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Assam govt to restore forest cover in Behali Wildlife Sanctuary

Action against encroachers on cards: Minister

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, July 16: Forest Minister Jayanta Mallabarua on Thursday said the state government would immediately restore forest cover in areas of Behali Wildlife Sanctuary where large-scale destruction of trees has been reported, while warning of strict action against those responsible for the damage.

After visiting the sanctuary in Biswanath district, the minister said satellite imagery had revealed that a sizable stretch of forest, which was densely covered with trees around six months ago, had since been cleared.

"We noticed through satellite images that a large portion of the forest has been destroyed over the



past few months. That is why I came here personally to assess the situation on the ground," Mallabarua told reporters.

The minister said senior officials

from the Forest Department, Assam Police and other agencies accompanied him during the inspection and that a detailed assessment of the damage would be

carried out.

"Our immediate priority is to restore the forest. Wherever trees have been destroyed, we will undertake plantation drives without delay. Under no circumstances will the government encourage the destruction of forests," he said.

Mallabarua alleged that the damage was caused by "miscreants" operating for personal gain and asserted that the state government had no role in such activities.

"Some anti-social elements have carried out these acts for their own benefit. The government is taking the matter very seriously, and both the Forest Department and the police will initiate stringent action against those involved," he said. Referring to the Assam-Arunachal

Pradesh border, the minister clarified that the issue of the inter-state boundary should not be linked to the destruction of forests.

"The border dispute is a separate matter and is being addressed through the regional committee mechanism in accordance with the directions of the Gauhati High Court and the Supreme Court. But irrespective of the boundary issue, forests and trees must be protected. No one can justify felling trees in the name of a border dispute," Mallabarua said.

He reiterated that the government remains committed to protecting Assam's forest resources and ensuring that those responsible for environmental damage are brought to justice.

Assam Budget prioritises Barak Valley's development: Himanta



Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, July 16: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday said the state government has accorded top priority to fulfilling the long-standing aspirations of the people of Barak Valley over the past decade, asserting that the region will no longer remain behind in Assam's development journey.

Taking to micro-blogging site X, the chief minister said the Assam Budget 2026 has incorporated several landmark measures aimed at strengthening governance, healthcare, education, connectivity and infrastructure in the valley.

"Over the last decade, we have given the highest priority to fulfilling the hopes and aspirations of the people of Barak Valley. In Assam's overall development journey, Barak Valley will no longer be left behind," Sarma wrote.

He added that the budget has addressed the region's long-pending needs by making significant provisions across key sectors.

Highlighting the government's development philosophy, Sarma said balanced regional growth re-

mains central to its vision of building a "Viksit Assam". He noted that the Budget 2026 seeks to unlock the immense potential of Barak Valley by strengthening its institutions, expanding healthcare facilities and improving transport and communication networks.

According to the chief minister, the government is committed to ensuring equal opportunities and equitable development for every region and every section of society, while making it clear that there would be no compromise on this objective.

The Barak Valley, comprising the districts of Cachar, Sribhumi and Hailakandi, has often witnessed demands for greater investments in infrastructure, education and healthcare. The state government has in recent years announced several projects for the region, including road connectivity improvements, medical infrastructure expansion and educational initiatives. The chief minister's remarks come as the BJP-led government highlights the regional focus of the Assam Budget 2026 ahead of (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CRPF trains Manipur CoBRA units for crowd control, law and order duties

NEW DELHI, July 16: The CRPF has provided special law and order and crowd control training to the personnel of the two CoBRA battalions recently deployed in ethnic strife-torn Manipur, officials said on Thursday.

The central paramilitary force's specially-armed jungle warfare unit has also been directed to follow a strict standard operating procedure (SOP) and avoid any "stray" or "unplanned movement" in the state.

Officials said that the CoBRA units have been asked to work "in coordination" with Manipur Police and the Army units deployed in the state. More than 260 people have been killed and thousands have been rendered homeless in the ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023.

The two Commando Battalions for Resolute Action (CoBRA) were deployed in Manipur in May. Before this, these units were conducting operations against Maoists and have since been relieved from that task after India declared itself Naxal-free in March.

The personnel of these two CoBRA units received month-long pre-induction training in law and order and crowd control techniques. They are getting familiarised with the state, officials said.

To tighten the security grid and disarm miscreants, the CRPF has also dispatched about 100 armoured vehicles to transport CoBRA and other security forces personnel for patrolling and quick response duties, according to officials. The CoBRA and regular CRPF units are working to ensure peace in the region and demolish bunkers and ambush points set up by the miscreants, the officials added.

The CRPF along with other forces, conducted an area-clearing operation in mid-June and dismantled 30 active insurgent bunkers in the Leimakhong town in Kangpokpi district, the officials said.

Manipur has about 320 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) deployed, with CRPF contributing about 200 units. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Abandon 3rd language policy, Centre told verbally

SC voices concern over CBSE's third language decision from Class IX onwards

NEW DELHI, July 16: The Supreme Court on Thursday voiced concern over the introduction of a third language in Class 9 under the CBSE curriculum, observing it would increase the stress level of students and suggesting it be introduced in Class 5 or Class 6 so that students can cope with it.

A bench of Justices BV Nagarathna and R Mahadevan orally asked the Centre to not introduce a third language in Class 9.

"Union of India please don't have a third language from Class 9 level. It would unnecessarily increase the stress level of students. If you want to introduce a new language, then please do it at Class 5 or Class 6 level but not at Class 9 level. Class nine is full of stress, it starts from Class 8 onwards," Justice Nagarathna told the counsel, appearing for the Centre, and asked her to convey the feeling of the court to the government. The remarks were made during the hearing of the Tamil Nadu government's plea against a Madras High Court directive to facilitate the establishment of Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas (JNVs) in every district of the State.

The Tamil Nadu government has consistently



opposed the setting up of JNVs, over concerns with regard to the three-language policy curriculum followed by the schools.

The bench was not directly dealing with the issue of new policy of CBSE but the court made observations on the timing of introduction of third language in schools.

Another apex court bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant is already examining issues with regard to challenge to the new policy of the CBSE and recently refused to stay the noti-

fication. During the hearing, the Tamil Nadu government counsel submitted that the State's objection relates to the three-language policy.

Justice Nagarathna observed that the policy did not mandate Hindi as the third language.

"The State language has to be taught, English has to be taught and any third language. It doesn't say Hindi," she remarked.

Advocate G Priyadarshini, appearing for respondent NGO "Kumari Maha Sabha", which was the petitioner before the high court, submitted that the National Education Policy specifically provides that no language should be imposed on any state. Justice Nagarathna then asked the state, "You don't want Hindi, but if it's Sanskrit, what is the issue?"

Counsel for the state replied that the third-language under curriculum becomes compulsory only from Class 9.

Reacting to this, Justice Nagarathna said, "No, that's very bad. Class 9 is very stressful. Why do you introduce a new language in Class 9? Why don't you introduce it in Class 6th." Justice Nagarathna, also recalled her school days, and said that (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India investing heavily in America, bilateral ties 'really great': Senior US official

NEW YORK, July 16: Describing India as a "leader in many areas", a senior US official said the country has made substantial investments in America and that bilateral ties are "really great".

Ambassador Dan Negrea, US Representative to the UN Economic and Social Council and Alternate Representative of the United States to the Sessions of the General Assembly, made the remarks here on Wednesday at a press briefing organised by the New York Foreign Press Centre on 'Outcomes of the High-Level Forum on the US'.

"India has a lot to offer. And there are many areas in which India is a leader," he said.

Responding to a question by PTI on India's contributions to South-South cooperation at the UN and prospects for India-US collaboration in these areas, Negrea said India is very "important" to the United States.

Emphasising the strength of bilateral ties, he said, "Relations with India are really great... There is a lot of investment from India in the United States... India said we have excess capital.

"Yes, we are investing in growing things in India, but it is efficient for us to also invest. So (there is) very close collaboration in about all areas you can think of." Negrea also noted that President Donald Trump has appointed one of his closest associates, Sergio Gor, as ambassador to India, saying the choice reflected the significance of the bilateral relationship.

"There is nothing more important in an Ambassador than having access to the decision-maker in the country that they represent," Negrea said.

He said Gor, who also serves as special envoy to Central Asia, has "tremendous energy" and plays an important role in advancing US engagement in the region.

Replying to another question by PTI on US aid to Pakistan and concerns about Islamabad harbouring terrorist organisations, Negrea said development doesn't go well when there is no peace and security.

"If a country has policies that create domestic disturbance or conflicts with neighbours, there will be no investment. So this is the spirit in which we are thinking in general," he said, adding that the US' objective is not to direct government aid, but to create conditions where the private sector invests in a country.

"If you look at countries that have done well economically over the years, there are always some key characteristics that are common to all the countries that have done well. You have the rule of law. You have predictable courts.

"Investors in those countries can put their money in according to laws that when they invest their money, they can also get their money out. And the other requirement is that there is no war. Nobody invests in a war situation," Negrea said.

He also outlined the US vision of shifting the international economic development paradigm toward free-market policies, foreign direct investment, and mutually beneficial business partnerships.

The Trade Over Aid Forum, hosted by the US Mission to the UN on the sidelines of the UN High-Level Political Forum, brought together UN member states, businesses and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India's first hydrogen train equipped with multi-layer safety systems

CHANDIGARH, July 16: India's first hydrogen-powered train, to be flagged off by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Haryana's Jind railway station on Friday, is equipped with multi-layer safety systems capable of detecting hydrogen leaks, heat, flames and smoke.

The train will run between the Jind and Sonapat railway stations.

Unlike conventional electric trains that draw power from overhead lines, the Hydrogen Fuel Cell Trainset generates electricity on board through a chemical reaction between hydrogen and oxygen, with water vapour and heat as its only by-product.

"In a sense, the train once again carries its own source of power, as steam and diesel locomotives once did. But instead of burning traditional fuels, such as coal or diesel, hydrogen generates electricity inside the train using oxygen from the atmosphere, eliminating combustion and dependence on an external power supply," according to an official statement issued on Thursday.

As electricity is generated on

board through clean-hydrogen technology, the train represents the greenest form of rail propulsion, powering the future of sustainable mobility.

"To complement this advanced propulsion system, India has equipped the train with multi-layer safety systems capable of detecting hydrogen leaks, heat, flames and smoke," the statement said.

With an operational speed of 75 kmph and a design speed of 110 kmph, the train is not only safer but also faster on the 89-km Jind-Sonapat section.

Hydrogen-powered trains are still at a nascent stage globally. Germany was the first country to introduce commercial hydrogen passenger trains, while France, Italy, China, Japan and a few other countries are pursuing pilot projects or limited deployments. However, these trains typically comprise two to four coaches and are intended primarily for regional passenger services.

In contrast, the Indian Railways' trainset has been configured as a 10-coach passenger train with a capacity of around 2,600 passengers,

demonstrating the scalability of hydrogen-powered rail transport for high-capacity passenger operations.

The hydrogen-powered train will initially operate on the Jind-Sonapat section of the Northern Railway, connecting Jind Junction, Gohana Junction and Sonapat, while serving intermediate stations and proposed halts, including Jind City, Pandu Pindara Junction, Lalit Khera Halt, Bhambhawa, Isapur Khera Halt, Butane Halt, Khandrai Halt, Rabrah Halt, Lath Halt, Mohana, Barwasni Halt and Sonapat New. The route has been selected to demonstrate the operational viability, safety and reliability of hydrogen-powered passenger train services under regular operating conditions. The dedicated hydrogen storage, compression and dispensing facility established at Jind will support refuelling operations, creating India's first integrated hydrogen railway ecosystem, the statement said.

Beyond the train itself, India has also established the country's largest railway hydrogen refuelling facility at (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Many passengers can be seen taking photos of its architectural elements

Recognised among most beautiful airports, Guwahati's Terminal 2 celebrates nature, heritage

GUWAHATI, July 16: If you are transiting through the Terminal 2 of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International Airport in Guwahati, which appears like an oversized bamboo forest from a distance, the airport itself feels like a destination.

With its striking design inspired by Assam's natural beauty and cultural heritage, the imposing terminal blends modern engineering with traditional craftsmanship.

Guwahati's airport -- gateway to the Northeast -- offers an array of modern amenities and facilities to passengers, but what makes its new Terminal 2 stand out is its nature-themed architecture -- a sheer delight to the eyes.

The design of the terminal -- aptly christened 'The Bamboo Orchids' -- has been inspired by 'kopou phool' and local bamboo of the region.

Giant concrete columns clad with a layer of material that lends the airport the nature-themed look, welcome departing passengers as they make their way to the airport for their next destination.

Complementing these artistic pillars are the gates leading to the impressive departure lounge, which have giant digital screens mounted around each of them, on which images of nature play in loop, elevating both the standard of architecture as well as the passenger experience.

The Terminal 2 of the international airport in Guwahati, along with Navi Mumbai International Airport (NMIA), were recently named among the world's most beautiful airports for 2026 by the prestigious Prix Versailles, which recognises exceptional architecture and design worldwide.

Both these airports are managed



by the Adani Airport Holdings Limited (AAHL), the country's largest private airport operator.

The five other international airports named in the list include Guangzhou airport in China; Frankfurt airport in Germany; and

Pittsburgh airport in the US.

The Terminal 2 of the Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi International (LGBI) Airport was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in December 2025, while passenger services began from March this

year. Many passengers can be seen taking photos of its architectural elements and charming decor design or snapping quick selfies.

Sasanka Bordoloi, 36, a Guwahati native who works in Mumbai, says the new terminal is an "absolute delight" to the senses.

"I have also come here for the first time, and this is quite unique. They have decorated this... The airport is quite good when you compare it with our old airport. So, the Guwahati airport has come a long way if you compare it with those in Mumbai, Bangalore, and other Tier 1 cities," he told PTI.

Several other passengers from Assam also say the nature-inspired design of the terminal fills them with pride in their heritage.

"As an Assamese, it also makes us feel proud that our airport is also ranked as one of the best (among most beautiful airports).

And there is more to come.. so we're expecting more shops, more outlets, and more footfall at this airport," he said.

Many passengers hope that more upcoming airports in India, being planned or built in different cities, will draw inspiration from their local heritage and celebrate it in their architectural designs, instead of just building glass-fronted giant, swanky buildings.

The design of this unique terminal in Guwahati was unveiled by Prime Minister Modi at Advantage Assam 2.0 in February 2025.

"The Bamboo Orchids terminal 2 at Guwahati Airport is inspired by the kopou phool (foxtail orchid) and local bamboo.. Terminal 2 at LGBI Airport, Guwahati, currently under construction, will be the Gateway to the North East and have an impressive array of facilities and amenities, many that will

be seen for the first time in the North East of India," Guwahati international airport had posted on X soon after the design was unveiled.

According to Adani group, around 140 metric tonnes of locally sourced bamboo from the region have been used across the terminal, positioning it among India's most prominent examples of nature-inspired airport architecture where traditional craftsmanship is reimaged through modern engineering.

Equipped with DigiYatra-enabled processing, smart check-in systems and expansive passenger areas, the terminal is designed to handle 13.1 million passengers annually by 2032, the firm said in a statement at the inauguration. Overall, the passengers feel, the terminal isn't just a state-of-the-art aviation infrastructure, it also stands proudly as a work of art. (PTI)

Govt proposes tougher CAFE-III fuel efficiency norms for passenger vehicles from April 2027

NEW DELHI, July 16: The government has proposed tighter fuel efficiency standards for passenger vehicles under the third phase of the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) regulations, including stricter carbon dioxide emission targets, incentives for cleaner technologies, and a market-based compliance mechanism.

The Union Power Ministry on Thursday released draft CAFE-III norms for stakeholder consultation, proposing the new norms to take effect from April 1, 2027, after the current CAFE-II regime expires on March 31, 2027. These will remain in force for five years.

Compliance would be assessed over two blocks -- an initial three-year period followed by a two-year period.

The proposed regulations would apply to M1 category passenger vehicles having not more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat, that are manufactured or imported for sale in



India during the 2027-28 to 2031-32 period. The draft proposes progressively tighter fleet-average fuel consumption targets, reducing the benchmark from 3.996 litres per 100 km (94.76 grams of carbon dioxide per km) in 2027-28 to 3.3273 litres per 100 km (78.90 grams of CO2 per km) by 2031-32.

The phased approach is intended to provide automakers with greater regu-

latory certainty while allowing time to develop and introduce more fuel-efficient models.

For the first time, the proposal introduces Carbon Neutrality Factors (CNFs), allowing specified reductions in declared tailpipe CO2 emissions for vehicles using ethanol, biofuels and Compressed Bio-Gas (CBG).

An 8 per cent CNF has been proposed for current ethanol blending levels, while reductions for CBG and other bio-fuels would be linked to prevailing blending levels.

The draft also proposes compliance incentives of up to 9 grams of CO2 per km for approved fuel-saving technologies, subject to a cap of 1 gram per technology, and retains volume-based "super credits" for battery electric vehicles, range-extended electric vehicles, plug-in hybrids, strong hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles while calculating fleet-average fuel consumption.

A credit-and-debit mechanism has also been proposed under which manufacturers exceeding their prescribed targets would earn compliance credits that can be carried forward within a compliance block.

Automakers falling short of their targets could meet their obligations through carry-forward provisions, voluntary pooling arrangements with other manufacturers or by purchasing compliance credits from the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE).

The proposal sets an initial buyout price of ₹ 2,500 for each compliance credit, with the price rising by ₹ 500 annually. Credits would lapse if left unused at the end of a compliance block.

Manufacturers failing to comply with the norms would be liable for penalties under the Energy Conservation Act, while passenger vehicle makers with annual sales of fewer than 1,000 units would remain exempt. (PTI)

I-T dept raises Cost Inflation Index to 384 for FY27

NEW DELHI, July 16: The income tax department has increased the Cost Inflation Index for the current fiscal for calculating long-term capital gains arising from the sale of immovable property, securities and jewellery.

The Cost Inflation Index (CII) is used by taxpayers to calculate gains from the sale of capital assets after adjusting inflation.

The Cost Inflation Index for FY 2026-27 is 384, as per a notification of the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT).

The CII for fiscal 2025-26 was 376.

AMRG Global Managing Partner Rajat Mohan said the annual notification of the Cost Inflation Index reflects the government's commitment to maintaining an objective inflation-adjustment mechanism wherever indexation benefits continue under the new tax framework.

It provides taxpayers, valuers and tax professionals with clarity for computing the indexed cost and reduces interpretational disputes, Mohan added.

CII or Cost Inflation Index is notified under the Income-tax Act, 1961 every year. It is popularly used to

calculate "indexed cost of acquisition" while calculating capital gains at the time of sale of any capital asset.

Normally, an asset is required to be retained for more than 36 months (24 months for immovable property and unlisted shares, 12 months for listed securities) to qualify as 'long-term capital gains'.

Since the prices of goods increase over time resulting in a fall in the purchasing power, the CII is used to determine the inflation-adjusted purchasing price of assets so as to compute taxable long-term capital gains (LTCG). (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Abandon 3rd language policy

there was a choice in Class 9 to choose which language to study. She said that students in her school began learning the third language during middle school. "It was Kannada for those who had a second language as Hindi and vice versa. Sanskrit was also there, so you could have a third language. The earlier, the better," she observed.

Justice Nagarathna also asked the Tamil Nadu government against rejecting Central schemes merely because they originate from the Centre.

"You may have your education system, but don't prevent the Central government schools... You should not have this attitude that it is the Union government scheme, so why should we accept it," she said.

The bench, however, noted that discussions between the Centre and the state were underway regarding the establishment of Navodaya schools.

"Talks have not concluded. If that fails, then only a question of us addressing any merits arises," the bench observed. Counsel for the state sought some time to seek further instruction in the matter.

The bench noted that a new dispensation has come into power in the state and observed that it remained to be seen what policy approach the new government would adopt. The matter has been posted for further hearing on August 11.

The Tamil Nadu government has challenged the 2017 order of the high court which directed the establishment of a JNV in every district of the State. The high court had held that the State's refusal to permit JNVs curtailed students' right to choose educational institutions and was inconsistent with the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009.

The top court had stayed the high court's directions on December 11, 2017 after the state government challenged the decision.

On December 15, 2025, the top court modified the order of stay and directed the state to identify the requisite extent(s) of land that is necessary for establishing Navodaya Vidyalaya in each of the districts of the state.

The said exercise shall be carried out within a period of six weeks and place the report before this court, it had said, while clarifying that the directions were issued only in the interest of those students who are entitled to be admitted to such schools in Tamil Nadu. The top court also asked the representatives of the state and the Centre to hold discussions with regard to the establishment of these schools in the State. (PTI)

Assam Budget prioritises

the implementation of several development projects announced during the Budget session. The government has maintained that balanced regional development is essential for achieving inclusive economic growth and ensuring that all parts of the state benefit equally from Assam's ongoing development initiatives.

CRPF trains Manipur CoBRA

The CoBRA was raised by the CRPF in 2008-09 to tackle the menace of Left Wing Extremism (LWE) that was raging in multiple Indian states, in addition to insurgency in certain states of the Northeast.

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) credits the commandos of this battalion with undertaking successful intelligence-based jungle warfare and guerrilla tactics operations against Naxals leading to the end of Maoist violence in the country this March.

Regarding the deployment of the force in other combat areas, security officials said that about 60 companies of the CRPF are being withdrawn from West Bengal following their deployment there for poll-related duties.

Security officials also said that more units of other CAPFs are being withdrawn from Bengal where assembly polls have just concluded. About 40 companies of the CRPF, deployed for the assembly polls in April-May, will continue to remain in West Bengal, security officials said. (PTI)

India investing heavily

international organisations to promote investment-friendly environments in developing countries. The event also launched a Trade Over Aid Library, described as a "clearinghouse for capacity building offers for countries that want to open their markets through free market reforms".

According to information provided by the New York Foreign Press Centre, the State Department's Trade Over Aid Initiative is based on the premise that sustainable development partnerships are built on trade, investment and prosperity rather than government-run aid programmes.

Negrea said the initiative implements a new foreign aid vision outlined by Secretary of State Marco Rubio in July last year.

"It is an imperative of our times that we look for a new way in foreign aid because foreign aid from all countries, not just from the United States, is decreasing... as aid shrinks, we need to increase trade," he said. Negrea emphasised that the initiative does not signal an end to humanitarian assistance. "Humanitarian aid has continued from the United States to countries where there is a humanitarian crisis," he said, noting that the US announced a USD 3.8 billion donation to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Negrea also said the United States continues to pursue economic partnerships with countries across the Indo-Pacific, stressing that "Trade Over Aid doesn't mean no aid. It just means we emphasise trade more than we emphasise aid". (PTI)

India's first hydrogen train

Jind, creating a complete hydrogen rail ecosystem encompassing rolling stock, storage, dispensing infrastructure, safety systems and operational protocols, it added.

The Indian Railways is also exploring the deployment of hydrogen technology on heritage railways, including the Kalka-Shimla route, by leveraging the experience gained through the Jind-Sonapat hydrogen train project, it said.

"The train and the plant are fitted with devices that continuously watch for hydrogen leaks, unusual heat, flames or smoke, so any problem is caught within seconds. On top of this, non-stop ventilation keeps air moving through the train at all times, so that even if a tiny amount of hydrogen were to leak, it gets safely carried away and diluted in the open air instead of collecting anywhere," the statement said.

There is also an automatic shut-off system. If anything unusual is detected, it can automatically cut off the hydrogen supply on its own, without waiting for a person to react.

Loco pilot safety has been given particular attention. The Loco pilot's cabin has been specifically designed to keep the person safe, with a special mode that allows the train to be moved to safety in an emergency and a screen that shows the loco pilot the real health of the whole system at all times.

The Jind hydrogen plant itself has similar protections, including leak detectors, flame detectors, automatic shutdown systems, water sprays to control any fire and fire alarms, all working together.

Before this train was cleared to run, it was put through a series of demanding tests.

Unlike conventional diesel locomotives that burn fuel to generate mechanical power, a hydrogen train carries a small power plant on board in the form of a Proton Exchange Membrane (PEM) fuel cell.

The hydrogen stored in the train's cylinders combines with oxygen from the surrounding air inside the fuel cell, producing electricity that powers the traction motors and turns the wheels. The only direct by-products of this electrochemical reaction are water vapour and heat. There is no combustion, smoke and tailpipe carbon emissions.

The flagging off of India's first hydrogen-powered train will mark the latest chapter in how the Indian Railways has powered its trains, reflecting the country's broader journey from coal and steam to cleaner, more sustainable sources of energy, the statement said.

Over the last 12 years, rapid electrification has significantly reduced dependence on imported diesel, paving the way for the next leap in clean rail mobility, it said, adding that today, with more than 99 per cent of broad gauge routes electrified, the Indian Railways is taking that journey a step further. (PTI)

Raksha Mantri flags off Shaurya Vijay Yatra with riders on Jawa and Yezdi motorcycles

HT Bureau

NEW DELHI, July 16: To mark the nationwide commemoration of Kargil Vijay Diwas 2026, Raksha Mantri Rajnath Singh flagged off the 'Shaurya Vijay Yatra' from the National War Memorial, New Delhi, with riders undertaking the 13-day expedition on Jawa and Yezdi motorcycles.

With the motto "One Ride, One Nation, One Salute", the 1,900-km expedition will see 28 riders, including serving and retired defence personnel, and the next of kin of fearless martyrs, travel to the Kargil War Memorial in Dras, Ladakh.

