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Mob attacks AR camp, torches vehicles in Manipur



SENAPATI/IMPHAL, July 15: A mob attacked an Assam Rifles camp, hurled stones and torched three vehicles of security personnel outside the facility in Manipur's Senapati district, hours after a search operation was conducted in an area, officials said on Wednesday.

The violence occurred at the district town camp of the paramilitary force at 9.30 pm on Tuesday when the mob attacked it, they said.

The situation was brought under control after security forces fired tear gas shells and dispersed the crowd by midnight, one of the officials said.

No casualty was reported in the

incident, he said, adding that the situation in Senapati district is "now peaceful and under control".

Based on credible intelligence inputs regarding the presence of armed cadres in the general area of Makulongdi, nearly 2 km west of a designated NSCN (IM) camp at Oklong, an area domination patrol and search operation were launched by the Assam Rifles, a defence statement said.

"Intelligence reports and the social media posts indicated the presence of armed cadres moving outside designated camps, carrying weapons and wearing uniforms, in apparent violation of established ceasefire (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

CM defends Budget, claims poverty rate has declined from 32.67 pc in 2015 to 14.47 pc

'Budget reflection of BJP's double-engine govt'

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday defended the State Budget in the Assam Assembly, asserting that direct cash benefit transfer (DBT) schemes have played the most significant role in reducing poverty in Assam while reaffirming the government's commitment to welfare, industrialisation, pension reforms and infrastructure-led growth.

Participating in the discussion on the State Budget, Sarma said Assam's multidimensional poverty rate has declined from 32.67 per cent in 2015 to 14.47 per cent at present and expressed confidence that it would be reduced to a single digit.

"Direct cash benefit transfer is the most effective way to attack poverty directly. Development through industries, agriculture and MSMEs is essential, but those measures take time to produce results," he said.

The Chief Minister attributed the decline in poverty largely to welfare schemes such as Orunodoi, Nijut Moina and the free foodgrain distribution programme.

He alleged that previous Congress governments had failed to ef-



fectively reduce poverty because beneficiaries lacked bank accounts and Aadhaar linkage, recalling former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's observation that only a small fraction of welfare benefits reached intended recipients.

Sarma said the Centre's support had enabled Assam to undertake transformational projects, including the proposed Kaziranga elevated corridor and the underwater tunnel beneath the Brahmaputra, describing the Budget as a reflection of the BJP's "double-engine government."

"To expand the size of the

Budget, the State needs sustained economic growth. Industrialisation, agriculture and allied sectors will be the key drivers of revenue generation," he said, while stressing that Assam must remain competitive in securing greater financial assistance from the Centre.

Highlighting improvements in human development indicators, Sarma said Assam had made significant progress in reducing the Maternal Mortality Rate, improving institutional deliveries and promoting girls' education, bringing several indicators close to the na-

tional average.

The Chief Minister also noted that despite global economic uncertainties arising from the West Asia crisis, Assam had increased the Dearness Allowance (DA) of its employees to 60 per cent, a feat achieved by only a few states.

He accused people influenced by Left ideology of obstructing development projects and warned that strict action would be taken against those creating hurdles.

Referring to neighbouring Arunachal Pradesh, Sarma said the state could soon surpass Assam in economic growth with the implementation of 3,000 MW hydropower projects, adding that while people there cooperate with development initiatives, even small infrastructure projects often face prolonged opposition in Assam.

The Chief Minister also advocated local area planning models similar to those implemented in Odisha and Gujarat, arguing that such an approach could help address problems like artificial flooding in Assam.

Rejecting the Opposition's criticism that the Budget was merely a repetition of previous years, Sarma said continuity reflected the public mandate. (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Garima concludes her visit to proposed Zubeen Garg memorial site in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent
KOKRAJHAR, July 15: On the concluding day of her two-day visit to Kokrajhar, Garima Saikia Garg, wife of Assam's music icon Zubeen Garg, on Wednesday met BTC Chief Executive Member Hagrama Mohilary at the Bodoland Guest House before concluding her visit to the district.

Garima had arrived in Kokrajhar to participate as a resource person in a costume designing workshop organised by the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Earlier on Tuesday, she visited the site of the proposed Zubeen Garg Project at Chandrapara in Kokrajhar, where a memorial complex is being developed on nearly 30 bighas of land allotted by the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

During the visit, she paid floral tributes to a portrait of Zubeen Garg and planted Nahor saplings in his memory.

Speaking to the media, Garima appreciated the initiative taken by the people of Bodoland to preserve Zubeen Garg's legacy and thanked the BTC Government, particularly CEM Hagrama Mohilary, for allotting land for the project, which is proposed to include a museum, an auditorium (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

KA gears up for digital Census 2027

HT Bureau
DIPHU, July 15: The Karbi Anglong District Administration has completed preparations for a large-scale training programme for field personnel ahead of Census 2027, marking a significant step towards the implementation of India's first fully digital census.

The district-wide training programme for 1,995 Enumerators and Supervisors (E&S) will commence on July 16 and continue in multiple phases until August 8. Daily sessions will be held from 9.30 am to 5.30 pm at various schools, colleges and government institutions across the district.

To facilitate the training, the administration has established multiple centres, including Thong Nokbe College at Dokmoka, Government Model College at Deithor, higher secondary schools at Dokmoka, Howraghat, Deithor and Chowkholah, Rengbonghom High School, Barpathar High School, Diphu Government Girls' High School, the Circuit House Conference Hall in Diphu, the Eri Seed Grainage Conference Hall at Dengaon, Bakalia Municipal Board Office, the BDO Office Conference Hall at Manja, Chowkholah Town Committee Office, and the Bokajan Municipal Board Meeting Hall.

The training programme will equip field officials with the skills required to conduct the country's first fully digital census using dedicated mobile applications and secure digital platforms, replacing the traditional paper-based system.

During the first phase, participants will be trained in House-listing and Housing Operations (HLO), including the collection of data on household amenities, housing (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Left-liberal politics opposes development, CM pitches 'competitive federalism'

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, July 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday launched a sharp attack on what he described as "left-liberal" politics, accusing such groups of routinely opposing development projects and asserting that states must embrace "competitive federalism" to secure greater support from the Centre.

Speaking in the Assam Assembly, Sarma said people need better hospitals, roads, irrigation facilities and agricultural development, but alleged that certain groups oppose projects wherever they are proposed.

"Left-liberal people try to oppose every development initiative.

We need hospitals, roads, irrigation and agriculture, but whenever a project comes up, they resist it," he said.

The Chief Minister argued that Assam cannot afford to remain behind in the race for economic growth and infrastructure development.

"This is the era of competitive federalism. If we do not compete in development, Assam will continue to lag behind. We have to compete in growth and gradually take the state forward," he said.

Sarma said the Union government would naturally extend greater assistance to states that undertake reforms, promote industrialisation, expand exports, achieve higher literacy and work towards

becoming power-surplus economies.

"The states that speak about reforms, industrialisation, exports, 100 per cent literacy and contributing to India's development will receive support. States that fail to move with the country's development will eventually be left behind," he said.

Referring to the changing economic landscape of the Northeast, Sarma said Assam has traditionally been the region's most developed state because it utilised its available resources effectively.

However, he cautioned that neighbouring states are now moving rapidly with ambitious development programmes and Assam must (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Himanta calls for 'self-reliant constituencies', urges MLAs to end dependence on imported food

Staff Reporter
GUWAHATI, July 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Wednesday called on legislators to transform their constituencies into self-reliant economic units, urging them to reduce dependence on food imports from other states and make Assam self-sufficient in milk, fish, meat and agricultural produce.

Addressing the Assembly during a discussion on the state government's development agenda, Sarma said achieving self-reliance would be the most effective way to eliminate the "syndicate culture" in the state.

"The answer to ending the syndicate system is self-reliance. Once Assam becomes self-reliant,

there will be no need to depend on resources coming from outside the state," the Chief Minister said.

He appealed to all MLAs to launch constituency-level campaigns aimed at achieving self-sufficiency in key sectors, including dairy, fisheries, livestock and agriculture.

Sarma said every Assembly constituency should aspire to become an "Atmanirbhar Constituency", where essential commodities such as milk, fish, vegetables, potatoes and eggs are produced locally instead of being sourced from neighbouring constituencies or outside Assam.

"We speak about Atmanirbhar Bharat and Atmanirbhar Assam. Now we must work towards cre-

ating Atmanirbhar constituencies. My constituency should not need milk, fish or vegetables from elsewhere," he said.

The Chief Minister encouraged legislators to promote dairy cooperative societies, fish farming, piggy and poultry under various government schemes, saying these initiatives would strengthen rural livelihoods while boosting local production.

Referring to dairy giant Amul, Sarma said Assam should set an ambitious target of significantly increasing milk production.

"If Amul can produce between 80 lakh and over one crore litres of milk daily, there is no reason why Assam cannot build dozens of (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

14 pc of India-Bangladesh border in Assam yet to be fenced: Minister

GUWAHATI, July 15: Nearly 14 per cent of the 267.5 km India-Bangladesh border in Assam is yet to be fenced, state Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora informed the Assembly on Wednesday.

Replying to a question by Congress MLA Jakir Hussain Sikdar, the minister said a 228.541 km stretch of the border has so far been fenced with barbed wire, leaving 38.959 km unfenced.

He highlighted that according to Survey of India data, Assam shares a 267.5 km boundary with

Bangladesh, with Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Cachar and Sribhumi districts lying on the international border.

Asserting that fencing the international border is the Central government's responsibility, Bora said that of the unfenced portion, 34.609 km is river border while 4.35 km of land on the shores of Kushiara river in Sribhumi has not been fenced due to objection by Border Guard Bangladesh. Bora said that Border Security Force (BSF) has been patrolling the river border using boats and the Comprehensive (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)



Ezar tree plantation to make Guwahati 'purple city': Himanta

GUWAHATI, July 15: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Wednesday that plantation of Ezar trees along the road from Khanapara to Jalukbari, which is the national highway 37 bypass for Guwahati, will be undertaken in keeping with the government's plan to develop the state's largest city as a 'purple city'.

The purple hue of the 'kapou' flower (foxtail orchid) is already being used by the Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) in the project for the city, he added.

Speaking during a discussion on the government's steps towards developing Guwahati as a 'purple city', Sarma said that besides the

measures by GMC, the Public Works Department has also been asked to use the shade in its buildings wherever possible in the city.

"The Forest department will initiate the plantation of Ezar trees from Khanapara to Jalukbari as part of the Guwahati Ring Road project," he added.

The GMC had earlier announced its plans of developing Guwahati as a 'purple city', inspired by the hues of the 'kapou', which is the state flower, and the purple summer bloom of Ezar tree or the Queen's Grape Myrtle.

The chief minister further said that Rs 150 crore has been allocated as part of the Ring Road

project to provide relief from the flood problem in Jorabat area, on the outskirts of Guwahati, which acts as an entry point to Meghalaya.

"The consultant for the Ring Road has been asked to draw up a plan and also talk to IIT-Guwahati experts for the flood problem mitigation," Sarma, who represents Jalukbari constituency, one of the five Assembly seats of Guwahati, added.

