raphael Claus for stepping on an opponent's ankle, triggering an automatic one-game suspension.

After Trump spoke by phone to FIFA president Gianni Infantino, FIFA's disciplinary committee suspended the discipline for a year on Sunday.

Infantino said he did not play a role in the decision by the disciplinary committee, which also fined Balogun \$40,000, a penalty that can be paid by the U.S. Soccer Federation.

The FIFA president was in attendance for the match, watching from a suite with Pascale Van Damme, chair of the Belgian Football Association, and Cindy Parlow Cone, president of the USSF. U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin was seated nearby. (AP)

A disappointing World Cup for Christian Pulisic as US star is scoreless and hobbled by injuries

SEATTLE, July 7: United States forward Christian Pulisic could only watch from the bench as Belgium extinguished his team's World Cup bid, ending a tournament in which the American star was hobbled by injuries and largely ineffective. The most accomplished U.S. striker, Pulisic was held scoreless in his second World Cup. He has 33 goals in 90 international appearances but has scored just once in eight World Cup games — against Iran in the group stage in 2022.

For the second time in this World Cup, Pulisic left a match in the second half with an injury, leaving Monday's 4-1 loss to Belgium after twisting his right ankle when he extended for a shot attempt and hit the boot of Belgium captain Youri Tielemans in the 52nd minute.

After spending a few moments lying on the pitch, Pulisic began favoring the foot and was replaced in the 59th by Sebastian Berhalter with the U.S. trailing 3-1.

Having to come out of the game was "difficult for me to deal with," he said.

"I felt really good this summer with the guys and I thought my level was high," Pulisic said. "It's disappointing I didn't quite have the moments I was hoping to and to try to help us to get over this next step of beating a really good team."

U.S. coach Mauricio Pochettino said after the game he hoped Pulisic's injury was nothing serious and that Pulisic would be able to reintegrate with his club, AC Milan. Players typically get 21 days off after the end of the World Cup before having to report to their clubs. (AP)

Kylian Mbappé condemns Paraguayan senator over racist remarks

NEW YORK, July 7: France star Kylian Mbappé on Monday condemned a Paraguayan senator over racist remarks she made following Paraguay's loss to France in the round of 16 at the World Cup. Mbappé called Celeste Amarilla, a senator from Paraguay's Liberal Radical Party, a "despicable woman" who was "unworthy" of serving in Paraguay's Congress.

"Through your recklessness and your brazen racism, the entire world has already forgotten the journey and the historic effort that your players accomplished during this World Cup," Mbappé wrote on X. Amarilla posted a series of racist comments on X after Mbappé converted the winning penalty in France's victory over Paraguay on Saturday, mocking the French captain's origins, upbringing, education and appearance. France advanced to the quarterfinals, where it will face Morocco on Thursday. (AP)

Cricket takes baby steps in football-crazy US

WASHINGTON, July 7: As all eyes remain fixated on the football World Cup, the game of cricket is also taking root in the US with the country's first professional league currently underway in California and Texas.

The Major League Cricket (MLC), currently in its fourth season, has attracted players mostly from cricket-playing nations including India and members of the diaspora of those countries.

Cricket is also returning to the Olympic Games after a gap of 128 years when the sporting extravaganza will be held in Los Angeles in 2028, with the US getting an opportunity to field a team as the host nation.

"If cricket is in the Olympics, it will get a lot of eyeballs from the people in the US, particularly locals. They may also start accepting the sport. That will happen," Mumbai-born Harmeet Singh, who now plays for the MLC team Seattle Orcas, told PTI.

A glance at the MLC player list shows up familiar names — Ravichandran Ashwin, Faf du

Plessis, Keshav Maharaj, Sunil Narine, Marcus Stoinis, Kusal Perera, Rachin Ravindra, Haris Rauf, Unmukt Chand, and Jason Holder among others.

Most cricketers in the US are either from countries where the game is already popular or from the diaspora of those nations.

"Right now, the kids of immigrants figure prominently in the game. But once cricket grows in the US, it will attract more local talent. It has become an Olympic sport in 2028, and if it sustains, then schools and colleges may also start giving scholarships," said Harmeet, adding that the road ahead was challenging.