"The expedition will honour the courage, resolve, and supreme sacrifice of the Indian bravehearts who ensured victory in the 1999 Kargil War. The ride will pass through the Chandimandir, Rezang La, and the Leh War Memorials before culminating at the Kargil War Memorial on 26 July 2026," an official statement said. It further said that the expedition will carry sacred soil from the National War Memorial to Kargil to symbolise the confluence of generations of war heroes India has witnessed. The riders will also felicitate Veer Naris for their resilience.

The flag-off ceremony was graced by the Defence Minister of India; General NS Raja Subramani, chief of defence Staff; and general Dhiraj Seth, chief of the Army Staff, along with senior military officials, veterans, and invited guests. "With the National Cadet Corps in attendance, the occasion conveyed to India's youth the importance of honouring India's gallant soldiers in their memories and by upholding the values of duty, honour, and selfless service," it added.

Addressing the gathering, Singh paid tribute to the Indian soldiers whose courage and endurance upheld the honour of the Tricolour in the Kargil War.

Ashok Leyland expands Upper Assam presence with new 3S dealership in Dibrugarh

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Ashok Leyland, the flagship commercial vehicle company of the Hinduja Group, has strengthened its presence in Upper Assam with the inauguration of a new 3S (Sales, Service and Spares) dealership in Dibrugarh in partnership with M/s Bimal Auto Commercial Pvt Ltd.

Spread over 40,000 sq ft, the dealership has been equipped with 10 modern service bays and offers customers an integrated facility for vehicle sales, servicing and genuine spare parts under one roof.

Strategically located, the dealership will cater to customers from Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Dhemaji and Lakhimpur, improving access to Ashok Leyland's products and after-sales services across Upper Assam.

The facility features advanced workshop infrastructure, including wheel alignment systems, pneumatic tools, accident repair facilities and mobile service support, aimed at reducing turnaround time and improving vehicle uptime.

Speaking on the occasion, Madhavi Deshmukh, National Sales Head of Ashok Leyland, said the North East remains a key market for the company.

Himanta graces 35th JK Architect of the Year Awards

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday graced the 35th JK Architect of the Year Awards (JK AYA) Ceremony which was successfully held on 15th July 2026 in Guwahati.

The prestigious milestone ceremony brought together eminent architects, construction industry professionals, academicians, and government dignitaries, reaffirming JK AYA's position as one of India's most respected and enduring architectural award platforms.

The program commenced with the welcome of the dignitaries followed by the traditional lamp-lighting ceremony, symbolising knowledge, creativity, and progress.

Addressing the gathering, Dr. Nidhipati Singhania emphasised JK Cement Ltd.'s 35-year commitment to architecture, nation-building, and sustainable development.

A poignant highlight of the evening was a special retrospective honoring the award's historic 35-year legacy and paying homage to the foundational vision of Late Yadupati Singhania, whose ideals and leadership continue to inspire generations and guide the company's contribution to the architectural fraternity.

MODERNIZATION OF GATI SHAKTI OFFICE AT GM/NFR COMPLEX
Tender Notice No.: CPM-GS-MLG-BLD-2026-05. Date: 13-07-2026. Open tender through e-tendering system is invited from experienced and reputed contractors (s)/firm(s) for the following works. **Tender No.: CPM-GS-MLG-BLD-2026-05. Name of work:** At Maligaon Modernization of Gati shakti Office/ Maligaon Ground floor at GM/NFR complex of N. F. Railway. Approx. Value: ₹1,34,83,456.38. E-tender will be closed at 14:30 hrs. on 04-08-2026 and will be opened at 14:30 hrs. on 04-08-2026. For Details please visit www.ireps.gov.in.

AXEN/GSU/MLG-2
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

ENROUTE WATERING OF NOMINATED TRAINS AT MARIANI RAILWAY STATION
Tender Notice No. M-TSK-2026-28
Dated: 14-07-2026. Works tenders through "E" Tendering system for and on behalf of the president of India are invited for the works as detailed below: **Tender No. M-TSK-2026-28. Name of work:** Enroute watering of nominated trains at Mariani Railway Station of Tinsukia Division, N. F. Railway for a period of two years. **Tender Value:** ₹2,16,54,533.58/- **Earnest Money:** ₹2,58,300/- **Date & time of closing of tender:** At 13.00 hrs. on 05-08-2026. The complete information with tender documents of above e-tender will be available in the website www.ireps.gov.in

Divisional Railway Manager (M), Tinsukia Division
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a Smile"

CONSTRUCTION OF STAFF QUARTERS IN LUMDING DIVISION
Tender Notice No.: SCL-Engg-55-2026. E-Tender is invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN-1: Brief Description of Item:** Badarpur : (A) Construction of Staff Quarters (Type-II: 15 Units) in replacement of dilapidated old MG quarters of Buddha Colony, (B) Construction of Staff quarters (Type-II: 15 units) in replacement of dilapidated old MG quarters of Hill Colony under SSE/W/ Badarpur. **Tender Value:** ₹8,77,22,264/- **Earnest Money:** ₹17,54,400/- **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 05-08-2026 and opening at 15:00 hrs. on 08-08-2026.** Complete information along with the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 05-08-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in
DRM(W)/Lumding, Silchar
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a Smile"

DIRECTORATE CUM ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER

P.W.D. (R&B), HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU

No.ACEH/CS/AAP/97/2025-26/06

Dated: 15/07/2026

PRESS NOTICE (RE-TENDER)

Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B), Hills Assam, Diphu on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Bids from registered Contractors (Roads) for the work:"Construction of Road from Hidim Timung near Little Flower to Chelan Tisso" under AAP for the year 2025-26 under the Executive Engineer, PWD, Diphu Roads Division, Diphu.

The details may be seen at the website www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-

Director-cum-Additional Chief Engineer

IPRD/ KAAC/ 2026-27/92

PWD (R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu

DIRECTORATE CUM ADDITIONAL CHIEF ENGINEER

P.W.D. (R&B), HILLS, ASSAM, DIPHU

No. ACEH/CS/AAP/96/2025-26/06

Dated: 15/07/2026

PRESS NOTICE (RE-TENDER)

Director-Cum-Additional Chief Engineer, PWD (R&B), Hills Assam, Diphu on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites Bids from registered Contractors (Roads) for the work:"Construction of Road from Dikreng Longkam Tisso to Mon Sing Teron via Sarpo Rongpi" under AAP for the year 2025-26 under the Executive Engineer, PWD, Diphu Roads Division, Diphu.

The details may be seen at the website www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours.

Sd/-

Director-cum-Additional Chief Engineer

IPRD/ KAAC/2026-27/90

PWD (R&B), Hills, Assam, Diphu

SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER

P.W.D. (R&B), DIPHU CIRCLE-I, DIPHU

No. DPU/KAAC (AAP)/02/2025-26/657

Dated: 14/07/2026

PRESS NOTICE INVITING BID

The Superintending Engineer, PWD (R&B), Diphu Circle-I, Diphu, on behalf of the Governor of Assam, invites bids from approved and eligible contractors registered with PWRD, Assam for one (1) work for : Improvement of road under AAP for the year 2025-26 in Karbi Anglong district amounting to Rs. 1,99,38,000.00 (Approx.)

Details may be seen at www.assamtenders.gov.in and also in the office of the undersigned during office hours from 16.07.2026 to 31.07.2026. The last date/time for receipt of bids is up to 2.00 PM on 31.07.2026.

Sd/-

Superintending Engineer

IPRD/ KAAC/ 2026-27/ 94

PWD (R&B), Diphu Circle-I, Diphu

ELECTRICAL WORKS UNDER TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-Tender Notice No. TSK/Elect/248; dated: 13-07-2026. Works tender through E-Tendering System are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **SN.1. Brief Description of Item:** Electrical (TRD) work in connection with construction of track machine siding at 5 stations - Furkating Jn., Mariani Jn., Simaluguri Jn., Sapekhati and New Tinsukia station. **(Tender No. LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-09-R3).** Tender Value: ₹1,41,77,947.27; Earnest Money: ₹2,20,900.00. **SN.2. Brief Description of Item:** Electrical (TRD) work in connection with construction of machine siding at 8 stations - Boginadi, Bordolani, Sripani, Silapathar, Simen Chapari, Laimekuri, Murkongselek and Numoligarh Station. **(Tender No. LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-10-R3).** Tender Value: ₹69,61,628.05; Earnest Money: ₹1,39,200.00. **SN.3. Brief Description of Item:** Provision of anti-bird disc over Tinsukia division. **(Tender No. LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-13-R).** Tender Value: ₹29,41,345.71; Earnest Money: ₹58,800.00. **SN.4. Brief Description of Item:** TRD work in connection with TSR (P) work in Simaluguri Junction-Morantah & Furkating Junction - Mariani Junction under Tinsukia Division. **(Tender No. LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-17).** Tender Value: ₹37,54,333.12; Earnest Money: ₹75,100.00. **SN.5. Brief Description of Item:** TRD work in connection with realignment of Curve nos. 165, 168, 170, 182, 186, 187, 188, 199, 205, 208, 215 and 216 in North Lakhimpur-Silapathar Section under Tinsukia Division. **(Tender No. LV-T-14-TSK-TRD-18).** Tender Value: ₹3,26,66,295.24; Earnest Money: ₹6,53,300.00. **E-tenders will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 04-08-2026 and Opened at 13:00 hrs. on 04-08-2026.** The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 13:00 hrs. on 04-08-2026 in website <http://www.ireps.gov.in>
DRM (Elect/TRD), Tinsukia
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
"Serving Customers with a smile"

AFFIDAVIT

Through a notary affidavit I, Jamuna Kalita, D/O - Lt Chakram Kalita, W/O- Tankeswar Kalita of Chechamukh, Mouza - Niz Sahar, Nagaon, declare that my actual name is Jamuna Kalita which is recorded in all my documents. But my name is wrongly recorded in my land land document as Rina Kalita, W/O- Tankeswar Kalita.

Both Jamuna Kalita and Rina Kalita is the name of one and single person i.e. myself.

Jamuna Kalita
W/O - Tankeswar Kalita
Chechamukh, Mouza -Niz Sahar, Nagaon (Assam)

NAME CHANGE

My name "Khrishila Teronpi" has been changed to "Khrishila Teronpi, and my Date of Birth "30/08/1983" to "08/10/1981". Therefore, for all intent and purposes my name will be and is Khrishila Teronpi and Date of Birth is 08/10/1981.

Khrishila Teronpi,
W/o- No 15149030H Rank:
HAV Name Ranjit Engngel,
Vill.- Engngel Gaon,
PO- Rajapathar, Dist.: Karbi Anglong, Assam

Capital Point–Rangirkhari road to be rebuilt by PWD; heavy vehicles barred Ministers review key infrastructure projects in Cachar, announce road overhaul

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, July 16: Minister for Public Health Engineering (PHE), Barak Valley Development, Hill Areas Development and Cachar Guardian Minister Krishnendu Paul, along with Minister for Food, Public Distribution, Housing and Urban Affairs, Consumer Affairs and Cooperation Kaushik Rai, on Thursday chaired a high-level review meeting to assess the progress of major infrastructure projects across Cachar and announced a series of measures aimed at expediting road development in the district.

The meeting, held at the new Conference Hall of the Office of the District Commissioner, was attended by senior officials of the District Administration, National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL), Public Works Department (PWD), Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) and other line departments.

During the meeting, the ministers reviewed the implementation status of several key road infrastructure projects, including the Capital



Point–Rangirkhari Road, Silchar Flyover, road leading to the Interstate Bus Terminus (ISBT) and the Birbal Bazar–Silchar Medical College and Hospital Road. Officials presented detailed progress reports, while the ministers examined the pace of execution, identified bottlenecks and directed the implementing agencies to complete the pending works within the stipulated timeframe.

The meeting also reviewed the progress of several other ongoing

road development projects across Cachar, with emphasis on improving connectivity, easing traffic congestion and ensuring greater public convenience.

Among those present were Cachar District Commissioner Rahul Kumar Gupta, Executive Director of NHIDCL Nirman Kishan Jambhulkar, and senior officials from NHIDCL, PWD, PHED and the District Administration.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Minister Kaushik Rai an-

nounced that the Capital Point–Rangirkhari Road, currently under NHIDCL, would be transferred to the Assam Public Works Department (PWD) for complete reconstruction.

He said the PWD would prepare a fresh estimate and undertake reconstruction of the road after completing all necessary government procedures. The project will involve removal of the damaged road surface and construction of a new bituminous carriageway.

Rai further announced that heavy vehicles will no longer be allowed to ply on the Capital Point–Rangirkhari stretch, adding that directions have already been issued to the Additional Superintendent of Police, Cachar, to strictly enforce the restriction in the interest of public safety and smooth traffic movement. The minister also said that the Rangirkhari–Sonabarighat Road, which is presently under NHIDCL, would first undergo construction of a proper drainage system before being handed over to the State PWD for future maintenance and development.

Governor visits Manohari Tea Estate, inaugurates Tea Tasting and Tourist Lounge Lakshman Prasad Acharya reviews welfare measures for tea workers, interacts with students

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Thursday visited Manohari Tea Estate on the concluding day of his two-day tour of Dibrugarh district, where he interacted with tea garden workers, students and members of the estate community and inaugurated a Tea Tasting and Tourist Lounge.

During the visit, the Governor reviewed various welfare measures being implemented for the tea garden community and enquired about the availability of basic amenities, including sanitation, safe drinking water, healthcare and educational facilities.

He also sought feedback from workers on initiatives undertaken for their socio-economic development and overall well-being.

Interacting with students of Manohari Tea Estate LP School, Acharya distributed sweets and spoke to them about their studies and future aspirations.

Encouraging the students to pursue education with dedication,



he expressed hope that they would grow into responsible and successful citizens.

Later, the Governor visited the tea factory and inaugurated the Tea Tasting and Tourist Lounge, which has been developed to showcase the rich heritage of Assam tea while providing visitors with an opportunity to learn

about the traditions and history of the state's tea industry.

During his visit to the factory, Acharya was briefed on the different varieties of tea produced at the estate and the various stages involved in tea processing.

He also interacted with officials on the manufacturing practices followed at the estate.

Eviction begins for ₹100.63-crore AMRUT 2.0 water supply project in Haflong

HT Correspondent

HAFLONG, July 16: The implementation of the Greater Haflong Water Supply Scheme under the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) 2.0 entered a crucial phase on Thursday with the commencement of an eviction drive at a partially encroached plot belonging to the Soil Conservation Department at Lodi village in Haflong. The site has been earmarked for the construction of a major water reservoir, a key component of the ambitious drinking water project aimed at addressing the long-standing water scarcity in Haflong, the headquarters of Dima Hasao district and Assam's only hill station.

Approved under the AMRUT 2.0 programme of the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Government of India, the centrally funded project has an estimated cost of ₹100.63 crore. The scheme is designed to strengthen the town's water supply infrastructure with a pumping capacity of 70 lakh litres of water per day. It will provide House Service Con-

nections (HSCs) to 10,086 households and includes the laying of nearly 70.25 kilometres of distribution pipelines across the town to ensure reliable and efficient water supply.

The project also includes the construction of an underground reservoir with a storage capacity of 2.2 lakh litres, which will support continuous water distribution and improve the overall efficiency of the supply network. Officials said the reservoir is a critical component of the Greater Haflong Water Supply Scheme and will play a vital role in ensuring a safe, sustainable and uninterrupted supply of drinking water to the town's growing population.

They added that the commencement of the eviction process marks the beginning of on-ground implementation of the project, which is expected to be completed within 18 months. Once completed, the scheme is expected to significantly improve the quality, reliability and coverage of drinking water services while supporting Haflong's future urban development.

PM Modi to inaugurate three redeveloped NFR stations today

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will virtually inaugurate three redeveloped railway stations under the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) on Friday as part of the nationwide launch of 75 stations upgraded under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme (ABSS).

The stations to be inaugurated are Majbat in Assam and Jalpaiguri Road and Haldibari in West Bengal. Their inauguration marks a significant milestone in the Centre's railway modernisation initiative aimed at transforming stations into passenger-friendly transport hubs.

Majbat becomes the second railway station in Assam, after Haibargaon, to be inaugurated under the scheme.

Of the 50 stations identified in the state for redevelopment, the station has been upgraded at a cost of ₹10.19 crore.

Jalpaiguri Road and Haldibari stations have been redeveloped at



costs of ₹34.80 crore and approximately ₹26 crore, respectively.

According to NFR, the inauguration reflects the Government of India's focus on strengthening grassroots infrastructure, improving regional connectivity and accelerating development in the Northeast. The redevelopment projects are intended to enhance passenger convenience while preserving the cultural identity of each region.

The upgraded stations feature

improved passenger amenities, better accessibility, modern infrastructure and enhanced aesthetics.

NFR said the three stations set a benchmark for future station redevelopment projects across the zone and are expected to contribute to regional connectivity and socio-economic development.

The inauguration forms part of the Indian Railways' broader effort to modernise railway infrastructure across the country through the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme.

Guv attends Jagannath Rath Yatra Mahotsav

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya on Thursday attended the Jagannath Rath Yatra Mahotsav organised by the Shri Shri Jagannath Cultural Trust in Dibrugarh and extended his greetings and best wishes to devotees on the auspicious occasion.

Addressing the gathering, the Governor described the Rath Yatra as a timeless symbol of India's rich cultural heritage, spiritual values, social harmony and inclusiveness.

"Rath Yatra is a timeless symbol of India's rich cultural heritage, spiritual values, social harmony and inclusiveness. The divine journey of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra inspires people to uphold the ideals of compassion, selfless service and dedication towards the welfare of society," he said.

KKHSOU gets UGC approval to offer science programmes in ODL mode

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) has received approval from the University Grants Commission's Distance Education Bureau (UGC-DEB) to offer M.Sc. programmes in Physics and Chemistry, a B.Sc. programme in Mathematics, and a Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) through the Open and Distance Learning (ODL) mode from the July 2026 academic session.

With the new approvals, KKHSOU becomes a multidisciplinary institution offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Arts, Science and Commerce in line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Addressing a press conference, Vice-Chancellor Prof. Rajendra Prasad Das said the approval would

benefit thousands of learners, particularly in-service science teachers seeking postgraduate education through ODL.

He said the university currently contributes around 11 per cent of Assam's higher education enrolment, with nearly one lakh students enrolled across 77 academic programmes.

Prof Das also announced that KKHSOU has become the first university in Northeast India to be recognised by the National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVT) as an Awarding and Assessment Body, with approval already granted for a skill course in Solar Panel Installation.

Registrar Prof Pranab Saikia said the university is also establishing a Science Laboratory and Skill Hub at its Rani Campus to strengthen science and vocational education.

'Dipholu' title track released ahead of film's theatrical debut

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 16: Building on the positive response to Xorogi Xopun, one of the last songs recorded by the late Zubeen Garg and Gayatri Hazarika, the makers of the upcoming Assamese feature film Dipholu have released its lively title track, Dipholu Nodir Paarote, ahead of the film's theatrical release.

Released on YouTube, the song offers a colourful portrayal of Assamese rural life through vibrant visuals, folk-inspired music and energetic performances by the ensemble cast.

The track has been sung by Rakesh Reeyan and Rupali Kashyap, with lyrics by Nekib, music composed and directed by Jekiv, music programming by Matrix and mixing and mastering by Nobo Medhi.

Unlike the film's earlier romantic ballad, the title track captures the playful and celebratory spirit of vil-

lage life, highlighting community bonding, local traditions and everyday humour that form the backdrop of the film. Director Nekib described the song as the musical identity of Dipholu, saying it reflects the warmth, innocence and energy of Assamese village life while celebrating the state's rich cultural heritage.

Music composer and producer Jekiv said the team sought to blend traditional Assamese folk elements with a contemporary musical style to create a soundtrack that is both familiar and fresh. He expressed hope that the song would resonate with audiences and convey the optimism and joy central to the film.

The music video, directed by Nekib and shot by cinematographer Uttam Kalita, introduces viewers to the film's characters through colourful visuals, lively choreography and authentic rural settings.

Produced by Jekiv and directed by

Nekib, Dipholu marks Borluit Productions' debut feature film following its acclaimed short films Rong – The Colour and Akaax Bisari – Into the Sky. Rooted in the realities of Assamese village life, the film blends humour, romance and social themes while celebrating the culture and resilience of rural Assam.

Besides the title track, the film's soundtrack includes Xorogi Xopun and other original compositions featuring Rupali Kashyap, Rakesh Reeyan and Montumoni Saikia, with lyrics by Nekib and Gargee Bhat-tacharjee.

The film stars Amrita Gogoi, Subrat Deori, Arun Nath, Arun Hazarika, Purnada Hazarika, Rajib Dowari, Jyotishman Borah, Kanika Nath, Anirban Kalita, Ankur Baidya, Dr Hitesh Baruah, Simashree Bora, Priyanshi Kashyap and Dibya Jyoti Borah while veteran actress Mrindula Barua appears in a special role.

AUDC to celebrate 20th Foundation Day tomorrow

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 16: Assam University Diphu Campus (AUDC) will celebrate its 20th Foundation Day on July 18, marking two decades of its contribution to higher education, particularly in empowering students from Karbi Anglong and other under-served areas of the region.

The milestone event will be attended by Air Chief Marshal (Retd) Arup Raha, Chancellor of Assam University as the chief guest. Other distinguished guests include Assam University Vice-Chancellor Prof Rajiv Mohan Pant, Pro Vice-Chancellor Prof Sivasish Biswas, KADC, and Padma Shri awardee Pakhila Lekhethe. The campus administration said elaborate preparations have been completed for the celebration, which will bring together students, faculty members, academicians and eminent personalities to commemorate the institution's journey of academic excellence.

Man jumps into Bhogdoi from Jorhat bypass bridge

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 16: A search operation was underway on Thursday after a man allegedly jumped into the Bhogdoi River from the Jorhat bypass bridge, leaving his bicycle behind on the riverbank.

According to sources, the incident came to light when a delivery worker passing through the area witnessed the man jumping into the river and immediately raised an alarm.

Local residents rushed to the spot but could only see the man floating downstream before he disappeared beneath the water.

On receiving information, a police team and personnel of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) reached the site and launched a search and rescue operation.

However, the missing man had not been traced till the filing of this report.

Sources said the individual is suspected to be a resident of Naubaisa village on the outskirts of Jorhat. Police are continuing their investigation while the search operation remains in progress.

World Snake Day observed in Tezpur; rescuers, doctors honoured Awareness programme stresses timely treatment, aims for zero snakebite deaths by 2030

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 16: World Snake Day was observed in Tezpur on Thursday with a day-long awareness programme and award ceremony organised by the Sarpa Bondhu Sourav Borkotoky Team at the Baliram Lahkar Auditorium of Asomiya Club, highlighting the importance of snake conservation and scientific treatment of snakebite cases.

The programme began with senior journalist Arup Kalita planting a rudraksha sapling at Chitralakha Udyan.

The ceremonial lamp was lit by Tutumoni Kalita, president of the organisation Prakriti, while the inaugural session was presided over by Pushpa Deka, president of the Sarpa Bondhu team.

Addressing the gathering, noted snake conservationist Sourav Borkotoky said the organisation had spent the last 35 years working to dispel myths surrounding snakes and promote scientific awareness.

He recalled that although his rescue work was initially met with scepti-

cism, public recognition came gradually through sustained efforts in conservation and rescue.

Borkotoky said snakebite claimed 150 lives in Assam in 2022, leading to demands for wider availability of Anti-Snake Venom (ASV).

He noted that since ASV became available in most government hospitals in 2023, snakebite deaths have declined significantly, with only seven deaths reported in the state so far this year.

He said the organisation has set a target of reducing snakebite deaths in Assam to zero by 2030.

He urged people to seek immediate medical treatment instead of relying on faith healers or traditional remedies.

Citing the successful treatment of an eight-month-old child at Tezpur Mission Hospital and nearly 1,100 snakebite patients treated successfully at Biswanath Civil Hospital since 2024, Borkotoky stressed that timely medical intervention saves lives.

Sonitpur District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das attended the pro-



gramme as chief guest, while retired forest officer Ramesh Gogoi, doctors Bhabani Bhuyan and Ripun Chutia attended as guests of honour.

Itali Das delivered the welcome address. A documentary titled "Snake Friend Sourav Borkotoky: An Expedition" was screened during the event and its director Sanjay Barua and as-

sistant director Rajballav Sharma were felicitated.

Speaking during the programme, the District Commissioner lauded Borkotoky's contribution to wildlife conservation and public awareness.

Doctors Chafini Berrel B, Ripun Chutia and Bhabani Bhuyan emphasised the importance of prompt med-

ical treatment for snakebite victims, while retired forest officer Ramesh Gogoi described Borkotoky as "a true naturalist."

Several individuals were honoured for their contributions to snake conservation and healthcare.

The Snake Bite Life Saver Award was presented to Dr Chafini Berrel B, the Paribesh Prabari Award to writer Nishanta Kumar Bordoloi while the 'Sarpa Bondhu' (Snake Friend) title was conferred on snake rescuers Champak Sharma of Rangia, Banjit Das of Kamrup and Lohit Saikia of Tezpur.

The Neelakantha Samman was presented to Ankurjyoti Bora and Hemantika Behera.