Raising the matter of the 'purple city' plan, BJP legislator Pradyut Bordoloi dwelt on the significance of choosing the colour for this largest city, often referred to as (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Akhil Gogoi suspended from Assam Assembly for a day

GUWAHATI, July 15: Opposition Rajior Dal MLA Akhil Gogoi was on Wednesday suspended from the Assam Assembly for the day after repeatedly interrupting Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma during a discussion on the state budget.

Gogoi attempted to interrupt Sarma on several occasions while the chief minister was speaking.

Despite repeated requests by Speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass to take his seat, the legislator continued to interrupt.

When Sarma mentioned that the state's multidimensional poverty rate had declined from 32.67 per cent in 2015 to 14.47 per cent at present, Gogoi again rose from his seat to contend that the state's overall ranking in the index remained high.

Dass then ordered the suspension of Gogoi for the rest of the day, with (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Drugs worth ₹ 8 cr seized, three traffickers nabbed

GUWAHATI, July 15: Narcotic substances worth almost ₹ 8 crore were seized and three suspected drug traffickers were arrested from Assam's Sribhumi district in this connection, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

"Fast & Furious? More like Fast & Seized. Kudos to @sribhumipolice for intercepting a no number plate vehicle carrying 80,000 Yaba tablets worth ₹ 8 cr and apprehending three accused," Sarma said in a post on X on Tuesday night.

Yaba or 'crazy medicine' in Thai is a tablet form of a mixture of methamphetamine, a powerful and addictive stimulant, and caffeine. It is banned in India.

The state's fight against the drug menace will continue with full force, he added. (PTI)

Modi says deal will deepen economic ties and boost exports

India-UK trade pact takes effect

NEW DELHI, July 15: The India-United Kingdom Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) came into force on Wednesday, granting duty-free access to nearly 99 per cent of Indian exports to the UK and paving the way for deeper trade, investment and services ties between the two countries.

Starting Wednesday, 99 per cent of Indian goods entering the UK and 90 per cent of UK goods entering India will either be duty-free or attract reduced tariffs. It will benefit a wide range of sectors on both sides, including automotive, manufacturing, consumer goods, creative industries, and medical technology.

The agreement lowers tariffs across a range of sectors, including textiles, leather, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, marine



products, pharmaceuticals and processed food, while expanding market access for services, digital trade and government procurement.

Alongside CETA, the Agreement on Social Security (Double Contribution Convention) exempts

Indian professionals on temporary UK assignments of up to 60 months from making social security contributions in both countries, reducing costs for employees and employers.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said that CETA is a pact

between two major and complementary economies. It took over 800 technical sessions and 14 rounds of negotiations to conclude this pact.

He said that goods worth USD 140 million were shipped on day one under the agreement.

Agrawal further said that the commerce ministry, along with industry and export promotion councils, will spread awareness about the pact.

India offered tariff concessions on 89.5 per cent of its tariff lines, covering 91 per cent of UK exports, while retaining protections for sensitive sectors such as dairy, cereals, edible oils and certain manufacturing industries through phased tariff reductions and quota-based access. The agreement also provides a phased reduction in duties on (CONTD. ON PAGE 2)

Raktsey Karpo, Halman apricots spearhead Ladakh's biggest export drive; LG pitches processing unit

NEW DELHI, July 15: Ladakh Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Wednesday flagged off the first consignment of indigenous Raktsey Karpo and Halman apricots under the Union Territory's largest-ever export programme to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and pitched for setting up a world-class apricot processing unit to boost value addition and overseas shipments.

The inaugural consignment of five metric tonnes was flagged off from Ladakh Bhawan here under an agreement signed by the Ladakh administration earlier this year. The initiative is expected to facilitate the export of more than 1,000 metric tonnes of fresh apricots during the current harvest season, a quantum leap from around 1,500 kg exported over the previous two years.

"It would not be incorrect to say that today marks a historic occasion for Ladakh's entire horticulture sector, and especially for its hardworking farmers," Saxena said, adding that the export would give Ladakh's world-famous Raktsey Karpo and Halman apricots "a new and strong identity" in international markets.

He said direct access to overseas markets would enable farmers to obtain "fair and better prices" for their produce, leading to higher incomes and improved living standards.

Highlighting the region's unique



climatic conditions, Saxena said Ladakh's high altitude, intense sunlight, cool temperatures and pristine ecosystem enhance the colour, flavour, sweetness and nutritional value of its apricots, making them highly sought-after globally.

The export programme focuses on Raktsey Karpo and Halman, Ladakh's indigenous apricot varieties, which are internationally recognised for their exceptional sweetness, rich flavour, superior nutritional value, and organic cultivation.

Referring to the export programme, Saxena said more than 1,000 metric tonnes of apricots would be shipped from Ladakh this season.

He added that exporters under-

take harvesting, sorting, grading, packing, transportation, and marketing, relieving farmers of the burden of managing the entire supply chain while reducing post-harvest losses.

Speaking to reporters after the flag-off, Saxena said, "We signed an agreement in April to export 1,000 tonnes of apricots. Today, under that agreement, a five-tonne consignment has been flagged off from here and is set to depart for Dubai this evening."

"Farmers simply provide access to their orchards, and the exporter manages the entire process," he said.

Saxena said the Ladakh administration had been monitoring the movement of trucks carrying the

produce from orchards to Delhi through a dedicated control room and would continue extending full support to ensure timely exports.

He said the administration was also working to facilitate a green corridor or similar arrangements so that trucks carrying the fruit could reach Delhi in 2-3 days.

With support from Container Corporation of India (CONCOR), the administration has also ensured cold-chain transportation for the highly perishable fruit to preserve its freshness during transit.

Calling for value addition in the horticulture sector, Saxena said he would strive to establish a world-class apricot processing unit in Ladakh within a year.

"Our challenge today is the lack of high-quality processing units. However, I assure you that I will strive to establish a world-class processing unit in Ladakh within a year," he said, adding that it would help address the fruit's short shelf life and make exports smoother.

Saxena said the initiative would create new marketing opportunities, increase farmers' incomes, reduce post-harvest losses, encourage greater investment in horticulture and help establish Ladakh as one of India's leading exporters of premium-quality horticultural produce.

He thanked APEDA, CONCOR, Lulu Group, and officials of the Ladakh administration for supporting the export initiative. (PTI)

Ather to unveil first mass-market electric scooter on new EL platform

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 15: Electric two-wheeler manufacturer Ather Energy Limited has announced that the fourth edition of its flagship Ather Community Day will be held in Bengaluru on August 29, during which the company will unveil the first scooter based on its new EL platform, marking its entry into the mass-market electric scooter segment.

The event, themed "A New Dawn of Magic," will also feature a range of new technologies, charging solutions and ecosystem innovations aimed at enhancing the ownership experience.

According to the company, the EL platform is its next-generation vehicle architecture and the first completely new platform developed since the launch of the Ather 450.

Designed for greater versatility, scalability and manufacturing efficiency, the platform will support Ather's future range of electric vehicles across multiple segments.

The first scooter built on the EL platform is expected to target the ₹1 lakh to ₹1.25 lakh price bracket, enabling the company to expand its presence in the mass-market electric scooter segment and broaden its customer base.

Ather Community Day 2026 will bring together thousands of Ather owners, automotive enthusiasts, technology experts and business partners to witness the company's latest products and innovations.

The company said the annual event has evolved into one of India's leading automotive and technology showcases, providing a platform to present its long-term vision and future product roadmap.

At the 2025 edition of the event, attended by more than 4,000 participants, Ather had unveiled the EL platform, the Redux concept vehicle, its next-generation fast-charging technology and AtherStack 7.0 software platform.

The company said additional details about Ather Community Day 2026 will be announced in the coming weeks.

Contd. from Page 1...

'Budget reflection of

"People voted for continuity because they wanted these schemes to continue. We are simply carrying forward that vision," he said, urging legislators to promote entrepreneurship, support government projects and encourage young people to prepare for competitive examinations.

Defending other major policy initiatives, Sarma said the State's Satra institutions and the broader Vaishnavite tradition are inseparable and expressed confidence that public understanding of their relationship would continue to grow. He also reiterated the government's commitment to granting land rights to tea garden workers, stating that around 30,000 land pattas had already been distributed and that another 1.5 lakh families would receive land titles this year.

According to him, nearly three lakh tea garden families would be covered within the next two to three years. Responding to demands for restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS), Sarma defended the government's decision to retain the National Pension System (NPS) while introducing the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) as an alternative.

He said over 1.5 lakh government employees are already covered under the NPS and would have the option of remaining under it or shifting to the UPS.

The Chief Minister also criticised the Opposition for not seeking updates on several flagship announcements made in previous budgets. He informed the House that the tendering process for the proposed Assam satellite project had been completed, orders for the proposed proton therapy facility would be issued shortly and work on the State's proposed OTT platform was progressing. (With inputs from PTI)

Mob attacks AR

ground rules," another official said, adding that the reported violations were formally informed to the Cease-fire Monitoring Group. During the course of the operation, the Assam Rifles columns approached Makuilongdi and Oklong villages, and residents, including women, obstructed them.

As tensions escalated, reports emerged at around 9 pm that a large crowd gathered in Senapati town and prepared to march towards the Assam Rifles camp in Naga Taphou area, the official said. "Despite the withdrawal of the columns, a large mob reached the camp at around 9.30 pm, hurled stones, damaging property and attempting acts of arson," the statement said.

The mob vandalised and damaged Assam Rifles vehicles, it said, adding that "one light vehicle was set ablaze, while two trucks were overturned and damaged. A private car was also burnt during the violence".

A waiting shed in front of the camp was also torched by the mob, it said.

The Senapati district police and CRPF were immediately deployed to help the security personnel control the situation, he said.

In coordination with the Manipur Police, minimum force was deployed, and tear gas shells and blank rounds were fired to disperse the violent crowd and prevent further escalation, the statement said.

No casualties were reported, and efforts to address concerns and maintain communal harmony have been undertaken with civil society organisations and the district authorities, it added.

On July 6, two Assam Rifles personnel were killed when suspected militants ambushed a convoy at Shangshak near Nungshang Khong, about 17 km from the Ukhrul district headquarters, and three persons were detained in connection with it. 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. (PTI)

Garima concludes her

and a recording studio dedicated to the legendary singer. "The greatest happiness for me is seeing people accept Zubeen as a member of their own family and preserve his creations in their hearts forever," she said, adding that the singer had always cherished the Bodo community and dreamt of a greater and united Assam.

She said the love and respect shown by the people of Bodoland had deeply touched her family and expressed hope that the spirit of unity and harmony would continue.

On the legal proceedings concerning Zubeen Garg, Garima said she had complete faith in the country's judicial system, while acknowledging that the case was taking time because it involved 394 witnesses.

"We are fighting for the truth through lawful means, and I firmly believe justice will prevail. Every Assamese person is praying for justice," she said. Making an emotional appeal, she remarked, "If a person like Zubeen does not get justice, the word 'justice' loses its meaning."

She, however, reiterated her confidence that the truth would ultimately prevail through the legal process.

Declining to comment on the recent controversy surrounding a painting of Zubeen Garg, Garima appealed to the media not to raise issues that could disturb the late singer's peace or cause further pain to his family.

A large number of admirers gathered at the project site during her visit and paid tribute by singing Zubeen Garg's evergreen song Mayabini. BTC Council Member Yubiraj Basumatary and several fans were present on the occasion.

Himanta calls for

successful dairy cooperatives and emerge as a leading milk-producing state," he said.

