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- Ebola death toll in Congo rises to at least 930, including dozens of health workers
- Moldova proposes exploring possibility of direct connectivity with India: official
- INDIA bloc vows to demand accountability from govt on Ram temple donation 'theft'
- Teargas and lathi-charges as CJP protesters storm into central Delhi, Dipke detained



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THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. III Issue No. 134 RNI-ASSEN/2023/86488

GUWAHATI, TUESDAY, JULY 21, 2026

PAGES 8 PRICE ₹ 8

Army deployed, rail services hit ● Over 57,100 people affected ● Death toll touches 5

Flood situation in Upper Assam worsens

GUWAHATI, July 20: Incessant rains worsened the flood situation in Upper Assam on Monday, requiring the deployment of Army personnel to assist state agencies in relief and rescue operations, while rail traffic was hit in the region with several trains rerouted, suspended or short-terminated.

According to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), five people have died so far in this year's floods. More than 57,100 people in Charaideo, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia and Udalguri districts have been affected by the deluge, it said.

Several tea estates in the state are under floodwaters, with the Assam unit of the Tea Association of India saying that rivers from Nagaland have swelled suddenly and were flowing above the danger level.

The breach of the embankment on the Dorka River aggravated the situation, inundating extensive stretches of the tea estates in the Nazira region, it said.

Northeast Frontier Railway said that due to heavy rainfall, the swollen Dikhow river flooded Simaluguri town in Sivasagar district in Tinsukia Division.

"Floodwaters have entered the station yard and the railway colony. Railway tracks in the area have also been inundated. For passenger safety, train movement in the Simaluguri-Namtali and



Simaluguri-Selenghat sections has been suspended until further notice," it said.

Long-distance trains from Dibrugarh and Tinsukia have been diverted through the Rangiya-Rangapara route on the north bank of the Brahmaputra while several

local trains have either been cancelled or short-terminated.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said four of his cabinet colleagues are on the ground and monitoring the rescue and relief operations. He has asked all MPs and

MLAs of the affected districts to be at the flood-hit areas to oversee the rapidly changing situation.

"In Sivasagar, 510 people have been rescued by SDRF and the Fire and Emergency Services. Rescue efforts continue with addi-

tional boats and Army helicopters deployed to reach inaccessible areas," the Chief Minister's office posted on social media.

In Charaideo, the National Disaster Response Force, its state counterpart and Army teams have (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two girls drown in Titabor rivulet in spate

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 20: Two girls -- Susmita Mirdha and Sonia Paharia of Narayanpur Panbari Tea Estate -- drowned in the rising waters of the Doijan rivulet on Monday while they had gone to take a dip.

Another girl was rescued and is stated to be in critical condition.

A source said that although all the girls were pulled out of the rivulet and rushed to Titabor Civil Hospital, Susmita and Sonia were declared brought dead on arrival.

Titabor MLA Dhiraj Gowala said the area had not witnessed such severe flooding in previous years as it had this year.

He appealed to people not to bathe in rivers or venture into them for fishing or other activities during the monsoon season. He also urged parents to keep a watch on their children and ensure that they did not venture near water bodies.

Landslides hit Guwahati; residents asked to stay alert as more rainfall likely

GUWAHATI, July 20: Several landslides were reported in Guwahati on Monday, with the authorities issuing an alert for more rainfall in the city over the next 24 hours, aggravating the situation.

Kamrup Metropolitan district commissioner Swapneel Paul said landslides were reported from at least five locations, though no casualties have been reported so far.

The affected areas include Kamakhya main road beyond Prashanti Lodge, Kamakhya Colony near Ganesh Mandir, Paschim Kamakhya village near the water tanker, Pandu Temple Ghat and Madhavdevnagar in Maligaon, he said.

People have been advised to avoid unnecessary travel in hilly areas of the district, particularly around Maligaon and Pandu, he said.

Paul also said traffic movement on the road leading to the Kamakhya temple may be regulated because of recurring landslides, which could delay devotees visiting the shrine.

Meanwhile, the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA), citing the India Meteorological Department's forecast, warned of moderate to heavy rainfall (6-12 cm in 24 hours), accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning, across Guwahati.

The expected rainfall could aggravate waterlogging, urban flooding, flash floods, traffic congestion and increase the risk of landslides in vulnerable areas, the ASDMA said. The district administration and the ASDMA said they were closely monitoring the situation and had (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC CEM orders revenue crackdown, faster project execution



DIPHU, July 20: In a major push to bolster local revenue and speed up public infrastructure projects, the chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang,

directed all revenue-generating departments under the council to tighten collection mechanisms and eliminate financial leakages.

The directives were issued during a high-level review meeting chaired by the CEM at the Conference Hall of the Arboretum-cum-Craft Centre in Diphu on Monday.

Ronghang conducted a detailed assessment of revenue collection performance spanning the last three financial years, alongside the first quarter of the current fiscal year.

To strengthen the Council's fiscal standing, the CEM highlighted critical revenue-earning sectors that require immediate enhancement are Forest & Land through Forest Royalty, Land Revenue, Stamp, and Registration, and Commerce & Transit through General Economic Services, Roads and Transport, Markets, and Professional Tax.

To ensure transparency and prevent loss of funds, the CEM instructed department heads to conduct regular reconciliations of revenue figures with the Treasury. This process aims to quickly identify discrepancies, plug systemic leakages, and optimise overall collection efficiency. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Wangchuk seeks temporary discharge from Safdarjung Hospital to join 'Sansad Chalo' march

NEW DELHI, July 20: Activist Sonam Wangchuk on Monday requested the medical superintendent of Safdarjung Hospital to allow him to leave "even if temporarily" to participate in the Cockroach Janta Party's Parliament march, asserting that he was feeling "very fine" and that his health parameters were normal.

In a handwritten letter addressed to the medical superintendent, Wangchuk wrote, "This is to state that I am feeling very fine today and my health parameters are also showing as quite normal. Hence, I request you to kindly allow me to leave the hospital, even if temporarily, so that I can join the march to Parliament -- Sansad

Chalo -- this morning."

"I shall be most grateful," the letter dated July 20 said.

Sharing the letter on Wangchuk's X account, his team said he was "trying hard" to join the protesters marching to Parliament. Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali J Angmo said he was not allowed to use his tablet.

"Sonam Wangchuk is trying hard to see you all! Just submitted a letter to the hospital, as his health is good, and they claim he is not in detention. So why the restrictions?" the post said.

In another handwritten note shared earlier in the day, Wangchuk said his hunger strike would continue beyond the

"Sansad Chalo" march and would end only if the government took accountability for recent failures in the education system, including paper leaks, or if Members of Parliament and leaders of political parties assured him that the issue would be taken up during the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

He had said that if his health or other factors prevented him from reaching Parliament, MPs and political party leaders should visit him at the hospital to give an assurance.

Wangchuk also alleged in the note that he was under "illegal detention" at Safdarjung Hospital, claiming that his "freedom of movement, speech and all commu-

nication are restricted."

On Saturday, Angmo said Wangchuk would end his fast if political leaders met him at the hospital and assured him that they would raise the issue of accountability in the education sector during the Monsoon Session.

She had also conveyed Wangchuk's appeal to supporters to keep the "Sansad Chalo" march peaceful and not allow the protest to be misused.

Wangchuk sat on a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar on June 28, in support of the Cockroach Janta Party's protest at the venue seeking accountability following alleged irregularities in competitive examinations (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The first direct contact between the government and youth-led CJP came on a day when police

cracked down on the protesters by using tear gas and baton charge to prevent them from marching towards Parliament.

In a statement, Nadda said discussions with the protesters had been underway since 11.50 am after they proposed talks with the government earlier in the day.

"The meeting took place in a cordial atmosphere. An initial verbal discussion was held in detail with their delegation, and they submitted a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

tinued.

Previously, as soon as the House met at 11 am, opposition members started raising slogans forcing Speaker Om Birla to adjourn the proceedings till 12 noon as the Question Hour was being taken up.

Birla objected to two members raising slogans when obituary references were read out on the demise of six former MPs, saying it was not a good precedent.

When the House met again at 12 noon, noisy protest continued and the House was adjourned till 12:30 pm.

Before the proceeding were adjourned Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal introduced a bill to replace an ordinance which increased the number of Supreme Court judges from 34 to 38, including the Chief Justice of India.

Similar scenes were witness at

12:30 pm when repeated pleas by the Chair to take up Zero Hour failed to get a positive response from opposition members. Dilip Saikia, who was in the Chair, adjourned the proceeding till 1 pm.

When the House met at 1 PM, the protests by the opposition continued.

Saikia, who was in the chair, asked the opposition members to go back to their seats and participate in the proceedings.

"The House is ready for discussions on various issues. But you are not interested. You don't want to discuss people's issues. This is not the way. You are disrupting the House repeatedly. You are showing banners and posters which is not acceptable," he said.

As the opposition ignored his appeal, Saikia adjourned the House till 2 PM. (PTI)

Nadda assures protesting CJP that govt will consider its demands

NEW DELHI, July 20: The Centre on Monday reached out to the agitating Cockroach Janta Party, with Union Minister J P Nadda assuring a two-member CJP delegation that the government leadership will hold internal discussions on their demands and get back to them, after thousands of protesters tried to march to Parliament but were prevented by police.

According to the CJP, the assurance came after its spokespersons Ashutosh Ranka and Saurav Das met Nadda, who acted as a government emissary, twice within two hours at the minister's residence and submitted a memorandum citing their demands, including the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over alleged examination irregularities.

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cracked down on the protesters by using tear gas and baton charge to prevent them from marching towards Parliament.

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"The meeting took place in a cordial atmosphere. An initial verbal discussion was held in detail with their delegation, and they submitted a (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Tripura DGP found hanging in office

AGARTALA, July 20: Tripura's Director General of Police Anurag Dhankar was found hanging in his washroom at the police headquarters here on Monday, Chief Minister Manik Saha said.

Opposition parties CPI(M) and Congress demanded an impartial probe into the circumstances leading to the death of the police officer who served the northeastern state for around 18 years in various positions.

The 1994 batch IPS officer was 60, and is survived by his wife and son who lives in Canada.

Dhankar was due to retire in 11 months. Permanent DGPs have a fixed service tenure of at least two years, irrespective of their age. He was appointed the state police chief last year. Officials said that Dhankar's body was handed over to the family after post-mortem examination, and it will be taken to his ancestral house in Meerut in Uttar Pradesh.

"I am deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic demise of Anurag, IPS, Director General of Police, Tripura, who was found hanging in the washroom of his official chamber today," the chief minister said in a Facebook post. He was promptly taken to GBP Hospital where attending doctors, after examination, declared him 'brought dead', Saha said.

The chief minister stated, "I extend my deepest condolences to the bereaved family during this hour of profound grief. May the departed soul rest in peace, and may the family find strength and courage to bear this irreparable loss." Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Jitendra Chaudhury, sought a Special Investigative Team (SIT) under the supervision of the High Court of Tripura to conduct an impartial probe into the incident. "The DGP was under pressure because (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

The data indicates 'substantial improvement' in tourist footfall during the last decade

International tourist arrivals increased from 1.31 crore in 2014 to 2.06 crore in 2024: Govt



NEW DELHI, July 20: International tourist arrivals (ITAs) in India increased from 1.31 crore in 2014 to 2.06 crore in 2024, registering a growth of 56.93 per cent, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

Union Tourism Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat shared the data in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

Also, according to the latest UN's World Tourism Barometer, India's global share of international tourist arrivals has seen an increase from 1.15 per cent in 2014 to 1.41 per cent in 2024, he said.

According to data sourced from UN's World Tourism Barometer 2026, the ITAs for the top five countries in 2024 stood at -- France (102 million), Spain (93.8 million), the US (72.3 million), Turkey (60.6 million) and Italy (57.7 million), the government said in its response.

The government said the Ministry of Tourism maintains the data on ITAs and domestic tourist visits (DTV) as provided by the Bureau of Immigration

(BoI) and states and UTs, respectively.

"The ITAs increased from 1.31 crore in 2014 to 2.06 crore in 2024 registering a growth of 56.93 per cent. Similarly, the DTVs have also increased from 128.28 crore in 2014 to 294.53 crore in 2024 thereby registering a growth of 129.60 per cent," the minister said.

The data indicates "substantial improvement" in tourist footfall during the last decade.

Further, in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) 2024, India improved its position significantly, ranking 39th globally out of 119 countries (up from 65th in 2013) and holding the first position among SAARC countries, Shekhawat said.

"To conduct comparative assessments and identify structural barriers, the Ministry of Tourism has undertaken a detailed analysis of the TTDI 2024 edition to identify data gaps, methodological limitations, and areas requiring policy and institutional interventions," he said. (PTI)

Sensex declines by 443 pts on heavy selling in HDFC Bank, Axis Bank

MUMBAI, July 20: Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower on Monday, dragged down by heavy selling in blue-chip bank stocks HDFC Bank and Axis Bank amid margin-related concerns and a flare-up in US-Iran tensions.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 442.93 points, or 0.57 per cent, to settle at 77,708.52. During the day, it tanked 783.16 points, or 1 per cent, to 77,368.29.

The 50-share NSE Nifty edged lower by 95.80 points, or 0.39 per cent, to end at 24,238.50.

Among Sensex shares, Axis Bank was the biggest loser, dropping by 5.48 per cent after its quarterly results over the weekend. HDFC Bank declined by 5.12 per cent.

"HDFC Bank has disappointed, particularly on the NIM front," V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Maruti, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, Mahindra & Mahindra and Bharat Electronics were also among the laggards from the blue-chip pack. Trent, Power Grid, NTPC and Bharti Airtel were among the gainers.

"Indian equity markets ended in the red as investors turned cautious amid escalating tensions in the Middle East and a global technology-led sell-off. Losses were compounded by a sharp decline in HDFC Bank after weaker-than-ex-



pected net interest margins disappointed investors, putting additional pressure on the banking sector and the broader benchmarks," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

The global oil benchmark, Brent crude, receded from an early high of USD 90 per barrel, later trading lower by 0.05 per cent to USD 88.06 per barrel.

"The collapse of the June ceasefire between the US and Iran has pushed crude prices to touch USD 90 a barrel. Markets have started the week on a cautious note, reflecting rising pressure on the global economy. These tensions are expected to persist in the near term as US military actions expand and global travel advisories for US citizens remain in place," Vinod

Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited, said.

Broader markets, however, closed higher with the BSE SmallCap Select index climbing 0.56 per cent and the MidCap Select index gaining 0.39 per cent.

Among sectors, Private Banks index declined the most by 2.15 per cent, followed by Top 10 Banks (1.89 per cent), Financial Services (0.97 per cent), Bankex (0.77 per cent) and MidSmall Private Banks Quality Tilt (0.60 per cent).

On the other hand, PSU Bank was the biggest gainer, rising by 2.96 per cent. Utilities (1.73 per cent), Power (1.48 per cent), Healthcare (1.11 per cent), Commodities (0.81 per cent), Metal (0.79 per cent) and Oil & Gas (0.76 per cent) also closed higher.

"Markets remained under pressure on Monday and ended lower amid disappointing earnings from private banking majors and renewed geopolitical concerns. Sectoral participation remained mixed, with banking and financials emerging as the key laggards following the earnings reaction," Ajit Mishra – SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

Investor sentiment remained subdued after quarterly earnings from major private banks disappointed on the margin front, triggering a sharp sell-off in banking heavyweights, he said. "At the same time, renewed geopolitical tensions in the Middle East pushed Brent crude prices above the USD 90 per barrel mark, reviving concerns over inflation," Mishra added.

In Asian markets, Shanghai's SSE Composite index and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended higher, while South Korea's KOSPI tanked 4.46 per cent. Markets in Japan were closed for a holiday. European markets were trading mostly higher. US markets ended lower on Friday.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth ₹ 376.41 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. On Friday, the Sensex bounced back 964.58 points, or 1.25 per cent, to settle at 78,151.45. The Nifty climbed 261.55 points, or 1.09 per cent, to end at 24,334.30. (PTI)

Core sector output growth rises to 5-month high of 5 pc in June

NEW DELHI, July 20: Production growth of nine core infrastructure sectors rose to a five-month high of 5 per cent in June due to an increase in output of cement, electricity and iron ore, official data released on Monday showed.

The core sectors' growth was 1.1 per cent in June 2025 and 3.2 per cent in May 2026.

The data has been released with a new base year, 2022-23, replacing the earlier base year of 2011-12. The government has also added iron ore to the index, increasing the number of core sectors to nine.

According to the official data, production of crude oil, natural gas, refinery products, and fertiliser declined during the month.

On the other hand, production of cement and electricity rose by 9.8 per cent each, and of iron ore, which has been included in the index under the new series, jumped by 43.9 per cent in June.

Coal output rose by 1.4 per cent in June against a 6.8 per cent contraction in the same month last year. Steel output growth slowed down to 4.6 per cent from 10.2 per cent in June 2025.

During April-June 2026-27, the key sectors expanded by 3.6 per cent against 1 per cent in the same period last year.

The commerce and industry ministry, in a statement, said that owing to intensive use of iron ore in the production process and its contribution to industrial development, it has been included in the list of core industries as a new item in the revised series.