Meanwhile, the District Health Society of Sonitpur also observed World Snake Day across the district by conducting awareness programmes on snakebite prevention, first aid and conservation.

Health workers educated ASHA workers, Anganwadi workers and local residents on preventive measures and the importance of seeking

immediate medical care following snakebite incidents.

The Health Society advised people to wear protective footwear while working in fields, use torches at night, keep surroundings free of bushes and debris, avoid inserting hands into holes or crevices, and sleep on raised beds or under properly tucked mosquito nets.

In the event of a snakebite, people were advised to keep the victim calm and still, immobilise the affected limb, avoid washing or cutting the wound and immediately shift the patient to the nearest health facility for treatment.

The department also cautioned against harmful practices such as applying tourniquets, cutting or burning the wound, using herbal remedies or alcohol or attempting to suck out venom, reiterating that Anti-Snake Venom should only be administered by trained medical professionals.

It appealed to the public to remain vigilant during the monsoon season and seek prompt medical attention in all snakebite cases.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The artist who aims at perfection in everything achieves it in nothing.- Eugene Delacroix

CJP protest and govt silence

Democratic protest has lost its constitutional relevance and moral values in India and the various democratic institutions have been facing the threat of extinction, is clearly manifest in reluctance of the centre to talk to CJP protestors and especially Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on indefinite hunger strike for the last several days in the support of CJP demands. Wangchuk has not resorted to hunger strikes for some personal gain. He has been the voice of the 22 lakh students who have been the victims of the NEET paper leak. Fasting in support of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), Wangchuk is demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over national examination irregularities. The CJP-led protests demand the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET paper leak controversy and alleged on-screen marking irregularities. Protesters are also asking for ₹1 crore in compensation for the families of students who died by suicide. Demonstrators have scheduled a march to Parliament for July 20 next, which coincides with the opening day of the Monsoon Session. The CJP released an open letter urging Modi to break his silence. But Modi has refused to be engaged. The protest has also gained backing from opposition leaders, including Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray etc.

The CJP also released an open letter to Modi, urging him to break what it called his 'resounding silence' over the agitation and hold Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan accountable for alleged examination paper leaks and student suicides. The letter said Wangchuk's hunger strike was intended to exert 'moral pressure' on the government and questioned why there had been no response to the ongoing protests. NDA government is playing with the fire. The government is not willing to lend its ears to the ground and listen to the vibration. The government would be committing hara-kiri by dismissing CJP's protest as a social media fad. Wangchuk has been a practitioner of Gandhian ideology. Since he represents the cause of the students, there was no reason for the government not to listen to him. Often an autocratic political establishment perceives pro-human stance as a sign of weakness. Rightist fascist forces view it as compromise—on political goals or backtracking on major policies—which demonstrates a lack of authority.

Democratic protest in India remains a vital, constitutionally protected right, but unfortunately its effectiveness is gradually being blunted. While mass demonstrations can force government concessions, critics argue that state crackdowns, media suppression, and internet shutdowns frequently hinder the impact of street-level dissent in the modern era. Authorities frequently rely on measures like internet shutdowns, mass detentions, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) to disrupt or penalize activists, leading to concerns over democratic backsliding.

Youth migration from rural Assam

The consequences of this movement extend well beyond individual households. Remittances undoubtedly improve family income, support children's education, finance better housing and increase household consumption. Many villages have witnessed improved living standards because of money earned outside Assam. Yet these financial gains coexist with significant social costs

Rural Assam is undergoing a quiet but far-reaching demographic and economic transformation. Every year, thousands of youths leave their villages for Guwahati, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Chennai, Pune, Delhi and other cities in search of employment, education and financial security. Migration has always been part of economic history, but the present pattern emerging from Assam is different in both scale and character. It is increasingly driven not merely by aspiration but by necessity. Villages that once depended on agriculture, fisheries, weaving and small rural enterprises are witnessing a steady decline in their young workforce. The elderly remain behind, agricultural land is cultivated with increasing difficulty, and traditional occupations are losing continuity. Rural families often

within their own districts. Government employment remains highly competitive, and the private sector outside a few urban centres is relatively small. Consequently, many young people accept jobs in construction, hospitality, retail, logistics, healthcare, information technology and manufacturing in other states where wages are significantly higher than those available locally. National labour statistics indicate that youth unemployment has eased in recent years, but young people continue to face greater employment challenges than older workers, especially in securing stable and well-paid positions. Migration is therefore driven not only by unemployment but also by underemployment and limited career progression. A diploma holder working as a daily



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

celebrate when a son or daughter secures employment outside the state because it promises regular income, yet the same achievement reflects the inability of the local economy to absorb educated youth. Recent research suggests that Assam has gradually shifted from being primarily a migration-receiving region to becoming a migration-sending state, influenced by structural unemployment, environmental vulnerability, and uneven regional development. This transformation raises an important question. Can Assam build an economy capable of retaining its young population, or will migration become the defining feature of its rural society over the coming decades? The answer depends not only on employment generation but also on the quality of education, industrial growth, agricultural modernisation and the confidence that young people have in the state's economic future. Migration itself is not a failure; every dynamic economy experiences labour mobility. The concern arises when migration becomes the only realistic path to opportunity because local prospects remain limited. That is increasingly the reality confronting many villages across Assam today.

The reasons behind this migration are interconnected rather than isolated. Agriculture continues to employ a large share of the rural population, yet farm incomes remain uncertain due to fragmented landholdings, recurring floods, riverbank erosion, changing rainfall patterns and volatile market prices. Mechanisation has reduced labour demand in some activities, while the absence of food-processing industries and value-addition enterprises limits employment beyond cultivation. Rural graduates often discover that years of education do not translate into meaningful opportunities

wage labourer in his village naturally seeks opportunities elsewhere. Likewise, nursing graduates, engineers, hospitality trainees and skilled technicians often find better career prospects outside Assam. Educational institutions themselves encourage national placement, unintentionally reinforcing outward migration. Better transport connectivity and digital communication have further reduced psychological barriers. Young migrants remain connected with their families through mobile technology while sending regular remittances, making migration socially acceptable and economically attractive. Over time, migration networks become self-sustaining, as relatives and friends help new entrants secure accommodation and employment in destination cities.

The consequences of this movement extend well beyond individual households. Remittances undoubtedly improve family income, support children's education, finance better housing and increase household consumption. Many villages have witnessed improved living standards because of money earned outside Assam. Yet these financial gains coexist with significant social costs. Rural communities gradually lose their most productive age group, weakening agricultural productivity, local entrepreneurship and civic participation. Elderly parents increasingly manage farms without adequate labour, while women often shoulder greater responsibility for both household management and agricultural work. Traditional crafts, indigenous knowledge and community institutions struggle to attract younger participants. Local markets experience reduced economic dynamism because purchasing power increasingly depends on external income rather than locally generated



production. In some districts, labour shortages during peak agricultural seasons have become more visible. Migration also creates emotional challenges for families separated over long periods. Children grow up with one or both parents working in distant cities, while festivals and community events lose much of their younger participation. There are additional risks associated with unsafe migration. Reports from security agencies have highlighted cases where vulnerable rural youth were trafficked or exploited after being lured with false promises of employment, demonstrating the need for stronger awareness campaigns and safer migration systems. These realities illustrate that migration cannot be understood solely through economic statistics. It reshapes social relationships, demographic structures and the cultural life of villages in ways that are difficult to measure but impossible to ignore. At the same time, migration exposes the uneven geography of India's economic development, where employment opportunities remain concentrated in a limited number of metropolitan regions while many peripheral areas continue to export their workforce.

Reversing this trend does not require preventing migration; rather, it requires creating genuine choices. Young people should migrate because they seek broader experiences or specialised careers, not because they see no future at home. Assam possesses considerable economic potential in agriculture, food processing, tea, bamboo, tourism, renewable energy, handloom, fisheries, logistics and the emerging semiconductor and manufacturing ecosystem. Realising this potential demands sustained investment in infrastructure, industrial clusters, skill development linked directly to market demand, easier credit for rural en-

trepreneurs and stronger partnerships between educational institutions and industry. Small and medium enterprises deserve particular attention because they generate employment more rapidly than capital-intensive industries. Digital infrastructure can enable rural youth to participate in remote services, freelancing, e-commerce and knowledge-based work without permanently leaving their villages. Strengthening vocational education, expanding apprenticeship programmes and improving market access for rural producers would further diversify employment opportunities. Better roads, reliable electricity, internet connectivity and efficient logistics remain essential for attracting private investment beyond Guwahati. Policy must also recognise the developmental value of returning migrants, many of whom acquire valuable technical skills, managerial experience and entrepreneurial knowledge while working elsewhere. Creating incentives for them to establish enterprises in Assam could convert migration into an engine of regional development. Ultimately, the challenge is not migration itself but the imbalance that compels excessive dependence on it. A resilient rural economy should retain talent while remaining connected to wider labour markets. Contemporary society increasingly rewards mobility, adaptability and skills, but it must also ensure that economic opportunity is not geographically concentrated. Assam's future prosperity will depend on whether its villages become places where ambitious young people can imagine successful careers without feeling compelled to leave their homeland. That transformation requires consistent policy, private investment, institutional reform and public confidence sustained over many years rather than short-term initiatives.

International Justice Day: Defending the victim's Voice

The human family has walked a long and often blood-stained path to reach a point where we believe that cruelty should not go unpunished, no matter how powerful the person committing it might be. Every year on the seventeenth of July, people around the globe pause to mark the World Day for International Justice. This day is sometimes called the Day of International Criminal Justice or simply International Justice Day. It is a moment dedicated to recognizing a quiet but profound revolution in human history, which is the birth and growth of a system designed to hold individuals accountable for the most terrible crimes known to humanity. It is a day that speaks to the victim who survived a conflict in a small village, to the refugee who had to flee their home with nothing but the clothes on their back, and to every ordinary citizen who believes that fairness should rule the world instead of raw force.

To truly understand why the seventeenth of July matters so much, we have to look back to a historic summer day in the late nineties. On this exact date in the year nineteen ninety-eight, representatives from nations all over the world gathered in Italy to adopt a treaty known as the Rome Statute. This was not just another piece of diplomatic paperwork. It was the foundation stone for the International Criminal Court, which is the very first permanent, independent court capable of trying individuals accused of crimes that shock the collective conscience of human beings. Before this court existed, if a leader or a military commander committed atrocities against their own people or a neighboring country, there was no permanent global courtroom to call them to account. There were only temporary tribunals set up after specific wars, like the famous trials in Nuremberg after the second world war, or the special courts built for the conflicts in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. While those courts did vital work, the world realized it needed something permanent, a standing institution that would send a clear warning to any future wrongdoer that they could not hide behind a flag, a title, or an army.

International Justice Day is not merely a celebration of a building in the Netherlands or a collection of legal articles written by professors. It is a living reminder of a promise that the international community made to itself. That promise states that certain acts are so monstrous that they affect all of humanity, and therefore, all of humanity has a duty to stop them and punish those who order them. The system focuses on four main categories of wrongdoing. The first is genocide, which is the deliberate attempt to destroy a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. The second involves crimes against humanity, which are widespread or systematic attacks directed against civilian populations, including acts like enslavement, torture, and forced displacement. The third category encompasses war crimes, which are serious violations of the laws that govern warfare,

such as targeting hospitals, using child soldiers, or harming prisoners of war. The fourth is the crime of aggression, which happens when a country uses illegal military force against another sovereign state.



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By: Satyabrata Borah

When we speak about these legal terms in a simple way, what we are really talking about is the protection of human dignity. We are saying that even when a war breaks out, there are lines that must never be crossed. A mother carrying her infant should be safe from harm. A doctor trying to heal the wounded should be protected. A school filled with children should never be treated as a target. For centuries, the sad truth of human history was that history was written by the victors, and the powerful often enjoyed total immunity from punishment for their cruelties. International justice aims to turn that old reality on its head by placing the law above power. It asserts that the law is a shield for the weak and a restraint on the strong.

The path toward achieving true international justice is not an easy one, and the system is far from perfect. One of the greatest challenges this system faces is the tension between national sovereignty and global accountability. Many powerful nations are hesitant to fully support a global court because they worry it might interfere with their domestic affairs or target their own citizens or leaders. This means that the court does not have universal jurisdiction. It can generally only step in if the country where the crime happened, or the country where the accused person comes from, has signed the treaty, or if the United Nations Security Council asks the court to investigate. This limitation sometimes creates a feeling of unfairness, where citizens of smaller or less powerful nations face trial while those from larger, dominant states remain untouched. Acknowledging this flaw is a crucial part of International Justice Day because true fairness cannot be selective. If justice is only applied to the weak, it ceases to be justice and becomes a political tool.

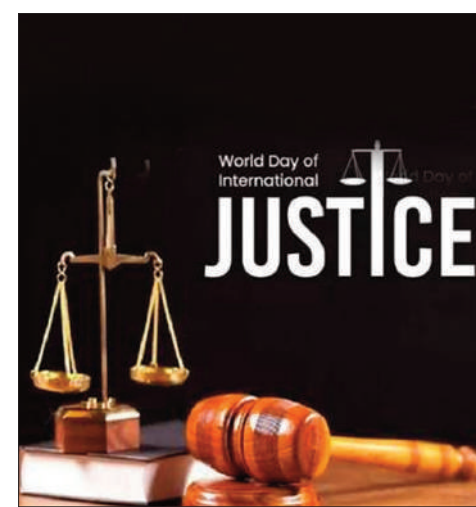
Another challenge is that international courts do not possess their own police forces. They cannot send officers into a country to arrest a president, a rebel leader, or a rogue general. The courts rely entirely on the goodwill and cooperation of national governments to execute arrest warrants, share evidence, protect witnesses, and freeze financial assets. When governments refuse to cooperate, the wheels of justice grind to a halt. We have seen instances where individuals wanted for grave violations travel freely across borders because neighboring states choose to look the other way rather than uphold their international obligations. This reliance on state cooperation shows how fragile the system can be and highlights why constant public pressure and political will are needed to keep the machinery of law moving forward.

The existence of the international justice system has achieved remarkable victories that should give

us hope. Over the years, individuals who once seemed completely untouchable have been forced to sit in a courtroom, listen to the testimonies of their victims, and answer for their actions. We have seen former heads of state, powerful militia commanders, and high ranking government officials convicted and sentenced to long prison terms for their roles in mass violence. Each of these convictions is a monumental milestone. They prove that the world can unite to reject impunity. They offer a deep sense of validation to survivors who spent years believing their suffering would be ignored by the rest of the world.

The impact of international justice goes far beyond the walls of the courtroom. It plays a massive role in rewriting history with truth rather than propaganda. During conflicts, leaders often use lies to justify their actions, blaming the other side and rewriting facts to portray themselves as heroes. But when a court systematically examines forensic evidence, listens to hundreds of witnesses from all sides, and cross-examines experts, it establishes an undeniable, objective record of what actually occurred. This truthful record is incredibly valuable for future generations. It makes it much harder for deniers to claim that a massacre never happened or that an ethnic cleansing was just a minor border dispute. In this way, international justice helps heal societies by anchoring their memory in the truth, which is the only foundation upon which lasting peace can ever be built. It is also important to recognize that international justice is not just about punishing the bad guys after a tragedy has already unfolded. The system is designed to act as a powerful deterrent. The hope is that if a leader or a military officer knows that there is a permanent court watching, and that they could face a lifetime in prison even decades down the road, they might hesitate before ordering an attack on a civilian neighborhood or deploying banned weapons. While it is hard to measure a crime that was never committed because someone was afraid of the law, the growing awareness of international law among modern military planners suggests that the threat of legal consequences is beginning to influence decision making in times of tension.

When we strip away the complex legal language, International Justice Day is deeply centered on the stories of human beings. It is about the survivors who show immense bravery by traveling to a distant city to stand before a panel of judges and recount the most painful moments of their lives. These witnesses often face significant risks to their safety and endure the trauma of remembering their losses, yet they choose to speak because they want to ensure that what happened to them never happens to anyone else. The international justice system has gradually learned to place these victims at the heart of its processes. Unlike traditional criminal systems where the focus is solely on the state and the accused, international courts have created mechanisms for victims to participate in the proceedings and to seek reparations, such as funding for community rehabilitation, schools, medical care, and memorials. This focus on restorative justice acknowledges that healing a broken community requires more than just locking



away a perpetrator; it requires active efforts to rebuild the lives that were shattered.

We must also understand that the international system is never meant to replace local courts. A key principle of this framework is called complementarity. This means that national courts always have the first right and the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute these massive crimes. The international court is designed to be a court of last resort, a safety net that only activates when a country's domestic legal system is genuinely unable or unwilling to carry out the task. For instance, if a nation's courts have completely collapsed due to civil war, or if the people in power are the very ones who committed the atrocities and refuse to investigate themselves, that is when the global community steps in. This principle encourages countries to strengthen their own laws and judiciary so that they can handle these cases at home, closer to the people who were affected.

Today, we are facing new types of global challenges that the writers of the Rome Statute could hardly have anticipated decades ago. We see the devastating impacts of climate change and environmental destruction, which displace millions of people and destroy the habitats of entire communities. There is an ongoing, passionate debate among legal scholars and activists about whether the definition of international crimes should be expanded to include ecocide, which is the widespread, long term destruction of the environment. People are arguing that corporations or leaders who knowingly destroy vital ecosystems for financial or strategic gain are committing a crime against the collective future of humanity and should be held accountable on a global stage. International Justice Day provides a perfect space to discuss these forward looking ideas, ensuring that the law remains a living, breathing tool that can protect us from contemporary harms.

In our modern digital era, the way evidence is gathered has also transformed completely. In the past, investigators had to rely almost entirely on physical documents, mass graves, and eyewitness memories. Today, conflicts are broadcast in real time on social media. Citizens use their mobile

phones to capture video footage of bombings, illegal detentions, and destruction of heritage sites. While this wealth of digital information offers incredible opportunities to document wrongdoing, it also presents massive hurdles. Courts must learn to verify this data, ensuring that videos are authentic and have not been manipulated or generated by artificial intelligence. Human rights organizations and tech experts are working hand in hand to create digital chains of custody that can turn a simple phone video into ironclad evidence that can stand up in a court of law. This fusion of technology and law is a testament to the evolving nature of the fight for accountability.

It is easy to look at the state of the world today, with ongoing conflicts, visible human suffering, and geopolitical divisions, and feel a sense of cynicism about the concept of international justice. We see international laws being openly ignored by powerful actors, and we watch the news feeling helpless as innocent civilians bear the brunt of political ambitions. But cynicism is a luxury we cannot afford. The alternative to a world governed by international law is a world governed by total chaos, where might makes right and the vulnerable have absolutely no recourse. The progress we have made since nineteen ninety-eight is not a straight line, but a crooked path with many steps forward and occasional steps backward. The very fact that we now have a shared language to condemn these acts, a permanent court to investigate them, and a global day to remember them is a massive victory compared to the centuries of total silence that came before.

International Justice Day is an invitation for everyone, not just lawyers and politicians, to become active participants in this global movement. We can support this cause by educating ourselves about human rights, by speaking out against injustice in our own communities, and by demanding that our national governments respect international treaties and support global legal institutions. When citizens around the world make it clear that they care about international law, it becomes much harder for political leaders to walk away from their commitments. We must remember that the grand architecture of international justice is only as strong as the collective will of the people who support it.

As the seventeenth of July arrives each year, it brings a message of deep solidarity. It reminds us that our empathy should not stop at our national borders. The pain of a family losing their home in a conflict zone halfway across the planet is not separate from us; it is a wound on our shared humanity. By committing ourselves to the ideals of international justice, we are declaring that we refuse to look away. We are asserting that a peaceful world is impossible without a just world, and that the long arc of the moral universe can indeed be bent toward fairness if we work together to bend it. Let this day be a time to honor the survivors, thank the brave investigators and lawyers who work in difficult conditions to find the truth, and renew our shared vow to create a world where law protects every single human life with equal measure.

Ethanol: Energy Security and the Path to Sustainable Growth

By: Lalit Garg

The world today is grappling with a threefold challenge—energy security, climate change, and escalating fuel costs. The Russia-Ukraine conflict, continuing tensions in West Asia, and disruptions in global supply chains have made it abundantly clear that excessive dependence on imported crude oil is not a sustainable long-term strategy for any nation. For a country like India, which imports nearly 85 percent of its crude oil requirements, the search for alternative fuels is not merely an environmental imperative but also an economic and strategic necessity. It is in this context that ethanol-blended fuels such as E20 (20 percent ethanol-blended petrol) and, more recently, E85 for flex-fuel vehicles are being actively promoted.

In recent months, the introduction of E20 has sparked considerable public debate. Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri has described E20 as completely safe, scientifically validated, and compliant with international standards. According to him, millions of vehicles across India have been successfully using E20 over the past few years without any evidence of widespread technical issues. On the other hand, consumer organizations, vehicle owners, and some experts have raised concerns regarding reduced fuel efficiency, compatibility with older engines, and potential long-term effects. This debate underscores an important reality: the success of any new energy policy depends not only on technological advancement but also on public confidence, transparency, and informed scientific dialogue.

In reality, ethanol is far from being a new fuel. It is a renewable biofuel produced from sugarcane, corn, and other biomass sources, and is blended with petrol for transportation use. Ethanol blending helps reduce dependence on fossil fuels, lowers carbon emissions, and creates an additional market for agricultural produce, thereby increasing farmers' incomes. In India, the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme has significantly benefited sugarcane farmers, strengthened

the financial health of sugar mills, and contributed to substantial savings in foreign exchange by reducing crude oil imports. A look at global experience reveals that Brazil stands out as the most successful example of ethanol adoption. For decades, E27 (27 percent ethanol-blended petrol) has been the standard fuel across the country, while a large number of flex-fuel vehicles can also operate on E100, or nearly pure ethanol. Brazilian consumers enjoy the freedom to choose between petrol and ethanol depending on price and convenience. The country's robust agricultural base and well-developed ethanol industry have been instrumental in making this model a remarkable success.

The United States has also been using ethanol as a transportation fuel for several decades. E10 is widely available at most fuel stations, while E85 is commonly used by flex-fuel vehicles. The corn-based ethanol industry has strengthened rural economies and reduced the country's dependence on imported energy resources. Across Europe, E10 has become the standard blend in many countries. However, Europe has not relied solely on ethanol; instead, it has adopted a balanced strategy that simultaneously promotes sustainable biomass, advanced biofuels, and electric mobility. Countries such as Canada, Thailand, Australia, Japan, and the Philippines have likewise implemented ethanol blending policies suited to their unique agricultural resources, economic priorities, and energy requirements.

At the same time, many countries are rapidly investing in a broader portfolio of renewable fuels and alternative energy technologies alongside ethanol. Bio-butanol, for instance, is considered a superior biofuel due to its higher energy density and compatibility with existing engines with minimal modifications. ABE (Acetone-Butanol-Ethanol) blends are also emerging as promising next-generation biofuels. Biodiesel has already become a well-established alternative for diesel-powered vehicles in many parts of the world. Beyond these, Green Hydrogen, Bio-Hydrogen, Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF), and synthetic e-



fuels are increasingly regarded as critical pillars of the future energy ecosystem. Clearly, the global trend is not to rely on a single fuel but to develop a diversified and balanced energy mix.

For India, ethanol offers multiple strategic advantages. It helps reduce crude oil imports, conserves valuable foreign exchange, strengthens energy self-reliance, provides additional income opportunities for farmers, and contributes to lower carbon emissions. According to government estimates, the ethanol blending programme has already resulted in foreign exchange savings worth thousands of crores of rupees. If ethanol production is balanced through the use of sugarcane, maize, and agricultural residues, it can also provide a significant boost to the rural economy. Nevertheless, certain practical challenges cannot be overlooked. Several automobile manufacturers have acknowledged that older vehicle models are not fully compatible with E20 fuel. Ethanol's high affinity for absorbing moisture may, under certain conditions, affect metallic components of the fuel system. Moreover, because ethanol contains less

energy per litre than petrol, some vehicles may experience a modest reduction in fuel economy. Rather than dismissing these concerns as mere misconceptions, they should be addressed through rigorous scientific testing, independent research, and transparent public communication.

The government and the automobile industry must ensure that E20 and E85 fuels are used only in vehicles certified for these blends. Clear vehicle labeling, proper consumer information at fuel stations, public awareness campaigns, and technical training are essential for smooth implementation. Furthermore, ethanol production policies must carefully balance food security, water use, and environmental sustainability so that the pursuit of energy independence does not inadvertently compromise agricultural or ecological priorities. The reality is that ethanol is neither a universal solution to all energy challenges nor an option that should be dismissed outright. Rather, it represents an important component of the broader global energy transition. Going forward, India must pursue a balanced strategy that integrates ethanol,

biodiesel, green hydrogen, electric mobility, CNG, bio-CNG, and synthetic fuels. Such a diversified approach will provide a stronger foundation for both energy security and environmental sustainability.

The need of the hour is not to support or oppose ethanol on ideological grounds, but to make informed decisions based on scientific evidence, practical experience, and objective analysis. If the ethanol blending programme is implemented with transparency, rigorous scientific validation, consumer protection, and robust infrastructure, it can become a major milestone on India's journey toward energy self-reliance. Conversely, if public concerns are ignored or expansion proceeds without adequate preparation, even a well-conceived policy could become mired in unnecessary controversy. India must therefore draw lessons from global best practices and move forward with a phased, science-driven, and widely accepted energy transition. That alone will ensure long-term energy security, economic resilience, and sustainable green growth.