Sarma also urged MLAs to ensure public cooperation in implementing government projects, particularly where land acquisition is required. He said landowners should receive fair compensation and adequate participation in the development process.

The Chief Minister described the next five years as crucial for Assam's growth, saying the state had laid a strong foundation during the previous term but now needed to accelerate development. He also reiterated the government's commitment to expanding healthcare infrastructure, stating that every district in Assam would eventually have a medical college as part of the state's long-term development strategy.

Left-liberal politics

continue pursuing reforms and infrastructure expansion to maintain its leadership in the region.

The Chief Minister made the remarks during a discussion in the Assembly while outlining the government's development agenda and emphasising the need for faster implementation of infrastructure projects.

KA gears up

structures and assets. The programme will also cover real-time digital data submission, validation procedures and privacy protection protocols, particularly for operations in remote and rural areas.

The district administration has directed all designated Enumerators and Supervisors to attend training strictly according to their allotted batch schedules and appealed to the public and local stakeholders to extend full cooperation for the successful conduct of the census exercise. Officials expressed confidence that the training would ensure an efficient, accurate and comprehensive digital census across Karbi Anglong.

14 pc of India-

Integrated Border Management System. On developmental initiatives along the border areas, he said it was being carried out under the Vibrant Village Programme-II, which has replaced the Border Area Development Programme. For inter-state border areas, various developmental works are being undertaken through Border Development Activities, Border Outpost and Border Outreach Programme, Bora added. (PTI)

Ezar tree plantation

'gateway to the North East'. Besides the choice of the colour being inspired by the 'kapou' flower, he also mentioned how the Ezar trees had played a significant part in the Ahom battles against the Mughals at Saraighat. Bordoloi said the wood from the Ezar was used to construct the boats used by the Ahom naval fleet, which played the pivotal role in handing down a decisive defeat to the invading Mughals.

Replying to Bordoloi, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Kaushik Rai said the decision to develop Guwahati as a 'purple city' was taken at a stakeholders' meeting. He said various measures, including plantation of Ezar trees, have been initiated, besides steps to ensure a cleaner and greener Guwahati. (PTI)

Akhil Gogoi suspended

marshals escorting him out of the House. Before leaving, Gogoi covered his mouth with a black cloth as he collected his belongings while being surrounded by security personnel. (PTI)

Arunachal's hydropower push

enabled Arunachal Pradesh to emerge as one of the fastest-growing states in the region.

He also said the state is competing at a national level in infrastructure development and energy generation, adding that such initiatives would significantly strengthen its economy.

Sarma maintained that development-oriented policies, supported by people and governments working together, are essential for states to attract investment and accelerate economic growth.

He made the remarks while participating in a debate on development and infrastructure in the ongoing budget session of the Assembly.

India-UK trade

British automobiles and alcoholic beverages, while safeguarding domestic producers through quotas and transition periods. Prime Minister Narendra Modi described the operationalisation of the agreements as "a significant moment in the India-United Kingdom partnership."

"With the coming into force of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Agreement on Social Security, our economic linkages are going to get even deeper. Together, these agreements translate our shared ambition into tangible opportunities for our people," Modi said in a post on X.

He said the trade pact would provide fresh momentum to farmers, entrepreneurs and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), while giving several sectors stronger access to the UK market. Modi added that the agreement would deepen cooperation in technology, professional services and innovation, while supporting greater mobility for skilled Indian talent. "The social security agreement will provide invaluable support to Indian professionals working temporarily in the UK and strengthen the competitiveness of Indian enterprises," Modi said. The prime minister added that the agreements reflected "the trust between our democracies and our resolve to build a forward-looking partnership driven by trade, technology, investment and innovation".

Merchandise trade between the two countries stood at USD 25.1 billion in 2025-26, while bilateral services trade reached USD 35.4 billion in 2024, according to government data. The agreement, signed in July last year, is expected to at least double bilateral trade from the current level of about 48 billion pounds annually by 2030 while boosting long-term economic growth in both countries. (PTI)

IESA welcomes Semicon 2.0, hails ₹1.27 lakh crore push for semiconductor ecosystem

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 15: The India Electronics and Semiconductor Association (IESA) has welcomed the Union Cabinet's approval of Semicon 2.0 and the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme (MPMS), describing the decisions as a major step towards building a trusted, self-reliant and globally competitive semiconductor ecosystem in India. The Cabinet has approved Semicon 2.0 with an outlay of ₹1,27,500 crore and the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme with an allocation of ₹62,500 crore over five years as part of a broader package of ₹2,19,353 crore for infrastructure and electronics manufacturing.

IESA said the new programme builds on the foundation laid by the first phase of the India Semiconductor Mission and signals the government's long-term commitment to developing a comprehensive semiconductor ecosystem encompassing fabrication plants, advanced packaging, chip design, research and development, talent development, equipment, materials and supply chains.

According to the association, the first phase attracted more than US\$20 billion in announced semiconductor investments and facilitated multiple fabrication and semiconductor packaging projects, with several advanced packaging units already under implementation.

Ashok Chandak, President of IESA and SEMI India, said Semicon 2.0 marks India's transition from policy formulation to large-scale execution.

He said the programme would strengthen semiconductor fabrication, advanced packaging, design, research and

development, talent and supply chains, creating the foundation for a globally competitive ecosystem capable of attracting sustained investments, generating high-value employment and significantly increasing domestic value addition. Chandak added that the policy comes at a time when global semiconductor manufacturing equipment investments are expected to reach nearly US\$230 billion by 2028, positioning India to benefit from the next wave of international investments in semiconductor manufacturing, packaging, equipment and materials.

Welcoming the approval of the Mobile Phone Manufacturing Scheme, he said the initiative aims to nearly double cumulative mobile phone production to about ₹39 lakh crore and exports to ₹15 lakh crore, while creating around 60,000 additional direct jobs.

He noted that India has already manufactured nearly 125 crore mobile phones, emerging as the world's second-largest mobile manufacturing ecosystem and meeting 99.2 per cent of domestic demand through locally manufactured devices.

IESA Chairperson Navin Bishnoi said the enhanced emphasis on indigenous product design, research and innovation would help transform India from a global design services hub into a complete design-to-manufacturing destination. The association said Semicon 2.0 is expected to attract an additional US\$40-50 billion in investments, create 2-3 lakh high-skilled jobs, significantly enhance domestic value addition and strengthen India's position as a trusted global semiconductor partner.

International Jawa-Yezdi Day unites over 7,500 riders across India

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 15: International Jawa-Yezdi Day (IJYD), one of the world's longest-running rider-led motorcycle celebrations, marked its 24th edition on July 12, bringing together more than 7,500 riders across 150 cities in India and enthusiasts from 11 countries.

Observed annually on the second Sunday of July, IJYD has grown from a small grassroots initiative by Jawa and Yezdi owners into a global celebration of motorcycling, heritage and community.

This year's edition saw participation from more than 40 Jawa-Yezdi rider clubs, dealerships and independent enthusiast groups across India.

Vintage Jawa and Yezdi motorcycles shared the roads with modern Jawa and Yezdi models, reflecting the enduring legacy of the iconic brands across generations. The celebrations extended beyond India, with riding communities in 11 countries organising local rides, community gatherings and digital events, reinforcing the global appeal of the Jawa-Yezdi fraternity.

According to the organisers, the event celebrated not only the motorcycles but also the friendships, memories and shared experiences that have kept the Jawa-Yezdi culture alive for decades.

Anupam Thareja, Co-founder of Classic Legends, said International Jawa-Yezdi Day began 24 years ago as a simple expression of passion among motorcycle enthusiasts and has since evolved into a global tradition.

Project INROAD completes 1.79 lakh hectares of rubber plantations in Northeast



HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 15: Project INROAD (Indian Natural Rubber Operations for Assisted Development) has completed 1.79 lakh hectares of new natural rubber plantations across Northeast India over the past five years, marking one of the country's largest plantation expansion programmes within such a short period.

Launched in 2021-22, the project has established 1,79,376 hectares of rubber plantations across 113 districts in the region and is expected to achieve its original target of two lakh hectares in the coming months.

Project INROAD is a first-of-its-kind initiative under which the Indian tyre industry directly supports rubber plantation development.

The project is funded by Apollo Tyres, CEAT, JK Tyre and MRF, and is being implemented by the Rubber Board of India.

CONSTRUCTION OF GOODS CIRCULATING AREA, APPROACH ROAD ETC.
Tender Notice No.: LMG/Engg/47 of 2026. **Dated:** 13-07-2026.
E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **SN-1. Brief Description of Item:** Senchoa- Construction of Goods circulating area, approach road, Goods Office, High mast tower, Merchant room, Labour room, CCTV, Furniture etc.
Tender Value: ₹7,02,13,757.92/-
Earnest Money: ₹14,04,300/-
Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 04-08-2026 and opening of tender at 15:00 hrs. on 05-08-2026. Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender will be available up to 15:00 hrs. on 04-08-2026 in the website www.ireps.gov.in
DRM(W)/Lumding
NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

AFFIDAVIT
I, Kulsan Begum, DO- Kasem Ali do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that I am a permanent resident of the below mentioned address and citizen of India by birth. That my father's actual and correct name is Kasem Ali but inadvertently his name has been recorded in the HSLC Admit Card vide Roll: B21-0842 No. 0589 and Registration No. 30/UV/0921/219023/19 as Md. Kasem Ali in place of Kasem Ali. That Md. Kasem Ali and Kasem Ali are the same and one person who is my father.

Sd/- Kulsan Begum
RO- No. 1 Sialmari Khuti
PS- Dalgao, Darrang

LOST
I have lost my HSLC admit card and marksheet bearing Roll B 22 - 0459 No. 0748, and registration No. 15/RP/0879/712097/20 of the year 2022. I lost the document on 28th May, 2026 in Loralungso area. If anybody possesses it, please kindly contact at the mobile number mentioned below.

Sarhon Terang,
S/o Khoyasang Terang
Mentila, Inglongcherop.
P.O. & P.S., Diphu
Dist.: Karbi Anglong, Assam
Pin code: 782460
Contact No. 86386-74298.

Judicial employees intensify statewide stir over long-pending demands

Court staff across Assam observe two-day strike seeking Shetty Commission implementation, restoration of OPS and service reforms

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 15: Judicial employees across Assam on Wednesday launched a two-day statewide strike under the banner of the All Assam Judicial Employees' Association (AAJEA), demanding the implementation of the Justice Shetty Commission's recommendations and resolution of several long-pending service-related issues.

The strike, being observed on July 15 and 16, witnessed participation from judicial employees in districts including Jorhat, Sivasagar, Goalpara and Gossaigaon, where court staff abstained from official duties and staged peaceful demonstrations inside court premises.

In Gossaigaon, employees held placards and raised slogans in support of their demands, disrupting the normal functioning of the court and causing inconvenience to litigants and visitors.

The Association warned that the agitation would be intensified if the government failed to address the issues at the earliest.

In Goalpara, judicial employees staged a sit-in demonstration within the district court premises, urging the State Government and the competent authorities to implement the Supreme Court's October 7, 2009 judgment in Writ Petition (Civil) No 1022 of 1989, based on the recommendations of the Justice Shetty Commission.

Members of the Jorhat District Judicial Employees' Association alleged that repeated representations to the State Government and the Judicial Department had failed to yield results.