Commenting on the data, ICRA Ltd said the pickup in June was not broad-based and was led by an improvement in the performance of just four of the nine sectors. (PTI)

Rachnatmak Bharat formulated for promotion of cultural, creative economy: Govt

NEW DELHI, July 20: The Ministry of Culture has formulated Rachnatmak Bharat, an initiative aimed at promoting and developing the country's cultural and creative economy, the government informed Parliament on Monday.

Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat shared the data in a written response to a query in Lok Sabha.

He was asked whether the government has formulated or proposes to formulate a national strategy for the promotion and de-

velopment of the cultural and creative economy; and details of the key sectors identified under the cultural and creative activities, including media, design, arts, heritage and creative service.

"The Ministry of Culture has formulated a cultural and creative economy intervention, namely Rachnatmak Bharat, for the promotion and development of the cultural and creative economy," he said.

The proposed strategy envisages interventions for capacity

building, market access, innovation, digital enablement and institutional strengthening with a view to promoting sustainable growth of the creative economy, including support for emerging artists and creative practitioners, the Union minister said.

The proposed intervention broadly covers sectors such as visual arts, performing arts, museums, cultural heritage, architecture, digital creative industries and other creative services. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Flood situation in Upper

been deployed in the worst-hit areas, while relief measures are underway to ensure the safety and well-being of affected residents, it added.

On Sunday night, Sharma said the state government requested the Army and Air Force to be on standby to assist the local administration in evacuating flood victims from several districts affected by the deluge.

"Flood-fighting work is underway in Jorhat, Charaideo and Sivasagar. Sand-filled bags are being dumped along the Dikhow embankment, geobags are being used to reinforce the Disang riverbank and flood-fighting work is underway at the Jhanji embankment in Norakonwar Bailing Gaon," the CMO said.

It said the Jhanji river was showing a receding trend with the water level falling by 0.04 metres since morning. Sharma said unprecedented rainfall over the last few days has aggravated the flood situation in Sivasagar and neighbouring districts.

"We remain committed to providing all sorts of assistance to the affected... Rescue efforts are underway and are being monitored by our ministerial team," he added. As rains continue, the administration is reinforcing its efforts to shift people to safer places and provide them with all necessary support, the chief minister said.

"We have adopted a whole-of-government approach to deal with the flood situation in Upper Assam. Due to unprecedented rainfall, Jaji, Dikhow and Dichang rivers are flowing above the danger level, flooding in Jorhat, Sivasagar, Charaideo, Dibrugarh and nearby districts," he added.

Sharma said on Sunday that he directed his ministerial colleagues Ajanta Neog, Bimal Borah, Keshab Mahanta and Susanta Borgohain to immediately reach the affected areas to supervise relief efforts.

Industries, Commerce and Public Enterprises Minister Bimal Borah said he reached Sivasagar early on Monday morning to review the flood situation with the district commissioners of Sivasagar and Charaideo. "We stand firmly with our people and will do everything possible to overcome this challenge together," he said.

Water Resources Minister Borgohain said that due to the flood situation in Lonporiya and nearby villages under Bokota-Lakuwa mandal of Demow constituency, the administration is carrying out rescue operations for the affected people. "Rescue operations will continue in other nearby flood-affected villages, and all necessary measures have been taken to ensure the safety of the affected families," he added.

Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Mahanta said that he took stock of the prevailing situation at Teok and interacted with flood-hit locals. (PTI)

KAAC CEM orders revenue

Looking ahead to upcoming state allocations, the CEM urged Heads of Departments (HoDs) to initiate developmental schemes immediately once the budget communication is received next month.

"Departments must execute projects in an accelerated manner so that all works are completed within stipulated timeframes and benefits reach the public without delay," he added.

The review meeting also evaluated progress on key infrastructure and public utility projects across Karbi Anglong, including proposed Pumped Storage Projects; Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) water supply coverage; RIDF Road Construction under the Public Works Department, and Construction of Boys' and Girls' Hostels under the PWD Building Wing.

Contractors handling PWD and Public Health Engineering (PHE) projects were present at the meeting to provide direct updates on ongoing works. Addressing contractor concerns, the CEM instructed departments to maintain strict project monitoring while expediting the settlement of contractor liabilities in line with prescribed procedures. The meeting saw the attendance from top state and council leadership, including Habbey Teron, deputy speaker, Assam Legislative Assembly; Surya Rongphar, MLA; Abhijit Kro, deputy chairman, KAAC, and executive members (EMs), members of Autonomous Council (MACs), and all administrative Heads of Departments under KAAC.

Landslides hit Guwahati

kept emergency response systems on alert.

Residents, especially those living in low-lying and hillside areas, have been asked to remain vigilant and watch for signs of flooding or landslides. The ASDMA also requested government and private establishments to allow employees to work from home, wherever feasible, in view of the weather forecast. People have been advised to avoid unnecessary travel during periods of intense rainfall and follow official weather updates and advisories issued by the authorities, it added. (PTI)

Wangchuk seeks temporary

and demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Delhi Police whisked away Wangchuk from the venue and forcefully admitted him to Safdarjung Hospital in the early hours of July 18 after his health deteriorated. While his supporters had alleged that he was forcibly removed from the protest site, police had maintained that he was shifted to the hospital on medical grounds. (PTI)

Nadda assures protesting CJP

written petition to me around 4 PM," he said. The minister said he had requested all the protesters to end their sit-in and assist the administration in restoring normalcy. "The minister assured us he will discuss this at the appropriate level. However, no commitments have been made so far. The peaceful protesters will not rest until the demand is met," Das said in a post on X after the meeting.

Official sources said talks within the government on the CJP protest were underway. Das said Nadda had also assured the delegation that there would be no further crackdown at Jantar Mantar and nearby areas, though he said there were no reports of the police action stopping.

Ranka told PTI Videos that the delegation met Nadda twice after reaching his residence around noon. "We have three demands -- Sonam Wangchuk ji should be released immediately. He wants to share a video message and should be allowed to do that.

"Dharmendra Pradhan... should be immediately sacked, and Rs 1 crore compensation should be given to the families of those who committed suicide after the NEET paper leak," he said, adding "the only assurance we got is that he will talk to the leadership and share the conclusions".

The CJP said they also demanded an end to police action against "peaceful protesters". In the memorandum submitted to Nadda, the CJP alleged repeated failures in the conduct of public examinations, including the NEET 2026 paper leak, CBSE Class XII portal issues and delays in CUET, and said its core demand since the start of the agitation had been the removal of Pradhan as education minister. It also sought Wangchuk's release without restrictions on his movement and urged the government to direct Delhi Police to stop using force against peaceful protesters. Ranka said it was only late Sunday night that the deputy commissioner of Police, New Delhi, reached out for opening a communication channel with the government.

He said there were more serious discussions only from 6 am on Monday, and only at around 11:45 am, there was "an alignment on meeting Nadda ji". "We finally met Nadda ji 10 mins ago and he is checking with the leadership internally wrt our demands. @DelhiPolice should immediately stop using brute force on peaceful protestors," Ranka wrote on 'X' at 2:48 PM

The CJP has been spearheading protests over alleged examination irregularities since June. Activist Sonam Wangchuk, who joined the agitation on June 28 and has been on a hunger strike, remains admitted to Safdarjung Hospital after being shifted there by Delhi Police on July 18 following a deterioration in his health.

Protesters participating in the Cockroach Janta Party's Parliament march on Monday refused to disperse despite heavy police barricading, lathicharge and use of tear gas, and raised slogans demanding the resignation of Pradhan.

The march, which witnessed participation of students and people from across Delhi, was stopped near Parliament Street, where police had put up multiple layers of barricades. Many protesters said they had anticipated resistance but were determined to continue their demonstration. (PTI)

Tripura DGP found hanging

of various reasons. We demand the constitution of an SIT under the High Court of Tripura to probe the unfortunate incident by convening a special cabinet meeting," he said while addressing a rally here.

Dhankar rose from an SDPO to the DGP showing his skill, integrity and dedication toward his responsibilities, he said. "Dhankar faced many challenges in his career and successfully navigated them. I don't believe an honest and experienced officer would end his life without a major reason. We lost a good police officer," the CPI(M) leader said.

Senior Congress MLA Sudip Roy Barman expressed deep sorrow over the death of the DGP.

"Mr Anurag Dhankar was among the finest and most efficient officers the state has ever had. This is the first time in the entire nation that a DGP-rank officer was found dead in his office at police headquarters while in uniform. The government must clear the mystery surrounding his death," he said.

Roy Barman demanded an impartial probe under the supervision of the High Court into the circumstances leading to the unfortunate incident.

BJP state president Abhishek Debroy said Dhankar had been discharging his duties with the highest degree of integrity, dedication and honesty.

"We never thought he would go this way. It is sad for all of us. There will be a magisterial-level probe into the incident. The truth will be clarified shortly," he said.

Dhankar who had served in the UN Mission in Kosovo (2003-04) was also admired by his fellow officers.

"As DGP, Anurag Dhankar sir was very strict in professional work but soft-hearted, as he never harmed subordinate officers. He used to scold us at times but never took any harsh decision without major mistakes," recalled Bhanupada Chakraborty, a former IPS officer. (PTI)

India gets USD 20.72 bn forex inflows under swap facility since June: RBI

MUMBAI, July 20: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had introduced the swap facility on June 5, 2026, as part of a host of measures to strengthen India's balance of payments and incentivise capital inflows.

The swap facility has seen avid interest and attracted steady forex inflows since June 8, 2026, the central bank said in a statement.

A strong mobilisation was witnessed through Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) or FCNR (B) deposits.

Of the total inflows, FCNR (B) deposits accounted for USD 17.406 billion, while Overseas Foreign Currency Borrowings (OFCBs) contributed USD 1.97 billion and External Commercial Borrowings (ECBs) amounted to USD 1.342 billion.

"With a view to strengthening our balance of payments and incentivising capital inflows, the RBI had announced a series of measures, including a facility for offering concessional swaps for fresh FCNR(B) deposits, OFCB and ECB inflows on June 5, 2026," the central bank said.

Gold rebounds ₹ 1,400 to near ₹ 1.47 lakh/10g; silver declines ₹ 1,000

NEW DELHI, July 20: Gold prices rebounded by ₹ 1,400 to hover around ₹1.47 lakh per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid firm global trends.

The yellow metal of 99.9 per cent purity climbed ₹ 1,400 to ₹ 1,46,900 per 10 grams (inclusive of all taxes) from Friday's closing level of ₹ 1,45,500 per 10 grams, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

However, silver depreciated by ₹ 1,000 to ₹ 2,21,500 per kilogram (inclusive of all taxes), extending losses for the sixth consecutive session. It had settled at ₹ 2,22,500 per kg in the previous session.

The white metal has declined by ₹ 15,500, or 6.5 per cent, cumulatively since July 10. Traders said value buying emerged in gold after last week's sharp sell-off. However, silver continued to face liquidation, with investors weighing geopolitical risks against expectations that the Federal Reserve could keep interest rates elevated.

"Gold edged higher on Monday, tracking positive cues from international markets, driven by bargain buying after last week's sharp decline," said Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst - Commodities at HDFC Securities. A subdued moment in the US dollar also improved the appeal of the precious metal for overseas

buyers, he added.

In the international markets, spot gold rose marginally to trade around USD 4,020 per ounce, and silver gained nearly 2 per cent at USD 56.88 per ounce.

Spot gold hovered around USD 4,020 an ounce while silver gained 2 per cent to USD 57, as mediation efforts between the US and Iran continued despite fresh American military strikes on Tehran, Kaynat Chainwala, AVP Commodity Research, Kotak Securities, said. Crude oil remained the market's biggest swing factor. Brent crude briefly climbed above USD 91 a barrel and West Texas Intermediate topped USD 85 after the US extended strikes on Iranian military infrastructure for a ninth consecutive night, she said.

Meanwhile, Tehran widened retaliatory strikes against US allies in the Gulf region.

Later, oil prices retreated after Iran acknowledged diplomatic exchanges through mediators aimed at easing tensions. "With both chokepoints still live but a mediation channel now open, Brent could retest USD 90 on renewed escalation, though confirmed progress on talks could quickly unwind the current risk premium," Chainwala said. (PTI)

Residents living within 20 km of toll plazas can now buy local passes through Rajmargyatra App: NHAI

NEW DELHI, July 20: State-owned NHAI on Monday said residents living within a 20 km radius of an eligible toll plaza can purchase a local pass digitally through the Rajmargyatra Mobile App, allowing unlimited travel through the respective toll plaza during the month.

Earlier, commuters were required to visit the toll plaza physically and submit supporting documents to establish their eligibility. Under the new digital framework, the entire process can now be digitally completed within a few minutes.

NHAI, in a statement, said the newly introduced 'local pass' feature enables eligible commuters to purchase a toll pass digitally through the Rajmargyatra Mobile App without visiting the toll plaza.

The first facility of digital local toll pass has been introduced at the Mundka – Bakkarwala Toll Plaza on Urban Extension Road-II (UER-II) in Delhi and will be rolled out at other toll plazas across the country in the coming months, it added.

According to the statement, the initiative leverages consent-based integration with government digi-



tal platforms, including Digilocker and VAHAN, to automatically retrieve verified details relating to the commuter's address, vehicle number and linked FASTag. Eligibility for a local pass is further established through GIS-based verification, eliminating manual documentation and significantly improving user convenience while ensuring transparency and accuracy.

Further enhancing services for National Highway users, NHAI said it has also introduced 'MargMitra' Help Centre, an intel-

ligent digital assistance platform integrated within the Rajmargyatra Mobile App.

Designed as a single-window interface for National Highway users, 'MargMitra' will enable commuters to access information, seek assistance and register grievances through an intuitive conversational interface.

The statement said users can type or speak their queries, feedback or grievances in any of the 22 Indian languages, and the platform provides them with appropriate information or guides them to the

relevant service.

The Help Centre provides instant assistance on a wide range of services, including FASTag recharge, KYC requirements, refund status, annual and local pass services and other frequently asked queries. For issues requiring intervention, NHAI said National Highway users can directly lodge complaints through the help centre, which is automatically routed to the concerned department for timely grievance resolution.

The platform also enables commuters to monitor the progress of their complaints in real time and provides an option to file an appeal if they are not satisfied with the resolution.

'MargMitra' also allows users to check FASTag blacklisting status, view pending e-notices and report road safety concerns such as stalled vehicles or encroachments on National highways. NHAI has been encouraging National highway commuters to download the Rajmargyatra Mobile App on Android and iOS platforms and avail the wide range of digital services designed to make National Highway travel safer, smarter and more convenient. (PTI)

Assam government distributes MMUA cheques to 22,818 women in Dhing

28 companies of security forces to be deployed in Nagaon

HT CORRESPONDENT

NAGAON, July 20: Assam Agriculture, Irrigation and Parliamentary Affairs Minister and Nagaon District Guardian Minister Pijush Hazarika on Sunday distributed cheques to 22,818 beneficiaries under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Udyamita Abhiyan (MMUA) at a programme held in Dhing, Nagaon.

Addressing the gathering, the minister described the scheme as a “powerful medium” to make women economically self-reliant. Under the MMUA, each beneficiary receives an initial grant of ₹ 10,000 to start a livelihood activity and achieve financial independence.

Hazarika urged the beneficiaries to utilise the seed capital effectively to establish businesses.

“Those who use the funds properly would become eligible for the next phases of financial assistance of ₹ 25,000 and ₹ 50,000 under the scheme,” he added.

Highlighting the state government’s welfare ini-

tiatives, the minister spoke about houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, improved road infrastructure, free ration for poor families and free admission for students in schools and colleges. He credited the state government, led by chief minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, with ushering in all-round development.

The minister also announced that free ration distribution would resume next month.

He further asserted that the present government was providing benefits impartially, rising above linguistic and religious differences, and that no area had been left out of development initiatives.

Speaking on flood protection, Hazarika said embankment construction and other flood-control measures had enabled farmers in the Dhing constituency to grow two or more crops a year.

“The recruitment corruption prevalent during the previous government had been eradicated and that meritorious students from poor families were now securing government jobs,” he added.

On agriculture, the minister called upon people to take up farming to contribute to Assam’s economic growth and assured them of full support from the Agriculture and Irrigation departments.

Later in the day, Hazarika attended another programme at Bhomoraguri and distributed land pattas to 81 families from the Nagaon-Batadraba constituency. He also handed over MMUA cheques to some local beneficiaries.

The minister said those who received land pattas would now be eligible for farmer registration and would receive identity cards, adding, “The registration would help them avail themselves of benefits under various government schemes”.

He also urged people not to leave agricultural land fallow and stressed the importance of intercropping profitable crops such as coconut, areca nut and black pepper to increase farmers’ income.

MLAs Mehboob Mukhtar and Rupak Sharma, Nagaon District commissioner Devashish Sharma and other dignitaries were present at the event.



Chatra Somaj and Nagarik Sabha demand resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan

HT CORRESPONDENT

NAGAON, July 20: Chatra Somaj and Nagaon Nagarik Sabha staged a sit-in protest at Nagaon on Monday demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the alleged NEET paper leak.