When earnings become more important than relationships



By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

In Indian society, the family has been not merely a collection of blood relations, but a vibrant institution of trust, sacrifice, partnership, and mutual responsibility. The greatest strength of this institution was that it encompassed both rights and duties. As times changed, education expanded, and women's participation expanded beyond the confines of the home, reaching education, administration, medicine, justice, the military, science, and industry. Economic independence gave women new confidence, the ability to make decisions, and social respect. This change was not only necessary but also a significant step towards a just society.

But every social change brings with it new challenges. Today, as both husband and wife earn, the question of sharing responsibilities alongside financial sharing has become more important than ever. Unfortunately, this balance appears to be deteriorating in many families. In some cases, there is an overemphasis on rights, while in others, duties are neglected. As a result, relationships are losing the ease and closeness that once characterized joint families.

For a long time, in Indian society, the man was considered the economic pillar of the family. His wife, children, and parents were considered to have a moral right to his earnings. He considered his income not personal property but the family's capital. On the other hand, women's contributions were more visible in domestic labor, child rearing, and family management. In modern times, circumstances have changed. Women are contributing as much financially as men by working hard. Therefore, the natural expectation was that economic responsibilities would be shared equally. However, in practice, the picture is often not so simple.

Today, in many families, it's common knowledge that the husband's income is still considered the primary source of income, while the wife's income is considered a means of personal savings, personal investment, or personal independence. This isn't the case in every family, but where it exists, it causes dissatisfaction. If the husband bears every major household expense, but the wife's income is kept separate from family responsibilities, the principle of equality remains incomplete. Similarly, if the husband expects the wife to work, manage the household, and yet

lack independence in financial decisions, this is also unjust. The problem isn't one party's, but one of double standards.

Equality doesn't just mean equal rights. It also means equal responsibility. If both earn, they should share responsibility for the family's needs, future plans, children's education, elderly care, and emergencies. Financial partnership means not only combining income, but also building trust.

The other aspect of the problem is psychological. Money not only provides comfort, it also gives confidence. But if this confidence turns into arrogance, it creates distance in relationships. Sometimes, it is seen that those with higher incomes begin to feel more empowered to make decisions. This tendency has been seen in men and is now visible in some women as well. Therefore, it would be correct to say that financial arrogance is a problem of only one gender. The arrogance of wealth changes the person, not their gender.

Today, in social media and public discourse, male-female relationships are often presented as a conflict. One side asserts its rights, while the other laments the injustices it has suffered. In this tug-of-war, family, communication, and partnership are left behind. Any ideology that aims to establish balance should be welcomed. However, if its interpretation limits its rights to the exclusion of duties, it is natural for imbalance to arise in society.

It's also true that millions of women today spend their entire income on their families. Along with their jobs, they also shoulder the responsibilities of home, children, and the elderly. There are many families where husbands and wives share their earnings without any accounting and make decisions together. Therefore, blaming any one group is neither fair nor factual. The aim of social analysis should not be to make accusations, but to understand trends and find solutions.

The problem becomes serious when financial transparency between husband and wife disappears. When income, savings, investments, and expenses become separate worlds, suspicion begins to creep into the relationship. Financial secrecy sometimes turns into emotional distance. Marriage is a partnership, not a business contract. Trust is its greatest asset.

The greatest irony of modern life is that conveniences have increased, but satisfaction has decreased. Incomes have risen, but communication has diminished. Independence has increased, but partnerships

have weakened. In the past, families lived together even with limited resources because decisions were made collectively. Today, resources are plentiful, but a mindset of "mine" and "yours" often divides relationships.

Here's another important question. Is domestic labor less valuable than economic income? If the wife manages the home and the husband earns outside, is the breadwinner the sole breadwinner of the family? Absolutely not. Similarly, if the wife also works, is it appropriate to leave all the household responsibilities to her? The answer to this is also no. A family will remain balanced only when both economic and domestic labor are equally respected.

This changing environment is also affecting children. When they see their parents embroiled in economic competition, their own definitions of relationships begin to shift. They learn a language of rights rather than cooperation. This is a matter of concern for future generations. Family not only creates the present, it also shapes the future.

What is the solution? The solution lies not in blaming one party, but in strengthening family communication. After marriage, husband and wife should openly discuss financial expectations, savings, investments, family expenses, and personal needs. It should be agreed that both will contribute to the family according to their respective capacities. Whether someone's income is high or low should not be the criterion for respect.

The true meaning of economic independence is not freedom, but responsible freedom. A free person is one who accepts their duties along with their rights. If earnings become a means of personal convenience, leaving the collective needs of the family behind, even economic prosperity cannot save relationships.

Today, we need to forge a new definition of equality. One in which men abandon their traditional superiority and embrace partnership, and women respect their economic independence and family responsibilities equally. Both see each other as collaborators, not competitors. Marriage is not a platform for victory or defeat, but a shared journey through life.

Ultimately, we must remember that money can make life comfortable, but it cannot make life happy. A bank balance can provide security, but not closeness. Expensive houses can be built, but families cannot be bought. The ultimate currency of relationships, even today, is trust, sensitivity, sacrifice, and mutual respect.

When income becomes more important than relationships, the family gradually transforms into a financial unit. Calculation replaces love, ownership replaces partnership, and dialogue replaces argument. Therefore, it's crucial to understand early on that earning money is a means to life, not its purpose. If money strengthens relationships, it's a blessing, but if it becomes a barrier between them, there's no greater irony.

A healthy society will be one where both men and women are financially capable, independent, respected, and fulfill their duties with equal devotion to their rights. This is true equality, true partnership, and the greatest strength of the Indian family system. (Dr. Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

Time for social reform: Drug-free youth, decent culture and crime-free Haryana

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

The greatest strength of any state is its youth. If youth are equipped with education, employment, values, and opportunities, they can elevate the state and nation to new heights. However, if these same youth are exposed to drug addiction, crime, and distraction, this very strength becomes a significant challenge for society. Today, the growing trend of drug abuse in many parts of the country, including Haryana, the influence of gangster culture, the glorification of crime on social media, and the increasing obscenity in stage programs are issues that require serious consideration. These problems cannot be resolved solely by relying on the law; instead, society, families, artists, educational institutions, and the administration must all shoulder their responsibilities together.

The first and foremost fight should be against drug addiction. If addiction is eradicated, a major cause of crime will automatically disappear. Addiction ruins not only the individual but the entire family. When a youth falls prey to addiction, they drop out of school, their health deteriorates, their family faces financial crisis, and they gradually begin to drift towards the world of crime. Drug addiction often becomes the primary cause of crimes like theft, robbery, violence, and murder. Therefore, a drug-free society is not only a matter of health, but also of law and order and social development.

Every parent dreams of their son or daughter leading a respectable life through education. No mother wants her son to be ruined before her eyes by drug addiction. Therefore, the primary goal of the government, administration, and society should be to protect the young generation from drug addiction. If youth are safe, families will be safe, and if families are safe, society and the nation will also become stronger. A system should be developed that ensures no mother cries upon seeing her son's dead body, and no father has to despair for his son's future.

Police action alone is not enough against drug abuse. Regular awareness campaigns must be conducted in schools, colleges, and universities. Students must be involved in sports, libraries, cultural activities, and skill development. Young people must be convinced that true success in life lies not in addiction, but in hard work, education, and discipline. De-addiction centers in villages and cities must be made more effective so that those who have fallen into the grip of addiction can be respectfully brought back into the mainstream.

Additionally, gangster culture has become a serious social challenge. Some criminal organizations lure innocent and underage children into crime. Young children are lured into crime by the allure of easy money, expensive cars, weapons, and social media fame. Often, these children are unaware of the quagmire they are entering. By the time they realize the reality, their future, their

families, and their lives are already in jeopardy.

The most worrying thing is that the adults who commit crimes remain silent while inciting innocent children. Ultimately, these children and their families bear the brunt of the crime. A minor's involvement in crime exposes his or her entire family to social humiliation, financial hardship, and mental anguish. Therefore, strict action against such criminal gangs is the need of the hour.

The police administration constantly strives to control crime, but the cooperation of society is equally essential. If suspicious activities are observed in any area, if someone is luring children into crime or dealing in illegal weapons and drugs, it is the duty of every responsible citizen to inform the relevant authorities. Only collective awareness of society can be the most effective weapon against criminals.

Social media has also exacerbated this problem. Today, some people portray gangsters as heroes. Their songs, videos, and posts portray crime as a symbol of power and honor. This trend has a negative impact on the minds of young people. Society needs to break these myths and introduce young people to real heroes—those who have brought glory to the nation through education, science, sports, the military, agriculture, industry, and social service.

Similarly, serious consideration is needed regarding the direction of cultural programs and stage events. Haryana has a rich cultural heritage. Its raginis, folk songs, folk dances, and traditional arts are hallmarks of Indian culture. These folk traditions, along with entertainment, also imparted moral education, social messages, and cultural dignity. However, over time, complaints have emerged regarding the increasing vulgarity, obscenity, and unnecessary display in some stage programs.

It is inappropriate for family viewing programs to feature scenes that adversely affect children and adolescents. Artists are a source of inspiration for society. Their words, their clothing, their performances, and their behavior reach millions. Therefore, artists' social responsibility is as great as their popularity.

Haryana's artists should be expected to maintain decorum on stage. Entertainment does not necessarily mean obscenity. Art becomes great when it unites, inspires, and positively guides society. The soul of folk culture lies in its simplicity, sensitivity, and social consciousness. If the stage becomes merely a medium for provocation, it loses its original identity.

Wherever public events are held, the organizers should be held accountable. They should adhere to the rules set by the administration, avoid obscene performances, control noise pollution, and conduct events within social norms. This will preserve culture and foster a positive environment in society.

However, it's important to remember that any art or cultural activity should be evaluated with a balanced perspective. Not all artists or stage programs are

the same. Many artists continue to promote excellent folk culture, social messages, and family entertainment. Therefore, the need is not to blame an entire community, but to discourage trends that violate social norms.

If drug addiction decreases in society, crime is effectively controlled, and cultural programs are given a positive direction, the younger generation will have a better environment. To achieve this, the government must increase employment opportunities, expand sports facilities, develop libraries and playgrounds in rural areas, and connect youth with skills training. Idle time and frustration often lead young people down the wrong path. Providing positive alternatives is as important as enforcing the law.

The role of families is paramount. Parents must become friends with their children. Sensitively monitor their behavior, peer groups, and digital activities. Maintaining communication with children, teaching them moral values, and addressing their problems in a timely manner are the most effective measures to prevent crime and drug abuse.

The role of teachers is also crucial. Schools aren't just a place to pass exams. They are centers of character development. If teachers instill discipline, sensitivity, patriotism, and a sense of social responsibility in students, future generations can become more aware and responsible.

Haryana has given the country soldiers, athletes, scientists, farmers, sportsmen, administrative officers, and many talented citizens. This state is known for its hard work, courage, and cultural identity. Therefore, it is essential that its new generation also carries forward this glorious tradition. To achieve this, a comprehensive public awareness campaign against drug addiction, crime, and social evils is the need of the hour.

Society progresses only when it recognizes its problems and makes collective efforts to address them. If we truly want every home to be prosperous, no mother to cry for her son, no innocent to be pushed into the world of crime, and our culture to progress with its dignity intact, we must take a pledge today. A decisive fight against drugs, strict action against gangster networks, the protection of children, respect for cultural dignity, and a positive social environment—this is the path that can become the foundation for a bright future not only for Haryana but for the entire country.

(Dr. Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

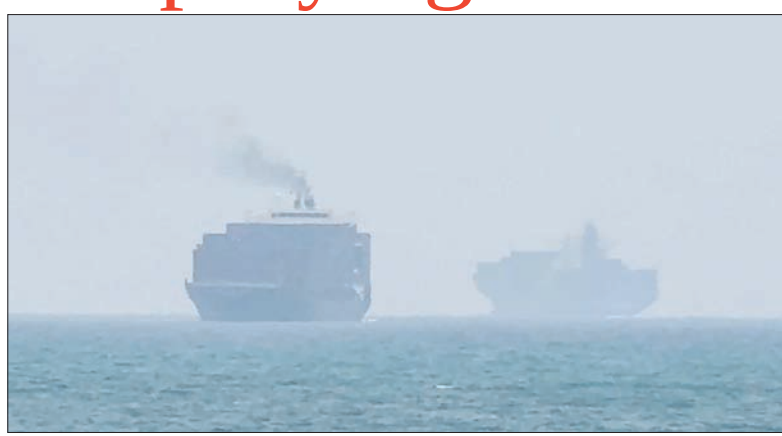
US expands strikes into northern Iran, disables ship trying to run blockade

DUBAI, July 16: The United States intensified its strikes on Iran early Thursday, hitting targets further north as American forces also fired into a ship the US accused of trying to break its naval blockade on the Islamic Republic. Iran retaliated with missile and drone fire targeting US allies in the region before dawn and warned its attacks may escalate.

Days of back-and-forth strikes by the US and Iran across the Middle East — and renewed threats to the Strait of Hormuz — have shredded the interim deal to end the Iran war and could tip the region back into all-out war. Already, Iranian officials say US strikes have killed more than 35 people and wounded over 300 others. Strikes also reached into areas around Iran's capital, Tehran, for the first time in this latest round of violence, showing a widening set of targets for the Americans.

When the US and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28, Tehran effectively closed the strait to shipping traffic, a move that sent the price of oil, fertiliser and many other goods soaring far beyond the region and gave Iran major leverage in negotiations.

Col. Ebrahim Zolfaghari, a spokesperson for the Iranian military's Khatam al-



Anbiya Central Headquarters, threatened that Iran could launch widespread attacks on regional infrastructure if the US acts on President Donald Trump's repeated warnings that America could hit Iranian bridges and power plants.

"All the infrastructure in the region will be crushed under the steel blows of the powerful armed forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran" should Trump's threat be carried out, Zolfaghari said.

"Under no circumstances and in no way will we allow America, as a foreign and extra-regional country, to interfere in the Strait of Hormuz," he

added. "This is Iran's invincible red line."

The US strikes early Thursday hit around Tehran, state media reported. It also reported that American attacks targeted Semnan province, home to Iran's ballistic missile production and space program. Iranian media also reported strikes Thursday morning around the provinces of Hamedan, Hormozgan, Khuzestan, Lorestan, Markazi, and Sistan and Baluchistan.

On Wednesday, the US resumed striking Iran during daylight, further showing the increasing tempo of the at-

tacks. An attack on Greater Tunb Island, a strategic point in the Strait of Hormuz, targeted Iranian defence and missile sites, Central Command said.

Meanwhile, the US military said it opened fire on the Curacao-flagged oil tanker Belma sailing toward Kharg Island, Iran's main oil export terminal in the Persian Gulf. After the ship "ignored multiple warnings," a US aircraft disabled the merchant vessel by firing a missile into the ship's smokestack.

Another American strike Wednesday targeted a barracks for Iran's 388th Mechanised Infantry Brigade, which operates tanks and armoured vehicles, in Sistan and Baluchestan province, Iranian state television reported. The report said Americans fired at least 13 missiles in the attack and the seven dead included conscripts and career soldiers. A number of troops were wounded.

Iran retaliated Thursday morning with missile and drone attacks on Bahrain, Jordan and Kuwait, authorities in those countries home to US forces said. There was no immediate acknowledgment of damage or casualties from the attacks. Kuwait reported a new round of incoming fire on Thursday afternoon. (AP)

Protesters rally in Kyiv as Zelenskyy moves to oust Ukraine's defence minister

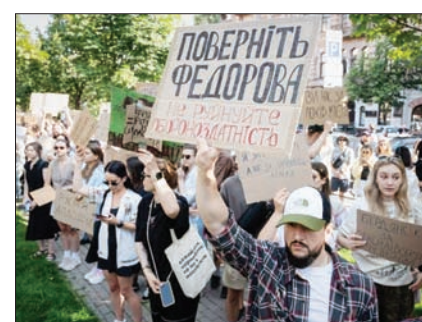
KYIV, July 16: Hundreds of protesters gathered in downtown Kyiv on Thursday after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy moved to dismiss his defense minister, as parliament appointed a new prime minister as part of a major government reshuffle.

The shake-up could become a test of Zelenskyy's political authority as Ukraine's fight against Russia's full-scale invasion approaches 4½ years.

Ukraine's parliament approved Serhii Kortsykyi, the head of state energy company Naftogaz, as the country's new prime minister. Zelenskyy nominated Kortsykyi, citing his record in the energy sector and arguing that he was best placed to help prepare Ukraine for another wartime winter. He was voted in with 289 votes in favour.

Outgoing Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov, 35, is considered to be a moderniser whose technological expertise is credited in part with a significant improvement in Ukraine's military performance in recent months against Russia's bigger army. He was expected to leave the government after just six months in the post.

Zelenskyy didn't publicly give a reason for Fedorov's anticipated exit. Unconfirmed Ukrainian media reports said that Fedorov had a strained relationship with Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, the commander of Ukraine's armed forces. Syrskyi, 60, is credited with initially organizing the defense of Kyiv in February 2022, and seven months later mas-



terminated a successful counteroffensive in the Kharkiv region. He was born in 1965 in the Soviet Union and attended Moscow Higher Military Command School before serving in the Soviet Artillery Corps.

The mostly young protesters shouted Fedorov's name and made crude remarks about Skryskyi. They chanted, "Syrskyi go away!" and "A European army for a European country!"

Bohdan Huryak, a Kyiv resident at the protest, said that he was "deeply outraged" by Fedorov's exit.

"I'm not deeply invested in the internal political debates, but this is a person who shows results on the battlefield, we see results, we feel the fighting spirit and confidence in victory rising," Huryak told The Associated Press. "And then, six months later, he is removed from office? Come on." (AP)

US imposing 25% tariff on some Brazilian imports starting July 22, citing unfair trade practices



WASHINGTON, July 16: The United States is imposing 25% tariffs on imports from Brazil after finding a range of what it deemed unfair trade practices by the world's 10th-biggest economy.

The tariffs, which were first proposed last month, will take effect July 22.

The order exempts some goods that are not produced in the US or that officials worry would disrupt supply chains.

Exempted products include coffee, beef, oranges and orange juice, some oil and gas energy products and aerospace parts and components.

The Office of the US Trade Representative concluded after a yearlong investigation that Brazil had a range of unfair trade practices, including lax anti-corruption enforcement and unfair tariffs of its own, among other practices seen as unreasonable and unfair.

The US, however, has had a goods trade surplus with Brazil for years.

US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer said in a statement that the action was necessary to ensure American workers and companies compete on a level playing field.

"Extensive negotiations with Brazil over the past year have not resolved these issues, but we remain open to continuing negotiations with Brazil to bring about long-needed changes to the problems identified in this investigation," he said.

After US officials in early June warned that they were proposing the tariffs, Brazilian Pres-

ident Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva reacted with indignation.

He instead pointed to political considerations, blaming his rival in the country's October elections, Sen Flavio Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro had recently visited Washington and is the son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, an ally of President Donald Trump.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio said in a post on X about the announcement of the tariffs: "Let there be no confusion about why: President Lula and his government have not negotiated with the US in good faith. His economic policies are bad for Americans and bad for Brazilians. For the past year, Lula has put his own ego ahead of making a deal for the welfare of the Brazilian people, and these tariffs are the price for that."

The tariffs are being imposed under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, allowing the US to launch the investigation into Brazil's trade practices.

The US Supreme Court in February ruled against many of Trump's tariffs imposed under a different law, the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977. The court found he overstepped his authority under that act to impose sweeping tariffs on US trading partners, including Brazil.

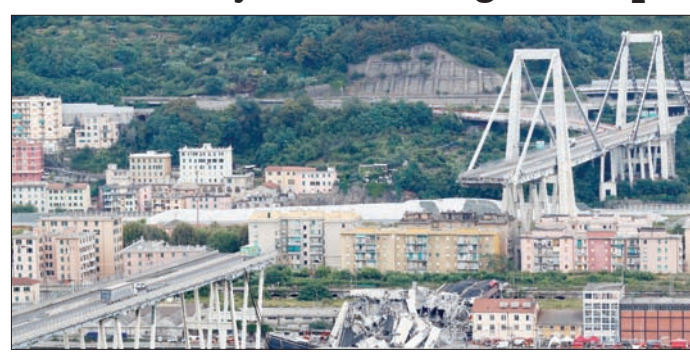
Trump had under that law imposed a 50% tariff on Brazil to protest its prosecution of Jair Bolsonaro for trying to overturn his loss in a 2022 election. But Trump's relationship with Lula seemed to improve in May, when he visited the White House. (AP)

Former CEO of Italian highway operator handed 12-year sentence over deadly 2018 bridge collapse

GENOA (ITALY), July 16: An Italian court on Thursday convicted the former CEO of Italian highway operator Autostrade per l'Italia in the deadly collapse of Genoa's highway bridge that killed 43 people nearly eight years ago.

The former chief executive, Giovanni Castellucci, received a 12-year sentence after four years of trial and four hours of deliberations. He was among dozens of defendants convicted in the collapse that revealed serious lapses in the maintenance of Italian infrastructure. On the morning of August 14, 2018, a 200-metre (650-foot) section of Genoa's Morandi highway bridge gave way during a rainstorm, sending dozens of vehicles plunging to the ground.

Images of the collapsed bridge were seen around the world and shocked Italians on one of Italy's busiest travel days, as millions headed out for the traditional Au-



gust 15 Ferragosto holiday that marks the peak summer vacation season. The 57 defendants include former executives of highway operator Autostrade per l'Italia, experts from its engineering company SPEA and former officials from Italy's Infrastructure and Transport Ministry.

Most face charges, including negligent disaster and multiple counts of manslaughter stemming

from alleged failures to maintain the bridge, which was part of a main route linking northern Italy with the French Riviera.

Prosecutors argued that years of maintenance neglect led to the collapse, and demanded combined sentences totalling nearly 400 years for all of the defendants. The defendants deny wrongdoing and say the fault was caused by a construction defect. (AP)

Syrian authorities seize truck of rockets allegedly bound for Lebanon's Hezbollah

DAMASCUS, July 16: Syrian authorities thwarted an attempted weapons smuggling on its border with Iraq, reportedly heading to the Iranian-backed Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon, state media said Thursday.

The truck that was seized was carrying advanced weapons and rockets, Syria's state-run SANA news agency quoted an unnamed Interior Ministry official as saying. A preliminary investigation concluded that its intended destination was Hezbollah in Lebanon, which since early March has been at war with Israel, the official said.

The new leadership in Syria, which toppled former President Bashar Assad in 2024, has cracked down on smuggling of weapons and illicit drugs along its borders, especially with Iraq and Lebanon, that for decades have served as strategic routes for supplying Hezbollah and other groups backed by Iran.

US President Donald Trump has insisted Syria take military action against Hezbollah, as Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa has been trying to prevent his country from being sucked into a wider regional conflict. Hezbollah did not comment on the allegations.

Iraqi Prime Minister Ali al-Zaidi earlier this week travelled to Washington to meet with Trump, who has been pushing Baghdad to disarm Tehran-backed militias. (AP)

Indian national stabbed in US over his religion: Reports

WASHINGTON, July 16: An Indian man was allegedly stabbed 15 times inside a shopping mall near Salt Lake City in the US state of Utah because of his religion, media reports said. Syed Sohailuddin, a worker in the Valley City Mall in West Valley City, Utah, was allegedly stabbed on Monday afternoon by Peter Michael Larsen, who asked the victim his religion, Fox 13 News reported.

The suspect, Larsen, was arrested on suspicion of attempted murder and carrying a prohibited dangerous weapon. He told police he targeted the employee over his religious beliefs, according to the court records, ABC News reported. Sohailuddin was transported to the hospital, where he underwent surgery. Larsen was also hospitalised with injuries suffered after he was punched in the head by those who stepped in to stop the alleged assault.

The Consulate General of India in San Francisco said it was deeply saddened by the tragic stabbing incident involving an Indian national in Utah.

"The Consulate is in close contact with the friends and family and stands ready to provide all possible consular assistance. We remain engaged with local authorities and will continue to monitor the matter closely," the Consulate said in a post on X.

Larsen told the law enforcement officials that "he believes he is a catalyst and he intends to kill Muslims."

An affidavit filed by the authorities in court said that releasing Larsen from jail would be dangerous, "based on his violent actions today" and his ideologies.

A witness told FOX 13 News that he was inside a nearby store where he worked when he heard shouting and people running away from a scene where the alleged stabbing had taken place.

Before attacking, the suspect asked Sohailuddin, who was working at a mall kiosk, where he was from, his name and if he was Muslim, said Luna Nunez, who works with the victim. Nunez was recalling the conversation she had with Sohailuddin when she visited him in the hospital.

Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill, whose office is determining whether to pursue charges, declined to comment.

"We don't want to say anything else until we receive the results of the investigation," Gill said in a statement.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations, a Muslim advocacy group, called on elected officials to reject anti-Muslim rhetoric. The New York Times quoted Imam Shuaib Din, who leads the Utah Islamic Centre, a mosque Sohailuddin has attended, as saying that there has been a spike in harassment, threats and violence against Muslims in Utah since the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas against Israel. (PTI)

1 dead, 23 missing after passenger boat sinks in Indonesia

PALU, July 16: One person is dead and 23 are missing after a passenger boat sank on the way to an island in Indonesia, authorities said Thursday.