Association president Sunil Kumar Dutta and secretary Ankur Pratim Saikia said employees were left with no option but to resort to the strike.

They expressed regret for the inconvenience caused to litigants and appealed to the public for understanding and support.

In Sivasagar, judicial employees joined the protest demanding implementation of the Justice Shetty Commission recommendations, publication of separate service rules for judicial employees, creation of Bench Clerk posts in the old districts and enforcement of the principle of "Equal Pay for Equal Work."

The Association's charter of demands also

includes restoration of the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) in place of the National Pension System (NPS), rectification of anomalies in ROP-2017, implementation of the May 30, 2024 notification relating to district judiciary employees, promotion opportunities for Grade-IV employees, filling up of vacant posts, removal of pay disparities, enhancement of permanent travelling allowance and creation of promotional posts such as Sheristadar/Chief Administrative Officer, Head Administrative Officer, Administrative Officer, Junior Administrative Officer, Senior Administrative Officer and Protocol Officer.

The Association has further sought imple-

mentation of the 25 per cent promotional quota from Grade-IV posts to the post of Junior Administrative Assistant (LDA), payment of special allowances to stenographers, drivers, record keepers and other eligible employees, grant of an additional five per cent of basic pay for employees performing duties during Lok Adalat holidays, award of Graduate Pay of ₹8,700 to eligible employees, and enhancement of the Grade Pay of Grade-IV staff from ₹3,900 to ₹4,400 with relaxation of the existing 10-year eligibility period.

The Association alleged that despite clear directions from the Supreme Court, the State Government and the Judicial Department had failed to implement the recommendations and address the longstanding grievances of judicial employees, many of whom routinely work beyond office hours without adequate service benefits.

Meanwhile, in a separate development, the Nagaon Bar Association constituted its new executive committee for the 2026-27 term.

Senior advocate Ganga Ballav Goswami was elected president, while Ajit Kumar Borah was re-elected secretary for a sixth consecutive term.

Alok Goswami was elected vice-president, with Imdad Nabi, Nipul Sarma and Kumkum Mahanta appointed assistant secretaries.

The newly elected office-bearers pledged to work for the welfare of the legal fraternity during their tenure.

Padma Shri Geeta Upadhyay cremated with full state honours in Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, July 15: The last rites of eminent litterateur, distinguished educationist, two-time Sahitya Akademi Award recipient and Padma Shri awardee Geeta Upadhyay were performed with full state honours at the Parowa public crematorium in Tezpur on Wednesday in the presence of thousands of admirers, family members and dignitaries.

Geeta Upadhyay passed away on the night of July 13. Her mortal remains were accorded state honours by the Assam Government before being consigned to flames.

On behalf of the State Government, Sonitpur District Commissioner Ananda Kumar Das, Inspector General of Police (North Assam Range) Prashanta Sagar Changmai, and Sonitpur Senior Superintendent of Police Barun Purakayastha paid floral tributes to the departed literary icon.

Floral tributes were also offered by heads of various government departments, administrative officials, Tezpur University Controller of Examinations Biren Das, noted Sattriya exponent Premananda Mahanta, Sahitya Akademi awardee Chandramani Upadhyay, litterateurs Gyan Bahadur Chettri and Kharga Bahadur Kaushik, representatives of political parties, literary and cultural organisations and numerous social bodies from Tezpur and across Sonitpur district. The ceremony, coordinated



by the Sonitpur district administration, witnessed a large gathering of mourners. As part of the state honours, personnel of the Sonitpur district police accorded a ceremonial gun salute to the departed writer.

Following the official ceremony, family members performed the last rites in accordance with Hindu customs. Her nephew, Dibakar Upadhyay, lit the funeral pyre, bringing to a close the final journey of the acclaimed author, who was widely recognised for building literary bridges between the Assamese and Nepali languages.

A special condolence meeting, held in keeping with Nepali community traditions, was also organised at the crematorium.

Speaking on the occasion, Biren Das recalled Geeta Upadhyay's contributions as a former member of the Tezpur University Board of Management, while distinguished litterateurs Kharga Bahadur Kaushik and Binod Khanal shared their memories of her life, literary achievements and enduring legacy.

Student body also appeals to activist to end hunger strike amid health concerns

ABSU extends solidarity to Sonam Wangchuk, urges Centre to open dialogue

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 15: The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has extended its solidarity to social activist Sonam Wangchuk, who is on an 18-day hunger strike, while appealing to both the Government of India to initiate dialogue and Wangchuk to end his fast in view of his deteriorating health.

In a press statement issued on Tuesday, ABSU president Khwrmndao Wary described Wangchuk as a "Soldier of Humanity" and highlighted his contributions to issues relating to climate change, education and social welfare.

Wangchuk is a recipient of the Upendra Nath Brahma Soldier of Humanity Award, conferred jointly by the UNB Trust and ABSU.

The student body said Wangchuk's movement carries significance for students and future generations, particularly in seeking greater transparency in the country's education system.

ABSU expressed support for demands aimed at ensuring transparent conduct of national-level examinations such as NEET, SSC and other centrally conducted recruitment and entrance examinations, free from irregularities.

It also said the demand for accountability in the education sector reflects the need for responsible governance and reforms to strengthen educational policies.

Appealing to the Union Government, ABSU urged it to respond positively to the non-violent movement by initiating dialogue, stating that such engagement would uphold the democratic values of the country.

The organisation also expressed concern over Wangchuk's reported deteriorating health and appealed to him to conclude his hunger strike and continue contributing to educational reforms and nation-building. ABSU further stated that a constructive response from the Government would reinforce India's democratic credentials and its commitment to addressing public concerns through peaceful dialogue.

Businessman detained over sexual harassment allegations in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 15: Police have detained a businessman in Kokrajhar following allegations of sexual harassment levelled by a woman employee, while student organisations staged protests demanding his immediate arrest and strict legal action.

The accused, identified as Amratanj Rajstogi, owner of the clothing and accessories store Little Sarojini Nagar on JD Road near Kadamtola, came under police scrutiny after a woman employee lodged an FIR at Kokrajhar Police Station on Monday evening.

According to the complaint, the businessman allegedly subjected female employees to sexual harassment during working hours over an extended period.

Police said the accused allegedly closed the shop after learning about the FIR.

However, he was later detained and is currently being interrogated.

A senior police officer confirmed that an investigation into the allegations is underway.

Dibrugarh Press Club urges PM to expedite airport upgrade
Memorandum seeks night flight operations and international airport status for Dibrugarh

HT Correspondent

DIBRUGARH, July 15: The Dibrugarh Press Club has submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Narendra Modi seeking the immediate commencement of regular scheduled night flight operations from Dibrugarh Airport and the early upgradation of the airport to international status.

The memorandum, signed by Press Club President Manash Jyoti Dutta, Vice-President Anil Kumar Poddar and General Secretary Ripunjay Das, stated that the organisation has been pursuing the long-pending demands through earlier memoranda submitted in December 2023, December 2024 and May 2025.

The Press Club noted that Dibrugarh has emerged as Assam's second capital with the establishment of Secretariat and Legislative Assembly infrastructure and serves as the commercial, industrial, educational and healthcare hub of Upper Assam.

It said the airport caters to passengers from Upper Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and neighbouring districts, making it one of the busiest airports in eastern India.

According to the memorandum, despite the availabil-

ity of modern night landing facilities since 2010 and the successful first evening landing in December 2014, regular scheduled night flight operations have yet to begin.

It attributed the delay to a shortage of airport operational staff and CISF personnel, which has restricted airport operations to a single shift despite the availability of the required infrastructure.

The memorandum also highlighted the ongoing modernisation of Dibrugarh Airport, including the completion of one of the largest Air Traffic Control (ATC) and Communication, Navigation and Surveillance (CNS) complexes in the Northeast.

It added that work on a new passenger terminal building and installation of an advanced radar system is also in progress.

The Press Club said the absence of regular evening and night flights causes inconvenience to business travellers, patients, students, tourists, defence personnel and working professionals, many of whom are compelled to incur additional expenses due to limited flight connectivity.

Emphasising Dibrugarh's strategic importance under

the Government of India's Act East Policy, the memorandum stated that the city has the potential to emerge as a major aviation gateway connecting Northeast India with Southeast Asian countries.

It welcomed the government's proposal to upgrade the airport to international status and urged that the process be expedited.

Among its key demands, the Press Club sought immediate commencement of regular night flight operations, deployment of adequate airport operational and CISF personnel, enhanced domestic connectivity through additional evening and night flights, early completion of the new terminal building and radar installation and the expeditious declaration of Dibrugarh Airport as an international airport.

Copies of the memorandum have also been forwarded to Union Civil Aviation Minister Kinjarapu Ram Mohan Naidu, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, State Capital Region Development Authority Chairman and Dibrugarh MLA Prasanta Phukan, Dibrugarh Deputy Commissioner Bikram Kairi, and Airport Director Bangajit Saha for necessary action.

KAAC declares holiday to honour late bureaucrat Tenzing Ingti

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 15: The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) on Wednesday declared July 15 a council holiday (Council Kesang Arni) as a mark of respect following the demise of Tenzing Ingti, a distinguished retired bureaucrat and one of the pioneering administrative officers from the Karbi community. An official notification issued by the Principal Secretary, KAAC, announced the holiday to enable officials and members of the public to pay their final respects to the departed administrator. Tenzing Ingti was among the early generation of Karbi officers to rise to senior positions in public service.

During his distinguished career, he served as Assistant Secretary of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council before joining the Government of Assam, where he retired as Joint Commissioner of Sales Tax.

In recognition of his contributions to public administration and the community, all KAAC offices and institutions remained closed on Wednesday. The Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council also expressed its heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family and paid tribute to Ingti's dedicated service and enduring legacy.

Planned power shutdown from today in Diphu

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 15: The Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) has announced a planned power shutdown from July 16 to facilitate the construction of the 33 KV Dhansiri Feeder at Diphu. In a public notice, Sub-Divisional Engineer of APDCL, Diphu Electrical Sub-Division-II, SJ Terang, said electricity supply through the 33 KV Medical Feeder, 33 KV Manja Feeder and 11 KV Industry Feeder will remain suspended daily from 4 am to 8 am until the completion of the construction work. The APDCL official said the temporary shutdown is necessary to carry out the infrastructure work aimed at strengthening the area's power distribution network.

Applications open for JNV Selection Test 2027 in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 15: The Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti (NVS), an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Education, has invited online applications for the Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya Selection Test (JNVST)-2027 for admission to Class VI at Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Kokrajhar, for the 2027-28 academic session.

According to the notification, applicants must be bona fide residents of the district where they are seeking admission and should be studying in Class V during the 2026-27 academic session in a recognised school. Candidates must have completed the full academic sessions of Classes III, IV and V in recognised schools and should have been born

between May 1, 2015 and July 31, 2017 (both dates inclusive). Online applications can be submitted through the Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti website.

The last date for submission of applications is July 31, 2026, while the JNV Selection Test will be conducted on November 28, 2026. The notification noted that 25,99,277 candidates registered for the Class VI JNV Selection Test across the country last year. Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalayas provide free residential education, including boarding, lodging, textbooks and other essential facilities, to selected students. The schools also focus on the holistic development of students through sports, co-curricular activities, NCC, Scouts and Guides.