The protest, held near Jubin Tower at Motiram Bora Kshetra, was organised by Nagaon Chatra Somaj and Nagaon Nagarik Sabha where protesters also demanded that all demands of Sonam Wangchuk, who is on a hunger strike in Delhi, be accepted unconditionally.

After the sit-in, demonstrators took out a rally through the main town of Nagaon and submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister through the Nagaon district commissioner, seeking the minister’s resignation.

Prominent participants included Nagaon Nagarik Sabha Secretary Birinchi Bora, Kabir Hussain, teacher Afsana Begum, and student leaders Azizul Haque, Navajyoti, Nargis, Rahul Baruah, Bishal Bora, Irfan, Mustafa and Imdadul. Over a hundred students from Nagaon University, ADP College, GNDG Commerce College, Physicwala, Kalong Kapili and other institutions joined the protest, raising slogans against the education minister.

IndiGo Airlines flight from Jorhat to Kolkata cancelled after technical glitch emerges

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 20: IndiGo Airlines flight 6E 6153 from Jorhat to Kolkata was cancelled after a technical fault was detected just before takeoff.

The incident occurred after all passengers had boarded the aircraft and taken their seats, while the flight was making its final preparations for departure at 1.30pm. Following the detection of the technical issue, the flight crew instructed passengers to deplane as a safety precaution.

According to passengers on board, the boarding process had been completed and everyone was seated when the crew was informed of the technical problem. The flight was immediately halted, and just moments before takeoff, all passengers were safely escorted off the aircraft with their belongings and taken back to the terminal.

A technical inspection of the aircraft then began.

After a detailed examination by the airline’s engineers, IndiGo decided to cancel the flight, prioritising passenger safety above all else. Following the cancellation, the airline initiated arrangements for alternative travel options and provided other necessary assistance to affected passengers in accordance with its standard operating procedures.

No injuries to passengers or crew members, or any other safety-related incidents, have been reported. However, the airline has not yet released an official statement detailing the nature of the technical fault.

Passengers are being kept informed, and coordination is underway regarding their onward travel.

Flash floods affect 1,000 people in Karbi Anglong, NH-29 shut



HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 20: Continuous rainfall over the past 24 hours has triggered flash floods and severe waterlogging across several parts of Assam’s Karbi Anglong district.

Rising water levels have inundated low-lying settlements, disrupting normal life and prompting emergency response teams to remain on high alert.

The affected population is estimated at around 1,000 people across nine villages in the Phuloni Revenue Circle. The worst-hit areas include Dokmoka town, Panjuri, Debgaon and Matikhula. National Highway 29 has also been temporarily closed to traffic due to flooding. Emergency response teams from Fire & Emergency Services (Howrahgah) and the

State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Hojai, are carrying out evacuation operations.

Water levels in the Horina and Dikrut rivers have risen due to heavy rainfall in the Phuloni Revenue Circle, putting nearby residential areas at heightened risk of further waterlogging. In the Silonijian Revenue Circle, the Diphlu River, which rose rapidly yesterday,

has begun to recede this morning, bringing partial relief to nearby communities.

Evacuation efforts are underway in the most vulnerable areas of the Phuloni Revenue Circle. Teams from Fire & Emergency Services (Howrahgah), along with SDRF personnel from Hojai, are deploying boats and rescue equipment to safely evacuate stranded residents to higher ground.

To ensure immediate shelter and relief, district authorities have kept relief camps on standby across three Revenue Circles. The camps will be activated at short notice should conditions deteriorate further.

All frontline departments, including Health, Public Health Engineering (PHE), Water Resources (WRD), Public Works Department (PWD), NHIDCL, APDCL, Forest and Revenue, along with local volunteers, have been directed to remain in the field to assist affected families and restore disrupted infrastructure.

District authorities said the situation is being closely monitored round the clock. Key departments are maintaining a continuous field presence to assess flood damage, assist affected communities and reopen NH-29 and other critical transport links as soon as water levels recede.

Cachar administration issues flood advisory as Barak river level rises

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 20: The Cachar district administration on Monday issued a public advisory asking residents to remain alert as the Barak river continued to rise amid persistent rainfall and forecasts of more heavy showers over the next two to three days.

The advisory, issued by the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), follows the India Meteorological Department’s prediction of widespread rainfall across Assam.

As per an official statement, officials opined that the prevailing weather conditions could lead to flooding, flash floods and urban waterlogging in vulnerable parts of the district if the rain continues.

The administration said all departments and emergency response agencies have been placed on alert and preparedness measures are in place to respond to any flood-related situation.

Residents have been advised to avoid unnecessary travel through low-lying, flood-prone and waterlogged areas, particularly during heavy rainfall.

“They have also been asked to stay away from rivers, streams, drains, culverts and inundated locations where water currents may become dangerous,” the statement added.

As a precaution, households have been urged to switch off electricity if floodwater enters their homes and move electrical appliances, important documents and other valuables to safer locations. People living in vulnerable areas have also been advised to be prepared for possible evacuation and to cooperate with rescue and relief personnel if required.

The administration cautioned against walking, riding or driving through flooded roads, saying submerged hazards could pose serious risks to life and property. It also advised families to keep emergency supplies, including drinking water, dry food, medicines, flashlights, batteries and essential documents, ready.

Officials urged residents to rely only on updates issued by the district administration and other government agencies, avoid spreading unverified information and keep mobile phones charged to receive emergency alerts.

The district administration said it would continue monitoring the situation round the clock and issue further advisories as required.

It further appealed to the public to immediately contact the District Emergency Operation Centre or other local authorities in case of any emergency.

AAU gears up for 5-day Northeast NSS festival from July 23 to 27

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 20 : The Assam Agricultural University (AAU) in collaboration with the Regional Directorate of NSS, Guwahati is gearing up to host the five-day ‘North East National Service Scheme (NSS) Festival 2026’ from July 23 to 27 at the Jorhat main campus of the university.

An AAU official stated that the festival will bring together more than 300 NSS volunteers and programme officers representing universities, colleges, and higher secondary institutions from all eight north-eastern states.

Organised under the theme ‘Agriculture for Viksit Bharat’, the festival aims to inspire the youths to become catalysts for sustainable agricultural development, environmental stewardship, social responsibility and nation building.

Moreover, by organising a series of cultural performances, folk dances, music, literary events, debates, quizzes, youth conventions,

community service activities, exhibitions, and interactive sessions, the organisers will enable participants to showcase the rich cultural diversity, traditions, and heritage of the north-eastern region.

Special sessions on sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, rural development, entrepreneurship, digital empowerment, health awareness, and volunteerism are expected to enrich the learning experience of the participants.

The event, aimed at strengthening the spirit of unity in diversity by reaffirming the ideals of NSS ‘Not Me But You’, will serve as a vibrant platform for fostering national integration, youth leadership, cultural exchange, and community engagement.

The official further added that AAU hosting the festival expresses the varsity’s commitment to youth empowerment and its vision of integrating agricultural education with social responsibility.

One-Day orientation on Management of High-Risk Pregnancy held in Kokrajhar



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 20: A one-day orientation programme on the management of high-risk pregnancy was held in Kokrajhar on Monday for Sectoral Medical Officers and Medical Officers undergoing their one-year compulsory rural posting.

The technical session was led by Dr. Zuniker Ali, deputy superintendent of RNB Civil Hospital, Kokrajhar, and consultant Gynaecologist. He provided comprehensive guidance on the early identification, risk stratification, timely referral, and evidence-based management of high-risk pregnancies to improve maternal and neonatal outcomes.

The programme was attended by the additional district commissioner (Health) and members of the District Programme Management Unit (DPMU), who emphasized the importance of strengthening maternal healthcare services through the capacity building of frontline medical officers.

The orientation concluded with an interactive discussion that

enabled participants to clarify clinical issues and reinforce best practices for delivering quality maternal healthcare across health facilities in the district.

Fresh floods, landslides hit four Arunachal districts; one missing in East Siang

ITANAGAR, July 20: Triggered by heavy rains, fresh floods and landslides hit four districts of Arunachal Pradesh on Monday while a search was on for a person who got swept away by a torrent of floodwater in East Siang a day ago.

The ongoing spell of floods and landslides has so far claimed seven lives, injured 29 and affected 1,49,378 people in 25 districts of the northeastern state.

According to a report by the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC) issued on Monday evening, East Siang, Kamle, Kra Daadi and Changlang districts witnessed fresh rain-triggered floods and landslides.

It said one person, Monggo Tayeng (27), remained missing after being swept away by floodwaters in East Siang district on Sunday. Search and rescue operations by the SDRF are underway.

Kamle witnessed widespread devastation due to heavy rainfall, while fresh landslides and floods were reported in Kra Daadi, East Siang and Changlang districts.

According to the bulletin, 51 people -- 41 in Changlang and 10 in Kamle -- were affected by the calamity since Sunday.

East Siang was the worst-hit district with around 35,500 people impacted, followed by Siang (25,365), Kra Daadi (13,731) and Upper Subansiri (13,017). (PTI)

Flood affects large parts of Sivasagar, Charaideo districts

HT CORRESPONDENT

SIVASAGAR, July 20: Heavy rainfall over the last two days in the catchment areas of the Dikhow, Desang, Darika, Janji and Mitong rivers has triggered widespread flooding in Sivasagar district. Overflowing rivers have inundated several areas of Sivasagar, Amguri, Nazira and Sonari, disrupting normal life.

The Sivasagar and Charaideo district administrations have been put on high alert, while rescue operations by the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) are underway in both districts.

Among the worst-affected areas are Bogidoul, Banharh, Hanchora, Konwarpur, Konwar Katak, Komaphadia, Salaguri, Mezenga, Kheluwa and Latumgaon. Army helicopters have also been deployed to rescue marooned residents and shift them to safer locations. No casualties have been reported so far.

Sub-Divisional Agriculture officer Mustachin Ahmed said the department has set up an information cell under three extension officers to assist farmers affected by the floods.

In Simaluguri, the Railway Colony, Ramugaon, Bhutagaon, Deodhaigaon and Borkola are completely submerged. SDRF personnel rescued two children and a woman from the strong flood currents at Ramugaon early on Monday, said local teacher Haren Sharma.

In Charaideo district, the Suffry, Taokak and Desang rivers are flowing well above the danger mark, inundating vast downstream areas.

The Health Department in both districts has launched awareness drives, advising residents to take preventive measures against the outbreak of water- and vector-borne diseases such as gastroenteritis, respiratory infections, dengue, kala-azar, skin diseases and encephalitis in flood-affected areas.

Cachar launches field-level training for Census 2027 personnel

‘Seven training halls have been set up at Cachar College for the programme’



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 20: Cachar district on Monday began the first phase of field-level training for Enumerators and Supervisors as part of preparations for the Census 2027, with the inaugural session for the Silchar Revenue Circle held at Cachar College.

As per an official statement, the training, organised by the district Census Cell, covers personnel from the five revenue circles of Silchar, Lakhimpur, Udharbond, Katigorah and Sonai.

Officials said the exercise is aimed at equipping field staff with the skills required for the country’s first fully digital Census.

“In the Silchar Revenue Circle alone, 1,171 Enumerators and 187 Supervisors will undergo training. Seven training halls have been set up at Cachar College for the programme,” the statement added.

According to officials, the district has scheduled the training in four phases be-

tween July 20 and August 5. The sessions, conducted from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm each day, include classroom instruction and practical demonstrations on digital data collection, household listing, verification procedures, reporting formats and other field protocols.

The programme was inaugurated by district census officer and additional district commissioner Roktim Baruah, who said Census 2027 would mark a major shift as it would be conducted through a digital platform for the first time. Stressing the importance of accurate data collection, he urged Enumerators and Supervisors to familiarise themselves with the digital applications and operational guidelines to ensure reliable data.

Silchar census charge officer Arnav Kumar Baruah, in his welcome address, asked the trainees to actively participate in the programme and carry out their responsibilities with diligence during the field exercise.

Officials said the training is being

conducted by 57 Field Trainers who had earlier undergone capacity-building under two batches of Master Trainer programmes held in June.

The administration also highlighted that citizens will, for the first time, have the option of self-enumeration through an online Census portal. The self-enumeration window will remain open from August 2 to August 16, after which Enumerators will begin door-to-door House Listing Operations from August 17.

The district administration has deployed 4,535 Enumerators and Supervisors for the Census exercise. The first phase, covering House Listing Operations, will continue until September 15, while the Population Enumeration phase is scheduled for February 2027.

Officials appealed to residents to make use of the self-enumeration facility wherever possible and cooperate with Census personnel during household visits to facilitate the smooth and timely completion of the exercise.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If you would be loved, love and be loveable.
- Benjamin Franklin

Hasina's Dhaka return plan

Former Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's recent announcement to return to her country in December this year ending her exile in India, has created big interests in global diplomatic circles, apart from India and Bangladesh. In an interview, she said that she intends to return to her own country voluntarily to face justice and revive her party Awami League. She was candid that she would lead an active political life. Hasina left Dhaka on August 5, 2024 at the height of the anti-discrimination movement of the students and since then, the deposed PM has been living in India enjoying all the facilities given by the Indian government. Narendra Modi government did not respond to the extradition demand made by the Bangladesh government a number of times. Right now, Sheikh Hasina is facing a death sentence for her alleged role in the killing of students in 2024 protests. So, what suddenly happened is that Hasina has suddenly planned to return to Dhaka. She is not a political novice. She must have done some planning. It is also fair to assume that she has consulted the Indian government leadership. India has a stake in Hasina's future. Hasina and her advisers must have held consultations with other countries and international legal bodies.

As regards Bangladesh reaction, the BNP government views this as a potential trap to incite unrest but still there is some restraint on the part of the BNP administration. Sources say that once she returns, she will be treated as per law. Significantly, Hasina said in her interview that upon her return, she would expose her farcical trial at the International Criminal Court. There are reasons to believe that the deposed PM and her advisers, many of whom are based in UK and USA have assessed the legal implications and the possibility of internationalise the trial in Bangladesh once it takes place. For India, Hasina's agreeing to return to Bangladesh on her own is a big relief as far as India-Bangladesh relations are concerned. BNP government has been insisting on extradition and there is the common view in Bangladesh that no improvement in bilateral relations with India can take place unless Sheikh Hasina is handed over to the Bangladesh government. That irritant is now over and it is easier for the Indian foreign ministry to make new moves in improving relations with Dhaka.

New Delhi has to take some supplementary moves to counter the challenge of China in Bangladesh. The visit of the Bangladesh Prime Minister Tarique Rahman to China in the last week of June opened up a new era of strategic relationship between the two countries. The signing of the Teesta Comprehensive Development and Restoration Treaty has serious implications for India's river system in the north eastern part. Hasina's going back on her own has created the right environment for the Indian side to take up bilateral issues in a friendly manner.

Assam's Schools at a crossroads

Assam's school education has reached a defining moment. The conversation is no longer confined to increasing enrolment, constructing classrooms or distributing textbooks. Those goals remain important, but they no longer answer the most pressing question before the state. The real challenge today is whether every child in Assam is receiving

an education that prepares them for a rapidly changing society while offering equal opportunities regardless of birthplace or family background. This question carries enormous significance because education influences every aspect of public life, from economic productivity and social mobility to democratic participation and cultural continuity. A school is not merely a place where children study prescribed lessons. It is where values are shaped, confidence is built, curiosity is encouraged, and future citizens begin to understand their responsibilities towards society. If schools fail in these responsibilities, the consequences extend far beyond examination results. They affect the state's workforce, governance, public health, technological advancement, and social harmony for decades. Assam has certainly made measurable progress during the past several years. School infrastructure has improved in many districts, enrolment has expanded, girls' participation has increased, and several national and state-level educational reforms have entered classrooms. Initiatives connected with the National Education Policy 2020, foundational literacy, digital learning, teacher development, and curriculum reforms have created new possibilities for strengthening education. Yet impressive policies alone cannot transform learning unless they consistently improve classroom experiences across every district. The gap between policy design and classroom reality remains one of the most significant obstacles confronting Assam's education system. Contemporary society demands more than literacy alone. Young people must develop analytical thinking, communication skills, creativity, scientific understanding, ethical judgment, and adaptability if they are to succeed in an economy shaped by technological innovation and global competition. Schools therefore stand at a crossroads where traditional approaches must evolve without abandoning the cultural and intellectual values that have long defined Assamese society.



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The greatest strength of any education system lies inside the classroom, where teachers and students interact every day. No educational reform can succeed if classroom teaching remains weak, inconsistent, or disconnected from students' actual learning needs. Assam's teachers continue to perform their duties under widely varying circumstances. Many schools in urban areas have comparatively better facilities, greater parental involvement, and easier access to educational resources, while numerous rural, riverine, hill, and remote schools struggle with shortages of teachers, limited subject specialists, poor connectivity, and geographical isolation. Such disparities create unequal educational experiences despite a common curriculum. Foundational literacy and numeracy deserve particular attention because they determine every stage of future learning. Children who cannot read fluently or solve basic mathematical problems during their early years often continue to face academic difficulties throughout secondary education. Addressing these challenges requires sustained investment in teacher training, classroom support, continuous assessment, and learning materials suited to children's developmental stages. Professional development should become an ongoing process rather than an occasional administrative requirement. Teachers must be equipped to use interactive teaching methods, multilingual approaches where appropriate, digital resources, and child-centred learning strategies that encourage understanding instead of mechanical memorisation. Equally important is reducing unnecessary administrative duties that divert teachers from instructional responsibilities. Educational quality also depends on creating classrooms where questioning is encouraged, mistakes become opportunities for learning, and students gradually develop independent thinking instead of depending exclusively on textbook answers. Modern economies increasingly reward individuals capable of solving unfamiliar problems, working collaboratively, and adapting to changing technologies. Schools therefore cannot limit themselves to preparing students only for examinations. They must prepare them for life itself. This broader understanding of education requires stronger libraries, functional laboratories, meaningful sports activities, arts education, environmental awareness, and opportunities for practical learning that connect classroom knowledge with everyday realities.