KM Nurul Salsa carried 70 passengers and crew, as well as copra, cattle and motorcycles, when the ship left the port in Jampea Island on Wednesday morning.

Authorities received a report Wednesday afternoon that the ship's engine had failed and it was sinking about 43 nautical miles (79 kilometres) from its destination port in the Selayar Islands in South Sulawesi Province. Rescuers located 46 survivors and were searching for the 23 missing passengers on Thursday, according to Muhammad Arif Anwar, head of the Makassar Search and Rescue Office, who said the effort had been hampered by poor weather.

"The challenge is the weather, with waves 2 to 2.5 metres high at the search site. The winds are also strong. That's the main challenge," Anwar said.

The search involved personnel from the Indonesian National Armed Forces, National Police, fishermen and residents.

Passenger boats are a common form of transportation in Indonesia, an archipelago with more than 17,000 islands. Lax safety standards and problems with overcrowding frequently result in accidents. (AP)

Bangladeshi diplomat appointed head of UN mission in Afghanistan

UNITED NATIONS, July 16: A senior Bangladeshi diplomat has been appointed as head of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan. Rabab Fatima, the former Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations, has been appointed by UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as his new Special Representative for Afghanistan and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

Fatima, who currently serves as Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS), succeeds Roza Otunbayeva of Kyrgyzstan, the Office of the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General said in a statement on Wednesday.

Fatima brings to her position at UNAMA "over 30 years of experience in national and international civil service, encompassing bilateral and multilateral diplomacy, policymaking, advocacy, programme planning and implementation", the statement said.



She served as Bangladesh's Permanent Representative to the United Nations from 2019 to 2022. During her tenure in New York, she served as President of the UNICEF Executive Board in 2020 and the UN-Women Executive Board in 2022, besides serving as

Vice-President of the Executive Board of the UN Development Programme, UN Population Fund and UN Office for Project Services in 2021.

In 2022, she became the first woman to be elected Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission and also served as a Vice-President of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly.

Fatima had also served as Bangladesh's ambassador to Japan from 2016 to 2019 and as Director-

General in the country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2015 to 2016.

She also held diplomatic assignments in Bangladesh's missions in New York, Geneva, Beijing and Kolkata.

She also served in the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) as Regional Adviser for South and South-West Asia and Regional Adviser for Climate Change and Migration (2012-2015), and as Regional Representative for South Asia (2007-2011). She was also the Head of Human Rights at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London (2006-2007).

Fatima holds a master's degree in international relations and diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in the United States and a bachelor's degree in social science from the University of Canberra in Australia. (AP)

Taken note of relevant reports: China on India's bid for non-permanent UNSC seat

BEIJING, July 16: China on Thursday said it has "taken note of relevant reports" about India's bid for a non-permanent seat at the UN Security Council for the 2028-29 period.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar launched India's official campaign for the non-permanent seat at the UNSC on Monday at an event at the UN headquarters, attended by ambassadors, diplomats and officials.

In his address, Jaishankar said that India's approach to the UN is rooted in "SHANTI: Securing Holistic Advancement through Norms, Trust and Integrity", as he outlined in detail New Delhi's priorities for the UNSC term.

"China has taken note of relevant reports," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian told a media briefing here when asked about China's view on India's announcement to contest for a non-permanent seat at the



UNSC.

China, one of the five veto-wielding permanent members of the UNSC, has yet to back India's bid. In comparison, the other four P5 members - the US, UK, Russia and France - have explicitly supported India's permanent membership in the reformed UN Security Council.

Elections for the 2028-29 term

will be conducted in June next year, when India and Tajikistan will compete for the sole seat in the Asia-Pacific Group category.

India last sat at the UNSC horse-shoe high table in 2021-22, its eighth time in the powerful 15-nation UN body after tenures in 1950-1951, 1967-1968, 1972-1973, 1977-1978, 1984-1985, 1991-1992 and 2011-2012. (PTI)

CM invites football lovers to FIFA World Cup final screening in Itanagar

ITANAGAR, July 16: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Thursday invited football lovers to join him at a live screening here of the FIFA World Cup 2026 final between Spain and Argentina.

In a social media post, Khandu urged fans to attend the free screening at IG Park in Itanagar in the early hours of July 20.

"I warmly invite all football lovers, families, and friends to join me at CM Fan Park for the LIVE Screening of the FIFA World Cup Final 2026," the chief minister said.

Khandu said the evening would also feature various entertainment programmes, including "live performances by winners of Arunachal Idol, Arunachal's Got Talent, Super Dancer, Mr Arunachal and Miss Arunachal".

The Football World Cup final will be played at New Jersey near New York City. (PTI)

'Such on-ground assessments are vital for shaping policies' NITI Aayog team visits Arunachal to assess flood impact

ITANAGAR, July 16: A high-level team from NITI Aayog on Thursday arrived in Arunachal Pradesh to assess the damage caused by recent floods and discuss measures to strengthen disaster resilience, as the deluge has affected more than one lakh people across the state, officials said.

The team, led by NITI Aayog member Dr Joram Aniya, included National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) member Rita Missal and senior officials from NITI Aayog, the NDMA and the Central Water Commission.

The ongoing spell of rain-triggered floods and landslides has so far claimed seven lives, injured 29 people and affected 1,03,167 people across the northeastern state. The calamity has also caused extensive damage to infrastructure, houses, agriculture and horticulture, according to official reports.

Chief Minister Pema Khandu said the meeting focused on strengthening disaster resilience and advancing Arunachal Pradesh's development priorities in view of the recurring natural disasters faced by the state.

Expressing gratitude to the visiting delegation, Khandu said the team's visit would provide policy-



makers with a better understanding of the challenges faced by the people of the frontier state, especially in the wake of the recent floods.

"I thank the delegation for visiting Arunachal Pradesh to gain first-hand insights into the challenges faced by our people, particularly in the wake of the recent floods," the chief minister said in a post on X.

He said such field visits are essential for formulating effective policies and support mechanisms

that reflect the realities on the ground.

"Such on-ground assessments are vital for shaping policies and support mechanisms that truly address the state's unique needs," Khandu added.

Highlighting the need for a region-specific approach to disaster management, the chief minister said Arunachal Pradesh's unique geographical and climatic conditions demand tailored solutions.

"Disaster management in

Arunachal Pradesh must be shaped by the realities of our terrain, climate and people, not by one-size-fits-all policies," Khandu said.

The cumulative number of people affected in the state has risen to 1,03,167, with Upper Siang emerging as the worst-hit district, affecting 49,259 people, followed by Siang (25,365), Kra Daadi (13,731), East Kameng (6,146), Upper Subansiri (3,467) and Namsai (2,657), according to official reports.

Floods and landslides have damaged 622 houses across the state, including 454 kutchha houses, 100 pucca houses, 44 huts and 24 houses under other categories.

The overall loss to agriculture and horticulture has also mounted to 561.75 hectares, comprising 224 hectares of agricultural land and 337.75 hectares of horticulture plantations.

The chief minister expressed confidence that close coordination between the Centre and the state, backed by first-hand assessments by central agencies, would help strengthen disaster preparedness, improve resilience and ensure that support measures are aligned with the state's specific requirements. (PTI)

NSCN/GPRN issues detailed statement explaining expulsion of senior leaders

Organisation cites repeated indiscipline, parallel administration and alleged constitutional violations



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 16: The NSCN/GPRN has issued a detailed official statement outlining the grounds for the termination and expulsion of former senior leaders Lieutenant General HS Ramsan (Retd) and Lieutenant General Absalom Raman, along with several of their associates, citing prolonged violations of the organisation's constitution, party discipline and directives of its collective leadership.

The statement traces the dispute to a series of events beginning in 2022, alleging that Ramsan repeatedly defied directives issued by the organisation's leadership, failed to comply with official orders and was subsequently suspended and removed from organisational responsibilities.

It further claims that despite multiple reconciliation efforts, including presidential pardons, peace missions and amnesty initiatives, the differences remained unresolved.

According to the statement, the organisation has accused Ramsan and his supporters of operating a parallel administrative structure,

maintaining unauthorised contacts with other armed groups and foreign entities, issuing public statements without approval, refusing to take the prescribed oath of allegiance and ignoring repeated directives from the NSCN/GPRN leadership.

The statement says that after reviewing the developments, the National Security Council concluded that the continued functioning of the group constituted a serious breach of the organisation's constitution.

It states that Ramsan and Absalom Raman were expelled from active party membership with effect from June 24, 2026, while several other associates were formally expelled on July 7, 2026.

The organisation has also directed all members currently operating under the command of Ramsan and Raman in the so-called Eastern Flank to report immediately to the Council Headquarters in Hebron or the General Headquarters.

It warned that failure to comply would be treated as an act against the organisation and would invite disciplinary action under its constitution and military laws.

7 arrested in Manipur for possessing illegal firearms

IMPHAL, July 16: Security forces arrested seven people for allegedly possessing illegal firearms in Manipur's hill and valley districts, police said on Thursday.

During an operation based on specific input, security forces apprehended four residents of Sikibung Village in Ukhrul district on Tuesday, a police statement said.

They were arrested during the operation conducted to nab the perpetrators of the July 6 ambush on an Assam Rifles convoy, which killed two of its personnel in the district.

Two Assam Rifles personnel were killed when suspected militants fired at the convoy at Shangshak near Nungshang Khong, about 17 km from the Ukhrul district headquarters, and three persons were detained in connection with it.

"Two SBBL guns, live SBBL cartridges and a wireless communication set were seized from the possession of the four arrested people," the police said.

Security forces also apprehended an active cadre of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party-MC (Progressive) on Wednesday from Khurai Ahongei in Imphal East district on charges of illegal firearm possession.

Two persons, hailing from Khurai Lairikyengbam in Imphal East district, were arrested on Wednesday from their locality, the police said.

One pistol along with two magazines and 11 live rounds of bullets were recovered from their possession, the statement added.

Security forces have been conducting search operations and area domination in the fringe and vulnerable localities across Manipur since ethnic violence broke out three years ago. More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

Fresh floods, landslides hit five districts as situation remains grim in Arunachal



ITANAGAR, July 16: Fresh floods and landslides were reported in Arunachal Pradesh, damaging houses, roads and crops, officials said on Thursday.

The ongoing spell of rain-triggered floods and landslides has so far claimed seven lives, injured 29 people and affected 1,03,860 people across the northeastern state.

According to the state Disaster Management Department's daily situation report issued on Thursday evening, fresh floods and landslides were reported in East Kameng, Upper Subansiri, Upper Siang, Kamle and Kra Daadi districts in the last 24 hours.

Seppa and Bameng circles in East Kameng, Daporijo in Upper

Subansiri, Mariyang, Migging and Tuting in Upper Siang; Gepen, Puchigeko and Raga in Kamle; and Tali circle in Kra Daadi district were affected.

The report said 640 people in East Kameng and 53 in Kamle were affected in the last 24 hours.

Infrastructure losses due to floods and landslides in the last 24 hours include roads and drainage systems in East Kameng, 13 minor irrigation projects and channels and a flood protection wall in Upper Siang, three bridges in Kamle, and a bridge and two retaining walls in Kra Daadi.

Upper Siang remains the worst-hit district with 49,259 affected people, followed by Siang

(25,365), Kra Daadi (13,731), East Kameng (6,786), Upper Subansiri (3,467), Namsai (2,657) and Anjaw (1,011), the report stated.

Official figures show that 804 houses have been damaged across the state, including 614 kutchha and 120 pucca houses.

Damage has also been reported to roads, bridges, power infrastructure, government buildings, schools, hospitals, water supply schemes and flood protection structures.

The cumulative loss to agriculture and horticulture has increased to 603.75 hectares, comprising 240 hectares of agricultural land and 363.75 hectares of horticulture plantations, it said.

Meanwhile, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast continued rain across Arunachal Pradesh from Friday, with heavy to very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning likely over several districts during the next three days.

An 'orange' alert (be prepared) has been issued for Papum Pare, Tirap and Changlang on Friday, warning of thunderstorms with lightning and heavy rainfall.

The warning has been extended on Saturday for Longding, East Siang, Lower Subansiri, Papum Pare, Tirap and Changlang, which are likely to witness thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and heavy rainfall.

The IMD has also warned of very heavy rainfall over Lohit and Papum Pare on the same day.

The weather is expected to improve from Sunday, with most districts likely to remain under 'yellow' alert (be aware) or no warning, indicating a gradual reduction in the intensity of rainfall.

By Monday, weather conditions are expected to improve further across most parts of the state, although light to moderate rain may continue at isolated places.

The IMD has advised district authorities and residents in the affected areas to remain alert, as heavy rainfall may trigger landslides, flash floods, waterlogging and disruption of road connectivity, particularly in vulnerable locations. (PTI)

One-time registration for CSAB-NEUT counselling to begin today

HT Correspondent

ITANAGAR, July 16: The Directorate of Higher and Technical Education, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, has announced that online registration for allotment of Engineering, Architecture and Pharmacy degree seats for the 2026-27 academic session under the CSAB-NEUT counselling process will commence on July 17.

According to an official notification issued by the Directorate, the one-time online registration will remain open from 10 am on July 17 until 5 pm on July 25 for candidates seeking admission against seats allotted to the State by the Government of India.

The notification stated that candidates applying for Engineering and Architecture courses must have appeared in JEE (Main) 2026, while admission to Pharmacy courses will be based on marks obtained in the Class XII examination.

Eligible candidates have been advised to complete the registration process through the CSAB-NEUT portal within the stipulated deadline.

The Directorate has urged all interested applicants to carefully follow the admission guidelines available on the portal before submitting their applications.

Arunachal Assembly panel pulls up depts over pending govt assurances

ITANAGAR, July 16: The Committee on Government Assurances (GAC) of the Arunachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on Thursday reviewed the implementation status of the assurances made by the state government on the floor of the House during previous terms and called for their timely compliance by the departments concerned.

The fifth sitting of the GAC of the eighth Arunachal

Pradesh Legislative Assembly was held at the assembly secretariat conference hall here under the chairmanship of MLA Laisam Simai, according to an official release.

The committee examined the 'Action Taken Replies' submitted by the public works department, the sports department and the social justice, empowerment and tribal affairs department. (PTI)

DC directs departments to ensure accurate assessments and timely reporting Upper Subansiri reviews monsoon damage reporting, disaster preparedness

HT Correspondent

DAPORJO, July 16: The Upper Subansiri District Administration on Thursday reviewed monsoon-related damage reporting and disaster preparedness at a meeting chaired by Deputy Commissioner at the District Secretariat in Daporjo.

The meeting was attended by administrative officers, heads of various line departments and other concerned officials to assess the impact of the ongoing monsoon season and strengthen the district's disaster response mechanism.

District Disaster Management Officer (DDMO) presented an overview of the functioning of the District Disaster Management Office and briefed the participants on funding provisions, disaster response guidelines and the prescribed norms for assessing and reporting damages caused by landslides, floods, damage to public infrastructure, agricultural losses and private property.

Heads of various departments presented sector-wise reports on monsoon-related damages.



The meeting also discussed discrepancies observed in damage reporting, with emphasis on maintaining uniformity, accuracy and timely submission of verified reports to facilitate prompt relief measures and government assistance.

Officials highlighted several challenges faced during the monsoon, including difficulties in accessing remote and affected areas due to disrupted road connectivity and adverse weather conditions.

Departments also pointed to the limited availability of funds for immediate restoration of damaged infrastructure and essential public services pending the release of disaster relief assistance.

Addressing the meeting, the Deputy Commissioner directed all administrative officers and heads of departments to remain stationed within their respective jurisdictions during the monsoon season and maintain close coordination with field-level functionaries.

The Deputy Commissioner instructed departments to immediately report incidents of landslides, floods, road blockages, infrastructure damage and other emergencies to the district administration to enable swift response and coordinated action.

Emphasising transparency and accountability, the Deputy Commissioner directed that all damage assessments must be based on proper field verification and submitted in the prescribed format to eliminate discrepancies.

The officials were also urged to remain vigilant throughout the monsoon season, strengthen inter-departmental coordination and work proactively to safeguard lives and public infrastructure.

The meeting concluded with a collective resolve to improve the district's disaster reporting mechanism through timely, accurate and coordinated reporting to ensure effective disaster response, prompt restoration of essential services and timely assistance to affected communities across Upper Subansiri district.

Ensure timely, effective implementation of key Arunachal budget proposals: Dy CM

ITANAGAR, July 16: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein has directed all government departments to accord top priority to the timely and effective implementation of key proposals announced in the state budget for the 2026-27 fiscal.

Reviewing the status of several budget announcements across various departments here, Mein, who also holds the finance portfolio, evaluated the progress of ongoing projects.

He emphasised the need to fast-track flagship initiatives, including the Chief Minister's Rural Development Programme and the Chief Minister's Comprehensive Power Development Programme.

In a post on social media, Mein stressed that parallel focus must be maintained on critical sectors such as education, healthcare, drinking water supply, physical connectivity, and skill development to ensure holistic development. The deputy chief minister instructed departmental heads to submit revised guidelines wherever necessary to streamline execution, and to communicate any additional fund requirements at the earliest.

The Arunachal Pradesh government had earlier presented a ₹ 36,607-crore budget for the 2026-27 fiscal, with emphasis on infrastructure strengthening, governance reforms, and people-centric development. (PTI)

Kali Kumar Tongchangya elected as Chakma council chairman



AIZAWL, July 16: Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) leader Kali Kumar Tongchangya was on Thursday elected unopposed as the chairman of the Chakma Autonomous District Council (ADC) in Mizoram, officials said.

Tongchangya, Member of District Council (MDC) representing the Fultuli constituency, was declared elected by Deputy Chairman Sundor Muni Chakma, who presided over the special sitting convened to elect the new chairman.

The election was necessitated following the resignation of former chairman Lakkhan Chakma.

As per the election schedule, nominations were filed on July 15, and Tongchangya was the only candidate to submit his nomination papers, the officials said.

With no other contestant in the fray, he was declared elected unopposed, they said.

Assuming office, Tongchangya expressed gratitude to the members of the district council for placing their trust in him.

He pledged to discharge his du-

ties with fairness, impartiality and strict adherence to the council's rules, while calling on members to work together to uphold the dignity of the House and ensure its smooth and orderly functioning.

Leader of the House and Chief Executive Member Nirupam Chakma congratulated the newly elected chairman, describing him as an experienced legislator with a deep understanding of the council's procedures.

He expressed confidence that Tongchangya's leadership would help maintain fairness, impartiality and discipline in the conduct of House proceedings, enabling members to participate freely and effectively in the council's legislative business.

The ADC was previously placed under the Governor's Rule for one year from July 7, 2025 to July 7, 2026, following prolonged political instability caused by frequent leadership changes.

The ZPM, which is currently in power in the state, and the BJP forged a political alliance on June 23 and constituted the Chakma Democratic Alliance Legislature Party headed by senior BJP leader Nirupam Chakma.

The alliance subsequently staked a claim to form the executive body in the ADC.

Nirupam Chakma was sworn in as the new CEM of the ADC on July 8, ending the one-year Governor's Rule in the 20-member council.

In the present council, the BJP-ZPM combine has 19 members, the Mizo National Front (MNF) holds one seat. (PTI)

SIT report on Ram temple donation theft expected shortly; may shape trust reforms

'Yes, it is awaited, let it be submitted first'

LUCKNOW, July 16: The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing the alleged embezzlement of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya is expected to submit its final report to the Uttar Pradesh government shortly, sources said on Thursday.

The SIT's findings are likely to pave the way for sweeping changes in the temple's administration and donation-counting system. The three-member SIT, constituted by the UP government on June 13 at the request of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, was initially given 15 days to complete its probe. But its tenure was extended by another 15 days on July 1, and barring an unlikely second extension, the report is now expected shortly.

"We expect the report anytime soon, say by evening or within the next 24 hours at the most," a source familiar with the matter told PTI, indicating that another extension of the SIT's tenure is unlikely. The final report assumes signif-



icance as its recommendations are expected to be discussed in detail by the temple trust and could form the basis for major reforms in the management of the shrine and the system for counting and handling donations. The trust is scheduled to meet in Ayodhya on July 22.

"Yes, it is awaited, let it be submitted first," a senior trust official told PTI when asked to comment on the report. A preliminary nine-page report submitted by the SIT to the government on June 23 had triggered a series of actions in the

case, including the registration of an FIR, the arrest of key accused and the resignation of senior temple trust functionaries.

Former trust general secretary Champat Rai, whose resignation was accepted amid the controversy, had said in a letter that he would break his silence only after the SIT submitted its final report. In the same letter, he also questioned how the confidential preliminary SIT report had found its way into the public domain.

The probe has also come under

the scrutiny of the Supreme Court. On July 13, the apex court directed the SIT to submit a status report on its investigation while issuing notice to the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust on petitions seeking a fair and time-bound probe into the alleged donation embezzlement.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant sought the status report from the SIT, which comprises Lucknow divisional commissioner Vijay Vishwas Pant, inspector general of Police Kiran S and special secretary (Finance) Neel Ratan.

The petitions before the top court seek, among other reliefs, a Supreme Court-monitored CBI probe, a forensic audit and a comptroller and auditor general (CAG) audit of the trust's finances. One of the petitioners also questioned the manner in which the SIT commenced its inquiry before the registration of an FIR, while contending that the allegations had shaken the faith of millions of devotees. (PTI)

TMC's Koel Mallick resigns from RS, becomes 4th MP to sever ties with Mamata

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, July 16: Actor-turned-politician and Trinamool Congress MP Rukmini Mallick, popularly known as Koel Mallick, on Thursday resigned from the Rajya Sabha, the fourth TMC MP to do so ever since the Mamata Banerjee-led party was ousted from power in West Bengal.

Mallick met the Rajya Sabha chairman CP Radhakrishnan and put in her papers.

Her resignation dealt a fresh blow to the embattled TMC's strength in the Upper House, reducing it to the single-digit figure of nine, amid speculations that more from the party may follow suit and raising fresh questions on the party's stability in Parliament.

"I do hereby resign from the membership of Rajya Sabha, which may please be accepted with immediate effect," she said in her resignation letter.

"I convey my sincere gratitude to deputy chairman and all functionaries of Rajya Sabha Secretariat extending all help and cooperation during my tenure as member of Rajya Sabha," she wrote. Mallick quit within a week following the stepping down of Rajya Sabha MPs



Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Sushmita Deb and Prakash Chik Baraik in the wake of the TMC's poll debacle in Bengal and the subsequent widespread rebellion in its ranks.

The last three MPs later jumped ship to the BJP and have filed their nominations for re-elections to the seats they left vacant which, so far, remain uncontested. All three are likely to be re-elected as BJP nominees to the Upper House if their candidature remains unchallenged by the Friday, 3 pm deadline.

Interestingly, following the footsteps of some of the earlier TMC rebels in Parliament, Mallick, too, met BJP leader Bhupendra Yadav at his Motilal Nehru Marg residence in Delhi after quitting as MP, fuelling the buzz on whether the actor would join the saffron party or choose to move over to the disident MPs.

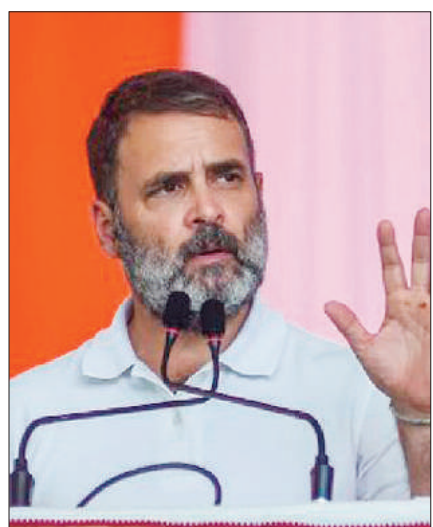
Mallick, one of TMC's celebrity nominees to the Rajya Sabha, was picked by Mamata Banerjee in February this year. She had submitted her nomination on March 5, alongside Supreme Court lawyer Menaka Guruswamy and former IPS officer Rajeev Kumar, and took oath as an MP a month later.

She, however, did not attend a single sitting of the Parliament and was scheduled to participate in the proceedings of the House from the upcoming monsoon session scheduled to commence from July 20.

One of Bengal's best-known film actors and the daughter of veteran actor Ranjit Mallick, Koel entered active politics only a month before being nominated to the Rajya Sabha. Her nomination was viewed as part of Mamata Banerjee's practice of bringing prominent public figures into Parliament.

"This is a new phase of my life, and I seek everyone's blessings for the responsibility I am about to shoulder. Serving the people and the country was in my mind for some time and I am fortunate to have received that opportunity," the actor had said after filing her nomination in March. (PTI)

Uttarakhand has become epicentre of paper leaks: Rahul



NEW DELHI, July 16: A day before his interaction with students in Dehradun, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday said Uttarakhand has turned into an epicentre of paper leaks and asserted that he will not let the future of youth be auctioned off.

Gandhi said he is visiting Dehradun on July 17th because 'Devbhoomi' has been

turned into an "epicentre" of paper leaks.

"A 'system' has taken root here regarding UKSSSC (Uttarakhand Subordinate Service Selection Commission) exams, where positions like Patwari or Lekhpal are secured not through merit, but at rates fixed by criminals," the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha alleged.