Two children killed as foundation stone collapses in Nagaon

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, July 15: Two children were killed and another sustained serious injuries after a roadside foundation stone collapsed on them while they were playing in Dhaniabheti under Batadrava Police Station in Nagaon district on Wednesday morning.

According to reports, a group of children were playing near a six-foot-high foundation stone erected beside a road when the structure suddenly gave way and fell on them.

Two girls, identified as Tahida Khatun and Reena Khatun, died on the spot after suffering severe head and chest injuries.

Another girl, Halima Khatun, sustained serious injuries to her waist and leg and was rushed for medical treatment.

Police from Batadrava Police Station reached the spot soon after the incident, recovered the bodies and sent them to Nagaon Medical College and Hospital for post-mortem examination.

Preliminary information indicates that the foundation stone had been installed under the MGN-REGA scheme for a proposed road construction project from the residence of Rahmat Ali to the house of Zakir Hussain in Ward No 5 of Dhaniabheti Panchayat.

The accident occurred before construction work on the road had commenced.

Police have launched an investigation into the incident to ascertain the circumstances leading to the collapse.

The tragic deaths of the two children have cast a pall of gloom over the locality, with residents expressing shock over the fatal accident.

Redeveloped NFR stations boost connectivity and local development

Modernised stations under Amrit Bharat Scheme improve passenger amenities and spur regional growth

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 15: The redevelopment of Majbat railway station in Assam and Jalpaiguri Road and Haldibari railway stations in West Bengal under the Amrit Bharat Station Scheme has brought improved passenger amenities while opening new avenues for economic growth and regional development, the Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) said on Wednesday.

According to NFR, the upgraded stations have ushered in a new era of convenience for passengers, traders and local residents by providing modern infrastructure while preserving the cultural identity of each region.

Before redevelopment, commuters faced inadequate waiting areas, limited passenger facilities, poor circulation space and infrastructure constraints.



The upgraded stations now feature modern station buildings, spacious waiting halls, improved platforms, enhanced circulating areas, modern toilets, better lighting, advanced passenger information systems, Divyangyan-friendly

facilities and landscaped surroundings. NFR said the redevelopment has significantly improved the travel experience by providing safer, more comfortable and passenger-friendly infrastructure.

The railway also stated that the

transformed stations are expected to act as catalysts for regional development by promoting tourism, supporting local businesses and creating fresh economic opportunities.

Initiatives such as the promotion of indigenous products are also expected to benefit local communities. Expressing satisfaction over the transformation, Vishal Das and Jolly Dey, residents of Majbat, said the station has undergone a remarkable change and now offers modern amenities and a more comfortable environment for passengers.

NFR said the redevelopment reflects its commitment to building modern, inclusive and future-ready railway stations that enhance passenger convenience while contributing to the socio-economic development of the regions they serve.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

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

BJP's plan for Uttar Pradesh polls

With Uttar Pradesh elections drawing closer, the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is rolling out a comprehensive, strategic plan aimed not only at retaining its power in the state but also at solidifying its influence across India. The strategy emphasises uniting the NDA and addressing local issues that resonate with voters. Still, it would benefit from detailing how the BJP plans to tailor messages for specific caste and regional concerns to demonstrate a nuanced understanding of voter diversity. The BJP has identified 100 constituencies particularly important for electoral success, but including the criteria or process used to select them would clarify how these priorities are determined and their significance. The party plans to appoint local organisers known as booth palaks, who will energise grassroots engagement, making voters feel their concerns are valued and understood, and booth pravisas, who will facilitate outreach and mobilisation efforts. These local representatives will play a crucial role in liaising with residents, understanding their concerns, and ensuring that the party's messages resonate effectively within the communities. The party plans to launch extensive social media campaigns and targeted advertisements to reach diverse demographics, with tailored digital strategies to inspire confidence in the campaign's effectiveness across regions and age groups.

The BJP is promoting a message of inclusive development. The party is committed to supporting various demographic groups, particularly farmers and women. The schemes launched would benefit farmers and women's self-help groups, uplifting these communities. Nationalism remains a cornerstone of the BJP's identity and messaging. The party seeks to project itself as a guardian of national interests, particularly regarding national security. By emphasising robust defence policies and a strong stance on terrorism and internal security, the BJP aims to resonate with voters who favour a strong, secure government. This approach seeks to galvanise support by appealing to citizens' desire for a protective leadership that adequately addresses threats. The economy will also be a focal point of the BJP's campaign. The party intends to showcase its efforts to revive the economy, with particular emphasis on job-creation initiatives. Programs like the Production-Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, which aims to incentivise domestic manufacturing and attract investment, will be focused.

In addition, the BJP is preparing to robustly counter any opposition criticism of its governance. The strategy includes claudes demonstrating that the Opposition is fragmented and lacks a coherent governance plan. By drawing sharp contrasts between its own successes and the failures of opposing parties, the BJP seeks to bolster its image as an effective and reliable party. While the BJP stands as a formidable national presence, it also recognises the importance of building local alliances. The party is likely to seek partnerships with regional and smaller political parties to enhance its electoral prospects, fostering hope that such cooperation will strengthen governance and community representation.

Nabakanta Barua shaped Assam's Cultural and Intellectual landscape

Assam on July 14 once again remembered Nabakanta Barua, one of the most luminous voices of modern Assamese literature, on his 24th death anniversary, paying homage to a writer whose influence continues to ripple through generations of readers, poets and thinkers. To write an obituary for Nabakanta Barua is to step into a landscape shaped by lyricism, introspection, and cultural depth, for he was not merely a poet or novelist but a chronicler of the Assamese soul. His passing in 2002 marked the end of an era, yet his words remain alive, echoing through classrooms, literary circles, and the quiet corners of readers' hearts. Even today, his legacy feels astonishingly present, as though he continues to converse with us through his poems, novels, and essays, urging us to look deeper into ourselves and the world around us.

Nabakanta Barua's literary oeuvre stands as one of the most defining pillars of modern Assamese literature, marked by lyrical intensity, philosophical depth, and a profound engagement with the human condition. His poetry, fiction, and essays together form a landscape where emotion, intellect, and cultural memory coexist with remarkable harmony. Barua's poetic voice is distinguished by its introspective clarity; he often wrote as though he were conversing with his own soul, and through that intimate dialogue, he reached the hearts of his readers. In one of his well-known lines, he writes, "Manuhor monor gobhirat jibonor sorai jaye," a reflection that captures his belief that poetry emerges from the deepest chambers of human experience. This line, though simple, reveals his ability to distill complex emotions into accessible language, a hallmark of his poetic craft.

His works frequently explore the tension between nature and modernity, a theme that resonates strongly in Assamese literature. The Brahmaputra, the monsoon, and the shifting seasons appear repeatedly in his poems, not merely as scenic elements but as metaphors for life's fluidity. In another memorable line, he observes, "Brahmaputrar dharar motoi manuhor bhabana boh jai," suggesting that human thought, like the river, is ever moving, ever changing. This metaphorical richness is central to Barua's poetic identity, allowing him to connect personal introspection with the broader rhythms of Assamese geography and culture. His novels, too, reflect this philosophical sensibility. Barua's fiction often delves into the psychological complexities of his characters, portraying their inner conflicts with empathy and nuance. His narrative style is gentle yet penetrating, revealing the fragility of human relationships and the silent struggles

that shape everyday life. Through his characters, he explored themes of identity, alienation, and the search for meaning, making his novels deeply relevant even today. His ability to weave social commentary into personal stories demonstrates his mastery of the form and his commitment to portraying the evolving Assamese society.

Barua's contributions to children's literature further highlight his versatility. His stories for young readers are filled with imagination and moral insight, reflecting his belief that literature must nurture curiosity and compassion from an early age. His legacy continues to inspire scholars, writers, and readers, who find in his works a rare blend of beauty, wisdom, and emotional truth. His writings remain a testament to the enduring power of Assamese literature and its capacity to illuminate the human spirit.

Born in Guwahati in 1926, Nabakanta Barua belonged to a generation of writers who witnessed the turbulence of history and the transformation of Assam's cultural identity. His early life was shaped by the intellectual atmosphere of his family, and he grew up absorbing the rhythms of Assamese culture, folklore, and oral traditions. These influences later blossomed into a literary voice that was both rooted and expansive, capable of capturing the intimate nuances of human emotion while also addressing the larger questions of society. His education, his travels, and his exposure to global literature enriched his worldview, allowing him to craft works that were distinctly Assamese yet universally resonant. His contributions to poetry, fiction, essays, and children's literature form a body of work that remains indispensable to anyone seeking to understand the evolution of Assamese modernism.

Nabakanta Barua's poetry is often described as a bridge between tradition and modernity. His verses carry the fragrance of the Brahmaputra, the melancholy of changing seasons, and the philosophical depth of a mind constantly interrogating existence. He wrote with a clarity that felt effortless, yet beneath that simplicity lay profound introspection. His poems often explored themes of identity, love, loss, nature, and the human condition, weaving them into a tapestry that felt both personal and collective. Readers found in his poetry a companion for their own inner journeys, a voice that articulated emotions they themselves struggled to express. His ability to blend lyrical beauty with intellectual depth made him one of the most admired poets of his time, and his works continue to be studied, recited, and cherished.

As a novelist, Nabakanta Barua expanded the horizons of Assamese fiction. His novels

were not merely stories but explorations of human psychology, social dynamics, and cultural transitions. He wrote about ordinary people with extraordinary sensitivity, capturing their struggles, dreams, and contradictions with remarkable empathy. His characters were never one-dimensional; they were complex, flawed, and deeply human. Through them, he illuminated the changing fabric of Assamese society, addressing issues such as identity, migration, modernity, and the tension between tradition and progress. His narrative style, marked by elegance and emotional richness, set new standards for Assamese prose and inspired countless writers who followed in his footsteps. Nabakanta Barua was also a beloved figure in children's literature. His stories for young readers were filled with imagination, humour and moral insight, reflecting his belief that literature for children must be both entertaining and enriching. Generations of Assamese children grew up reading his tales, discovering through them the joy of storytelling and the beauty of language. His contributions to children's literature remain a testament to his versatility and his commitment to nurturing young minds.

Beyond his literary achievements, Nabakanta Barua played a pivotal role in shaping Assam's cultural and intellectual landscape. He served as President of the Assam Sahitya Sabha, where his leadership helped strengthen the institution's role in promoting Assamese literature and culture. His speeches, essays, and public engagements reflected his deep concern for the preservation of linguistic heritage, the promotion of literary excellence, and the need for intellectual openness. He believed that literature must evolve with time, embracing new ideas while remaining rooted in cultural identity. His vision for Assamese literature was expansive, inclusive, and forward-looking, and his influence continues to guide literary discourse in the state.