Educational equity remains an equally urgent concern because opportunities continue to vary significantly across different sections of Assamese society. Geography continues to shape educational outcomes in profound ways. Annual floods interrupt schooling in many districts, damaging buildings, displacing families, and disrupting academic calendars. Students living in river islands often travel long distances under difficult conditions simply to attend school. Children from tea garden communities, economically weaker households, remote tribal villages, and isolated border regions frequently encounter obstacles that extend well beyond the classroom. Financial hardship sometimes forces children to balance education with family responsibilities, increasing absenteeism and eventually contributing to school dropouts. Girls have made remarkable progress in educational participation, yet challenges related to transportation, sanitation, safety, nutrition, and early marriage continue to affect school attendance in certain areas. Children with disabilities require greater institutional support through accessible infrastructure, specialised learning materials, trained teachers, and inclusive classroom practices that enable them to participate fully alongside their peers. Language also deserves careful consideration in a multilingual state like

Assam. Early education in familiar languages strengthens comprehension and cognitive development, while proficiency in Assamese and English expands higher education and employment opportunities. Educational policy must balance these objectives thoughtfully so that linguistic diversity becomes a strength rather than a source of exclusion. The digital divide has emerged as another significant concern in contemporary education. While technology offers enormous educational possibilities, unequal access to electricity, internet connectivity, digital devices, and digital literacy continues to prevent many students from benefiting equally. Technology should complement effective classroom teaching rather than substitute it. Educational equity also depends upon active community participation. Parents, local organisations, school management committees, and civil society all influence children's educational experiences. When communities value education, monitor school functioning, and support children's learning, schools become stronger institutions. Educational inequality ultimately reflects broader social inequalities. Unless every child receives meaningful learn-

ing opportunities, the promise of inclusive development will remain incomplete.

Assam's educational future depends not upon isolated reforms but upon sustained commitment to improving quality while expanding opportunity for every learner. Policymakers must recognise that educational transformation requires patience, consistency, adequate funding, and evidence-based decision-making rather than frequent policy changes driven by short-term objectives. Filling teacher vacancies promptly should remain a priority, particularly in underserved regions where shortages directly affect learning outcomes. Schools require not only classrooms but also libraries stocked with relevant books, laboratories equipped for practical science education, reliable electricity, safe drinking water, clean sanitation facilities, sports infrastructure, and digital resources that genuinely enhance learning rather than merely satisfy administrative targets. Mental health support, career guidance, vocational education, financial literacy, environmental awareness, and civic education should receive greater attention as schools prepare students for an increasingly complex society. Higher education institutions must also strengthen research, innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration with industry so that graduates possess practical skills alongside academic qualifications. Assam's economic future will depend substantially upon the quality of its human capital, making educational investment one of the state's most important development priorities. At the same time, schools should continue nurturing an appreciation of Assamese language, literature, history, cultural traditions and social values. Modernisation should not weaken cultural identity. Instead, education should enable students to engage confidently with the wider world while remaining firmly connected to their own heritage. The success of Assam's schools cannot be measured solely through enrolment statistics or examination pass percentages. Their true success will be reflected in the emergence of thoughtful citizens who possess knowledge, integrity, resilience, compassion, and the confidence to contribute constructively to society. Assam's schools stand at a crossroads because the decisions taken today will influence the state's social and economic landscape for generations. Choosing the path of educational quality alongside genuine equity will ensure that every child receives not merely access to schooling but the opportunity to realise his or her fullest potential. Such a vision demands collective responsibility from governments, educators, parents, communities, and society itself. The future of Assam will ultimately be written inside its classrooms, where today's students are preparing to become tomorrow's leaders, innovators, professionals, and responsible citizens.



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Assam Floods: Rural devastation and the systemic collapse of urban Hydro-Governance

By: Dipak Kurmi

The monsoon framework in Northeast India has once again manifested its devastating potential, precipitating a severe and multi-layered hydrological crisis across the state of Assam. Following a weekend of continuous, high-intensity precipitation, the flood situation has deteriorated sharply, resulting in the loss of life, widespread displacement, and severe disruption to both rural and urban ecosystems. The sudden escalation of water levels has forced the provincial administration to adopt an aggressive emergency footing, mobilizing state resources and requesting the federal armed forces to remain on standby to avert a larger humanitarian catastrophe. As several major river systems breach their structural and natural boundaries, the intersection of extreme meteorological phenomena and systemic municipal vulnerabilities has left multiple districts highly compromised. The crisis is bifurcated into two distinct operational challenges: the acute humanitarian disaster unfolding across the rural landscapes of Upper Assam and the chronic structural failure of urban hydro-governance plaguing major metropolitan centers like Guwahati.

According to the official data released by the Assam State Disaster Management Authority, the recent wave of floods has claimed at least one life in the Sivasagar district, elevating the cumulative mortality toll for this year's monsoon-induced deluges to five individuals. The geographical scope of the crisis is expansive, with more than 57,100 people reported as actively affected across seven distinct districts, specifically Charaideo, Dhemaji, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Tinsukia, and Udalguri. The trajectory of the inundation underscores an alarming velocity; just twenty-four hours prior, the number of individuals suffering from the deluge stood at approximately 24,000 across four districts, indicating that the impact of the floodwaters has more than doubled within a single diurnal cycle. A localized analysis reveals that Charaideo has emerged as the most severely impacted region, with nearly 24,000 residents reeling under the surge, followed closely by Dhemaji with over 22,000 affected citizens, and Dibrugarh, where more than 4,000 individuals are experiencing the direct consequences of the rising waters.

In response to the rapid acceleration of the floodwaters, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has initiated high-level emergency protocols to coordinate rescue operations and expedite the delivery of essential supplies. Utilizing digital communication channels to brief the public, the Chief Minister confirmed that the state government has officially requested the Indian Army and the Indian Air Force to remain on standby for immediate deployment. This precautionary mobilization is targeted primarily at the worst-affected sub-regions of Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Jorhat, where conventional rescue infrastructure could soon become overwhelmed if the current rate of inundation persists. To ensure direct administrative oversight and prevent bureaucratic bottlenecks on the ground, the Chief Minister has deployed four senior cabinet col-

leagues—Ajanta Neog, Bimal Borah, Keshab Mahanta, and Susanta Borgohain—to the Upper Assam region with strict directives to manage relief logistics and guarantee that every displaced family receives timely and adequate assistance.

The logistics of the state-led relief operations are currently managed by local administrative bodies in tandem with regional disaster response teams. The disaster management authority reported the functional operation of fourteen relief camps and distribution centers across four districts, which are currently providing shelter and basic amenities to 440 displaced citizens. Simultaneously, tactical operations executed by the State Disaster Response Force have successfully extracted ten individuals from highly vulnerable positions within the Charaideo district. To sustain the affected populations, authorities have disbursed considerable quantities of essential food supplies over a twenty-four-hour period, including 58.17 quintals of rice, 10.89 quintals of dal, 3.26 quintals of salt, and 326.88 liters of mustard oil. Despite these interventions, the physical scale of the disaster remains immense, with 298 villages completely submerged and approximately 3,874.84 hectares of agricultural crop land suffering extensive damage, threatening the long-term economic stability of the agrarian communities involved.

The destructive capacity of the deluge has not been confined to agricultural sectors; it has severely compromised critical civic infrastructure and the regional livestock economy. Embankments designed to regulate river channels, along with vital transportation networks including roads and bridges, have sustained varying degrees of structural failure across multiple districts. A key focal point of hydrological concern is the Burhidighi River, which is currently flowing well above the designated danger mark at Chenimari in the Khowang region of the Dibrugarh district. Furthermore, the ecological and economic toll is compounded by the impact on domestic animals, with statistics showing that over 37,558 domestic animals and poultry have been adversely affected or displaced by the intrusion of floodwaters into grazing lands and shelters.

Urban centers in Upper Assam have faced severe flash flooding, exposing deep-seated structural issues within local municipal governance and drainage infrastructure. Intense, early-morning downpours caused immediate waterlogging across Sonari, Sivasagar, and portions of Jorhat. In Sonari, located within the Charaideo district, crucial arterial pathways such as the Dhodar Ali Road, alongside numerous secondary residential streets, were transformed into torrents of knee-deep water that persisted for hours. The floodwater quickly breached residential perimeters, causing extensive damage to household assets, furniture, and irreplaceable legal documentation. Long-term residents of Ward 6 expressed profound dismay, noting that the severity of the internal street flooding was unprecedented over the past three and a half decades. Public sentiment in these urban pockets heavily criticizes the municipal authorities, attributing the crisis to neglected drainage maintenance and an inability of existing

channels to handle heavy precipitation events.

The socio-political landscape in Sonari has further complicated the administrative response to this environmental crisis. The current civic gridlock coincides with an acute institutional deadlock within the Sonari Municipal Board, precipitated by ten councilors moving a formal no-confidence motion against the sitting chairperson, Tilak Chandra Neog. Local business owners and residents argue that this political impasse has directly stalled vital public works and structural mitigation projects that could have alleviated the severity of the drainage failure. Meanwhile, in Sivasagar town, the situation mirrored these urban challenges, with all fourteen municipal wards reporting extensive waterlogging. Critical commercial and residential sectors, including Dolmukh Chariati, Muktinath Chariati, Melachakar, Phukan Nagar, Amolapaty, BG Road, HCB Road, ONGC Colony, Babupatty, and Boarding Road, were heavily inundated. While municipal leaders claim that field teams are actively working to clear blockages and prioritize the worst-hit wards, the immediate reality for citizens remains one of severe disruption. Similarly, in Jorhat, municipal authorities have had to resort to emergency water pumps to clear localities where major drainage channels completely overflowed.

While the crisis in Upper Assam unfolds with acute immediacy, a parallel structural failure paralyzes the state capital, Guwahati, illustrating a chronic deficiency in long-term urban hydro-governance. Resolving Guwahati's urban floods requires substantial political will, something that has historically been in short supply. The city's flooding problem is neither new, unknown, nor intrinsically unsolvable; rather, what remains chronically missing is the institutional urgency to act decisively. A few minutes of hail and intense rainfall, which constitutes an ordinary meteorological occurrence for a city accustomed to the subtropical monsoon, was sufficient to bring large parts of the metropolitan area to a complete standstill once again. Streets quickly transformed into active streams, vehicles stalled mid-road, and residents were forced to wade through knee-deep water in historically vulnerable localities such as Anil Nagar, Nabin Nagar, Rukminigaon, and various critical stretches along National Highway 27. These scenes are painfully familiar for a city that designates itself as the gateway to the Northeast, yet continues to be held hostage by an annual crisis that is no longer purely natural, but rather the compounding result of decades of administrative neglect, indecision, and fragmented urban planning.

Each time the metropolitan area floods, a predictable and unproductive blame game unfolds between the citizenry and the state. Citizens routinely accuse the government of operational incompetence, while the government, in turn, points fingers elsewhere, occasionally attributing the source of the excess runoff to regions beyond state borders. Amid this noisy exchange of rhetoric, the core hydrological solution is frequently ignored, leaving residents to wonder why, despite experiencing repeated floods for more than two decades,

the city has failed to build an integrated engineering system capable of coping with even moderate rainfall. The root of the answer lies in the historic absence of a functional, city-wide drainage strategy. Social activists and former legislators, such as Padma Shri awardee Ajoy Kumar Dutta, argue that massive sums of money have been continuously wasted in the name of the Smart City project without laying down the foundational stormwater drainage systems necessary to support a rapidly expanding urban landscape.

This lack of structural execution is emphasized by historical missed opportunities, particularly a major proposal that dates back half a century. Ajoy Kumar Dutta recalls that in 1974, a comprehensive drainage blueprint was designed for the city, for which the World Bank had agreed to provide funding, committing seventy-eight crore rupees across two distinct phases alongside an additional six crore rupees dedicated entirely to preliminary surveys. Following a high-level intervention where the President requested World Bank funding during a pivotal meeting in Delhi, the city stood on the precipice of transforming its urban infrastructure. However, political differences between the then state government and the non-Congress-led Guwahati Municipal Corporation ultimately stalled the initiative, causing the entire project to be shifted to Hyderabad. The consequences of that historic impasse are visible every monsoon season, as piecemeal, reactionary drain construction continues to take precedence over a comprehensive and integrated drainage strategy, rendering current capital expenditures largely ineffective.

Experts and urban planners argue that the modern flooding crisis reflects a much deeper breakdown of the city's natural hydrology rather than mere blockages in artificial conduits. Natural rivers such as the Bharalu and the Bahini, which serve as the primary drainage arteries of the valley, have been reduced over decades to narrow, heavily polluted channels completely incapable of carrying heavy stormwater flows away from the city. Wetlands and natural retention basins that historically absorbed excess rainwater have steadily disappeared under unmitigated human encroachment, while extensive hill-cutting has drastically accelerated surface runoff during heavy showers. This man-made disruption means that when natural wetlands are choked and hills are stripped of vegetation, the rainwater has no viable natural outlet. Consequently, engineering solutions that focus solely on building concrete drains without restoring the surrounding ecosystem are fundamentally flawed and destined to fail.

Multiple studies over the years, spanning from international development agencies to the highly detailed Tahal Group report in 2008, have accurately identified the city's unique problems and recommended practical solutions. Yet, virtually none of these systemic suggestions have been implemented by successive authorities. The modern government maintains that administrative progress is being made, pointing to recent directives from the Housing and Urban Affairs Department instructing consultants to revise the Comprehensive

Drainage Master Plan and the Detailed Project Report for the Bahini-Bharalu basin. While political leadership emphasizes the need for practical, sustainable solutions to address existing gaps, residents remain highly skeptical. The Guwahati Metropolitan Development Authority has been working on this specific master plan for more than two years without achieving final approval, demonstrating that bureaucratic delays carry immediate, tangible consequences for thousands of families whose homes are inundated within minutes of rainfall.

This disconnect between aggressive infrastructure expansion and environmental realities lies at the heart of the regional flooding crisis. Major infrastructure projects continue to move forward, often without fully addressing the underlying flood risks they exacerbate. For instance, the proposed flyover at Jorabat, which forms a vital part of the ambitious six-thousand-one-hundred crore rupee ring road project, has already raised serious concerns among locals due to the area's notoriety for extreme waterlogging, which recently left commuters stranded for nearly nine hours. While sources within the National Highways Authority of India assert that the development will incorporate drainage improvements to address the waterlogging issue, residents rightly worry that building massive concrete structures without fixing the core drainage network will only worsen the accumulation of water. Flyovers, wider roads, and cosmetic Smart City projects cannot compensate for the absence of a legally enforceable drainage master plan that integrates land use, water flow, and ecological preservation.

Ultimately, any sustainable resolution to the urban and rural flooding plaguing Assam requires a unified command structure and a departure from the current system where multiple agencies, including the municipal corporations, development authorities, and the Water Resources Department, work in absolute isolation. The dumping of solid waste and poor municipal maintenance have significantly reduced the carrying capacity of the existing drainage channels, necessitating strict enforcement alongside public responsibility to prevent the clogging of vital conduits. While advanced technologies such as real-time flood monitoring systems, geographic information system mapping, and predictive modeling offer useful support, they cannot substitute for physical infrastructure and ecological restoration. The real issue facing Assam is not the availability of funding, but the setting of civic priorities. As the India Meteorological Department predicts an intensification of moderate to heavy rainfall ranging from six to twelve centimeters over the coming days, the state cannot afford to rely on temporary, fragmented measures. Policymakers must move past endless reports, revised project plans, and monsoon review meetings to exhibit the political courage required to execute long-understood scientific solutions, ensuring that development is measured not just by what rises above the ground, but by the efficiency of the systems functioning beneath it. (the writer can be reached at dipakkurmipltd@gmail.com)

Revamping the tea industry in Assam: Assam Budget 2026-27

By: Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee

The Assam Budget 2026-27 arrives at a moment when the state's tea industry stands at a crossroads between its storied past and an uncertain future. For more than a century, Assam Tea has been synonymous with strength, aroma, and global recognition, yet the industry today faces challenges that demand structural reinvention rather than cosmetic reform. Climate change, fluctuating global prices, rising production costs, and the growing dominance of small tea growers have reshaped the landscape. The Budget, therefore, does not merely allocate funds; it attempts to reimagine the very architecture of tea production, branding, and sustainability. In doing so, it positions Assam Tea not as a relic of colonial plantation history but as a dynamic, future ready agro industrial ecosystem capable of competing with the world's finest teas.