The government enacted an anti-cheating law but the leaks continued, he said.

"The law remained merely on paper, while exam papers continued to be sold in the market. Just imagine: a student prepares for years. The student fills out the form, pays the fees, and travels to a distant exam centre. Yet, the position meant for that student is bought by someone else," Gandhi said.

"This isn't just a leak, it is theft, he asserted. "Theft of that young person's rights, livelihood, and future," he said.

"I say to every aspirant, every student, and every young person in Uttarakhand - this is your fight, and I stand with you. July 17, Dehradun. Come, let us turn the 'Voice of Students' (Chhatron Ki Goonj) into a powerful roar," he said.

"We will not let the future be auctioned off. We will not let dreams be leaked off," Gandhi said. (PTI)

'Don't ask me to end fast, join July 20 march instead: Sonam Wangchuk

NEW DELHI, July 16: Activist Sonam Wangchuk has ruled out ending his indefinite hunger strike despite appeals from political leaders and supporters, saying breaking the fast without any response from the government would send the wrong message.

"If I eat, what message will go? The message to the government will be that there is no need for accountability. Protesters sit and leave..." said Wangchuk and asked what would change if he ended the fast.

Instead, he urged people to strengthen the Cockroach Janta Party's proposed Parliament march on July 20, saying students in schools and colleges should participate "in a real lesson in political science and democracy".

In a video message shared late on Wednesday night -- day 18 of his hunger strike, Wangchuk said, "I have received thousands of messages asking me to break my fast. Many senior politicians have come to me and spoken to me with love and concern."

Some have even approached the

court seeking directions to make me eat, he said. Seeking to allay concerns over his health, Wangchuk said medical examinations conducted so far had not indicated any immediate danger.

"My condition is not such that I will die in two-four days. Many medical tests have been conducted and the results are quite normal for an 18-day fast. An ECG was also done and it is not bad. I can continue for many more days," he said.

"Yes, there is weakness and my muscles are getting weak, but my heart and core are still fine," he said. Instead of appealing to him to end the fast, Wangchuk urged supporters to participate in large numbers in the CJP's proposed "Chalo Sansad" march on July 20, so that a message is sent to the government.

"I request all schools, colleges and universities to observe July 20 as a day of experiential education under the National Education Policy. Students will get to witness and participate in a real lesson in political science and democracy," (PTI)

BJP accuses Cong of patronising 'conversion mafia' over Hyderabad school row

NEW DELHI, July 16: The BJP on Thursday attacked the Congress government in Telangana over allegations that a private school in Hyderabad asked a class 2 Hindu student to learn an Islamic verse as part of his homework.

The BJP accused the Congress of patronising a "conversion mafia" in the state and demanded action against the school management.

A private school in Hyderabad has come under scrutiny after parents of a 6-year-old student alleged that their son was asked to learn an Islamic verse as part of his homework.

BJP national spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla claimed the school has terminated the teacher after the issue came to light but said the action was inadequate.

"Too little, too late. The school in question, which was allowing the forcible recitation of the Kalma, an Islamic prayer, to Hindu children, has finally, after giving a series of excuses and saying it was a mistake, terminated the teacher."

"But that is not enough. Why did such a case take place in Hyderabad, under Revanth Reddy and (Asaduddin) Owaisi?" Poonawalla said in a video post on X.



He demanded strict action against the school and alleged that such incidents are the result of Congress and AIMIM patronising such elements.

"Now the question is -- What action will the state government and police take against the teacher, the school administration and the school itself, and why do Revanth Reddy, the Congress and others give patronage to such elements with their statement that Congress means Muslims?" he said.

Poonawalla alleged that the incident is "nothing short of a forcible conversion case, a forcible Kalma test". (PTI)

People in Haryana already reeling under high cost of fuel, now toll rates also hiked: Hooda

CHANDIGARH, July 16: Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday said that people in Haryana were already reeling under the high cost of fuel and now they have to bear increased toll rates too.

The Leader of the Opposition in Haryana and former chief minister alleged that the BJP government in the state is continuously looting the public in the name of tolls.

Recently, there has been a hike in rates at toll plazas in Karnal, Kurukshetra, Hisar, Panipat and Jhajjar, Hooda said in a statement here.

"On one hand, motorists are already reeling under the burden of exorbitant taxes and the high cost of fuel. To make matters worse, the government has added to the burden on people by raising toll rates for cars, jeeps and other commercial vehicles by up to ₹ 30.

"Rates have been hiked for the second time in three months at all toll plazas, including the Thana toll plaza on the Hisar-Chandigarh National Highway. Similarly, at the Ramayan toll plaza in Hisar, rates for cars, buses, trucks and commercial vehicles have been increased by



amounts ranging from ₹ 5 to ₹ 30," Hooda said, adding that in effect, travelling both within and outside Haryana has become more expensive.

He claimed that the people of Haryana are being subjected to the highest toll collection in the country.

"The situation is such that more toll is being collected in Haryana than in Gujarat, a state three times its size. While Gujarat has 62 toll plazas, Haryana has a much higher number, 75, where people are being fleeced," he alleged.

Hooda said Union minister for Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari informed the Lok Sabha that toll collection in Gujarat decreased by ₹ 1,928.57 crore in October 2025, compared to 2024, whereas in Haryana, it increased by ₹ 368.57 crore during the same period. Haryana records the highest per capita toll collection at ₹ 917.1, the highest in the country, he added.

The Congress leader said the annual toll collection per kilometre in Haryana stands at ₹ 0.69 crore, which is the highest in the country.

Moreover, he said, the minimum distance between two toll plazas on a national highway is required to be 60 kilometres, as stipulated by the National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008. However, in Haryana, the distance between two toll plazas is merely 45 kilometres, the shortest in the country, he added.

"The toll collections in Haryana have risen from ₹ 461.88 crore in 2014-15 to ₹ 2,324.95 crore in 2025-26 -- an increase of more than five-fold, according to data presented in Parliament," he said. (PTI)

Cong chief Kharge writes to PM on bill involving delimitation, seeks all-party meeting

NEW DELHI, July 16: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Thursday wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over reports that the government is now planning to reintroduce a Constitution amendment bill that would involve delimitation, urging him to convene an all-party meeting to discuss the revised proposals.

In his letter to the PM, Kharge said during March and April, he had been writing to Minister of Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijju, requesting that the Union government convene an all-party meeting to discuss its proposals regarding delimitation, etc.

"Unfortunately, these requests had not been accepted. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, then failed to secure the required 2/3 majority in Lok Sabha on 17 April, 2026 by a clear margin," he said.

"I have been reading in media reports that the Union Government now proposes to reintroduce a revised (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026 during the forthcoming Monsoon Session of Parliament. I would, once again, request you to convene an all-party meeting to discuss the government's revised proposals on delimitation, etc., and give us adequate time to study them in detail before they are introduced in Parliament," Kharge said.

The Congress chief's letter comes days



after it emerged that the government is learnt to be working on multiple formulations to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats for all states by 50 per cent to assuage the concerns of southern states, as it seeks to operationalise a fresh draft of the Constitution amendment bill on women's quota law.

The draft is being readied keeping in mind the concerns of the southern states that a population-based delimitation exercise would shrink their political power in the Lok Sabha. The first Bill failed to clear the Lok Sabha test on April 17, as the government could not muster the two-thirds majority re-

quired to pass it.

The Modi government had said that it wanted to get the Bill passed as it wanted to advance the enforcement of the women reservation law.

As of now, the ruling NDA has around 300 MPs in the Lok Sabha with three vacancies. It needs 360 votes to achieve the two-thirds mark.

Under the current law, reservation for women would not be enforceable before 2034, as the process is tied to the completion of the delimitation exercise post the 2027 Census. (PTI)

Cong leaders discuss party strategy for upcoming Parliament session



NEW DELHI, July 16: Top Congress leaders met here on Thursday to discuss the party's strategy during the Monsoon session of Parliament beginning July 20.

Senior Congress leaders, including party chief Mallikarjun Kharge, leader of opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and other senior leaders deliberated on key issues to be taken up during the session.

The meeting was held at the 10, Janpath residence of Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) chairperson Sonia Gandhi. The Monsoon session of Parliament is starting on July 20 and is likely to continue till August 13.

Among other Congress leaders who attended the key strategy meeting included AICC general secretary K C Venugopal, Congress' chief whip

in Rajya Sabha Jairam Ramesh, P Chidambaram, K Suresh, Naseer Hussain, Manickam Tagore, Kumari Selja, Tariq Anwar, Shashi Tharoor and Manish Tewari among others. The opposition INDIA bloc will also hold its strategy meet on Monday ahead of the start of the session to evolve its joint strategy.

The government will meet leaders of various parties on Sunday to discuss various issues to be taken up during the session.

The government is likely to bring up crucial legislation, including the Constitution amendment bill on introducing delimitation and increase of Lok Sabha seats, besides one pertaining to the removal of the prime minister, chief ministers and Union ministers on being jailed. (PTI)

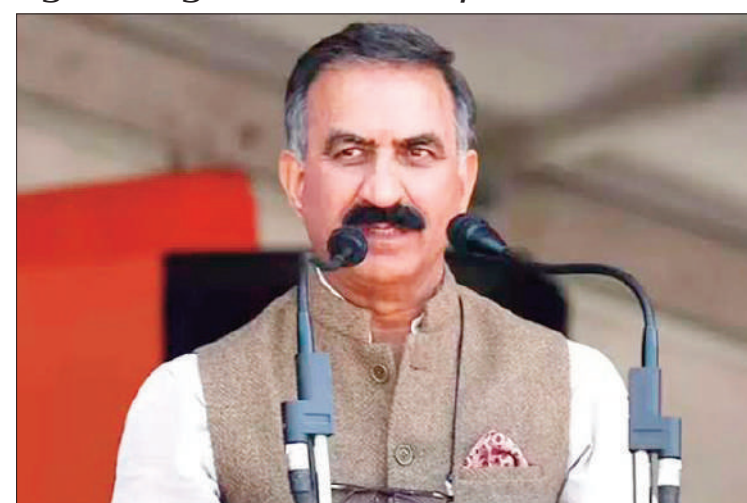
District hospitals play pivotal role in delivering timely healthcare services: CM Sukhu

'The state govt is strengthening healthcare infrastructure across district hospitals'

SHIMLA, July 16: District hospitals play a pivotal role in delivering accessible and timely healthcare services, Himachal Pradesh chief minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu said on Thursday, adding that Kullu, Una, Bilaspur and Solan, among eight hospitals, will get 1.5 Tesla MRI Machines.

Chairing a high-level meeting of the Health Department, CM Sukhu said that the state government is strengthening healthcare infrastructure across district hospitals and all seven government medical colleges to ensure quality medical services closer to people's homes, a statement issued here said.

He said that, as part of this initiative, the state government would install 1.5 Tesla MRI machines at Regional Hospitals Bilaspur, Kullu, Una and Solan, District Hospital Kinnaur, Dr Y S Parmar Government Medical College and Hospital, Nahan, Zonal Hospital Dharamshala and Civil Hospital Palampur.



He said that advanced 3 Tesla MRI machines were being installed in the government medical colleges to further strengthen specialised diagnostic services across the state. Digital Mammography machines

would also be installed at district hospitals Nahan and Hamirpur, regional hospitals Bilaspur and Solan along with the Zonal Hospital Dharamshala to enhance diagnostic facilities, he added.

Sukhu said that the procurement process for 42 handheld X-ray machines is underway, of which 14 have already been received. These machines would be deployed across the state, particularly in remote and far-flung areas, for chest screening and early detection of tuberculosis.

He said that the initiative would facilitate timely diagnosis and treatment, thereby improving health outcomes.

The chief minister said that 256-slice high-end CT scan machines would be installed at Atal Institute of Medical Super Specialty, Chamianiya, IGMCH Shimla, Dr Rajendra Prasad Government Medical College, Tanda, Dr Radhakrishnan Government Medical College, Hamirpur and Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri Government Medical College, Ner Chowk.

In addition, digital X-ray and 4D ultrasound machines would be provided to various healthcare institutions across the state. (PTI)

Latur coaching owner paid ₹ 5 lakh to procure NEET questions from NTA paper-setter: CBI

NEW DELHI, July 16: Latur-based coaching centre owner Shivraj Raghunath Motegaonkar, arrested by the CBI in the NEET paper leak case, allegedly paid ₹ 5 lakh to procure chemistry questions from P V Kulkarni, who was on the National Testing Agency (NTA) panel that set the questions for the examination, the agency told a special court.

The agency alleged on Wednesday that Motegaonkar's son attended the coaching classes of Kulkarni where the questions were provided.

In its response to a bail application filed by Motegaonkar, the agency alleged that he, "in conspiracy with the co-accused, procured NEET (UG) leaked chemistry questions prior to exam, and paid Rs 5 lakh for the same".

The agency said Motegaonkar prepared handwritten notes from the questions provided in Kulkarni's chemistry tutorial classes.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has recovered Mote-



gaonkar's phone in which 36 images (five duplicate images) containing 132 handwritten questions of chemistry were found, the agency said.

It has found that 111 of these questions allegedly match with the questions in the NTA's master question sets prepared for NEET (UG) 2026, the CBI said in its re-

sponse.

These were purportedly in the handwriting of Motegaonkar, it claimed, adding that metadata analysis has showed that these pictures were taken nearly 10 days before the May 3 NEET (UG) examination.

"Incriminating notes of chemistry questions relating to NEET UG 2026, allegedly in the handwriting of ...Shivraj Raghunath Motegaonkar was recovered from his mobile phone. The money allegedly paid for sourcing the leaked questions was recovered by CBI at the instance of co-accused Manoj Bhagwanrao Shirure," the agency said.

The agency has arrested 13 persons in the case, all of whom are in judicial custody.

On May 12, the NTA cancelled the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (Undergraduate), or NEET-UG, held on May 3 for medical admissions amid allegations of paper leak. A re-exam was then held on June 21. (PTI)

The establishment had also failed to make necessary corrections in its license details Ketan Agarwal murder: Stop business notice to spice shop run by accused Siya's family

PUNE, July 16: Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued a notice to a spice and dry fruits shop owned by the family of Siya Goyal — accused in the murder of Pune realtor Ketan Agarwal — asking it to halt operations over alleged norm violations, officials said.

The action was taken after the firm was found to have not complied with certain mandatory provisions under the Food Safety and Standards Act, the regulatory authority said on Wednesday.

Siya Goyal and her boyfriend Chetan Chaudhary (22) are accused of pushing her fiancé Agarwal (25) off a cliff at Lohagad Fort in Pune district on June 18 during a trek, leading to his death.

The shop located at Market Yard in the heart of Pune city is operated by M/s BG Goyal and Company, a firm owned by the family of Siya



Goyal (20), who is currently in jail.

Following an inspection by the FDA, the shop has been asked to stop business operations until further orders, officials said.

According to the FDA, its officials inspected the establishment and collected four samples of food products, including turmeric powder of 'Sant' and 'Sadhu'

brands, sesame seeds and soybean chunks.

A stock of 4,172 kg of these products, valued at ₹ 8.14 lakh, was seized during the inspection due to suspected contravention in labelling and possible adulteration, the FDA said.

The establishment had also failed to make necessary correc-

tions in its license details, it stated. "Considering the violations, a notice has been issued directing the firm to stop its business activities until further orders," an official said.

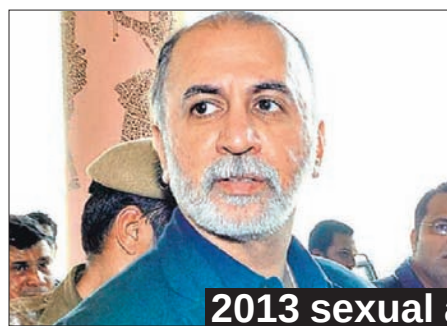
Meanwhile, a Crime Branch team visited Rajasthan as part of probe into Agarwal's murder after it came to light that Goyal and Chaudhary visited the desert state in December last year.

The police did not provide further details.

They earlier said that analysis of some chats exchanged between Goyal and Chaudhary indicated they had secretly married at a temple in Rajasthan.

"A police team visited the temple and checked if any CCTV footage was available to confirm their marriage. However, nothing was found," a Pune rural police official said. (PTI)

Tarun Tejpal raises doubts on victim's 'contradictory' statements



2013 sexual assault case

PANAJI, July 16: Tehelka magazine's founder-editor Tarun Tejpal on Thursday raised doubts before the Bombay High Court on the "contradictory" statements made by the victim in connection with the sexual assault case filed against him in 2013.

While a court at Mapusa in Goa had acquitted Tejpal of all charges in 2021, the state government had challenged the acquittal.

The Goa bench of the Bombay High Court on Thursday began hearing the final arguments on the government's appeal.

The case stems from allegations made by a former female colleague of Tejpal, who accused him of sexually assaulting her inside a hotel elevator on November 7 and 8, 2013, during an event organised by Tehelka magazine in Goa.

A division bench comprising Justices Dr Neela Gokhale and Amit Jamsandekar began hearing the final arguments on the government's appeal.

During the hearing, the video clips of the hotel lift, where the incident allegedly took place, were played before the bench, restraining their view to the people present in the courtroom.

Advocate Aabad Ponda, representing Tejpal, pointed out the contradictions in the statements made by the victim in her deposition before the investigating officer and the court during the trial.

He said that in her police complaint, the victim claimed about the "two-minutes trauma" in the lift.

Ponda said the woman claimed that the accused kept on pressing the buttons of the lift so that it remained in circuit.

He said the testimony by the lift experts and also the security in-charge of the hotel proved that her statement was wrong as "lifts in the hotels are not to be trapped."

"The lifts in the hotel are designed not to trap anyone inside," Ponda told the court.

Playing the video further, he argued the case of the victim is that she was pulled back in the lift and was manhandled, but this is not the case as seen in the video. (PTI)

Thane woman booked for 'honey-trapping' ex-Army officer, extorting ₹ 20 lakh

THANE, July 16: Police have registered a case against a woman from Maharashtra's Thane city for allegedly "honey-trapping" a 53-year-old retired Army major and extorting ₹ 20 lakh by threatening him with false criminal cases, officials said on Thursday. The victim, a doctor currently residing in Bhilwara, Rajasthan, alleged that the accused, a resident of Balkum Pada in Thane, blackmailed him over two years between April 2024 and May 2026.

She allegedly orchestrated a "honey-trap" by collecting selected photographs, videos, and phone recordings of the victim and threatened to "frame him" in a false case if her financial demands were not met, an official from Kapurbawdi police station said. The accused also filed a case against the victim on charges of rape and false promise of marriage, leading to his arrest. While he was in judicial custody, the woman allegedly extorted ₹ 20 lakh from his relative, the official said.

The woman later demanded an additional ₹ 15 lakh. She took advice from lawyers in Bhilwara and Thane to hatch the conspiracy and extort money, the police said. Based on the victim's complaint, the Kapurbawdi police registered a case against the woman on Tuesday under various Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita sections, including 318(4) (cheating), 308(2) (extortion), 351(2) (criminal intimidation) and 248(b) (false charge of offence made with intent to injure). (PTI)

Interpretation of sexual offences should not be limited only to physical act: NCW chief

NEW DELHI, July 16: National Commission for Women (NCW) chairperson Vijaya Rahatkar on Wednesday said the interpretation of sexual offences by courts should not be confined to the physical act alone, asserting that equal importance must be given to the survivor's dignity, consent, and the fear she experienced.

Rahatkar's remarks came after a Patna High Court judgment which, according to media reports, held that attempting to remove a woman's salwar and pressing her chest did not amount to an attempt to rape.

"While interpreting sexual offences, the focus should not be limited only to the physical act. Equal importance must also be given to the survivor's dignity, her consent, the fear she experienced, and the psychological trauma caused by the incident," Rahatkar said. The NCW chief said the objective of justice cannot be confined merely to a technical interpretation of the law.

"If the judicial process becomes



detached from the survivor's lived experience and the underlying spirit of the law, it is only natural that public confidence in the justice delivery system may be affected," she said.

"Undoubtedly, courts deliver judgments on the basis of law and the evidence placed before them. However, if a survivor does not receive a sense of complete justice even after an 18-year-long judicial process, and those responsible for serious sexual offences do not re-

ceive effective punishment, it can adversely affect women's confidence in both themselves and the justice system," she said.

Rahatkar said protecting the dignity, bodily autonomy and constitutional rights of women must remain the "highest priority of the justice system".

"In this context, I welcome the clear, sensitive, and survivor-centric approach adopted by Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Surya Kant," the NCW chief said. (PTI)

HC seeks Centre's response on comedian Kunal Kamra's plea against 'Sahyog Portal'



MUMBAI, July 16: The Bombay High Court on Thursday directed the Union government to file its affidavit in response to a petition filed by stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra challenging the constitutional validity of the Centre's 'Sahyog Portal'.

Kamra, in his plea, also challenged an amendment to the Information Technology (IT) Rules that requires social media or online intermediaries to remove any objectionable content within 36 hours.

He had claimed that the Sahyog Portal was a tool used by the gov-

ernment for online censorship and the amended rules enabled the government to order the takedown of content without adequate safeguards.

Kamra's counsel, Navroz Seervai, on Thursday mentioned the plea before a division bench of Acting Chief Justice Ravindra Ghuge and Justice Gautam Ankhad, claiming that it was an important matter, but the government, despite repeated directions, had not filed its affidavit.

He said the petition was filed in February this year and the court

had ordered the government from time to time to file its affidavit, but it had not been done to date.

Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh, appearing for the Centre, said the affidavit would be filed by July 29.

The court agreed and posted the matter for hearing on August 14.

The Sahyog Portal, developed by the Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, was launched in 2024 to expedite the blocking of objectionable content uploaded online.

Kamra, in his plea, contended that the Sahyog Portal permits blocking and takedown of online content without prior notice, thereby violating the principles of natural justice as well as the guarantee of free speech under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

The Sahyog Portal empowers a "unilateral takedown" of online content, he alleged.

The amended rules, the plea claimed, amounted to a flagrant violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed to every citizen under the Constitution. (PTI)

RAIPUR, July 16: A district consumer commission in Chhattisgarh has asked a Maruti Suzuki dealer to replace a car bought by a doctor with a new E20 petrol-compliant model after holding the dealer sold a vehicle made 16 months ago and failed to rectify recurring engine problems despite repeated repairs.

The commission, in its July 14 order, held respondents (Maruti Suzuki and the dealer) committed deficiency in service and indulged in unfair trade practice by refusing to take back the defective vehicle and provide a new vehicle of the same model equipped with an E20-compatible engine.

The District Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission, Additional Bench, Raipur, also directed that if the replacement vehicle was not provided within 45 days, the dealer and the manufacturer must refund ₹ 20.50 lakh paid by the complainant towards the vehicle, registration and insurance, besides paying compensation and litigation costs.

The order was passed by Com-



mission chairman Prashant Kundu and member Dr Anand Varghese on a complaint filed by Raipur-based doctor Premraj Debta.

The commission awarded ₹ 1 lakh as compensation to the complainant for mental harassment and ₹ 10,000 towards litigation expenses, payable within 45 days.

According to the complainant, he purchased a top-end Maruti Grand Vitara Intelligent Electric (Strong Hybrid) Zeta Plus 1.5 CVT from Nexa Magneto (Skya Automobiles), an authorised dealer of the company, on June 3, 2024,

for ₹ 18.29 lakh. Including insurance and RTO charges, he paid a total of ₹ 20,50,494 to the Maruti Suzuki dealer, the order said.

The vehicle was covered under an extended warranty valid until May 2029 or one lakh kilometres run, whichever comes first.

During the hearing, the complainant's counsel said after the vehicle had covered around 21,913 km, its engine warning light came on and the car broke down on November 11, 2024. The dealer's service centre initially attributed the problem to adulterated fuel and

drained the fuel tank before refilling it with fresh petrol.

However, the vehicle allegedly stalled again after travelling about 60 km.

Despite repeated cleaning of the fuel tank and assurances by the dealer that the problem had been resolved, the engine reportedly continued to malfunction, forcing the complainant to repeatedly return the vehicle to the workshop, he said.

The doctor also approached the petrol pump where he had refuelled the car, but the outlet reportedly informed him that the fuel quality met prescribed standards and no similar complaints had been received from other customers, according to the counsel.

The complainant stated that Maruti Suzuki later informed him by email that the engine and certain components of the car required replacement due to fuel adulteration at an estimated cost of about ₹ 5.3 lakh and refused to undertake the repairs free of cost despite the vehicle being under warranty. (PTI)

As Rath Yatra reaches Ahmedabad's Saraspur, 'pols' keep tradition alive of feeding thousands 'Every year, the residents warmly welcome the deities with great enthusiasm'



AHMEDABAD, July 16: Thousands of devotees and spiritual leaders were served traditional community meals across Saraspur's 'pols' or local societies in Gujarat's Ahmedabad on Thursday after the Jagannath Rath Yatra reached there, which is regarded as the maternal home of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra.

Participants from the 'akhadas', tableaux, and thousands of other devo-

tees made their way to the community kitchens housed in the narrow 'pols' such as Limbda Pol, Kadiyawad, Gandhi ni Pol, Luhar Sheri, Vaniyawad, Vasan Sheri, Thakorwas, Panchawad and Ambliwad, where residents kept a centuries-old tradition alive by preparing and serving food to all irrespective of caste and creed.