His passing on July 14, 2002, left a void that remains unfilled. Assam mourned not just a writer but a cultural icon, a mentor, and a visionary. The grief that followed his death was not confined to literary circles; it was felt across the state, among readers, students, and admirers who had been touched by his words. His funeral became a moment of collective remembrance, where people gathered to honour a man whose life had been dedicated to enriching Assamese literature. Even today, on his Punyatithi, people across Assam pause to reflect on his contributions, revisiting his poems, discussing his novels, and remembering the gentle yet powerful presence he brought to the literary world. What makes Nabakanta Barua's legacy enduring is not merely the volume of his work but the emotional and intellectual depth it carries. His writings continue to resonate because they speak to timeless human concerns. In an age of rapid change, his reflections on identity, belonging, and the search for

meaning feel more relevant than ever. His portrayal of nature, particularly the landscapes of Assam, offers solace in a world increasingly disconnected from the environment. His philosophical musings invite readers to slow down, to contemplate, and to engage with life more thoughtfully. His works remain a refuge for those seeking beauty, wisdom, and emotional clarity. His influence extends beyond literature into education, cultural studies, and public discourse. Scholars continue to analyse his works, exploring their thematic richness, stylistic innovations, and cultural significance. Students encounter his writings in classrooms, discovering through them the power of language and the importance of cultural identity. Writers draw inspiration from his mastery of form and his fearless exploration of human complexity. His legacy is not static; it evolves with each new reader who discovers his works and finds in them a source of inspiration.

On his 24th death anniversary, Assam's remembrance of Nabakanta Barua is not merely ceremonial; it is heartfelt and deeply personal. People recall his gentle demeanour, his intellectual curiosity, and his unwavering commitment to literature. They remember the warmth of his personality, the humility with which he carried his achievements, and the generosity with which he encouraged young writers. His life becomes a reminder that true greatness lies not only in talent but in character, dedication, and the ability to touch lives through words. As Assam moves forward, navigating new cultural and social landscapes, Nabakanta Barua's legacy remains a guiding light. His works remind us of the importance of introspection, empathy, and artistic integrity. They encourage us to preserve our cultural heritage while embracing new ideas. They inspire us to write, to think, and to dream. His presence may no longer be physical, but his spirit continues to live through his writings, shaping the literary consciousness of Assam.

To write an obituary for Nabakanta Barua is to acknowledge that some lives transcend mortality. His was one such life. He may have left the world on a July morning in 2002, but his words remain, vibrant and alive, carrying forward his vision, his wisdom, and his love for Assam. On this Punyatithi, as readers across the state bow their heads in remembrance, they do so with gratitude — for a poet who gave them language, for a novelist who gave them stories, for a thinker who gave them perspective, and for a human being who gave them hope. Nabakanta Barua's journey may have ended, but his legacy continues, flowing like the Brahmaputra, timeless and ever renewing. *(International Tagore Awardee Multilingual writer and poet Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee is a Former Affiliate Faculty of Virginia Commonwealth University Richmond, USA. prof.ratanbhattacharjee@gmail.com Mobile +1(804)-564-2383)*

Rising prices and the common people

The rise in the prices of commodities in the market is an economic process that directly influences the economy of a country. The increase in the prices of goods is primarily the result of an imbalance between supply and consumer demand. According to the principles of economics, when the demand for a particular commodity in the market exceeds its available supply, the price of that commodity naturally rises. This is a universally accepted economic principle. Besides this, an increase in the cost of production also plays a significant role in determining the price of commodities. From agricultural produce to industrial goods, every sector involves various factors associated with production, such as the cost of raw materials, labour wages, and transportation expenses. When these costs increase, the final price of goods inevitably rises. An increase in the price of fuel used in transportation creates a rapid chain reaction throughout the market system.

As fuel prices rise, the transportation cost of carrying goods also increases. Consequently, at every stage from the production centre to the hands of consumers, the price of commodities continues to rise gradually. This process affects the market for essential commodities required for daily life more than anything else. The increase in the prices of necessities such as rice, pulses, edible oil, and vegetables directly raises the cost of living for ordinary people. This continuous process of inflation reduces the purchasing power of money. The matter is quite simple. After prices rise, more money is required to purchase the same quantity of goods that could previously be bought for a lesser amount. As a result, people with limited incomes are compelled to struggle to fulfil their basic needs. Alongside these domestic economic factors, the influence of the international market is also undeniable. Fluctuations in the price of crude oil in the global market directly affect the domestic market of our country. Similarly, if the value of the domestic currency declines against foreign currencies, the cost of imported goods increases, thereby contributing to inflation. All these factors together create a complex economic environment in which the ordinary earning class has to bear the greatest financial burden. No individual alone can bring about change in this market mechanism. The graph of price rise is determined by government policies, the rate of production, and global economic conditions. Therefore, the proper management of these factors is essential to maintain economic stability.

Both natural and human-induced factors contribute equally to rising prices in the market. In an agriculture-based state like Assam, natural disasters have a severe adverse impact on agricultural production. Every year, floods, riverbank erosion, and sometimes drought destroy cultivated fields. As a result, the quantity of crops supplied to the market declines alarmingly. As production decreases, a shortage of commodities naturally develops in the market. The direct consequence is a

steep increase in prices. However, alongside natural causes, a section of unscrupulous traders also fuels inflation by creating artificial shortages. Hoarding is an illegal practice in which certain middlemen and large traders stockpile commodities in warehouses even when there is an adequate supply in the market. They deliberately create an artificial scarcity so that prices rise. When prices reach their desired level, they release the hoarded goods into the market and earn abnormal profits. This system of middlemen has long exploited both producers and consumers. On one hand, farmers

fail to receive fair prices for their produce, while on the other hand, consumers are forced to purchase the same commodities at excessively high prices. In addition, the lack of infrastructure has emerged as another significant factor, particularly the shortage of cold storage facilities. Consequently, many perishable commodities such as vegetables and fruits are spoiled before reaching the market. To recover the losses caused by such spoilage, traders increase the prices of the remaining goods. Government tax policies and various duties also contribute significantly to price rise. Indirect taxes such as the Goods and Services Tax are directly added to the price of commodities. Whenever the government increases the tax rate on essential commodities or reduces subsidies, the burden ultimately falls upon ordinary consumers. Deficiencies in the inter-state transportation system also prevent essential commodities from reaching the market on time. Delays during transportation and various tolls collected at different stages indirectly increase the final price of commodities. The combined effect of these multiple factors transforms inflation into a continuous and uncontrolled process.

The most severe and direct impact of rising prices falls upon the ordinary and middle-class sections of society. For people dependent upon limited and fixed incomes, the continuous increase in market prices creates a serious economic crisis. Monthly earnings do not increase at the same pace as the prices of commodities, which rise much faster. This imbalance substantially reduces people's purchasing power. A large portion of a family's monthly income is spent on food and other essential needs. As a result, people are forced to compromise with their standard of living. Basic necessities such as nutritious food, quality healthcare, and good education gradually move beyond the reach of ordinary people. Owing to economic pressure, many families are compelled to reduce their daily expenditure, adversely affecting the health of family members. Inflation also severely hampers the process of future savings. When an individual's entire income is spent merely on meeting present needs, saving money for future security becomes almost impossible. Consequently, during emergencies such as medical treatment or higher education for children, people are compelled to borrow from banks or private lenders, gradually falling into a debt trap. The condition of those living below the



poverty line is even more distressing. For them, arranging two meals a day itself becomes a major struggle. Due to financial hardship, many children are deprived of education and are forced to enter the workforce at an early age, creating several additional social problems. Likewise, small traders and workers in the unorganised sector also face severe financial uncertainty because of inflation. Since their income is unstable while the cost of living continues to rise, they frequently experience financial hardship. The impact is even more visible in the rural economy. Farmers are compelled to purchase fertilisers, seeds, and other agricultural inputs at higher prices but fail to receive appropriate prices when selling their crops. As a result, poverty in rural areas becomes even more concentrated. Inflation thus creates deep economic inequality within society, where the financially weaker sections become progressively weaker.

Rising prices act as a major obstacle to the overall development and progress of a country. Continuous inflation renders economic planning ineffective. Owing to market instability, both the government and private investors hesitate to undertake long-term investments. Consequently, the establishment of new industries and the creation of employment opportunities slow down considerably. Inflation also has a direct relationship with unemployment. When industries witness declining profits because of increasing production costs, they resort to measures such as retrenching workers or suspending new recruitment. This leads to growing frustration among the younger generation. Inflation also weakens the government's efforts to eradicate poverty. The financial relief provided to ordinary citizens through various welfare schemes loses much of its significance because of inflation. Infrastructure development is similarly affected. Budgets allocated for the construction of roads, bridges, hospitals, and other public infrastructure become inadequate due to rising prices. As a result, many projects have to be suspended midway or require additional financial allocations. This places an extra burden on the national treasury and widens the fiscal deficit. In order to control the fiscal deficit, the government is often compelled to impose additional taxes upon the people, which in turn contributes further to inflation. This becomes

a continuous cycle from which escape is not easy. Furthermore, the banking system is also deeply affected. To control inflation, the central bank is often compelled to increase interest rates. Higher interest rates make borrowing more expensive, reducing the flow of money in the market. Although this measure may temporarily help in controlling inflation, it adversely affects business expansion and overall economic growth. Inflation also influences international trade. When domestic production costs increase, the export sector finds it difficult to remain competitive in the global market. Consequently, exports decline while imports increase, further weakening the country's economy. Therefore, inflation is not merely an individual problem. It is a complex economic disorder that weakens the entire economic structure of a nation.

To address this problem within the market system, it is essential to adopt a well-planned and multidimensional strategy. Firstly, the government must strengthen the public distribution system and make it free from corruption so that poor and low-income people can regularly obtain essential commodities at affordable prices. Through this system, not only rice and wheat but also other necessities such as pulses and edible oil should be supplied. Secondly, strict action must be taken against unscrupulous market syndicates and middlemen. Those engaged in creating artificial shortages through hoarding must be identified and punished exemplarily according to the law. Only then can the normal supply of commodities in the market be maintained. For this, the administrative machinery must become more active and accountable. Thirdly, special emphasis must be placed on the development of the agricultural sector. Farmers should be provided with quality seeds, fertilisers, and modern agricultural equipment at affordable prices, while irrigation facilities should also be improved. A direct marketing system between farmers and consumers should be established so that farmers receive fair prices for their produce while consumers can purchase goods at reasonable rates. Measures should be taken to improve transportation infrastructure and reduce transportation costs through effective control of fuel prices. Rationalising tax rates imposed on essential commodities can provide financial relief to the common people.

Greater emphasis on increasing local production will reduce dependence on imported goods, thereby helping to control inflation. Expanding food processing industries and increasing the number of cold storage facilities will reduce the wastage of agricultural produce. Self-help groups can also be more actively involved in commercial activities to strengthen the rural economy. By directly bringing locally produced goods to the market, they can reduce the influence of middlemen. This would also help rural women become financially self-reliant and strengthen the economic foundation of society. At the same time, the government's economic policies must remain people-oriented and realistic. The monetary policies adopted by the Reserve Bank should aim to control inflation without hindering economic growth. Only through long-term planning and continuous efforts can this problem be brought under control and financial security ensured for the common people.