The Budget's vision begins with modernization, a theme that runs like an undercurrent through every proposal. The government recognizes that traditional methods of cultivation, while culturally significant, are no longer sufficient to sustain productivity. Mechanization support, including incentives for pruning machines, leaf harvesters, and energy efficient dryers, signals a shift toward scientific agriculture. This is not merely about replacing manual labor but about enhancing precision, reducing costs, and ensuring consistency in leaf quality. The introduction of a comprehensive soil health mission further strengthens this approach. Soil testing laboratories in major tea belts such as Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Sonitpur will allow planters to understand nutrient deficiencies and adopt targeted interventions. The Budget also emphasizes collaboration with research institutions, particularly the Tocklai Tea Research Institute, which has long been the intellectual backbone of Assam's tea science. Strengthening Tocklai's capacity to develop climate resilient clones, pest resistant varieties, and innovative cultivation techniques is a step toward ensuring that Assam Tea remains competitive in a rapidly evolving global market.

Yet modernization alone cannot address the structural imbalance within the industry. Small tea growers (STGs), who now contribute more than half of Assam's total tea production, often operate without adequate support, infrastructure, or bargaining power. The Budget's focus on empowering STGs is therefore both timely and transformative. A proposed minimum support price framework for green leaf aims to stabilize incomes and reduce exploitation by bought leaf

factories. Cluster based processing units, supported by government grants, will allow small growers to process their own leaves rather than selling them at low prices. This democratization of production infrastructure marks a significant departure from the plantation centric model that has dominated Assam's tea economy for decades. Digital traceability systems, another key component of the Budget, will help small growers meet global quality standards and access export markets. By integrating technology with grassroots production, the Budget attempts to create an inclusive ecosystem where small growers are not merely participants but stakeholders in Assam's global tea identity.

Global branding forms the next major pillar of the Budget's strategy. Assam Tea, despite its reputation, has often struggled to position itself as a premium product in international markets. The Budget's emphasis on GI based marketing seeks to correct this imbalance by highlighting the unique terroir, flavor profile and heritage of Assam's orthodox and specialty teas. Export facilitation hubs in Guwahati and Dibrugarh will streamline logistics, reduce bottlenecks, and provide exporters with access to quality testing, packaging, and documentation services. The modernization of the Guwahati Tea Auction Centre, including the introduction of AI based grading systems, reflects a broader shift toward transparency and efficiency. These reforms collectively aim to reposition Assam Tea as a global luxury product rather than a mass market commodity.

Climate resilience is another critical dimension of the Budget, reflecting the growing urgency of environmental challenges. Assam's tea gardens have witnessed erratic rainfall, rising temperatures, and increased pest attacks in recent years. The Budget responds with a suite of sustainability initiatives: rainwater harvesting incentives, shade tree plantation drives, and support for carbon neutral tea estates. These measures are not merely ecological interventions but economic necessities. Sustainable practices reduce long term costs, improve soil health, and align Assam Tea with global environmental standards. The Budget's focus on climate resilience also reflects a deeper understanding of tea as a living ecosystem where soil, water, biodiversity, and human labor coexist in delicate balance.

The cultural dimension of tea finds expression in the Budget's emphasis on tourism. Assam's tea gardens are not just sites of production; they are landscapes of memory, heritage, and identity. The proposal to develop tea heritage circuits connect-



ing Jorhat, Dibrugarh and Sonitpur seeks to transform tea from an agricultural commodity into a cultural experience. Estate based homestays, supported by the government, will allow visitors to immerse themselves in the rhythms of tea life — from early morning plucking to factory visits and tasting sessions. The expansion of tea festivals, with a focus on music, literature, and culinary traditions, further integrates tea into Assam's cultural economy. Tourism, in this context, becomes a bridge between heritage and livelihood, offering new opportunities for local communities while strengthening Assam's global cultural footprint.

The Budget's allocations reflect a careful balance between immediate needs and long term vision. Funds directed toward modernization, small grower empowerment, branding, sustainability, and tourism collectively form a multi layered strategy. The underlying philosophy is clear: Assam Tea must evolve, diversify, and innovate to remain relevant in a world where consumer preferences are shifting toward artisanal, organic, and ethically sourced products. The Budget's proposals, therefore, are not isolated interventions but interconnected pathways toward a more resilient and globally competitive tea industry. What makes the Budget particularly significant is its recogni-

tion of tea as both an economic and cultural asset. The mist laden mornings of Assam's tea gardens, the rhythmic movement of pluckers, the hum of factories, and the aroma of freshly brewed tea are not merely sensory experiences; they are symbols of a heritage that has shaped the region's identity for generations. The Budget's attempt to integrate technology, sustainability, and cultural tourism reflects a holistic understanding of tea as a living heritage. It acknowledges that the future of Assam Tea lies not in preserving the past but in reimagining it for a new era.

The Budget also implicitly addresses the socio economic dimensions of the tea industry. Tea workers, many of whom belong to marginalized communities, have historically faced challenges related to wages, housing, healthcare, and education. While the Budget does not directly overhaul labor policies, its emphasis on modernization, cluster based units, and tourism indirectly creates opportunities for improved livelihoods. Mechanization reduces drudgery, cluster units generate local employment, and tourism opens new avenues for community participation. The Budget's focus on inclusive growth ensures that the benefits of modernization do not remain confined to large estates but extend to small growers, workers, and

local communities.

In the broader context of Assam's economy, the tea industry remains a cornerstone. It contributes significantly to employment, exports, and rural development. The Budget's attempt to revamp the industry therefore has implications beyond tea; it influences agriculture, tourism, infrastructure, and cultural policy. By positioning tea as a driver of innovation and sustainability, the Budget aligns Assam's economic strategy with global trends. The emphasis on digital traceability, AI based grading, and climate resilient cultivation reflects a forward looking approach that integrates tradition with technology. The Budget also encourages diversification within the tea sector. Specialty teas, including white tea, purple tea, and artisanal blends, are gaining popularity among global consumers. The Budget's support for research and branding creates an environment where innovation can flourish. Young entrepreneurs, tea sommeliers, and boutique tea brands can leverage government support to create unique products that reflect Assam's terroir. This diversification not only enhances global competitiveness but also reduces dependence on traditional CTC production, which faces price volatility in international markets.

As one reflects on the Budget's proposals, a larger narrative emerges — a narrative of transformation. Assam Tea, once shaped by colonial plantations, is now being reimagined through the lenses of science, sustainability, and cultural identity. The Budget's vision is not merely administrative; it is poetic in its ambition. It imagines a future where drones map soil moisture in century old gardens, where small growers use digital platforms to access global markets, where tourists walk through heritage trails listening to stories of tea's journey, and where Assam Tea stands proudly on the world stage as a symbol of quality, resilience, and cultural richness. The Budget 2026-27, therefore, is more than a financial document; it is a manifesto for the future of Assam Tea. It recognizes the challenges, acknowledges the heritage, and charts a path toward innovation. The mist over the tea gardens may remain unchanged, but beneath that mist, a quiet revolution is unfolding — one that promises to reshape the destiny of Assam's most iconic industry. (International Tagore Awarded Multilingual writer and poet Dr Ratan Bhattacharjee is a Former Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, USA)

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Culture of convenience and eroding tolerance

By: Lalit Nath

Once upon a time, the pace of life was not as swift as it is today. Waiting for a letter for weeks on end, waiting months for a government or personal matter to reach completion, patiently anticipating scheduled transport for a long journey, or even saving money over an extended period to purchase a cherished item—these were the natural norms of society. People understood that the meaningful things in life could not be obtained instantaneously. Consequently, patience, restraint and waiting were intrinsic, natural components of daily human practice. This state of waiting matured human beings from within. However, the unprecedented developments in science, technology, and globalization in the twenty-first century have fundamentally altered this traditional picture. Today, at the mere touch of a few fingers or the click of a button, numerous life needs are fulfilled in an instant. From food delivery to banking, shopping, education and healthcare services, everything seems to reside directly within the palm of one's hand. Even establishing instant contact with a person in any remote corner of the globe has become a completely routine affair. Without a doubt, this digital transformation has rendered human civilization more dynamic, convenient and comfortable—representing a major positive milestone of modern society.

Yet, behind the curtain of this unprecedented culture of convenience, a profound social crisis is quietly taking shape. In truth, technological convenience itself is not the problem; the issue arises when it gradually begins to paralyze human psychology. These conveniences have not merely altered our lifestyle; rather, they have completely reshaped the way human beings think and form expectations. Consequently, as life has become progressively easier, human

patience, perseverance and the innate capacity to wait have steadily eroded. This growing inclination toward instant gratification has birthed a mindset wherein even minor delays, slight inconveniences, or temporary failures have become intolerable to modern individuals.

The mental fortitude required to confront the natural complexities and uncertainties of life has grown progressively weak. As a result, even a brief traffic gridlock on the road, a slow internet connection, or waiting just a few minutes at a bank counter causes many to become visibly impatient and enraged. This obsession with immediate fulfillment has, bit by bit, eroded the fabric of human tolerance.

Tolerance is not merely a word; it is the most fundamental virtue shaping human personality and character. No genuine success in life is attained instantaneously; enduring achievement comes only through perseverance, arduous labor and maturing oneself by learning from failure. As the renowned American author and educator Helen Keller observed: "The highest result of education is tolerance."

In other words, education is not simply a medium for gathering information or acquiring knowledge; it is a vital instrument for building character and psychological resilience. Yet, in today's convenience-driven environment, a major question arises as to how far our modern educational system succeeds in cultivating these essential values among students.

The most alarming impact of this culture of convenience is visible among the younger generation. Today's children are growing up in an artificial environment where almost every desire is fulfilled in the blink of an eye. At the slightest sign of restlessness or boredom, a mobile phone is thrust into their hands, or they are immersed in the mechanical world of videos and online games. Consequently, op-

portunities for children to naturally develop virtues such as patience, concentration, self-control and emotional stability are rapidly slipping away.

This intolerance is starkly evident in the environment of contemporary schools. Slight disagreements, a loss on the playing field, or minor criticism from teachers are no longer easily accepted by many students. As a result, incidents of uncontrolled anger, physical altercations and conflict among peers are steadily rising. However, blaming children alone for this trend would be unjust. An excessively competitive, score-centric education system, combined with overindulgent parenting, has deprived children of the natural opportunity to learn from life's genuine struggles and failures.

Tolerance is by no means a sign of weakness; it is, in reality, a deep spiritual and psychological strength. In our rural and indigenous social structures, countless quiet individuals continue to serve as living testaments to this strength. Our farmers and laborers, who battle harsh weather and toil day and night pouring sweat onto the soil, along with mothers who hold households together with boundless patience, sacrifice and affection, are the true embodiments of endurance. It is their fortitude that continues to protect society from collapsing into fragments. In stark contrast, the lack of this virtue in modern convenience-driven life has led to an alarming rise in anger, friction and social intolerance over minor issues. Therefore, the greatest call of our contemporary era is not to abandon modern technology or conveniences, but rather to practice a prudent, disciplined, and controlled usage of them. The time has arrived for families, educational institutions, and society at large to consciously cultivate the true values of patience, self-regulation and waiting.

The ultimate goal of civilizational progress cannot merely be to reduce human effort or multiply material comforts; making human beings more sensitive, thoughtful, and humane must remain one of its primary objectives. If the expansion of physical conveniences steadily corrodes our inner patience and endurance, then such progress will forever remain incomplete and perilous. What today's world requires far more than newer technology is a healthy equilibrium between convenience and tolerance. For every timeless and truly valuable attainment in life remains possible only through the rigorous practice of time, dedication and patience.

Vikram-1: A Golden chapter in new India's journey to space

By: Lalit Garg

India has once again demonstrated that when determination, scientific vision, and innovation converge, the sky is no longer the limit—it is merely the beginning of limitless possibilities. The successful launch of Vikram-1, India's first privately developed orbital rocket, is not merely a technological milestone; it is a powerful declaration of an Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India), an innovation-driven economy, and a science-led future. Launched under Mission Agaman from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota, this historic mission has added a glorious new chapter to India's space history. It has unequivocally established that space exploration is no longer the exclusive domain of government institutions; India's private enterprises are now prepared to compete and lead on the global stage. Vikram-1 marks the dawn of India's private space revolution and symbolizes the nation's soaring scientific aspirations.

The success of Vikram-1 is also a fitting tribute to the visionary scientist Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, the father of India's space programme, who firmly believed that space technology was not a luxury for a developing nation but an essential instrument of national development. Today, that vision finds a modern expression in Skyroot Aerospace, which has scripted history with its very first orbital launch. India has now joined the select group of nations whose private companies have successfully developed orbital launch vehicles. Just as SpaceX transformed the global commercial space industry, India has unveiled its own indigenous model of private space innovation. Technologically, Vikram-1 is an outstanding achievement. Constructed almost entirely from advanced carbon-composite materials, the rocket is lighter, stronger, and significantly more cost-effective than conventional launch vehicles. Extensive use of 3D printing technology has substantially reduced manufacturing costs. This innovation positions India to become a major player in the rapidly expanding global market for launching small satellites.

As demand for small satellites continues to rise across sectors such as telecommunications, weather forecasting, agriculture, defence, disaster management, internet connectivity, and artificial intelligence, India's reputation for delivering reliable and economical launch services could become a significant competitive advantage. The naming of the rocket after Dr. Vikram Sarabhai is itself deeply meaningful. By christening its first launch vehicle "Vikram-1," Skyroot Aerospace has paid homage to the architect of India's space programme while conveying an inspiring message to Indian industry—that commercial success and national heritage can go hand in hand. It recalls April 1975, when India's first satellite was named Aryabhata, honouring the legendary mathematician and astronomer. Such traditions reinforce the nation's respect for its scientific legacy.

This achievement is not solely the success of one company; it is also the outcome of visionary policy reforms. By opening the space sector to private participation, establishing institutions such as IN-SPaCE and liberalising foreign direct investment norms, the Government of India has created an enabling ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship. Today, numerous Indian space startups are making remarkable progress in satellite manufacturing, launch systems, space communications, and data services.



These developments are laying a strong foundation for a knowledge-based economy.

Yet, every milestone brings new challenges. While Vikram-1's maiden mission has been successful, sustainable success in the space industry requires consistency rather than a single achievement. Skyroot Aerospace must now compete with established global players such as SpaceX, Rocket Lab, and several rapidly growing private Chinese space companies. Securing regular customers, ensuring timely launches, maintaining cost competitiveness, achieving high reliability and eventually developing reusable launch technologies will determine its long-term success. In the space business, credibility is built through repeated excellence. This historic accomplishment also raises an important concern: Can ISRO retain its finest scientific talent? In recent years, several experienced scientists have been drawn towards the private sector—not merely because of higher salaries, but also due to greater research freedom, faster decision-making, improved work culture, and stronger support for innovation.

ISRO has earned worldwide admiration through landmark missions such as Chandrayaan, Mangalyaan, Aditya-L1, and the upcoming Gaganyaan programme. Achieving world-class results despite limited resources has become its hallmark. However, if a gradual migration of scientific talent continues, India's long-term research capabilities and national space ambitions could face challenges. Therefore, ISRO's greatest responsibility today extends beyond launching new missions—it must also inspire, reward and retain exceptional scientific minds. The government should strengthen ISRO by introducing globally competitive compensation, state-of-the-art research infrastructure, greater institutional autonomy, and policies that actively encourage innovation. Rather than fostering competition between public institutions and private enterprises, India should build a collaborative ecosystem. Just as NASA and SpaceX complement one another in advancing America's space ambitions, a strong partnership between ISRO and India's private space companies can propel the country towards global leadership.

Equally important is the need to bring space science into schools and universities. Science must become a national movement rather than remain confined to laboratories. Young scientists, engineers, and innovators should be encouraged to embrace entrepreneurship through targeted support for space technology startups. If every state establishes Space Technology Innovation Centres, strengthens research partner-

ships between universities and industries, and expands investments in advanced space technologies, India could emerge as one of the world's foremost centres of space innovation within the next decade. To prepare the foundation for future achievements, several strategic initiatives deserve priority:

- Launch joint research programmes between ISRO and private space companies.
- Invest aggressively in reusable launch vehicles and green propulsion technologies.
- Strengthen indigenous manufacturing and supply chains for space systems.
- Create dedicated funding mechanisms to promote space entrepreneurship among young innovators.
- Simplify and modernise India's space regulations to make them more transparent and investment-friendly.

Simultaneously, equal emphasis must be placed on managing space debris, protecting the space environment, and expanding international cooperation, because the future of space exploration is not merely a technological challenge but also an environmental and ethical responsibility. Vikram-1 has proved that India is no longer merely a nation reaching space; it is becoming a nation capable of shaping the global space economy. This achievement reflects the confidence of a new India, the brilliance of its youth, and the triumph of scientific thinking. It tells the inspiring story of a country that once transported rocket components on bicycles and bullock carts, and today is making a powerful mark in the international commercial space industry through private enterprise. In essence, Vikram-1 is far more than a rocket—it is a soaring symbol of India's scientific confidence and technological renaissance. It reminds us that when visionary policies, scientific talent, entrepreneurial spirit, and national determination move in harmony, even the impossible becomes achievable.