"For over 100 years, a feast for around 5,000 devotees and saints has

been organised in Mota Vasan ni Sheri. Saraspur is regarded as the mosal (maternal home) of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra, and Devi Subhadra. Every year, the residents warmly welcome the deities with great enthusiasm," organiser Laxmandasji Maharaj said. At Panchawad Pol, residents said the tradition has continued for four generations.

"People of the pol have been preparing food for the last four to five days. Around 500 kg of boondi, 200 kg of potato sabji and puris made from 200 kg of wheat flour have been prepared. More than 2,500 devotees are expected to partake in the feast," organiser Prakash Jotani said.

Luhar Sheri residents have been organising the community meal for the past 49 years, with more than 15,000 devotees being served lunch here, organiser Pravin Patel said. Around 200 residents participated in preparing meals, which needed 1,000 kg of potato sabji, puris and 1,500 kg of mohanthal, he added.

Ambliwad, which has been hosting the tradition for 81 years, was preparing

meals for 15,000-16,000 devotees, organiser Nityanand Maharaj said, adding more than 200 residents came together to prepare food.

Apart from community kitchens, residents and local groups in Saraspur have also set up free refreshment stalls offering water, buttermilk and juices along the Rath Yatra route for devotees.

As the Rath Yatra entered Saraspur amid tight security, devotees lined the streets for a glimpse of the procession, which comprised 18 decorated elephants, around 100 trucks carrying tableaux, nearly 30 akhadas, 20 bhajan 'mandalis' along with the three chariots carrying the revered deities.

The chariots reached Saraspur amid devotional chants and resounding religious slogans from thousands of devotees. Residents lined along the narrow lanes showered flowers, creating a vibrant and devotional atmosphere.

Despite the intense heat, lakhs of people gathered with great enthusiasm to welcome the deities along the route. (PTI)

PK meets Patna victim's family, slams govt

PATNA, July 16: Jan Suraj founder Prashant Kishor on Thursday met the family of Bunty Yadav, who was allegedly abducted and murdered in Patna, and demanded swift justice.

Kishor, who is contesting the Bankipur assembly bypoll, alleged that the state government's "criminal character" was responsible for an increase in incidents of crime.

"The state government's criminal character has contributed to a rise in such incidents. The family members have demanded immediate arrest of those named in the FIR, departmental action against officers of Kotwali and Jakkampur police stations for their alleged negligence, and compensation along with a job for an eligible member of the victim's family," he said.

Bunty Yadav, 25, was allegedly abducted on July 6, and his decomposed body was recovered from the Athmalgola area of Patna district on July 12.

Kishor alleged that the police had initially failed to cooperate with the victim's family despite their repeated pleas for help.

"When I came here four to five days ago, the family members had staged a sit-

in protest after the abduction. They withdrew it after the police assured them that Bunty would be found within two days. Later that evening, the family informed me that officials of Jakkampur and Kotwali police stations did not cooperate with them," he claimed.

He said the family learnt four days later that Bunty Yadav's body had been recovered from Athmalgola.

Kishor also criticised the police for linking the victim to the illegal liquor trade after his death.

"If the police believed he was involved in the illegal liquor trade, they should have acted against him earlier. If there was no case registered against him, the police have no right to make such allegations after his death," he said.

Earlier in the day, Patna SSP Kartikeya K Sharma said the prime accused in the case was injured in an exchange of fire with police during an operation to arrest him.

He said the kidnapping and murder appeared to be linked to a rivalry for supremacy between gangs involved in the illegal liquor trade.

Five people have been arrested in connection with the case. (PTI)



With shows opening at 6.30 am on Friday and closing at 11.55 pm, Christopher Nolan's "The Odyssey" is set for a phenomenal India start with exhibitors and trade experts expecting the film to surpass the business of director's previous hit "Oppenheimer".

Tickets for the film, an adaptation of Homer's Greek epic, range from ₹ 900 to ₹ 3,000. And they are selling fast.

On Thursday, for instance, the IMAX 2D format ticket priced at ₹ 3,100 (recliner seats) at Mumbai's PVR Phoenix Palladium was fully booked for the 10 am show on day one Friday.

Several exhibitors, including Ashish Mishra of Cinepolis India and Bihar-based exhibitor Vishek Chauhan, predict that the opening day collection could be in the region of ₹ 20 crore and the weekend could see earnings of up to ₹ 60 crore.

Nolan's last blockbuster, the 2023 "Oppenheimer", earned ₹ 157.50 crore in India.

His latest, an epic extravaganza starring Matt Damon, Anne Hathaway and Tom Holland, is the first film ever to be entirely shot in IMAX format. The director has used the technology to introduce new age audiences to the 3,000-year-old story about Odysseus voyage through treacherous seas and vengeful gods to reach his home Ithaca. According to Kamal Gianchandani, chief business planning & strategy, PVR INOX Ltd and the president of the Multiplex Association of India (MAI), there is tremendous excitement for "The Odyssey" in India and the ad-

Tickets up to ₹ 3,000 and all-day shows: 'The Odyssey' set for phenomenal India opening

vance sales numbers back that.

"We have seen some robust numbers there, much better than what we have seen in the past. I believe the opening will definitely beat 'Oppenheimer'. And it will definitely be the highest opening of a Hollywood film in this year till date," Gianchandani told PTI. The excitement surrounding "The Odyssey" is a reminder that, even in an era of endless entertainment choices, truly event-worthy films continue to bring audiences to theatres in extraordinary numbers, added Ashish Mishra, head of commercialisation, Cinepolis India.

"Advance bookings indicate the film is on track for a ₹ 20 crore opening day in India, potentially surpassing 'Oppenheimer's' opening and reaffirming Christopher Nolan's unique ability to turn a theatrical release into a cultural event," Mishra said. As the first feature film shot entirely with 65 mm IMAX cameras, "The Odyssey" has created unprecedented demand for IMAX, with advance bookings approaching full capacity for the opening weekend.

Nolan was in India last week for the premiere of the movie in Mumbai along with Damon and Holland.

India is a place where Nolan enjoys a movie star-like popularity with a filmography that includes "Memento", "The Prestige", "The Dark Knight" trilogy, "Inception", "Interstel-

lar", "Dunkirk" and his last release, the multiple Oscar-winner "Oppenheimer".

Sameer Munshi, vice president, operations & F&B, Miraj Entertainment Ltd, said the advance booking for the film opened a month ago and is already exceptional. He is also expecting a strong walk-in audience.

"The demand has prompted us to significantly widen our show windows. At our IMAX Wadala (Mumbai) property alone, we're already running six shows a day, starting as early as 6.30 am and going right up to a late-night 11.55 pm show.

"Early morning slots, which are usually a hard sell, are seeing solid bookings, and the late night show is becoming its own event, especially with fans wanting the big-screen experience without changing their weekday schedules," Munshi said.

As he sees it, Nolan is that rare filmmaker whose audience is format conscious and is driving the demand for IMAX and premium large-format screens.

"(It's) genuinely one of the strongest advance booking numbers we've seen for an IMAX release. Our IMAX shows are almost sold out for the entire opening weekend, and this isn't just a metro phenomenon... (Nolan's) fandom is now travelling well beyond the usual big-city crowd," he said.

Gianchandani, who attended the premiere of "The Odyssey"

in Mumbai, sees Nolan's India trip right before the film's international release as a "big validation of the growing importance" the theatrical market here.

"This is a big milestone in the journey of Hollywood films in this country. It will give a lot of boost to the box office revenue because the awareness of 'The Odyssey' has gone to another level," he said.

Trade expert Girish Wankhede agreed, saying Nolan's recent trip to Mumbai generated a lot of excitement.

It's not just the metros.

"The buzz is far stronger for 'The Odyssey' across metros and tier 2 and 3 cities as well because it's a huge film. It is releasing in Telugu, Tamil and Malayalam, and Hindi. The opening day collection should be over ₹ 15-18 crore, and over the weekend it should do over ₹ 50 crore across languages in India," he said.

Distributor-exhibitor Akshay Rathi, who owns theatres in Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, also said "The Odyssey" is poised to open at ₹ 20 crore plus in India.

He said markets like Jaipur, Ranchi and Coimbatore are responding well too.

"... And that too on a limited number of screens because it requires Digital Cinema Initiatives (DCI) compliance screens or other screens eligible due to the required technology. With the IMAX screens firing all guns at ticket prices that are among the highest it looks like a ballistic opening weekend of ₹ 75 crore plus in India." Raj Bansal, a film distributor and director of Entertainment Paradise in Jaipur, is of the view that the good reviews will boost ticket sales.

"Those who've already watched the film have only good things to say about it. We are expecting a huge opening from the film," he said.

Bihar-based exhibitor and distributor Vishek Chauhan said "The Odyssey" phenomenon is not just limited to big cities.

"The film should earn over ₹ 60 crore in the weekend... The audience rewards a filmmaker like him, they see his belief system, his passion for cinema comes across, and his commitment to theatrical is his edge," he said. The demand for "The Odyssey" is equally great in the southern belt where Vijay's "Jan Nayagan" is also slated for release a week later.

"The buzz around 'The Odyssey' in south India is unlike anything we've seen for a Hollywood film outside the established superhero franchises. Christopher Nolan has built an exceptionally strong theatrical following in markets like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Telangana, and Kerala, where audiences actively seek the first-day, first-show experience," Chennai-based trade expert Ramesh Bala said. (PTI)

Prabhas-starrer 'Fauzi' set for December 3 theatrical release



Telugu superstar Prabhas on Wednesday announced that his upcoming historical drama "Fauzi" will release in theatres worldwide on December 3.

The 46-year-old actor shared the release date on Instagram along with a new poster of the film. Directed by Hanu Raghavapudi, "Fauzi" is billed as a historical fiction drama centred on a soldier.

The newly unveiled poster shows Prabhas in a blood-soaked avatar, perched atop a rock with bodies lying around him as he clutches a gun.

Featuring the tagline, "A Battalion Who Fights Alone", the artwork teases an action-packed war drama centred on courage, sacrifice and rebellion.

The film stars debutant Imanvi as the female lead alongside veteran actors Mithun Chakraborty and Jaya Prada.

Produced by Mythri Movie Makers in association with T-Series, the film features music by Vishal Chandrasekar, cinematography by Sudeep Chatterjee and editing by Kotagiri Venkateswara Rao.

"Fauzi" was announced on Prabhas' birthday in 2023 with a first-look poster introducing the actor in the lead role.

Prabhas, who was most recently seen in "The RajaSaab", which made its debut in theatres in January this year, has a busy slate of films lined up over the next few years.

He is currently shooting for Sandeep Reddy Vanga's "Spiri", in which he is set to play a police officer.

He will also reprise his role as the bounty hunter Bhairava in Nag Ashwin's "Kalki 2898 AD: Part II", the sequel to the 2024 sci-fi epic that also starred Amitabh Bachchan, Deepika Padukone and Kamal Haasan.

In addition, Prabhas is expected to reunite with "Salaar" director Prashanth Neel for "Salaar Part 2: Shouryaanga Parvam", which will continue the story of Deva after the events of the first film. (PTI)

DON'T LET HIM DIE: '3 IDIOTS' STAR OMI VAIDYA EXTENDS SUPPORT TO SONAM WANGCHUK'S HUNGER STRIKE

"3 Idiots" actor Omi Vaidya on Tuesday urged people to pay attention to the deteriorating health of Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on hunger strike since June 28, saying he does not want the activist to die.

Wangchuk, who inspired Aamir Khan's "3 Idiots" character of Phunsukh Wangdu, Janata Party's (CJP) protest demanding education minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination on June 28.

Vaidya, who essayed the fan-favourite role of Chatur "Silencer" Ranalingam in the Rajkumar Hirani-directed 2009 film, shared a video on his X handle to bring people's attention to Wangchuk's situation.

"I don't want him to die. Hello idiots, pehchana? This is Omi Vaidya, Chatur from '3 Idiots'. I have an important message for you. I don't really do this very often, so please listen up," he said in the video.

Vaidya then reminded that Khan's character Phunsukh Wangdu was inspired by Wangchuk, calling him a "humble" and "pretty impressive person".

"I suggest you look it up and see what he is up to because right now he is on a very long hunger strike, it is over several weeks, and his blood sugar has gone down very much.

"I don't know if you have heard about this, I don't know if the media is reporting this, but this is a pretty important thing... Why he is on the hunger strike? He has some issues with the education system in India...and whether you agree with him or not, I don't want him to die," the actor said.

According to the organisers, Wangchuk has lost 8.2 kilograms since he began fasting. His latest medical parameters showed a blood pressure of 107/70 mmHg and a blood glucose level of 67 mg/dL.

Vaidya urged people to take some time out from their routines and look into the issues that Wangchuk is raising with his hunger strike.

"I would like him to live. We are just regular people, and we have regular lives, and we are just so busy to deal with this stuff, but if you look into these issues, you may agree with him, and you may see you having the same issues.

"So if you have a second to just stop, put down your work from the project that needs to be completed or the household duties, or whatever, and just take a look at what is going on... I don't want Phunsukh Wangdu to die," he said. (PTI)



SONAKSHI SINHA BACKS SONAM WANGCHUK, QUESTIONS GOVT'S SILENCE OVER HUNGER STRIKE

Actor Sonakshi Sinha on Thursday came out in support of Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on a hunger strike for 19 days, asking why the government has not yet initiated dialogue with the activist who is fighting for the future of the country's children.

Wangchuk has been on hunger strike after joining the Cockroach Janata Party's (CJP) protest demanding education minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over alleged irregularities in the NEET examination on June 28.

In a video message, posted on her Instagram page, the "Dahaad" star said she could not remain silent, especially at a time when others have chosen not to say anything. SouthAsians & Diaspora

"I've never made a public statement like this before, but I can't stay silent any longer. We all know Sonam Wangchuk. We know what he has done for the country, his achievements, and the many honours he has received.

"For the past 18 days, he has been on a hunger strike without food. And why? Because he is fighting for the future of children, a future he believes is being pushed towards ruin," the actor.

Sonakshi, daughter of veteran star and politician

Shatrughan Sinha, said Wangchuk is standing up for children who have lost their lives and also protesting against a system that "we all know is not functioning the way it should".

"He may not know us personally, but despite that, he has chosen to sacrifice his own well-being for this country's children. Yet so many people have remained silent. I couldn't. Whatever happens now, so be it, but I can no longer stay quiet," she added.

She commended the Cockroach Janata Party and the country's youth for "raising their voices for truth and for a better future." "No one seems to care. No one is opening a dialogue or even turning to acknowledge him. That's when I asked myself: why am I silent? I, too, am a young citizen of this country. I, too, want what's best for India. I'm not anti-national, so why should I remain quiet?" SouthAsians & Diaspora

"Sonam ji himself said: 'Don't ask me to end my fast. Ask the government why it won't talk to us.' He's right. Sir, you are incredibly important to us. You are a gem, and I cannot thank you enough for everything you're doing for this country. So I won't ask you to end my fast."

Instead, Sonakshi posed a series of questions to the people in power -- "When will enough be enough? Will people act only after this man dies? And if that happens, who will take responsibility?" "What is happening is not right. I simply wanted to say that. We should all raise our voices and open our eyes, whether others choose to or not. I just wanted to say that," she concluded her video.

According to the latest medical bulletin, Wangchuk has lost more than nine kg since beginning his hunger strike. His blood sugar was recorded at 80 mg/dL, pulse rate at 72 per minute, while his blood pressure was 105/61 mmHg in the lying position and 101/65 mmHg while sitting. Doctors said his hydration was fair and he remained mentally alert. (PTI)

RAM GOPAL VARMA CALLS FOR END TO FILM CENSORSHIP, SAYS AUDIENCES SHOULD DECIDE WHAT TO WATCH

Filmmaker Ram Gopal Varma has strongly criticised India's film censorship system, arguing that it has become outdated in the digital age and urging the industry to push for the abolition of the existing censor board.

In a series of posts on X on Wednesday, Varma said censoring films was an insult to the intelligence of viewers, especially at a time when people have unrestricted access to content through smartphones, streaming platforms and the internet.

Questioning the relevance of a government-appointed body deciding what adults should watch, he said it was unreasonable to believe that a committee could shield audiences from a filmmaker's perspective in today's connected world. He also questioned the qualifications of those serving on such panels.

Drawing a comparison with the democratic process, Varma said adults are trusted to elect the country's leaders, manage businesses and raise families, yet are considered incapable of deciding which films they should watch.

"If citizens are mature enough to shape the nation's future through their vote, they should also be trusted to make their own entertainment



choices," he argued, adding that treating adults otherwise amounted to infantilising society.

The director maintained that films are creative works reflecting a filmmaker's viewpoint, and audiences should have the freedom to either accept or reject that perspective. According to him, cutting scenes before theatrical release serves little purpose because uncensored versions quickly become available online through international platforms and other digital channels.

Citing his film "Obsession", Varma claimed that a sequence removed by censors eventually reached a far larger audience through social media clips than it did in theatres, demonstrating that censorship often increases public curiosity rather than suppressing content.

He further argued that in an era of artificial intelligence and borderless internet access, attempts to regulate cinema through cuts have become ineffective. Restricting language, violence, sensuality or ideological themes, he said, only weakens artistic expression and results in compromised storytelling.

Varma also questioned why films continue to face strict scrutiny when people, including minors, can easily access disturbing news and graphic online content without similar restrictions.

According to the filmmaker, cinema should provoke thought and encourage discussion rather than be controlled through censorship. He said the current system assumes adults require supervision and fails to respect their ability to make informed viewing choices.

Instead of enforcing cuts, Varma suggested that films should carry clear content classifications and warnings, allowing viewers to decide for themselves whether they wish to watch them.

He also urged producers and directors to stop accepting arbitrary edits imposed by authorities, arguing that repeated compromises have only strengthened the influence of what he described as an uncreative and bureaucratic system that neither understands cinema nor respects its audience.

Calling for collective action, Varma appealed to the film industry to legally and publicly challenge the censor board in its current form. He said freedom of expression is essential in a democracy and that restricting films in an age of global digital access is ultimately harmful to the growth of cinema. Ending his remarks, he used the hashtag #BanTheCensor. (Agencies)

Argentina's Messi facing Spain's Yamal for WC title

The World Cup final is set



NEW YORK, July 16: The best offense. The best defense.

The World Cup final is set, and fittingly, a clash of styles awaits. Lionel Messi — the most prolific goal scorer in the tournament's history — and defending champion Argentina will take on Spain's defensive juggernaut on Sunday in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Spain beat France in one semifinal on Tuesday; Argentina, the comeback king of this tournament, rallied to beat England 2-1 in the other semifinal on Wednesday.

Argentina is seeking its fourth title and is looking to become the

first back-to-back World Cup champion since Brazil pulled off the feat in 1958 and 1962. Spain is looking for its second title, after winning in 2010.

Argentina leads the tournament in goals scored — 19.

Spain leads the tournament in fewest goals allowed — one.

Something will have to give on Sunday, when the biggest World Cup ever — a 48-team, 104-match extravaganza spread out over the U.S., Canada and Mexico — comes to an end.

It's not Finalissima. It's going to be better.

South American champion Ar-

gentina and European champion Spain were supposed to meet in Doha, Qatar, in late March in Finalissima, a showdown between the teams led by Messi and Lamine Yamal in a prequel of the World Cup.

That game never happened. Security became an issue because of unrest in the Middle East, with Iran intensifying its attacks on neighboring countries at that time in retaliation to the aerial attacks by United States and Israel in a war that is still ongoing. The game was called off.

So, instead of playing at Lusail Stadium, the site of the epic 2022

How Spain got here

- Record: Six wins, one draw, zero losses.
- Goals for: 13.
- Goals against: 1.
- Group stage: drew with Cape Verde 0-0, beat Saudi Arabia 4-0, beat Uruguay 1-0.
- Knockout stage: beat Austria 3-0, beat Portugal 1-0, beat Belgium 2-1, beat France 2-0.

How Argentina got here

- Record: Seven wins, zero draws, zero losses.
- Goals for: 19.
- Goals against: 7.
- Group stage: beat Algeria 3-0, beat Austria 2-0, beat Jordan 3-1.
- Knockout stage: beat Cape Verde 3-2, beat Egypt 3-2, beat Switzerland 3-1, beat England 2-1.

Streaking

Both teams enter the final with impressive unbeaten streaks.

- Spain is carrying a 37-match unbeaten streak across all competitions and friendlies into the final, having won 28 of those matches with nine draws. Its last loss was 1-0 to Colombia in March 2024.

- Argentina is unbeaten in its last 13 World Cup matches, with 11 victories and two draws since falling to Saudi Arabia to open group play at the 2022 tournament.

The odds

Spain (+120) has been installed as the early favorite over Argentina (+275). Odds for a draw were quickly set at +200, and it's reasonable to think all those numbers could change considerably before the title matchup.

World Cup final where Messi and Argentina won on penalty kicks over France and Kylian Mbappé, they'll play just outside of New York in soccer's biggest game.

It'll be a showdown of soccer's present versus soccer's future, not to mention a showdown of the teams that held the top two spots in FIFA's world rankings entering the World Cup — Argentina at No 1, Spain at No 2.

There was a famous photo taken

in 2007 when Messi was part of a UNICEF program and posed with a baby.

Yamal was that baby. Like Messi (who now plays for Inter Miami), Yamal would become a left-footed star for Spanish club Barcelona. It is the most improbable of stories: From a photo together two decades ago, the two stars are set to be together again to end this year's World Cup.

A picture-perfect finish. (AP)

UK urges FIFA to investigate Argentina over Falklands banner at World Cup



LONDON, July 16: The British government on Thursday urged FIFA to investigate Argentina's team after players posed with a banner claiming sovereignty over the contested Falkland Islands.

Argentina beat England 2-1 in a World Cup semifinal on Wednesday in Atlanta.

During post-match celebrations, Argentine players held a banner handed over by fans in the stands, reading "Las Malvinas son Argentinas." "The Malvinas are Argentine."

Argentina refers to the Falkland Islands as Islas Malvinas. They were invaded in 1982 under orders from Argentina's then-military dictatorship, triggering a 10-week war won by Britain.

U.K. Business Secretary Peter Kyle said the players' behavior was "entirely inappropriate. I expect FIFA to do its investigation thoroughly."

FIFA can prosecute Argentina's players and soccer federation because its disciplinary code prohibits at stadiums any "message that is not appropriate for a sports event" including those of "a political, ideological, religious or offensive nature."

The FIFA fines for political messaging are \$5,000 to \$20,000.

FIFA was approached for comment Thursday.

A FIFA disciplinary case under previous leadership banned a South Korea player for two 2014 World Cup qualifying games because he held up a similar banner about a territorial claim against Japan at the 2012 London Olympics. Park Jong-woo took a fan banner with the slogan "Dokdo is our territory" after South Korea beat Japan in the men's bronze medal game.

On Wednesday, Argentina player Lisandro Martinez said displaying the banner "really stirred up deep emotions."

"I can picture a Malvinas veteran seeing that and weeping," said Martinez, who has played in England for the past four years with Manchester United. "I don't know if there might be sanctions or not, but what they did was display that banner and assert that the islands belong to us."

Argentina-England soccer rivalry

The sporting rivalry between the two countries is heightened by political tensions over the South Atlantic archipelago. It is a British overseas territory with a population of around 3,500 people located about 8,000 miles (13,000 kilometers) from the U.K. and 300 miles (480 kilometers) from Argentina.

Argentina argues that the islands were illegally taken from it in 1833. Britain, which says its territorial claim dates to 1765, sent a warship to the islands in 1833 to expel Argentine

forces who sought to establish sovereignty over the territory.

The war in 1982 killed 649 Argentine troops, 255 British service personnel and three islanders.

That conflict ended during the 1982 World Cup in Spain where Argentina, England, Scotland and Northern Ireland all played. British television networks declined to broadcast Argentina playing in the tournament's opening game, when the defending champion lost to Belgium.

"Sadly, it is a sad part of our history," Argentine player Leandro Paredes said in Atlanta about the banner, "for everyone involved in that chapter of, I repeat, our history. And it hurts. We knew we were playing for them, too."

Politics in soccer

British government minister Kyle told the BBC "politics should be separate from football."

"In fact, the World Cup has one of its central tenets that politics is separate from football," he said. "That is now a matter for FIFA."

FIFA's statutory political neutrality has been questioned at this World Cup after its president, Gianni Infantino, and disciplinary process — which could now judge Argentina — seemed to cave to pressure from U.S. President Donald Trump in allowing United States forward Folarin Balogun to play Belgium in the round of 16.

Balogun was shown a red card in the previous round and FIFA disciplinary rules mandated he should be banned from his team's next game. FIFA deferred that suspension for one year of probation, provoking an all-time controversy in modern World Cup history. Belgium beat the U.S. 4-1 to advance to the quarterfinals.

Infantino is expected to sit with Trump and Argentina President Javier Milei, who are political allies, at the World Cup final Sunday. Argentina plays Spain in East Rutherford, New Jersey.

Previous cases

Argentina players showed the same "Las Malvinas son Argentinas" slogan at a warmup game in June 2014 in Buenos Aires for the World Cup that started days later in Brazil.

FIFA's disciplinary panel ruling in that case was published after the tournament finished and fined the Argentina federation 30,000 Swiss francs (\$37,000).

In the 2012 London Olympics case, FIFA's ruling said the conduct of the South Korea player "cannot be tolerated."