Alongside the government and administration, every conscious citizen also has an important role to play in controlling inflation. Consumers must remain informed about market trends and the actual prices of commodities. Instead of blindly paying whatever price a seller demands, consumers should make an effort to know the correct price of goods. Various awareness programmes can be undertaken to educate people about their consumer rights. When consumers become aware and raise their voices against traders demanding excessive prices, unscrupulous businessmen will no longer be able to exploit them so easily. People can also form cooperative societies to purchase essential commodities directly from wholesale markets or producers. This system completely eliminates the role of middlemen and enables consumers to obtain goods at considerably lower prices. If people at every level of society cultivate the habit of living economically, overall demand can also remain under control. Giving priority to essential commodities instead of unnecessary luxuries will substantially reduce the excessive pressure on the market. We must also emphasise preventing wastage in our daily lives. The wastage of food and other essential commodities adversely affects the overall demand for goods in the market. As far as possible, people should develop the habit of using locally produced goods. This strengthens the local economy while reducing dependence on goods transported from distant places. Even cultivating vegetables on a small scale within household premises or on rooftops can significantly reduce a family's daily expenditure. Such small personal initiatives can collectively bring about substantial economic change. Inflation is not a problem caused by a single factor. It is the combined result of numerous domestic and global factors. It may not be possible to eliminate it completely. However, through sound economic management, the government's political will, and the active participation of the people, it can certainly be brought down to a tolerable level. Establishing proper coordination among all sectors to maintain economic balance is the greatest challenge of the present time. Only a stable economy can lead the people of a nation towards the right path.

AUTHOR

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

Swachh Bharat's unfinished mission: The Governance Gap in Urban Sanitation

By : Dhaval Desai

The Bombay High Court's recent directive to the Maharashtra government to pay INR 30 lakh each to the families of two workers who died while cleaning a septic tank in a private property in Nanded offers a degree of long-delayed relief. The order also highlights a familiar weakness of India's response to such tragedies: the judiciary usually enters the picture only after a death has occurred. Even then, the remit of the courts is limited to awarding compensation, censuring the authorities, and reminding the state of its duties. They cannot reverse the governance failures that led two workers to enter a septic tank to die in the most horrific circumstances.

The Bombay High Court order comes more than six years after an earlier ORF article, Swachh Bharat: A Failed Mission for Manual Scavengers, argued that deaths during sewer and septic tank cleaning could no longer be treated as isolated accidents. While the article recognised the gains made under the Swachh Bharat Mission in toilet construction and public awareness, it also questioned a sanitation model that celebrated cleanliness without protecting the workers responsible for sustaining it. The article further argued that statutory prohibition had achieved little when unsafe sanitation work continued to be assigned through informal contracts.

Policy Progress, Unproven Outcomes

The intervening years have only reinforced that concern. India's sanitation policy has progressively expanded from legal prohibition and rehabilitation under the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act (EMSCDL Act) of 1993, the Prohibition of Employment as Manual Scavengers and their Rehabilitation Act (PEMSR Act) of 2013, to more recent mechanisation under the National Action for Mechanised Sanitation Ecosystem (NAMASTE). Since its launch in 2023-24, NAMASTE has undertaken worker profiling, occupational safety, health protection, mechanisation, and livelihood support. As of April 2026, NAMASTE had profiled 90,942 sewer and septic tank workers, of whom 89,248 were validated; 87,037 received personal protective equipment, and 76,247 were provided with health insurance coverage. The government also released INR 34.17 crore in subsidies to 983 sanitation workers for purchasing 364 vehicles, conducted 1,562

training workshops, and provided 753 safety devices to Emergency Response Sanitation Units in larger municipal corporations and districts. While these figures demonstrate a push towards mechanisation and safety, they do not indicate how many sludge-suction vehicles and safety devices are operational or whether fatalities from sewer- and septic-tank-related work have declined in participating cities.

A Pattern, Not an Anomaly

The Nanded incident is not an isolated tragedy. Recent reports have consistently highlighted the recurrence of such deaths across India's cities. In May 2026, two contractual workers died while cleaning a sewage chamber in the Butibori industrial area near Nagpur after reportedly inhaling toxic gases. In October 2025, a contract worker attached to the Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board died of asphyxiation after entering an underground sewer in Kolahur. A month later, a worker died while cleaning a sludge-filled tank connected to a sewage-treatment plant of a residential building in Mumbai's upmarket Powai. In July 2026, a contract cleaner died while cleaning the sewer at Ahmedabad's UN Mehta Hospital.

Their frequency suggests that hazardous sanitation work is not an anomaly but rather a systemic failure in how urban India regulates sanitation services.

These are not tragedies confined to remote, poorly resourced towns but have occurred in Chennai, Mumbai, Nagpur, Ahmedabad, and several large urban agglomerations, as well as across public utilities, housing complexes, and industrial areas. Their frequency suggests that hazardous sanitation work is not an anomaly but rather a systemic failure in how urban India regulates sanitation services. Sanitation work is divided across municipal departments, water and sewerage utilities, contractors, subcontractors, housing societies, hospitals, and industrial and commercial establishments. After a worker dies, this dispersed approach often produces a blame game, even when the immediate safety lapses are clear.

Official records also confirm that hazardous sewer and septic tank cleaning continues to claim lives. Replying to the Rajya Sabha, the Minister of Social Justice and Empowerment reported that 377 people had died while cleaning sewers and septic tanks between 2019 and 2023. More recent



figures published in the ministry's Annual Report 2025-26, based on records maintained by the National Commission for Safai Karmacharis, place the cumulative number of reported sewer- and septic tank-related deaths between 1993 and 31 December 2025 at 1,350. However, these figures may still not capture every fatality. The Commission compiles cases brought to its notice by state authorities, the media, individuals, associations, and other sources, rather than through a statutory requirement mandating the reporting of each sewer- or septic-tank-related death.

Beyond Compensation: The Governance Question

When these tragedies occur, the question should not be who employed the workers or who should compensate their families. It should be why Indian cities continue to govern sanitation in ways that make such deaths possible. More than three decades after the EMSCDL Act banned employment of manual scavengers and the construction of dry latrines, over a decade after the PEMSAR Act outlawed hazardous cleaning of sewers and septic

tanks without prescribed safeguards, and despite several intervening judicial indictments, workers continue to die in circumstances that the law was intended to prevent.

Urbanisation in India has altered rather than eliminated the nature of hazardous sanitation work: while the spread of sewers and septic tanks reduced reliance dry latrines, it created a different, immediately life-threatening occupational hazard—one that can kill workers within minutes.

The contradiction increasingly stems from the gap between legal prohibition and everyday sanitation practices. Urbanisation in India has altered rather than eliminated the nature of hazardous sanitation work: while the spread of sewers and septic tanks reduced reliance dry latrines, it created a different, immediately life-threatening occupational hazard—one that can kill workers within minutes.

Indian cities have invested heavily in expanding sanitation infrastructure over the past decade. Millions of individual, community, and public toilets have been constructed; sewer networks have ex-

panded; faecal sludge and septage management has become part of urban policy discourse, and cleanliness has become a measure of municipal performance through Swachh Survekshan.

However, the sanitation chain does not end when a toilet is built, or a city is declared open-defecation-free; its most difficult downstream challenges begin there. Regular inspection and maintenance of every sewer, septic tank, or underground chamber is integral to sanitation management. The achievements of Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban (SBM-U) remain incomplete so long as the workers maintaining these systems continue to face preventable risks to their lives.

Safety protocols and mechanised alternatives are available, but they are not used consistently across municipal utilities, private properties, industrial sites and outsourced contracts. SBM-U must therefore be judged by a more rigorous standard that, in addition to demonstrating the expansion of sanitation services, ensures that their governance and maintenance no longer expose workers to potentially fatal conditions.

The Bombay High Court has ensured that two families receive compensation that should not have required any judicial intervention. This order should now prompt a broader examination of the systems that produced the deaths. SBM-U's mission is not merely to keep India's cities clean. It is to govern the entire sanitation chain—from the toilet and septic tank to the sewer, the desludging vehicle and the treatment plant—without transferring its gravest risks to the workers at the end of that chain.

No measure of urban cleanliness can be called a success if it is achieved at the cost of even one human life.

The law can prohibit hazardous cleaning, and courts can hold the authorities to account after a death. But preventing the next tragedy is the responsibility of the urban local bodies. It depends on whether they plan sanitation systems properly, supervise contractors, keep equipment in working order and ensure that no worker is sent into a sewer or septic tank merely because it is the quickest and cheapest option. No measure of urban cleanliness can be called a success if it is achieved at the cost of even one human life. Until that changes, Swachh Bharat will remain what this author described six years ago: a failed mission for India's sanitation workers. (Courtesy: ORF)

Renewable energy transition for a climate-resilient India

By: Satendra Singh

Every 10 July, Global Energy Independence Day underscores a simple truth: a nation's energy security is inseparable from its economic and strategic stability. A prolonged war in Eastern Europe, unrest across the Middle East, disrupted shipping lanes, and a fresh flashpoint between Iran and the United States have rattled oil markets in recent months, exposing how vulnerable countries remain when they depend on distant, unstable regions for fuel. Few nations feel that exposure as sharply as India, which imports close to 85% of its crude oil and more than half its natural gas - a dependence that shows up directly in import bills, the balance of payments, industrial competitiveness, and household budgets. As the country looks ahead to Viksit Bharat 2047, energy security has moved from a policy footnote to a national priority, with India's decade-long renewable energy transformation at its centre.

Conflict in any oil-producing region moves fast through the global economy: crude prices spike, freight costs climb, and import-dependent countries absorb the shock first. India has treated this as a wake-up call, spending the past decade on one of the world's most ambitious energy transitions - one that now ties together energy security, climate action, economic growth, technology and disaster preparedness.

Modern life runs on energy - industry, agriculture, healthcare, education and digital infrastructure all depend on it. Yet coal, oil and natural gas are also responsible for roughly three-quarters of global greenhouse gas emissions, according to international scientific assessments, driving melting glaciers, erratic monsoons, prolonged droughts, stronger cyclones and rising seas - risks that hit India especially hard given its geography and population. Shifting to renewable energy is therefore not simply a fuel substitution; it is one of the most effective tools for cutting climate risk while strengthening energy security.

As the world's fastest-growing major economy and its third-largest electricity consumer, India's power demand is set to climb sharply with urbanisation, industrial expansion, digitisation and rising living standards. Meeting that demand through fossil fuels alone would deepen import dependence and undercut India's climate commitments at once. Renewable energy avoids that trade-off: it is domestically available, abundant, environmentally sound, and - thanks to falling costs - genuinely competitive on price.

The Scale of the Renewable Revolution
India's numbers are striking. Total installed power generation capacity now exceeds 530 GW, with more than half drawn from non-fossil sources - meeting a key Paris Agreement commitment years ahead of its 2030 deadline. By March 2026, non-fossil capacity had reached roughly 283 GW, making India the world's third-largest producer of renewable energy, with solar and wind

together contributing nearly three-quarters of that total.

A few figures capture the pace of change: Solar power capacity has crossed 150 GW; wind has passed 56 GW and India now ranks as the world's third-largest renewable energy producer. This growth has been driven by coordinated policy support: the National Solar Mission, the PM Surya Ghar rooftop solar scheme, ultra-mega solar parks, production-linked manufacturing incentives, and sustained investment in transmission infrastructure.

India's Place on the Global Climate Stage

India's renewable energy record has also strengthened its standing as a global climate leader. At COP26, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the "Panchamrit" commitments: 500 GW of non-fossil power capacity by 2030, meeting half of India's energy needs from non-fossil sources, cutting a billion tonnes of projected carbon emissions, reducing the emissions intensity of GDP by 45% against 2005 levels, and reaching net-zero



by 2070. India has also pushed for developing nations to get adequate climate financing, technology transfer and capacity-building support, backing that stance through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance, co-founded with France.