The success of India's private space sector is a clarion call to every young dreamer passionate about science: "Space pioneers, march forward—the entire sky belongs to you." India must now treat this historic accomplishment not as a destination but as the beginning of a far greater journey. By combining ISRO's glorious legacy with the dynamism of private enterprise, the nation can build a robust ecosystem of research, innovation, and technological excellence. Only then will it truly be possible to say that not only the Earth, but the vast expanse of space itself has become the next frontier of India's remarkable development story.



The Ebola outbreak that was declared in eastern Congo on May 15 Ebola death toll in Congo rises to at least 930, including dozens of health workers

BUNIA (CONGO), July 20: The death toll in Congo's Ebola outbreak has risen to at least 930, the country's Ministry of Health said on Monday, with 37 new deaths reported in a 24-hour span Friday into Saturday, one of the highest totals.

The deaths were recorded out of the 2,344 cases confirmed as of Saturday, the health ministry said.

The Ebola outbreak that was declared in eastern Congo on May 15 is the fastest-growing Ebola outbreak on record. The Bundibugyo virus responsible for the outbreak is less common than others that cause Ebola disease, and there is no approved vaccine or treatment.

Ebola is highly contagious and can be transmitted to people from wild animals. It spreads in the human population through contact with bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen, and with contaminated surfaces and materials such as bedding and clothing. The disease is rare but severe and often



fatal.

The surge in deaths comes as safety fears have restricted the response in the worst-affected province of Ituri. A total of five provinces have been affected, all in the eastern region where rebel violence is rampant.

At least 12 attacks — mostly fueled by scepticism and rumours —

have been recorded against health facilities and teams since the outbreak was declared in mid-May, authorities said Saturday. Many health workers, meanwhile, have walked off their jobs as they protest the lack of payment.

At least 36 health workers infected with the virus have died. The World Health Organisation

last week expressed concerns that 80 per cent of new Ebola cases were emerging from unknown chains of transmission, a sign the outbreak is spreading faster than health officials can track despite an expanding response.

In the more than two months since the outbreak started, it has recorded an average increase of about 272 cases and 111 deaths per week, according to data from Congo's Health Ministry. The data also show that the weekly increases accelerated over time, particularly in July, when both reported cases and deaths rose more rapidly than in the earlier weeks.

The ministry's latest update said in its latest update that 724 patients are currently in isolation and in hospitals, and that it is intensifying response efforts in affected health zones.

"Patient care and support capacities are consolidating, with 22 new recoveries recorded in 24 hours," the ministry said. (AP)

Moldova proposes exploring possibility of direct connectivity with India: official

CHISINAU (MOLDOVA), July 20: Noting the increase in the number of Indians travelling to Moldova, a top diplomat on Monday said the Moldovan authorities had proposed exploring the possibility of direct connectivity with India.

Addressing a press conference during President Drouad Murmu's historic state visit to the eastern European country, Secretary (West) in the Ministry of External Affairs, Sibi George, said most of the capitals are looking for some form of connectivity with India.

"There was a proposal from the side of Moldova to explore the possibility of direct connectivity," he said in response to a question asked by PTI.

George said people-to-people connectivity is very important, and the number of Indians travelling to this part of the world has increased significantly.

Moldova has around 2,000 Indian students pursuing medical studies, and, therefore, there is a demand from both the general pub-



lic and the government for some kind of direct connectivity, he said. "I don't know when it will happen, but it is definitely part of the wish list which we have," George said.

He also said there is a determination on the part of both countries to double the bilateral trade.

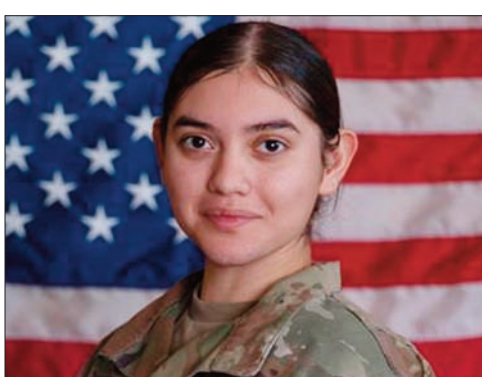
"The trade figures at present are very small. There are multiple factors for that. One of the objectives and one of the deliverables is a de-

termination by both countries to double the trade in the next few years," George said.

According to official data, the bilateral trade between India and Moldova was USD 16.75 million in 2023-24.

Moldova is a small (33,846 sq km) landlocked country in Eastern Europe, strategically located between Romania to the west and Ukraine to the north, east and south. (PTI)

US soldiers killed by Iran were from Texas and Hawaii, military says



WASHINGTON, July 20: Two US soldiers killed in Jordan by Iranian ballistic missile and drone attacks were identified on Monday, the first troop deaths from direct Iranian fire since the opening days of the war.

The Defence Department said in a statement that 1st Lt. Tyler James Feehan, 25, of Ewa Beach, Hawaii, and Pvt. Isabella Gonzales, 19, of Carrollton, Texas, was killed in Jordan. They were deployed to support a US mission against the Islamic State group, the statement said.

The US military says 17 service members have been killed in the war with Iran.

The deaths reflect the complicated reality that American soldiers don't need to be on the ground in Iran for there to be lethal risks in a conflict that involves drones, missiles and aeroplanes. American forces are arrayed across the Middle East, making other nations targets of Iran and its allies as the fighting has escalated after a breakdown in peace talks.

President Donald Trump has said the war is necessary to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons. Trump, a Republican, now faces political pressure to bring the war to a close and avoid the kind of prolonged Middle East conflict he had cam-

paigned against.

An American service member was also killed in northern Iraq on Saturday during a "controlled detonation" of unexploded ordnance from a downed Iranian drone, US Central Command said Sunday. A second service member was wounded and was receiving medical treatment for a minor injury.

The military said it was withholding additional information until 24 hours after families had been notified.

Iranian authorities said US strikes in just the past three weeks have killed at least 50 people and wounded more than 500 others, including eight killed in a strike on a bridge Friday.

Both sides have targeted civilian infrastructure relied on by millions of people. Workers on ships, as well as foreign workers and others in Gulf nations, Israel and Lebanon have also died in the conflict.

Shortly after the US and Israel began the war on Feb. 28, an Iranian drone strike at a civilian port in Kuwait killed six American soldiers. The soldiers were part of a supply and logistics unit based in Iowa that was working at a shipping container-style building that had no defences.

A seventh soldier died more than a week after being wounded during a March 1 attack by Iran on the Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia.

Later in March, six service members were killed when a KC-135 refuelling aircraft supporting US military operations against Iran crashed in Iraq. The aircraft was in "friendly" airspace when an unspecified incident involving another aircraft took place, according to US Central Command.

On Monday, the US military said a Navy pilot died in a helicopter crash in the Arabian Sea. The Navy initially described the July 1 crash as an emergency landing and said there was "no indication the emergency was caused by hostile action." The remaining three sailors aboard the helicopter were rescued. (AP)

Ukraine fires 400 drones toward Moscow as Zelenskyy grapples with protests

MOSCOW, July 20: Ukraine fired more than 400 drones toward Moscow in its latest major attack on the Russian capital, the city's mayor said Monday.

The blitz came hours after Russia bombarded Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities with ballistic missiles in a relentless cycle of tit-for-tat strikes that make a settlement to end Moscow's more than 4-year-old all-out invasion appear a distant possibility.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, meanwhile, said he would hold "key talks" on Monday as he tries to defuse a domestic political crisis, after last week's government reshuffle exposed a deep split between the military's old guard and young innovators over how to fight the war.

Zelenskyy needs to reassure Ukrainians that sacrificing 35-year-old Mykhailo Fedorov as defence minister and keeping faith with 60-year-old Soviet-trained Gen. Oleksandr Syrskiy as armed forces chief won't derail the fight against Russia.

Days of street protests in favour of Fedorov and against Syrskiy followed Zelenskyy's move.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanyin said over 400 Ukrainian drones were sent toward the Russian capital from late Sunday until early Monday, with most downed far from the city and 85 intercepted near it.

Moscow regional Gov. Andrei Vorobyov said 10 people were wounded by Ukrainian drones, while several residential buildings and civilian infrastructure facilities were damaged.

The attack started a fire at the Yuzhnye Vrata industrial park, about 30 kilometres (18 miles) south of Moscow, according to Yevgeniya Khurustaleva, the head of the Domodedovo area of the Moscow region.

The Astra news outlet reported the assault also caused a fire at an oil depot in Podolsk, about 20 kilometres (12 miles) south of Moscow, but there was no official confirmation of the strike.

Ukrainian forces hit logistics facilities and an oil depot in the Moscow region, Zelenskyy said, adding that Kyiv's forces hit two vessels belonging to Russia's so-called shadow fleet transporting sanctioned oil and four dry cargo ships in the Black Sea.

A drone struck a passenger bus in Shebekino in Rus-



sia's Belgorod region bordering Ukraine, killing five people — four women and a boy — and injuring 23 others, according to acting Gov. Alexander Shuyayev.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's claims.

Ukraine's long-range drone technology has evolved during the war, posing a problem for Russia, whose huge land mass is hard to protect fully. Kyiv's forces have aimed especially at Russian oil facilities, causing fuel shortages and embarrassing Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In May, the Russian Defence Ministry said air defences downed 1,054 Ukrainian drones in a 24-hour period.

As Kyiv pleads with foreign partners to supply it with sophisticated interceptors that can counter Russian ballistic missiles, which are much harder to stop than drones or cruise missiles, Moscow's forces have sought to take advantage of the weaknesses in Ukraine's air defences.

Ballistic missiles fly faster than the speed of sound and can reach Kyiv in minutes, giving air defences little time to react and civilians to reach shelter.

Russia has stepped up its use of ballistic missiles recently. Ukrainian officials said Sunday that Moscow's bombardment killed at least six people and wounded dozens.

"Russian forces have launched more ballistic missiles against Ukraine thus far in July than Russia reportedly produces each month," the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said late Sunday. (AP)

China hints at Xi's visit to US on course despite election meddling row

BEIJING, July 20: China on Monday said it is in talks with the US over the planned visit of President Xi Jinping to Washington in September, signalling that the visit is on track despite recent tensions after President Donald Trump's allegation that Beijing interfered in American elections.

"Head-of-state diplomacy provides irreplaceable strategic guidance for US-China relations," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a media briefing here on Monday while replying to a question over US Secretary Marco Rubio voicing confidence that Trump's remarks wouldn't affect Xi's visit to the US.

The two sides had "maintained communication regarding the arrangements for the heads of state's interactions later this year," Lin said.

On Sunday, Rubio, before flying to the Philippines to attend a meeting of ASEAN foreign ministers, struck an optimistic note when asked whether Trump's remarks would affect Xi's visit to the US.

"We anticipate that the trip is happening in September," Rubio said.

"They've continued to send over their teams to prepare for it, and I've heard nothing otherwise," he said of the Chinese side. "I have no reason to believe that they won't be coming," he told the media, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported. (PTI)

Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthis say they will block Saudi shipping at Red Sea gateway

CAIRO, July 20: Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels on Monday announced they are imposing a maritime embargo against Saudi Arabia in retaliation for a blockade on Yemen and a recent attack on Sanaa International Airport, threatening another vital waterway for global shipping and raising fears of renewed conflict.

A Houthi military spokesperson, Yahya Saree, said in a video statement that the maritime ban against Saudi Arabia will be effective immediately, describing it as an "equation of an eye for an eye."

There were few details, but the deputy head of the Houthi media office, Nasruddin Amer, said on X that the Bab al-Mandeb strait will be closed in response to what he called Saudi Arabia's "unjust blockade on Yemenis for over 10 years."

Bab el-Mandeb, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is the gateway to the Red Sea through which around 12 per cent of the world's trade usually passes. A fourth of global container trade transits through the 32-kilometre (20-mile)-wide strait to and from the Suez Canal.

The Houthis earlier demonstrated their ability to disrupt shipping there when they targeted ships for months over the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, with over 100 vessels attacked. It is unclear whether the Houthis will resume that level of attack against neighbouring Saudi Arabia. (AP)

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Singapore minister resigns over controversial 'interactions' with woman

SINGAPORE, July 20: Singapore's acting Minister-in-Charge of Muslim Affairs Faishal Ibrahim has resigned after questions regarding his conduct were raised over his interactions with a woman, according to an official statement.

"Most of their interactions took place through online messages. They also met on the sidelines of public events," Prime Minister Lawrence Wong said in a statement on Monday.

Last month, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) received an email from a woman detailing her interactions with Faishal, following which Wong directed the relevant authorities to review the situation.

During the investigation, both parties alleged harassment against each other. Later, the police concluded that no criminal offences were committed and that no action will be taken against either of them.

"But there was a separate question of whether Associate Professor Faishal's conduct met the standards expected of a Political Office Holder and MP," the statement said. (PTI)

The monastery is considered one of the oldest monasteries in Nepal Nepal to mint new coins, removes controversial map from one-rupee coin

KATHMANDU, July 20: The Nepal government has approved minting newly designed coins, removing the country's controversial map that included Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani from the one-rupee coin.

Nepal claims that Lipulekh and Kalapani are its territories, whereas India maintains that the territories belong to it.

Nepal's then K P Oli-led government in May 2020 included the territories, including Kalapani and Lipulekh, in its official map.

Sources said the Council of Ministers on Thursday approved the minting of newly designed one-rupee and two-rupee coins by the Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB).

As per the cabinet's decision, Nepal's new political map will be removed from the one-rupee coin, they said.

The redesigned one-rupee coin will replace the controversial map of Nepal, which included Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani, with the image of the Lo



Ghyakar Monastery, located in Marang village of Mustang, they said.

The monastery is considered one of the oldest monasteries in Nepal. However, the two-rupee coin will retain the map printed earlier, according to cabinet sources.

Commenting on the development, the Nepali Communist Party's senior leader Bhim Rawal on Sunday criticised the govern-

ment's decision to remove the new political map from the one-rupee coin, calling it a serious move against Nepal's territorial integrity.

Rawal demanded that both the government and the ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party immediately clarify the matter.

"If the government led by Prime Minister Balen Shah has indeed decided to remove the map of

Nepal, including Limpiyadhura, Lipulekh and Kalapani, from the one-rupee coin and replace it with the image of the Lo Ghyakar Monastery, it will constitute another serious anti-national decision and a blow to Nepal's territorial integrity," Rawal said.

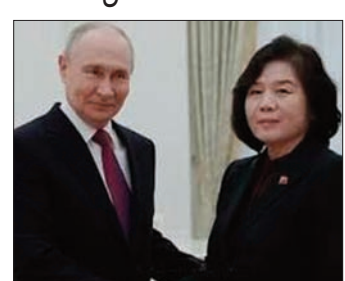
The Nepal Rastra Bank had proposed the new designs to replace the old ones to reduce the size and weight of coins, the bank's spokesperson Guru Prasad Paudel told PTI.

The new political map of Nepal cannot be accommodated in the one-rupee coin, which is smaller in size, he added.

The other side of the two-rupee coin will have Janaki Temple in it, he said.

The size of the new coins will be 3.2 grams from the earlier 4 grams for the rupee one and 3.8 grams from 5 grams for the rupee two. Similarly, it will be made of steel instead of mixed metal, and the colour will be steel white instead of yellow, he said. (PTI)

Russian President Putin meets with North Korean foreign minister in latest high-level diplomacy



SEOUL, July 20: Russian President Vladimir Putin met with North Korea's foreign minister and thanked Pyongyang for supporting his war against Ukraine, in the latest high-level diplomacy between the countries, Russian state media reported.

The visit by North Korean Foreign Minister Choe Son Hui comes

without an obvious occasion, such as a multilateral diplomatic event or state anniversary, and has raised speculation that she may be coordinating a possible visit to Russia by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. North Korean state media said Choe departed for Russia on Saturday at the invitation of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov but has yet to comment on the purpose of her visit.

Yoon Min Ho, spokesperson for South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles affairs related to North Korea, said Monday that Seoul was closely monitoring the meetings but declined to assess whether Moscow and Pyongyang were discussing another summit between their leaders. (AP)

PRESS ADVERTISEMENT

GOVERNMENT OF ARUNACHAL PRADESH
Department of Animal Husbandry, Veterinary & Dairy Development
Itanagar

No. AHV/AWBI/Misc-01/134/

Dated 17th July 2026

Call for Expression of Interest (Eoi)

The Secretary, Department of Animal Husbandry, Veterinary & Dairy Development (AHV&DD), Government of Arunachal Pradesh, invites Expression of Interest (Eoi) from experienced and capable Agencies / Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for selection of Professional Agencies having proven knowledge / expertise in running ABC (Animal Birth Control) Centers for providing services of Operationalizing and running the four (04) nos. of ABC Centers, Dog-Catching, Shelter Management and Post-CSVR activities in the state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The detailed Terms of Reference (ToR) and other relevant information about the proposed engagement may be obtained from the website of the Department (www.ahvdd.arunachal.gov.in). The Eoi, along with all supporting documents, should be submitted to the undersigned within 30 days from the date of issue of this notice.

Sd/-
Secretary (AHV&DD)
Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh
Itanagar

DIPRI/ARN-208

'The INDIA opposition will demand accountability from the government on every issue'

INDIA bloc vows to demand accountability from govt on Ram temple donation 'theft', paper leaks

NEW DELHI, July 20: The opposition INDIA bloc on Monday vowed to demand accountability from the government over issues such as the Ram temple donation "theft" and the "systematic collapse" of the education system, asserting that the battle for people's rights would be fought with full strength.