Unmukt Chand, who led the India to U-19 World Cup victory in 2012, moved to the US in 2021 to pursue cricket.

"The game has grown in the last five years for sure since I have come here. Every year something new is happening. This year we got a dedicated cricket stadium in Los Angeles," said Unmukt, who plays for the LA Knightriders.

Last week, LA Knightriders un-



veiled a stadium in Pomona, California, which is billed as a permanent home for cricket.

The cricket venue, with eight wickets on the main square, ICC-standard playing dimensions, and six floodlight towers standing 120 feet tall, is set to host all the cricket fixtures of the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

The MLC is also expected to expand next year from six to eight teams, signalling increasing inter-

est in cricket in a country that loves baseball, basketball, and soccer.

"In India, everyone knows cricket, everyone understands the language. But here it is very different. It is a very niche sport for a very niche audience," Unmukt said, adding that the game will grow when it is embraced by the locals.

Harmeet said the biggest thing in any cricket-playing nation is infrastructure. "We have 3-4 stadi-

ums now, but we need more and in more cities, more grounds. Not just stadiums, but more outdoor training facilities," he said.

According to Harmeet, cricket will pick up in the US at the grassroots level only when schools and colleges start encouraging students to pick up the sport by giving scholarships.

"There has to be a clear pathway when a 10-year-old picks up a bat in the US. He should know that if I follow a particular path, I will play for the US team. That is not clear yet," he said.

"This generation of USA players, when they retire, the next generation should be as competitive. So, that is the bigger challenge which, let's say in five years' time, the US will have to solve," Harmeet said.

The Major League Tournament began on June 18 with six teams playing 34 matches at three venues — two in California and one in Dallas, Texas.

The final is scheduled for July 18 at the Oakland Coliseum in California. (PTI)

Battling rare immune disorder, Afghan pacer Shapoor Zadran dies day before 39th birthday

NEW DELHI, July 7: Veteran Afghanistan pacer Shapoor Zadran has died a day before his 39th birthday after battling a rare immune disorder called Hemophagocytic Lymphohistiocytosis (HLH) syndrome for which he was being treated at a hospital here.

Zadran, a left-arm fast bowler, played 44 ODIs and 36 T20Is for Afghanistan between 2009 and 2020. HLH is a hyper-inflammatory syndrome which compromises the immune system. He was brought to Delhi for treatment in January.

His death on Tuesday was announced by the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB).

"With profound grief and deep sorrow, the Afghanistan Cricket Board mourns the passing of former Afghanistan fast bowler Shapoor Zadran," the ACB wrote on X.

The ACB said Zadran, an imposing bowler who was a part of some memorable wins and drew attention for his flowing hair, was "one of the foundation-laying figures of Afghanistan cricket".

"Shapoor Zadran was one of the foundation-laying figures of Afghanistan cricket, whose dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment played a vital role in the rise and development of the game in our country," the ACB said.

Several members of the Afghanistan team, including skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi, Rashid Khan, and Mohammad Nabi had visited him in the hospital during the course of his treatment.

Zadran was Afghanistan's most successful bowler in the 2015 ODI World Cup, taking 10 wickets.

He recorded his career-best figures of 4/24 against the Netherlands on his ODI debut in August 2009, and claimed an overall 43 wickets in 44 matches for Afghanistan.

In 36 T20Is, Zadran took 37 wickets with a career-best of 3/40 against Bangladesh in Dehradun in June 2018.

He also played 9 First-Class matches taking 17 wickets, and claimed an overall 57 wickets in 56 List A matches and another 90 scalps in 83 T20s.

"He was among the proud cricketers who stood at the heart of Afghanistan's early cricket journey and helped build the path that brought Afghan cricket to the international stage."

The ACB said Zadran was a source of inspiration for many young cricketers not just in Afghanistan but for others around the world.

"Throughout his career, Shapoor served Afghanistan cricket with honor, courage, and pride. His contributions and achievements will always remain an important part of the history of Afghanistan cricket, and his efforts in the service of the national team will never be forgotten," the ACB wrote. (PTI)