At the 2022 World Cup, FIFA fined the Serbia federation 20,000 Swiss francs (\$24,800) for hanging a political banner about neighboring independent state Kosovo in the locker room before playing Brazil. (AP)

Ridhima leads by two shots in 10th leg of Women's Pro Tour

KOLAR, July 16: Ridhima Dilawari got over a late double bogey to extend her overnight lead to two shots after the second round of the tenth leg of the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour here on Thursday.

Ridhima, a three-time winner this season, had five birdies against two bogeys and a double bogey on the Par-17th. The birdie on the closing hole eased the pain as she carded 1-under 71 after a first round 68.

At 5-under 139 Ridhima is two shots clear of Amandeep Drall (69-72) and Vidhatri Urs (69-72).

Vani Kapoor dropped as many as four bogeys including back-to-back lapses on the eighth and the ninth as she shot 1-over 73 and is sole fourth.

Young Saanvi Somu, armed with the experience of playing on the Ladies Access Tour in Europe, had a great start with four birdies in the first six holes.

However, she lost that momentum as there were no more birdies and instead, she had two double bogeys on the Par-3 seventh and the Par-4 12th. She parred the rest and is even par 144 with cards of 71-73.

Ridhima has been in good form this season, though she was some way off from the wins in the last two starts. The Order of Merit leader had two early birdies on the second and the fourth but gave away a shot on the eighth to turn in 1-under.

A bogey on the 12th brought her to even par but back-to-back birdies on the 14th and the 15th restored some order before she ran into a double bogey on the Par-4 17th. A closing birdie on the 18th was a soothing balm.

Young stars Kashika Misra (72-73), Mannat Brar (73-74) and Riya Jadon (73-75) were sixth, seventh and eighth respectively while five players, Ananya Datar (72-77), Jasmine Shekar (74-75), Anvvi Dahiya (76-73), Karishma Govind (76-73) and Anvitha Narender (78-71) were tied ninth at 5-over 149.

Local star Ananti Vivek (74-76), who trains at Zion Hills, was the top amateur alongside Heena Kang (76-74) and Shreshtha Shukla (78-72). They were 6-over 150.

The cut fell at 155 with 34 players advancing to the third and final round. Prominent names missing the cut included Seher Atwal, Shweta Mansingh and Durga Nitpur. (PTI)

India drawn with Iraq, Syria in AFC U-17 Women's Asian Cup qualifiers



KUALALUMPUR, July 16: The Indian Under-17 women's football team has been drawn with Malaysia, Syria and Iraq in Group E of the AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers to be held here from October 5 to 11.

The draw was conducted at the AFC (Asian Football Confederation) House here on Thursday. India will begin their campaign against Iraq, followed by a match against Syria, and then Malaysia.

The group winners will qualify for the Under-17 Women's Asian Cup in Suzhou, China from March 31 to April 17 next year.

The Indian team had made a historic first-ever knockout stage appearance in the previous edition and will aim to qualify for back-to-back AFC U17 Women's Asian Cups for the first time.

The teams will compete in the Qualifiers in a single round-robin centralised league format.

The eight group winners will advance to the 11th edition of the Finals where they will be joined by the top four finishers from the 2026 campaign who have directly qualified. (PTI)

Sivasagar crowned Zone B champions in Assam Sub-Junior Football Championship

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 16: Host district Sivasagar emerged champions of the Assam Football Association's Zone B Inter-District Sub-Junior Football Championship, defeating Golaghat 5-1 in a one-sided final played at Peoli Phukan Stadium on Thursday.

Sivasagar dominated the contest from the outset, scoring all five goals in the first half to take complete control of the match. Golaghat managed to pull one back after the break through Rituraj Das, but the effort proved only a consolation.

Nidayan Phukan starred for the hosts with a hat-trick, while Rikiraj Chetia and Aswini Kumar Gogoi added a goal each to complete the emphatic victory. Sivasagar's John Bhunya was ad-

judged the Player of the Match, while Nigam Mili received the Best Goalkeeper award. The final was inaugurated by Pranjal Bhumij, player of Star Rajasthan FC.

Simanta Buragohain served as the Match Commissioner, while Jyoti Borgohain was the Referee-in-Charge. The champions were presented with the Late Umakanta Buragohain Memorial Trophy, while runners-up Golaghat received the Kiranbala Devi Memorial Trophy.

The trophies and individual awards were presented by sports organisers Punaram Mili, Manoj Kumar Borthakur, Nitul Buragohain, Anil Acharya, Mrinal Chutia, Manoj Bhagawati, Sarat Hazarika, Mrinanka Saikia, Tapan Dutta, Inamul Hazarika, Putul Gogoi and Nitul Kakoty.

Rifle shooter Sonam Maskar ready for Asian Games test

NEW DELHI, July 16: For Kolhapur's Sonam Uttam Maskar, shooting was just a hobby when she first took interest in the sport but having successfully turned that into a career choice, the rifle shooter is now gearing up for her biggest test so far -- a maiden Asian Games appearance in September.

The 23-year-old 10m air rifle shooter announced herself on the international stage in 2024 with three silver medals, including a standout finish at the ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi, cementing her place among India's brightest shooting talents.

With the ISSF World Cup in Hangzhou starting July 20 coming up before the Asian Games in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, in September-October, Sonam will look to carry that momentum onto the multi-sport showpiece.

Remarkably, it all began as a hobby.

"I was always interested in sports and even played chess. I wanted to try something different, so I took up shooting as a hobby. But it soon became something I wanted to build my career around," she said.

Sonam first picked up a rifle in 2018 while studying commerce in Mumbai. Her journey, however, was disrupted by the COVID-19



pandemic and the financial strain it placed on her family. She resumed training seriously at the Kolhapur shooting range in 2021.

"There was a time when we were facing financial difficulties, especially during the lockdown. When it became clear that I needed my own equipment, my father sold a property so we could buy it. It was a huge decision, but my family has always backed me," she said.

Her father, Uttam Maruti Maskar, sold a family property to keep her dream alive.

It paid off as Sonam clinched silver at the 2024 ISSF World Cup Final in New Delhi after earlier winning individual and mixed team silver medals at the Cairo

World Cup, performances that also earned her a placement in the Railways.

"The World Cup Final medal in Delhi is one of the most special moments of my career. Winning silver in front of the home crowd was unforgettable," she said.

Now, her sights are firmly set on the Asian Games as she fine-tunes her preparations with foreign coach Faruk Thomas and the Indian coaching staff.

"My preparations are going well. We are focused on being in the best possible shape for the Asian Games," she said.

"I am extremely grateful to everyone who has supported me throughout this journey. My family has always stood by me." (PTI)

F1 champion Lando Norris hit with 10-place grid penalty for Belgian GP

SPA-FRANCORCHAMPS (BELGIUM), July 16: Lando Norris' faltering Formula 1 title defense hit another setback Thursday as McLaren confirmed he will get a 10-place grid penalty for the Belgian Grand Prix. Norris is paying the price for poor reliability earlier in the season of the electronics which manage his car's hybrid power systems. Fitting an upgraded power electronics unit supplied by Mercedes with what McLaren called "a series of reliability fixes" took Norris over his allowance of three for the season and triggered the penalty. Norris lost two of the units to failures, including a breakdown which left him unable to start the Chinese Grand Prix. McLaren said it picked Belgium to use the new unit because it's relatively easy to overtake at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit, meaning Norris has a better chance of making up at least some of the places he'll lose. (AP)

How an Italian sculptor created the World Cup trophy that became an icon



a dog named Pickles beneath a hedge in south London, according to FIFA. It was stolen again from the Brazilian Football Confederation headquarters in 1983 after Brazil had taken permanent possession. It has never been recovered and is widely believed to have been melted down.

Gazzaniga's design depicts the struggle for victory

More than 50 proposals were submitted but only Gazzaniga presented a full model — which permitted the jury to appreciate both the form and the story it conveyed, his son said.

"There is the world, which stands above all else, there is the athlete's exertion, there is the athlete's movement within the metal, and the athlete's body is rough, rugged, for it has suffered, had to fight, and struggled for victory," the younger Gazzaniga said. "That victory is expressed through arms that resemble the wings of Victory, capturing not only the athlete's triumph but also the jubilation of the fan," he said.

Gazzaniga's family has preserved his office at a new location on the outskirts of Milan, including drawings, the original prototype submitted to FIFA and a wax cast.

World Cup winners don't get to keep the original trophy

The official World Cup trophy hoisted by the winning captain at the end of the final is 36 centimeters (14 inches) tall cast

in 18-carat gold, sitting on a base featuring two rings of green malachite, symbolizing the playing fields.

After the tournament, the original trophy goes back to FIFA, which keeps it at its Swiss headquarters between World Cups. The winning team brings home a gold-plated replica.

FIFA no longer lets three-time winners keep the original.

This is the 14th World Cup to use Gazzaniga's design, and FIFA has decided to keep the trophy in use at least through the 2038 tournament, according to Gazzaniga's website. The younger Gazzaniga still vividly remembers watching the 1974 World Cup final at home with his family as West Germany faced the Netherlands. It was the first time his father's trophy was presented at the World Cup.

"The real explosion of joy came when the German team raised the cup in Munich and the whole stadium erupted," he said. "That was the moment an object became an icon." (AP)

Defending champion Argentina reaches World Cup final by beating England 2-1

ATLANTA, July 16: No "Hand of God" this time. Argentina didn't need it. Instead it was the hallowed feet of Lionel Messi and the unbreakable spirit of a team that has repeatedly fought back at this year's World Cup that is now one step away from back-to-back titles.

Trailing 1-0 going into the 85th minute, Argentina rallied for a 2-1 victory over England on Wednesday with goals from Enzo Fernandez and substitute Lautaro Martinez.

"I dreamed it, I swear. I told Alexis (Mac Allister) that I was going to score. I told him that I was going to come on and I was going to win it," Martinez said. "I can tell you this team keeps showing what it's made of." At the final whistle, Messi fell to his knees in celebration while England players collapsed in disbelief — again.

Add 2026 to 1986 and 1998 on the list of games when Argentina has extinguished English hopes at the World Cup.

"I'm gutted for the team, the staff, the fans," England captain Harry Kane said. "We worked so hard to be here. The lads have given every bit of blood, sweat and tears. To fall short like we did is just gutting." The defending champions will take on European champion Spain in the final on Sunday in East



Rutherford, New Jersey. The best that South America has to offer against the best of Europe.

The loss for England will hurt a new generation of fans in a similar way to Diego Maradona's infamous handball goal in the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals and the penalty shootout loss in 1998 when David Beckham was sent off for kicking Diego Simeone.

The difference is there can be no sense of injustice this time, even if England had victory in its sights after Anthony Gordon scored the opening goal in the 55th minute.

The English were hanging on as the game wore on. England goal-

keeper Jordan Pickford made vital saves while Mac Allister sent a header off the post as wave after wave of Argentina attacks came.

Messi had largely been kept quiet. But when he's on the field, anything seems possible.

He fed the ball to Fernandez to sweep in the equalizer from outside the box in the 85th minute. And two minutes into stoppage time, Messi sent in a cross for Martinez to head in the winner.

It almost felt inevitable. Especially given the amount of times Argentina has simply refused to give in at this year's World Cup. From Cape Verde to Egypt, Messi and

Co. always seem to find a way. "It is a show of the collectiveness, the brotherhood that we are in, the fight to the very end that we've got," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "We were ready to go home, sad, knowing that we had left everything on the pitch, but after they scored we really proved ourselves."

England, in contrast, came up short in the World Cup semifinals for the third time after losses to Germany in 1990 and Croatia in 2018. And it's another occasion in recent years when England's players have squandered a winning position in the later stages of a major tournament. They led 1-0 against Croatia in the semifinals eight years ago and lost 2-1. They were up 1-0 against Italy in the European Championship final in 2021 and lost on penalties.

On Wednesday, England coach Thomas Tuchel's substitutions seemed to be more intent on holding on, rather than killing the game off with another goal.

"Argentina played with more risk, played with more rhythm, played with the feeling maybe that they have nothing to lose anymore, which freed them up and held us back because we played suddenly with a feeling that we have a lot to lose," Tuchel said. (AP)

Ministry asks IOA to form probe panel to investigate Lakra's allegations of harassment, intimidation

NEW DELHI, July 16: The Sports Ministry on Thursday directed the Indian Olympic Association to form an inquiry panel to former hockey player Asunta Lakra's allegations of sexual harassment after Hockey India President Dilip Tirkey conceded that an internal probe by HI may lead to "concerns regarding impartiality".

Lakra, who is also HI's Executive Board member and a selector, had urged the Sports Ministry to intervene urgently against what she described as the institutional protection of sexual harassment, intimidation and victimisation of women athletes in hockey.

She had also accused HI general secretary Bhola Nath Singh of intimidating her.

"The Sports Ministry has directed the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) to form a neutral panel to investigate Asunta Lakra's allegations. An explanation has also been sought from Hockey India," a ministry source told PTI.

Earlier, Tirkey requested the Sports Ministry to appoint the probe panel. In an email to ministry, he said said an inquiry by the Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) into the allegations might not be perceived to be fair.

"Hockey India treats the allegations with the utmost seriousness and remains committed to the safety, dignity and protection of all athletes. However as the allegations involve certain office bearers of Hockey India, referring the matter to HI's Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) may give rise to concerns regarding impartiality," Tirkey responded to the ministry through an email sent on Wednesday.

"To ensure a fair, transparent and independent inquiry, Hockey India requests the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs to consider constituting an independent inquiry committee comprising persons not connected with Hockey India to examine the allegations," the email further says.



He also give assurance of full cooperation to such a committee.

Tirkey also wrote to HI's executive board members informing them about this decision and requested them to maintain strict confidentiality and refrain from any action or communication that may influence the inquiry.

"Since both the complainant and the respondent are members of the HI Executive Board, it would not be appropriate for HI to conduct the inquiry through its own ICC," he said in the email to EB members on Thursday.

"I request all the Executive Board members to maintain strict confidentiality and refrain from any action or communication that may influence the inquiry," he added. (PTI)

Brar handed warning, demerit point for breaching the ICC Code of Conduct

DUBAI, July 16: India pacer Gurnoor Brar has been handed a warning and a demerit point for throwing the ball in an "inappropriate and dangerous" manner during the first ODI against England in Birmingham.

Brar was found guilty of breaching Article 2.9 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel, which is a Level 1 offence.

"In addition to this, one demerit point has been added to Brar's disciplinary record, for whom it was a first offence in a 24-month period," an ICC statement read.

The incident occurred in the eighth over of England's innings, when Brar picked up the ball while fielding and threw it towards the batter in an "inappropriate and dangerous manner."

India won the match by six wickets to take a 1-0 lead in the three-match series.

Brar admitted the offence and accepted the sanction proposed by match referee, Richie Richardson of the Emirates ICC Elite Panel of Match Referees and, as such, there was no need for a formal hearing.

On-field umpires Kumar Dharmasena and Mike Burns, third umpire Sam Nogajski, and fourth official Russell Warren levelled the charge.

Level 1 breaches carry a minimum penalty of an official reprimand, a maximum penalty of 50 per cent of a player's match fee, and one or two demerit points. (PTI)

CSK felt like the right franchise despite emotional RR exit: Sanju Samson

NEW DELHI, July 16: India wicketkeeper-batter Sanju Samson has revealed that leaving IPL franchise Rajasthan Royals after more than a decade long association was one of the toughest decisions of his career.

But the strong bond he shared with Mahendra Singh Dhoni and Ruturaj Gaikwad made his move to Chennai Super Kings an easy transition.

"Moving on from RR was a very big decision for me. I believe that after playing for a team for some time, you start to feel like this is your team and nobody can remove you. But, I always had the awareness that there is a limited time for everyone at one place," Samson, who led the Royals for five years before moving to CSK through a trade ahead of IPL 2026, told JioStar's 'Superstars'.

"You do your part, and you move out and after the end of IPL 2025, a point came when I felt that I should move on. I told myself that the boys are ready, and RR is ready to play without Sanju Samson. That is when I thought of leaving," he added.

The Kerala cricketer said he had a few options on the table after quitting RR but chose Chennai Super Kings because it felt like the perfect fit for his game. Samson added that finally donning the iconic yellow jersey was a special feeling.

"There were two or three options at that time. But honestly, CSK, Mahi bhai's influence, the franchise itself, and my friends



there, especially Ruturaj, meant I had great connections. Based on what I had heard about CSK from other players, I felt that this franchise was my type.

"If I go there, it will be very good for me. I had wished for that, but a trade is a tricky thing. I want to go there, but do they want me? And the original team needs to get what they want in return. Everyone has to agree. It was a major turning point. Luckily, I ended up in CSK. It was a great feeling," he said.

Growing up, the 31-year-old Samson idolised Dhoni and his fearless batting style, often going to bed dreaming of the day he would get the chance to represent India.

"The way he carried himself and his aggressive batting style really attracted me. He used to appear in the ads, and I would cut out his picture and stick it in my diary. Every kid has an idol, and Mahi bhai was mine.

"As a child, I used to watch

India play every day. Mahi bhai would be captaining and winning matches. I would go to sleep thinking, 'I have to play one day too.' I used to dream of batting with him, building a partnership, and fielding alongside him."

Now part of the CSK setup, Samson said one of his biggest dreams is to bat alongside Dhoni. Dhoni missed the entire 2026 IPL season with a calf injury, but Samson said he hasn't given up hope of playing alongside him.

Recalling how he got his first IPL opportunity, Samson said he spent the first few matches on the Rajasthan Royals bench before finally gathering the courage to approach then captain Rahul Dravid.

"He calmly explained that I needed to be patient and that my time would come. I was frustrated and disappointed after hearing that, so I took out all my anger in the nets. I would go to the nets and hit sixes, thinking, 'I'll show them.' (PTI)

Give bowlers something: Pujara bats for more sporting tracks in India

NEW DELHI, July 16: Former cricketer Cheteshwar Pujara has called for more bowler-friendly pitches in India as he believes playing on flat decks at home is adversely impacting the Indian batters' ability to adapt to seaming conditions in countries like England.

Indian batters struggled against bounce and movement, losing a T20I series to England 0-4 after being whitewashed 0-2 by lower-ranked Ireland in Belfast. The Indian batters were not lacking in form, having landed in the UK after an IPL season dominated by high-scoring matches, but struggled to adapt to a change of conditions. Pujara believes it can be avoided by simply ensuring a better balance between bat and ball in the pitches on offer here.

"Even in the IPL, you don't want matches where teams can easily chase 260. There has to be something for the bowlers," Pujara said on 'JioStar'.

"In T20 cricket, the margin for error is already very small, especially on flat pitches with short boundaries, while batters continue to get stronger and more innovative.

"That's why it's important to have pitches that offer bowlers a little assistance, whether through some turn or a bit of movement in the first two or three overs." (PTI)

British Open returns to a new Royal Birkdale and an old chase for the claret jug



SOUTHPORT (ENGLAND), July 16: Matthew Baldwin teed off at Royal Birkdale, just as he has done countless times as a member of the century-old links who grew up a short walk away. What made Thursday different was having a full grandstand surrounding him and a shiny claret jug reminding him what's at stake.

Baldwin hit the opening tee shot at the 154th edition of the British Open, an iron that split the middle of the brown fairway and was approved by a cheering crowd.

James Nicholas was in the first group for the second straight major. The New York native was first off at Shinnecock Hills last month in the U.S. Open, hitting his opening tee shot in fog so thick he couldn't see it land in the fairway. This shot at Birkdale didn't go so well, pulled into the thick grass and leading to an opening bogey.

And with that began the longest day in golf, part of what makes this major stand out from the others — 15 hours of golf along the Irish sea, summer daylight seemingly endless.

Defending champion Scottie Scheffler was among those playing early, along with Jordan Spieth, the last Open champion at Royal Birkdale in 2017.

But it's different now. The course was green and the rough was lush when Spieth won. A heat wave across Europe, and a forecast of sunshine, has left the course brown and baked, conditions that make for the best brand of links golf because the ball rolls and tumbles and bounces.

"The ball is just going to run forever," Scheffler said.

The course also has an entirely new 15th hole, a par 3 at 241 yards, and four other holes that have gone through significant changes.

Scheffler is coming off a missed cut at the Scottish Open — his first in nearly four years — and will try to become the first repeat winner of the British Open since Padraig Harrington in 2007-08. He also is trying to win for the first time since January.

He will be alongside Bryson DeChambeau, who has missed the cut in every major this year.

Baldwin is among 21 players from England in the field, and hopes have never been higher for an English links to produce an English champion for the first time since Tony Jacklin in 1969. (AP)

Changes to WC formats make sense but associate teams need more: Ashwin



NEW DELHI, July 16: Indian spin great R Ashwin on Thursday said the structural changes made to the ODI and T20 World Cup formats to include more teams make sense but for the game to become truly global, the ICC needs to add the lower rung sides into every bilateral series.

Following the revamp announced by the ICC on Wednesday, the 2027 ODI World Cup will be a three-stage competition and

the 2028 T20 World Cup's Super 8 phase will be expanded to accommodate 10 teams to achieve "greater context and consequence".

Ashwin said the world body is planning in the right direction but needs to do more.

"The ICC's changes to the fixture format for the 2027 ODI World Cup and 2028 T20 World Cup make sense from a competitiveness standpoint. But if the final goal is to grow the game, there needs to be a stronger pathway for emerging nations," Ashwin posted on 'X'.

"Teams like the Netherlands, Scotland, Nepal, USA and Ireland need more meaningful matches (FOR EXAMPLE: getting added as the third team into every bilateral series), not just qualification tournaments.

"Let's not forget, that collective growth will make this sport a spectacle at the Olympics," he added.

His views align with the demand for more meaningful games by teams like Nepal and Scotland who showed spark in the T20 World Cup earlier this year.

The 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa will feature 14 teams as planned before, up from the 10 in the previous edition, but the governing body has added a Super

Series round prior to the 'Group round' and a Super 7 stage before the semifinals in its bid to spice up the competition.

The teams that would qualify 12th to 14th for the tournament will play the Super Series round and the top finisher will progress to round two of the competition that will see six teams divided into two groups.

Top three teams from each group plus the next highest placed team across both groups will qualify for the Super 7 stage instead of the Super 6 planned earlier.

Four best-placed teams from the Super 7 stage will then progress to the semifinals.

For the T20 showpiece in Australia and New Zealand in 2028, the ICC has decided to try Super 10 instead of Super 8 after the Group stage.

Five groups of four teams will be created and the top two from each will enter the Super 10. Instead of top two teams from each Super 8 group making the semifinals in the last edition, only the one that tops the table in each group enters the last four.

Teams placed second in groups play in the eliminator against the teams placed third in the opposite group, adding another layer to the competition. (PTI)

World Cup glory hinges on collective effort: Sardar

NEW DELHI, July 16: Former India captain Sardar Singh believes the national men's hockey team has gained confidence at just the right time but success at next month's World Cup and the Asian Games after that will depend on consistent team effort instead of individual brilliance.

India head into the World Cup, beginning August 14, after an encouraging finish in the FIH Pro League, which was otherwise shaping up to be quite disappointing.

Craig Fulton's side recovered from a poor start to beat reigning world champions Germany and Olympic champions the Netherlands during the European leg before stretching England in closely-fought contests, prompting the coach to declare that India can beat any team if they stick to their game plan.

Sardar echoed that optimism while underlining the importance of squad depth, saying the Pro League had served its purpose by allowing the coaching staff to assess the entire core group before the season's biggest assignments.

"We have made a lot of improvements in terms of ranking and players. The men's team has performed very well in the latest matches of the Pro League," Sardar told reporters on the sidelines of the Oriental Cup football tournament's Finals here.

"Before that, I think it was important for the coaches to give a chance to all the players of the core group. You need to see the potential of every player before the World Cup and Asian Games so that you can choose the best squad.

"Selection should be based on the performances of all the players," said the former India



captain who played more than 300 international matches, featuring in three Olympics and three World Cups.

Sardar, who led the country to the 2014 Asian Games gold medal before retiring at the end of the 2018 Jakarta Asian Games, attended the Thursday's event as chief guest.

The former midfield general said a strong start would be crucial in a major tournament but insisted consistency across the squad would ultimately determine whether India can challenge for the World Cup title.

"It depends on how you start in the tournament," he said.

"Hockey is all about energy. You have to perform at 80-90 per cent in every match. It's not like two players can win you a tournament. If you want to win a good tournament, all the players have to perform at 80-90 per cent."

Now coaching the India Under-18 men's team, Sardar said developing young talent remains central to ensuring sustained success at the highest level.

"We should focus more on the junior players. These kids will represent our country in the future," he said.

"Hockey India has started a programme with the Sports Authority of India. I want to pass this knowledge to these kids so that they don't make the same mistakes in the future. Small mistakes can cost you at tournaments like the World Cup, Olympics and Asian Games, which come only once every four years. My target is to work more on the basics."

The Oriental Cup, meanwhile, continues to grow as a grassroots football initiative. The fourth edition featured more than 45 school teams from across Delhi-NCR, with over 1,500 student-athletes competing in the boys' Under-17 and girls' Under-19 categories.

Tournament founder Fareed Bakshi said the long-term ambition is to expand the competition beyond Delhi and establish it among the country's leading school football events.

"In the next two to three years, I intend to have a pan-India presence for the Oriental Cup and take it to the level of the Subroto Cup," Bakshi said. (PTI)