INDIA bloc floor leaders met in the chamber of leader of opposition in the Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge before the start of Parliament's Monsoon session and deliberated on the opposition's strategy.

Besides Kharge, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Congress' deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi, Congress general secretary Jai Ram Ramesh, Samajwadi Party's Dharmendra Yadav, NCP (SP)'s Supriya Sule, TMC's Saugata Roy and Sagarika Ghose, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Sanjay Raut, JMM's Mahua Maji, CPI(M)'s



John Brittas and P Santhosh Kumar, among others, attended the meeting.

In a post on X after the meeting, Kharge said that starting today, in the Monsoon session of Parliament, the Congress party and the INDIA bloc will raise the voice of the people and demand answers from the Modi govern-

ment on every issue.

"Whether it is the matter of theft in donations for Shri Ram Temple and deception of faith -- crores of devotees contributed their hard-earned money with devotion for the temple construction; they deserve justice, conduct an immediate independent investigation, and make the full ac-

count public.

"Or whether it is the matter of paper leaks and the systematic collapse of the education system -- 152 paper leaks have occurred from 2014 till now, 25 children have lost their lives, Dharmendra Pradhan will have to be sacked," the Congress chief said.

Similarly, the issue of forcibly imposing ethanol blending on 3.5 crore vehicle owners, which the government calls an "experiment", he said.

Is looting the public's hard-earned money the BJP's only tool, Kharge asked.

Besides these issues, other important matters and upcoming bills are questions that will affect the country's people, he added.

"The INDIA opposition will demand accountability from the government on every issue. The battle for the people's rights, the people's voice, and the people's trust will be fought with full strength," Kharge said. (PTI)

MP govt tables UCC Bill in assembly amid Cong uproar over CM land purchase allegations

BHOPAL, July 20: The Madhya Pradesh government on Monday introduced the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill in the assembly, where noisy scenes were witnessed as the Opposition demanded a discussion on the alleged land purchases linked to Chief Minister Mohan Yadav.

The state government tabled the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) Bill, 2026, on the opening day of the five-day monsoon session, even as Congress members demanded an urgent debate on the alleged scam in Ujjain.

The House was adjourned for 30 minutes after Congress members trooped into the well.

Speaker Narendra Singh Tomar said the House would take up discussion on the UCC Bill on Tuesday.

A recent newspaper report had



claimed that Yadav and his family members purchased huge land parcels after the latter became the chief minister -- a charge denied by the BJP as baseless.

As soon as the Question Hour concluded, leader of the opposition Umang Singh raised the issue of land purchases linked to the chief minister and family through an adjournment motion, inviting strong

objections from BJP legislators and ministers.

Assembly Affairs minister Kailash Vijayvargiya opposed the demand, saying the matter could not be taken up through an adjournment motion.

He contended that the adjournment motion is usually taken up on recent developments and not on old ones.

Congress MLAs trooped into the well of the House shouting slogans, and Singh maintained that the adjournment motion pertained to the alleged acquisition of land linked to the Simhashta area and the alleged purchase of land by the chief minister's family, insisting on a debate.

As the Congress members refused to relent, the Speaker adjourned the proceedings for 30 minutes. (PTI)

NCP (SP) holds protest outside Mumbai varsity campus



MUMBAI, July 20: The Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) on Monday held a protest outside Mumbai University against alleged action by police on those taking part in the BJP-led march to Parliament and the removal of activist Sonam Wangchuk from Jantar Mantar amid his hunger strike.

They also sought the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan in connection with alleged irregularities in the education sector and exam paper leaks.

The protest, led by NCP (SP) Mumbai unit president and former MLA Milind Anna Kamble, youth wing Mumbai president Amol Matele and Vaibhav Gadhave outside the Mumbai University campus, saw the participation of party workers and students, who raised slogans against the Centre.

The police action against peaceful protesters is an attack on democracy, Kamble said while accusing

the Union government of suppressing dissent. He also said Pradhan must resign.

"If the government fails to act, the youth of the country will respond democratically and hold it accountable," Kamble said.

The NCP (SP) also criticised the removal of Sonam Wangchuk from the protest site at Jantar Mantar on Saturday. He was taken forcibly to Safdarjung Hospital by police on the 21st day of his hunger strike.

He has been on an indefinite hunger strike since June 28 in support of the BJP-led protest over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination and the reported deaths of students linked to the controversy.

NCP (SP) youth leaders Matele and Gadhave warned that the agitation would be intensified if the government did not stop "the suppression of democratic protests". (PTI)

AISA activists end 23-day fast after appeal from MPs, civil society leaders

NEW DELHI, July 20: Three All India Students' Association (AISA) activists on Monday ended their 23-day indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar following an appeal from a delegation of opposition legislators, civil society members and eminent personalities, who urged them to continue the movement through Parliament and public campaigns.

AISA activists Neha, Manish and Aameen, who had been on a hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, ended their fast amid rain lashing the city.

The delegation assured the students that their demands would be raised inside Parliament during the Monsoon Session and pursued through political and public campaigns.

The delegation comprised Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha, CPI(M) MP Amra Ram, CPI(ML) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Rajaram Singh, social activist Yogendra Yadav, senior advocate Prashant Bhushan, academic Atul Soode and actors Prakash Raj and Shabana Azmi.

Appealing to the students to end the fast, Yogendra Yadav said, "This is not the breaking of the hunger strike, but the conclusion of this form of struggle."

Manoj Jha said the students had achieved "something massive" by exposing the government "on all fronts".

Shabana Azmi said, "We have failed as a generation to do good to our Gen Z, but you people have shown us the way forward."

Rajaram Singh told the students that "your struggle will also roar in the House of Democracy from today onwards. You have shown the entire Opposition the way to fight."

According to AISA, the three activists had each lost more than 12 per cent of their body mass during the 23-day fast and continued despite dangerously low blood sugar levels and serious health complications.

The student organisation said it would now launch a month-long nationwide campaign against Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the National Testing Agency and the National Education Policy 2020 alongside the Monsoon Session of Parliament, while continuing its demand for accountability over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations.

The AISA activists had been on an indefinite hunger strike since June 28 as part of the broader agitation at Jantar Mantar demanding the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan, a judicial probe into the alleged examination irregularities and wider reforms in the education system. (PTI)

Parliament belongs to students, not anyone's fiefdom: Priyanka

NEW DELHI, July 20: Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Monday slammed the Centre over police teargassing and lathi-charging protesters, saying the government is not ready to discuss the problems in the education policy and is instead beating up students.

A large number of students and protesters tried to march towards Parliament following a call given by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), only to be met by police teargas and lathi-charges in a spiralling protest that started with exam paper leaks and gained traction with activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike.

Asked about the use of force against protesters, Priyanka Gandhi told reporters in the Parliament House complex, "It's ridiculous... They are our own children... they are the future of the country. This Parliament belongs to them. It's not one's personal fiefdom."

"It is a genuine issue, Rahul ji has been raising this issue for quite some time. We have been saying there should be a discussion as there are problems in the education policy. You are not ready to discuss and fire tear gas at children and beat them up. For what? They are our children," Priyanka Gandhi said.

Clashes broke out with protesters, some in school uniform, streaming into central Delhi, navigating inner lanes and attempting to find alternative routes to get as close as possible to Parliament. Some police personnel and protesters were injured.

Undeterred by the extensive barricading, they walked several kilometres, sometimes joining groups of protesters, shouting slogans, stopping to wait for an opportune moment to break through and breaching layers of barricades at multiple locations.

There was chaos in the area with security forces using batons, lathis and teargas to disperse the restive crowds near Constitution Club, Patel Chowk, Shastri Bhawan, RBI Building and Parliament Street police. The internet was shut down in large parts of the area. (PTI)

Teargas and lathi-charges as CJP protesters storm into central Delhi, Dipke detained



NEW DELHI, July 20: Thousands of young and angry people converged on central Delhi on Monday, only to be met by police teargas and lathi-charges in a spiralling protest that started with exam paper leaks and gained traction with activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike. Large parts of central Delhi were gridlocked as the protests gathered pace. Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke was picked up by Delhi Police, the organisation's spokesperson said.

"Police brutally cracking down and beating up peaceful protesters, request MPs to stand in support of students on streets," Saurav Das said.

Clashes broke out with protesters, some in school uniform, streaming into central Delhi, navigating inner lanes and attempting to find alternative routes to get as close as possible to Parliament. Some police personnel and protesters were injured.

Undeterred by the extensive barricading, they walked several kilometres, sometimes joining groups of protesters, shouting slogans, stopping to wait for an opportune moment to break through and breaching layers of barricades at multiple locations.

A few kilometres away, activist Sonam Wangchuk, who is admitted at Safdarjung Hospital, requested the medical superintendent to allow him to leave "even if temporarily" to participate in the CJP's Parliament march, asserting that he was feeling "very fine" and that his health parameters were normal.

There was chaos in the area with security forces using batons, lathis and teargas to disperse the restive crowds near Constitution Club, Patel Chowk, Shastri Bhawan, RBI Building and Parliament Street police. Internet was shut down in large parts of the area. It was also the first day of the Monsoon session of Parliament. The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha witnessed multiple adjournments amid uproar by opposition members over the Cockroach Janta Party-led protest that started at Jantar Mantar.

The protesters are demanding accountability over alleged examination irregularities and the resignation of Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Security was doubled across the New Delhi district with additional companies of paramilitary forces and police personnel from adjoining districts deployed to maintain law and order. Several companies of paramilitary forces, which had been kept in reserve, have also been pressed into service as the situation evolved, they said.

Several commuters were stranded inside nearby metro stations after access was restricted and station gates were closed as a precautionary measure.

Scores of protesters carrying the national flag also gathered at multiple locations across the national capital raising slogans such as "Bharat Mata Ki Jai", "Vande Mataram" and "Dharmendra Pradhan Istifa Do". Police personnel were deployed in large numbers to regulate the crowds as the demonstrations continued across different parts of the city.

Earlier in the day, police stopped the procession reached the Connaught Place area and attempted to move towards Parliament. Protesters scattered in

different directions, with many running through the streets to avoid the smoke. Amid heavy security deployment, smaller groups regrouped at nearby intersections and continued raising slogans, while police maintained barricades to prevent the march from advancing towards Parliament.

Dipke, who has been on hunger strike since Wangchuk was picked up and whisked to hospital, founder of the CJP, said, "Our demands are clear: Dharmendra Pradhan should resign. The families of the children who committed suicide should receive compensation of 1 crore rupees, and Sonam Wangchuk should be released immediately."

The anger was palpable.

A protester from Maharashtra, who said he had travelled to Delhi solely to participate in the demonstration, described education as the foundation of the country's development and alleged that the system would deteriorate if quality education was not ensured.

"We have come here only to demand accountability and ensure that students receive the education they deserve," he said.

A government job aspirant from Bihar said the protesters had gathered peacefully to make their voices heard and seek answers from the authorities. He said many young people had spent years preparing for competitive examinations and deserved transparency and accountability. The CJP said the government has reached out to them for talks and that two of its spokespersons will be meeting Union minister J P Nadda to put forth their demands.

There was no official word from the government on the talks.

Congress leader Shashi Tharoor hit out at the government for not allowing a discussion in Parliament on issues such as the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the NEET UG paper leak, saying Parliament cannot be a notice board for announcing bills and getting them passed.

Tharoor referred to the old adage that the opposition must have its say because the government will have its way, to stress that Parliament is supposed to be the place where MPs can ventilate the voice of the people. Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal also slammed the Modi government for using force against the protesters, demanding that Centre listen to the youth and not order lathi charge against them.

Kejriwal appealed the government to "drop the arrogance and listen to the youth" in a video message posted on X.

"The entire youth of the country has gathered in lakhs at Jantar Mantar. Instead of listening to them, the government is ordering lathi charges against them. This is not right," Kejriwal said.

Earlier on Monday, Safdarjung Hospital authorities said that Wangchuk's vital parameters are stable but his blood parameters require close clinical observation.

"Sonam Wangchuk continues to receive comprehensive medical care at VMMC & Safdarjung Hospital. His vital parameters remain stable. Blood parameters continue to warrant close clinical observation. Wangchuk remains under continuous medical management and the close supervision of a multidisciplinary team of experts," the health bulletin issued by the hospital at 10 am said. (PTI)

Bengal govt to make all communications in Bengali from Sept 1: CM Adhikari in Assembly

KOLKATA, July 20: The West Bengal government will make all official communications in Bengali from September 1, Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari said in the Assembly on Monday and read out Amit Shah's letter, which suggested taking steps for the extensive use and development of Indian languages.

He said Union Home Minister Amit Shah had, in the letter, urged him to take steps for extensive use of the Bengali language at every level of state administration.

"From September 1, 2026, use of the Bengali language will be mandatory at every level of the state government," the chief minister said.

"We will use Bengali in all communications with the Centre and

other states," he said, adding that communications with the Union government will be in Hindi along with Bengali.

Currently, official communications with the Centre are generally conducted in English.

Adhikari said that during the Union home minister's three-day visit to West Bengal, the Union home minister wrote him a letter in Bengali, highlighting Bharatiya Jana Sangh founder Syama Prasad Mookerjee's views on language diversity.

"He was an ardent supporter of conservation, development, and the extensive use of Indian languages," said Shah in the letter, which Adhikari read out in the House.

The Union home minister suggested in the letter that it was espe-

cially necessary to ensure that from the land and land revenue department to the chief minister's office, file management, noting, departmental communications and orders are in Bengali.

Shah mentioned that Bengali language should be given priority in public services, digital administration, and other communications, websites, mobile apps, media advertisements and other governmental interactions.

The chief minister said Shah urged that the Bengali language should be used extensively in the registration of FIRs, complaint filing, citizen information, and public awareness messages to strengthen the people's faith in and their participation with the administration. (PTI)

Kejriwal urges Centre to 'listen to youth', not lathi-charge CJP protesters

NEW DELHI, July 20: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Monday appealed to the Centre to "listen to the youth" instead of ordering a lathi charge against protesters as thousands tried to march to Parliament as part of the Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) protest demanding Union education minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation.

In a video message on X, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader urged the government to "drop the arrogance and listen to the youth".

"The entire youth of the country has gathered in lakhs at Jantar Mantar. Instead of listening to them, the government is ordering lathi charges against them. You have stopped the internet in the area; they are being stopped from going towards Parliament. This is not right," Kejriwal said.

"I appeal to the government that these are our own country's children who have taken to the streets demanding justice, and then you resort



to a lathi charge. Drop the arrogance and listen to them," he added.

Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann also appealed to the Centre through a video message to heed the protesters' demands.

Earlier in the day, AAP leaders, including

leader of the opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Atishi, former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia and Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, joined the CJP protest in a show of solidarity.

Thousands of protesters converged on central Delhi on Monday and attempted to march towards Parliament, only to be met by police teargas and lathi-charges. The demonstrations, which began over alleged examination irregularities and paper leaks, gained traction with activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike.

On Sunday, Sisodia had urged political parties to join the July 20 march from Jantar Mantar to Parliament and demand Pradhan's resignation over the alleged NEET paper leak and examination irregularities.

Addressing protesters at Jantar Mantar, where the CJP has been leading an agitation seeking reforms in the examination system, Sisodia said the issue went beyond politics. (PTI)

Spain wins the World Cup by beating Argentina 1-0

EAST RUTHERFORD (USA), July 20: This is how good Spain was at the World Cup: Not even Lionel Messi had any answers. And when it was over, Spain walked off with the trophy. Messi simply walked off in tears.

Spain is back atop the soccer world for a second time, after Ferran Torres' first goal of this year's World Cup — unquestionably the goal of his life — gave his country a 1-0 win over now-dethroned champion Argentina in the final on Sunday.

"It was a goal scored by 47 million people," Torres said, referring to Spain's population.

Maybe not by them — but certainly for them.

The goal came with Argentina down to 10 men after Enzo Fernandez was sent off late in regulation following a reckless tackle. Tempers flared then, and flared again after the final whistle with Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni and players from both sides engaging in what appeared to be some pushing and shoving.

In the end, Spain denied Messi a second straight title in what he has indicated was his final World Cup match. Torres, a second-half substitute, pounced on a bouncing ball in the box and used his left foot to bury a shot just under the crossbar in the 106th minute.

From there, the airtight defense that dominated opponents throughout the

Ferran Torres' goal in extra time

tournament came through one final time. Spain — which also won the title in 2010 — allowed only one goal in eight matches in this World Cup run, setting a record for fewest goals allowed by a champion.

"I feel pride, to be honest," said Spain coach Luis de la Fuente, who at 65 is now the oldest man to lead a team to a World Cup title. "Accompanying them on this journey is an honor."

Spain gets a World Cup 1st

This title, combined with the Women's World Cup won by Spain in 2023, makes the European nation the first to hold both the men's and women's titles simultaneously. And in the streets of Madrid — probably many other places in Spain as well — countless people spilled into the streets, celebrating Sunday's victory long into the wee hours of Monday morning.

The score indicates this match was close, but only one team was in command.

Spain took the game's first 20 shots on goal before Argentina — desperate for an equalizer — got its first attempt off in the second half of extra time. Spain took nine of the game's first 10 corner kicks, and only a World Cup final-record 12 saves by Argentina goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez gave the 2022 champions a shot at going back-to-back.



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"Dibu was nothing short of exceptional," de la Fuente said, referring to Argentina's keeper by his nickname.

Spain is now unbeaten in its last 38 matches — 29 wins, nine draws — and is the outright holder of the longest such streak by any European men's team ever. Italy went 37 matches (28 wins, nine draws) from October 2018 through September 2021, before Spain ended that streak.

And for the last two-plus years, nobody has beaten Spain. Not even Messi. An Argentina team that was the kings of the late-game rally in this tournament had no answer this time.

"We lost the game, and we accept that," Scaloni said. "That doesn't mean that we will forget everything we've done so far, so I'd like to thank my people, my players and the country. I can tell them that we played our hearts out."

Spain survives a late push

Messi took a corner kick with about four minutes left before the final whistle and the ball took a fortunate skip toward substitute Giuliano Simeone — who sent it high and over the crossbar, holding his head in disbelief afterward.

After the post-match scuffles, they also paid tribute to the former champions. Spain's players lined up to form an honor guard of sorts for Argentina's squad to walk through on its way to the stage for the runner-up medals from President Donald Trump and FIFA President Gianni Infantino.

"I think now I'm in a cloud," said Spain midfielder Rodri, the Golden Ball winner as the tournament's best player.

Argentina was forced to finish the match down a man after Fernandez was sent off in second-half stoppage time after getting his second yellow card. Fernandez was whistled for a collision that sent Spain defender Pau Cubarsi cartwheeling into the air, and the card came out immediately.

Defense led Spain to a title

It was the 104th and last match of the biggest World Cup ever, a 48-team event that played out over the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Because there were more matches than any previous World Cup, it was no surprise that there were more goals than all other editions — more than 300, nearly three per match.

Except, of course, when Spain was involved. Spain's plan was simple and flawless: Hold the ball as much as possible, denying opponents any hint of chances.

It worked, all the way to the end.

Messi is 39 and the math certainly suggests that the Inter Miami star is at the end of his international career. There have been hints — such as Messi himself declaring that a home World Cup qualifying match against Venezuela last year would be his final competitive contest for Argentina on his nation's soil.

"I experienced a lot of things on this pitch, good and not so good," Messi said that night. "I'll take the good with me."

He retired from the national team after losing a Copa America final to Chile — in the same stadium he played in Sunday — a decade ago, then came back a few weeks later after changing his mind.

Good thing he did, because in that decade he went from superstar to absolute icon.

There was the World Cup title in 2022. There were two Copa America titles, the first in 2021 and the second in 2024. He won Argentina's player of the year award 16 times in a span of 19 years, first winning it as a teenager and continuing to win it all the way into his late 30s.

He's a legend within the game and on all corners of the globe. But Spain was better Sunday. (AP)

Sindhu leads Indian challenge at China Open

CHANGZHOU (CHINA), July 20: Bolstered by her Japan Open triumph, India's PV Sindhu will spearhead the country's challenge at the China Open Super 1000 tournament starting on Tuesday, but Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will miss the event as the former continues to recover from a shoulder injury.

India's badminton contingent will look to build on a productive week on the BWF World Tour, with Sindhu returning to China in red-hot form after capturing her first title in nearly two years.

The two-time Olympic medalist enjoyed a flawless campaign in Japan, defeating three-time world champion Akane Yamaguchi in the final and winning all her matches in straight games.

The 2016 China Open champion will look to carry that momentum into the tournament, where she opens her campaign against compatriot Ummat Hooda.

Sindhu could face fourth seed Chen Yu Fei of China in the second round. The Tokyo Olympic champion retired with a hamstring injury during her Japan Open semifinal last week and is scheduled to begin her campaign against Japan's Natsuki Nidaira, provided she recovers in time.

Devika Sihag is the other Indian in the women's singles draw and will begin her campaign against Thailand's Busanan Ongbamrungphan.

Satwik and Chirag, who won the Singapore Open Super 750 last month but withdrew from the Japan Open after Satwik's recurring shoulder injury flared up, have opted to skip the China Open to focus on regaining full fitness ahead of the World Championships, which return to India after 17 years.

The men's singles draw features Lakshya Sen, Paris Olympics semifinalist, world No. 24 Ayush Shetty and experienced campaigner HS Prannoy. (PTI)

Spain neutralised Messi, outclassed Argentina to lift World Cup: Indian football icons

NEW DELHI, July 20: Spain's complete domination, airtight defence and relentless pressing drew unanimous praise from India's former footballers, who said the European champions deserved the World Cup title after neutralising Lionel Messi and overpowering Argentina across 120 minutes.

In what was seen as Messi's grand swansong, Spain's second-half substitute Ferran Torres scored in the extra time (106th minute) to deny Argentina back-to-back World Cup titles.

Former India captain Victor Amalraj said Spain, who secured their second World Cup after 2010, completely controlled the final and could have won by a much bigger margin.

"Spain were outstanding, they completely dominated the final," said the 64-year-old former India midfielder, who played against a strong Argentina in the 1984 Nehru Cup in Kolkata.

The Carlos Bilardo-coached strong Argentine side, with many players later winning the 1986 World Cup, had beaten India 1-0.

He further hailed Emiliano Martinez's outstanding goalkeeping that prevented Spain from winning

by a much bigger margin.

"Spain could have scored three goals but for the Argentina goalkeeper who was at his best."

"Argentina wanted to end the match goalless and go for the tie-break, but that did not click," he said.

Amalraj said Spain's compact defence didn't allow Messi to play freely.

"Messi's performance was not up to the mark in the final. Spain completely blocked him. He must have touched the ball only a few times in the whole 120 minutes. He was not allowed to show his skills because the Spanish defence was so tight and there was no chance to penetrate. That is why Messi could not click in the final."

"Players representing their respective countries become emotional when they play in such big matches. The whole world was watching them. It was the same in the case of Maradona (in the 1990 final)," he said.

Spain are now unbeaten in their last 38 matches — 29 wins, nine draws — eclipsing Italy's streak of 37 matches (28 wins, nine draws) from October 2018 through Sep-

tember 2021.

Spain's possession game is global benchmark: Pal

Former India goalkeeper Subrata Pal said Spain continue to dominate world football with their possession-based game, a style many countries try to emulate but few can replicate.

"Whenever Spain play, they dominate the match. If you look at ball possession, even when they lose the ball, they quickly regain it because that is their style of football."

"Every country in the world is trying to copy the Spanish formation and style of play, but it is very difficult. Only Spain can play like this. So definitely they are contenders for Euro 2028..."

Calling Messi the world's best player, Pal said Spain's specific plan of double-marking him restricted his influence, underlining that football is ultimately a team game where even the greatest individual cannot win alone.

"He was always marked by two players. Whenever Argentina had the ball, they could not find Messi properly because Spain had prepared specifically to stop him, and they succeeded. (PTI)

Till I am playing, there will always be noise: Rohit Sharma



LONDON, July 20: Acutely aware but dismissive of the "noise" around his future in international cricket, veteran Indian batting star Rohit Sharma says he knows that speculation won't stop till he is playing but he would rather focus on scoring runs instead of fighting it.

With a facile 138 at the Lord's on Sunday, Rohit could not prevent India's 27-run loss didn't look his usual, possibly trying to mask the insult and hurt he must have felt.

"The noise, since I made my debut was there. Till I am going to stay here, it is always going to be

there, so it doesn't really matter too much," the 39-year-old, who became the oldest Indian centurion and first from the country to score a ton in 50-over cricket, told BCCI.TV.

"What really matters is what I do on the field, try and contribute to the success of the team. That's where all my focus is. Let the noise be there, if there is no noise there is no fun. My job is inside, their job is outside, that's how I look at it."

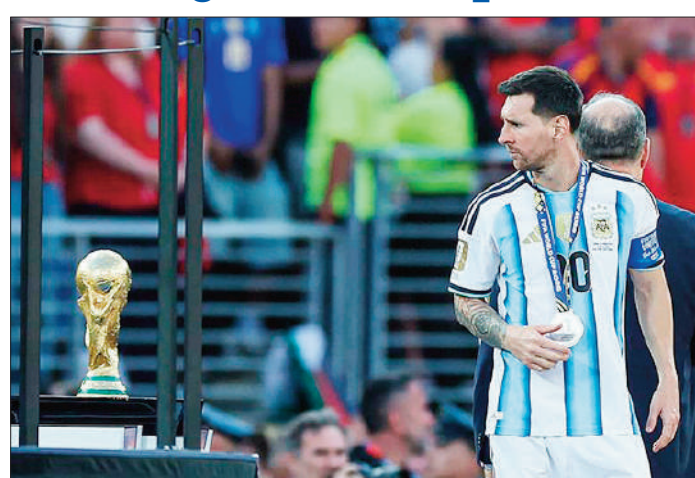
"My job is with bat, come and play, represent my country, that's what I have been told to do since I made my debut, so that's what I am

going to do," added the man, who is within touching distance of 12,000 ODI runs.

Under pressure, his 34th ODI ton was one of his best knocks in recent times. Rohit said he has always enjoyed playing in England.

"I love playing in England. The atmosphere, the grounds, the pitches, when you turn up to play any format over here, it challenges you in different ways. And that's what you want as a cricketer. To be challenged in every way possible. I enjoyed out there in the middle," he said. (PTI)

Messi can conjure no more magic as crown passes from Argentina to Spain



EAST RUTHERFORD (USA), July 20: Lionel Messi could conjure no more magic. Twenty years after his World Cup debut and a career that lifted him above Pelé and Diego Maradona as soccer's greatest player, at 39 he could not will Argentina to become the first repeat champion in more than a half-century.

Spain outplayed the Albiceleste from the opening whistle at MetLife Stadium, where the overwhelming majority of 80,663 were hoping for a reconsecration. Ferran Torres scored 37 seconds into the second extra-time period, lifting Spain to a 1-0 victory and its second World Cup title.

Instead of Messi becoming a two-time champion, the crown passed. He fought back tears and had a look of misery as he and teammates faced applauding and bowing Argentina fans at the stadium's south end while Spanish stars lifted the trophy on a podium at the center stripe.

After leading Argentina to victory in the 2022 final against France, sandwiched between consecutive Copa America championships, Messi could only bow his head, grimace and put hands on hips as Spain's Lamine Yamal, less than a week past his 19th birthday and projected as the sport's next big thing, ran to embrace Torres after the goal.

"I hope that everyone feels proud of him, of what he's achieved because he's the best football player ever stepping foot on a pitch," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said.

Spain's dominance was thorough in the final and throughout the World Cup as they extended their unbeaten streak to 38 games, the longest by a European team.

La Furia Roja had a 20-2 advantage in shots, the second-largest difference in a World Cup final since stats exist since 1966, behind only West Germany outshooting Argentina 23-1 in 1990, according to Opta. They out-passed Argentina 845-433.

They conceded just one goal the entire tournament, the fewest by a World Cup champion, and scored 14 while compiling a 145-45 advantage in shots. Goalkeeper Unai Simon totaled 10 saves over eight games — Argentina's Emiliano Martinez had 11 in the final alone.

When Messi left European soccer for MLS three years ago after four Champions League medals and 12 league titles with Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain, some

speculated he would be another retiree moving to Florida.

Instead, he won a Major League Soccer title with Miami and led Argentina back to the final with eight goals and four assists. He has played in a record 34 World Cup games over six tournaments and boosted career goals total to 21, the record until France's Kylian Mbappé scored twice in Saturday's third-place game to surpass him to 22.

Messi became the first player to start three World Cup finals and raised his international goals total to 125, second only to Cristiano Ronaldo's 146. He is now regularly mentioned in the same breath as Maradona and Pelé, the only three-time World Cup champion.

With his distinctive slow walk, arms swinging at his side as he waited for the right moment to burst into a sprint, the diminutive 5-foot-7 attacker was the center of attention any time he got the ball on the right flank. Opponents and fans waited for him to cut to the center and unleash a shot with his lethal left foot.

Messi had just 15 touches in the first half and 54 over the game at the stadium where he has been repeatedly frustrated. He famously retired from international soccer after a penalty-kicks loss to Chile in the 2016 Copa America final at MetLife only to reverse himself 47 days later and lead his nation to its third World Cup title.

Against Spain, Messi never had the ball in position to score, and his attempts to pass to teammates didn't connect.

"The first idea was to keep Messi at bay," Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said.

Half a dozen Spanish players walked over to Messi after the final whistle to hug and console him. Messi dropped to the grass, hands behind him, staring.

When Spain later formed a guard of honor for Argentina players to approach the podium for their second-place medals, Messi tried to smile but couldn't. He had a blank look as he walked through and a few opponents patted him on the back and chest.

Spain is now the world's soccer power, the first nation to hold the men's and women's titles at the same time. While gold confetti fluttered onto the Spaniards, Messi walked out one of the field's corner exits, a silver consolation medal hanging from his neck, his shoulders hunched, his expression glum. (AP)

The flight hours and miles of World Cup travels of FIFA's Infantino in numbers

NEW YORK, July 20: Multiple flights in a single day. Nearly 60,000 miles. More than 100 hours aloft.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino got some serious air time over the course of the 2026 World Cup, the tournament's most far-flung edition ever. He crisscrossed North America for matches, meetings and other appearances during the competition, which took place in three countries, 16 cities and four time zones, and ended with Sunday's final in New Jersey.

To track his travels, The Associated Press analyzed flight logs for a private business jet used by Infantino in recent years, along with photos taken by AP photographers and images posted on Instagram by FIFA and the head of world soccer's governing body himself. The analysis shows that by the time Spain defeated Argentina for the world title, he flew far enough to circle the planet almost 2 1/2 times.

Access to a Gulfstream G650 jet from the fleet of the Qatari government made Infantino's prodigious jet-setting possible. The aircraft is operated by the private charter division of Qatar Airways, a World Cup sponsor.

Since a June 9 flight from Los

Angeles to Mexico City ahead of the tournament's opening match, the aircraft averaged more than one flight a day and on multiple days made more than three, according to flight-tracking site FlightAware.

Along with attending matches, Infantino's itinerary included stops in New York for an interview on Fox & Friends and in Miami for a FIFA summit attended by representatives from the organization's 211 member associations. He also flew to Doha to attend the funeral of Qatar's former emir before returning to the U.S. in time for the World Cup semifinals.

FIFA did not respond to an emailed request for comment about Infantino's travel schedule and arrangements.

Here's a look at some of the numbers racked up by the person overseeing the 39-day tournament that featured a record 104 matches spread across the United States, Canada and Mexico, the largest geographic footprint in World Cup history.

44 matches: The number of World Cup matches Infantino attended during the tournament, according to AP's analysis. He was at a World Cup game on 31 of the tournament's 34 match days but



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managed to squeeze in two matches on some days.

One of the two match days he missed was spent in Miami for the FIFA Executive Football Summits. FlightAware showed the Gulfstream originally was scheduled to fly from New Jersey to Miami in time for Saturday's third-place match between England and France but never took off. Thunderstorms caused flight delays at New York City area airports on Saturday, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

16 stadiums: Infantino saw at least one match at all 16 World Cup venues. Miami's Hard Rock Stadium, where he attended five games, is the venue he visited the

most.

13: The number of days Infantino attended two matches, often at stadiums located hundreds of miles apart.

21 airports: The Gulfstream mostly used the host cities' main international airports during the tournament but sometimes relied on smaller general and business aviation airports, including Atlanta's Fulton County Executive Airport and Miami's Opa Locka Executive Airport.

23: The number of international border crossings the jet made within North America through the semifinals.

115 flight hours: The flight time the Gulfstream amassed during the tournament, not including repositioning flights and 29 hours of travel for the funeral in Qatar, equals nearly five full days in the air and would be enough for a commercial plane traveling at typical cruising speed to fly from New York to Los Angeles 20 times.

5 hours and 44 minutes: Excluding the journey to Qatar, the flight that took the longest lasted 344 minutes and went from Miami to Seattle, where Infantino attended the Belgium-Egypt match on June 15. The flight time is the same length as three full World Cup

matches from kickoff to final whistle.

28 minutes: The shortest flight time, excluding repositioning flights, was a 28-minute hop from Seattle to Vancouver on July 6 — about the length of a network TV sitcom like "Friends" with commercials. Infantino attended the United States-Belgium match in Seattle that day before watching Switzerland face Colombia in Vancouver the following day.

59,281 miles (95,403 kilometers): The distance the jet traveled during the tournament, excluding the journey to Qatar and back for the funeral, according to the AP analysis. That's more than round-trip flights between New York and Singapore, Los Angeles and Doha, Qatar, and London and the Australian city of Perth combined.

5,772 miles (9,289 kilometers): The most miles covered in a single day's itinerary were flown on June 26, which started with a morning trip from Miami to Dallas. From there, the plane went to Seattle, where Infantino attended the Egypt-Iran match. The final leg departed Seattle late that night and landed the next morning in Miami. Infantino watched Colombia face Portugal there. (AP)