More Than Just Clean Power

Renewable energy's value now reaches well beyond emissions reduction. Cutting reliance on imported fuel strengthens energy security and improves air quality, and steep declines in solar tariffs have made it one of the cheapest power sources available - an economic asset as much as an environmental one. It is also a genuine jobs engine, spanning manufacturing, installation, operations and research, while rooftop solar, solar pumps, mini-grids and biogas plants extend reliable electricity to rural communities once dependent on diesel, advancing goals from poverty reduction to public health and gender equality. As floods, cyclones, heatwaves, droughts and wildfires grow more frequent, reliable power becomes critical for hospitals, emergency centres, water systems and relief camps, all of which can lose power when conventional grids fail. Distributed renewable systems, including rooftop solar and battery-backed micro-grids, keep essential services running when the main grid goes down - some-

thing India has already put into practice, extending solar power to hospitals, schools and irrigation systems in disaster-prone regions. This echoes the "Build Back Better" principle under the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. Toward Viksit Bharat 2047, renewable energy is as much an investment in resilience as in clean power. India's renewable ambitions now extend well past solar and wind. The National Green Hydrogen Mission aims to make the country a global hub for green hydrogen, a fuel with real potential to decarbonise hard-to-electrify sectors such as steel, fertilisers, refining, shipping and heavy transport. Battery storage is another priority, smoothing out the natural variability of solar and wind generation, alongside continued investment in pumped hydro. Offshore wind pilots are underway in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, biomass and mini-hydro projects continue to expand, and rising EV adoption promises to further cut reliance on imported fuel.

What Still Needs Work

Real hurdles remain. Grid integration tops the list: solar and wind output depends on weather, so absorbing it reliably requires substantial investment in modern infrastructure and storage. Financing is another constraint - hitting the 500 GW non-fossil target by 2030 needs capital from international climate funds, green bonds and public-private partnerships. Domestic manufacturing also needs strengthening: despite progress under the production-linked incentive scheme, India still imports key raw materials for solar panels. Land acquisition, environmental clearances, skilled-workforce shortages and transmission delays add further complexity, all pointing to the need for sustained research and development.

The Way Forward

India's progress so far shows that economic growth and environmental sustainability can advance together. But reaching 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030, and net-zero by 2070, will require sustained policy consistency, investment and innovation: scaling up rooftop solar and battery storage, building smarter transmission networks, and expanding domestic production of solar modules, batteries and electrolyzers under the Make in India framework - alongside green hydrogen, energy efficiency and embedding renewable power into infrastructure such as hospitals and schools. The recent turbulence in the Middle East is only the latest reminder of how exposed fossil-fuel-dependent nations remain to forces beyond their control. For India, energy independence is no longer simply an environmental or economic goal; it is a strategic necessity tied to national security, economic stability and climate resilience. This Global Energy Independence Day carries a clear message: the shift to clean, self-reliant energy is not merely sound environmental policy - it is the foundation of a secure and sustainable future for India. (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Is corruption undermining India's flood defences amid climate change

By: Vishal

In India, governments spend thousands of crores of rupees annually on flood relief. Most of this money goes toward building and repairing embankments and creating flood control facilities. It is alarming that despite these significant government spending, floods disrupt people's lives every time. This brings a significant and relevant question: Do official audits and expert assessments point to these governance and accountability shortcomings?

Year after year, during the monsoon, millions of Indians are affected by this catastrophe. Embankments breach, and villages are reported to be submerged. Life in cities is disrupted for weeks. Thousands of people lose their homes and their daily livelihoods. Extreme rainfall due to climate change is impacting the entire Indian sub continent. Therefore, another important question the system must answer: Why, despite spending thousands of crores of rupees of taxpayer money on flood control infrastructure over decades, are people in the same flood-affected areas repeatedly facing the same hardships?

Flood management is one of India's most important climate adaptation priorities. Thousands of crores of rupees are spent every year, whether by the Government of India or state governments. This significant amount of taxpayer money is billed to be used for development of drainage systems, river training, anti-erosion measures, timely flood warnings, and the construction of embankments. Despite this, CAG audits consistently confirm that the real problem is not a lack of funds. Rather, the persistent lack of timely planning, lax implementation, and lack of accountability are the real problems that persist within the government system.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has also reached a similar conclusion in its study. During its performance audit, CAG made similar observations in its 2017 Report No. 10 regarding Schemes for Flood Control and Flood Forecasting. Overall, after investigating several projects in 17 states and union territories, some problems appeared to be persistent. These included unnecessary delays in project approvals at various government levels, poor implementation, diversion or failure to fully utilize funds, a severe lack of proper supervision, and the non-functionality of timely flood warning and related infrastructure. The report says that as a result, many flood relief projects failed to achieve their objectives despite significant government expenditure.

Bihar is one of the most prominent and clear examples in this regard. Despite decades of heavy government expenditure on the Kosi, Bagmati, Gandak, and Mahananda rivers, the flooding problem persists in the areas drained by these rivers, and residents are displaced annually. The Comptroller

and Auditor General of India (CAG) audit noted that despite significant government expenditure on embankments, the quality of the embankments was found to be poor. In one case, over 30 crore rupees were allocated for the construction of the Bagmati River embankment, but its quality was found to be poor. The CAG audit also revealed that 1 crore 18 lakh rupees were allocated for anti-erosion work, but the construction was washed away shortly after its completion. The audit clearly revealed that the failure of anti-erosion construction, despite the expenditure of crores of rupees, was due to the neglect of technical recommendations without any regulations. It is possible that these figures may not establish a case of criminal corruption, but one thing is clearly proved that the concerns expressed in the report regarding the required quality of construction work, supervision of construction work by competent authorities and financial accountability are absolutely correct.

Asom has also been grappling with similar government overreach for decades. State funds are granted to protect the population living along the Brahmaputra and Barak rivers. But, locals in Majuli, Morgaon, and Dhemaji continue to face the impacts of floods and erosion annually. The CAG report also exposed unnecessary delays, poor implementation, and inadequate capacity in flood management work in Asom. These findings made it clear that key government expenditures are also no guarantee of complete flood protection.

A similar pattern is visible in UP, the country's largest state in terms of population. The eastern part of the state is also known as Purvanchal. In the Gorakhpur, Bahraich, Kushinagar, and Shravasti districts of Purvanchal, government expenditure is annually incurred for embankment strengthening and river bank protection. Despite numerous government claims and heavy annual public expenditures, these districts remain among the most flood-prone areas not only in the state but across India. People in West Bengal also face annual floods. The Ghatat Master Plan in the state has been pending for a long time. Initially, many promises were made regarding it. After a lengthy survey and hydrological study, the state government prepared its DPR. Its primary objective was to provide relief to millions of residents in an area of 657 square kilometers from the annual flood-related problems and displacement. This was expected to primarily benefit millions of residents in the West Medinipur and East Medinipur districts. The estimated cost of the project was 1,238 crore rupees. The project remained stalled for a long time due to a lack of central financial support. Although reports emerged in 2022 that it had received investment clearance from the central government, reports later emerged that due to the prolonged lack of funds, the then West Bengal govern-

ment decided to initiate the project on its own. The CAG cited poor financial monitoring and inadequate accounting for advance withdrawals in its audit report. The Mahanadi Delta in Odisha continues to suffer the devastation of floods every year, despite significant government expenditures on embankments and river management. However, there is another aspect of this. The devastating 2015 Chennai floods are still remembered. The Chennai floods teaches us that if proper coordination and planning are not implemented, despite heavy investments in management, the infrastructure fails. In the end, The common man bears the brunt of this, losing his livelihood and resources.

Himanshu Thakkar, a water policy expert at the South Asian Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP), says India's flood management system faces the same problem across the country. This system relies on embankments, while severely lacking maintenance, transparency, and independent technical oversight. According to him, building these structures one after the other every year is not a wise decision. While building them, there is no evaluation of why they are always at risk of failure, and why are huge government expenditures being incurred on them, even though they are not providing any long-term resilience.

India's most respected news magazine on environment and climate change, Down to Earth magazine, citing the CAG report, has also recorded that flood early warning has been ineffective in many states. The reason for this was found to be the non-functionality of thousands of telemetry stations. Another important news media organization, The New Indian Express, has also recorded that there are long delays in the approval and implementation of many projects related to flood management. These projects are not completed within the stipulated period, rather these projects launched for the purpose of flood relief take years to complete.

The above facts confirm a worrying pattern across many states in the country. Flood relief infrastructure is failing repeatedly, government spending is rising, and accountability is virtually zero. This is significant and noteworthy because India is currently spending billions of rupees toward climate adaptation. In such a context, these questions become extremely relevant. Questions are repeatedly raised: are quality inspections truly conducted independently? Why are embankments repeatedly in need of repair? Are the contractors and officials held accountable?

There's no doubt that the Consequences of climate change are growing over time. However, climate change is often used to conceal corruption. Therefore, it's crucial to monitor these issues to clearly distinguish between climate change effects and deliberate corrupt tactics. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

SIR process focussed on exclusion, has played havoc with democracy: Ex CEC Quraishi

NEW DELHI, July 15: Former chief election commissioner S Y Quraishi has hit out at the Election Commission over the ongoing SIR exercise, saying the process is focussed more on "exclusion" and has "played havoc with democracy" with free and fair elections having been "disturbed".

The emphasis in the ongoing SIR process is on how many to exclude as if the EC would get good marks for "throwing out" as many as it can, Quraishi said in an exclusive interview with PTI Videos ahead of the launch of his new book 'India and I: A Hundred Memories, Not a Memoir'.

The book, published by Hachette India, throws light on 100 episodes from Quraishi's life.

Quraishi told PTI that being registered as a voter is a constitutional right but a situation is being created that it is a favour granted to people by the Election Commission. The ongoing process of Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is "unfair" because of the way this is being done, he said.

The process is focusing more on "exclusion", Quraishi said.

"How many people can you throw out of the electoral roll, that seems to be the focus," he said.

"Whereas in our time it was a very clear policy - our instruction to the polling staff used to be that if somebody comes introducing himself or herself and

there was some minor error in the spelling, age or address or something, but you know that the person is the right person, ignore all mistakes. So that no voter is excluded," Quraishi asserted.

Here the emphasis is on how many to exclude as if they would get good marks for "throwing out" as many as they can and crores have been "thrown out", Quraishi said, slamming the Commission.

"It has really played havoc with democracy, free and fair elections have been disturbed and that is something the nation should be concerned about and it is, which is why this controversy is there," Quraishi, who was the chief election commissioner (CEC) from July 30, 2010 till June 10, 2012, said.

"We were not fools. We were also purifying the electoral roll as per our constitutional mandate and were doing it every year. In 2002-2003, in Bihar, after the last intensive revision, the decision was taken that the intensive revision is no longer necessary because the rolls have been computerised.

"Now if your name is there and 99 per cent names are already there and then I go to a home and start finding from scratch who lived in that house, that is foolish," he said.

Therefore, Quraishi said the decision was taken that there will only be a summary revision.

It means officials go to a person's house, show



the electoral roll, show the voters' names, ages and if everything is fine they move on to the next house, he said.

"If not, if some voter has been added, the BLO will give you a form, form six, fill up the form and within seven days it will get added. Or if you need to delete somebody who has moved or somebody has died, you will fill form seven," Quraishi said.

All this was all done on the spot, with the result that 99% roll had become perfect as a result of the annual exercise, Quraishi pointed out.

"The same BLO who is coming to your house now creating difficulties for you, used to come and just check with you. And if the idea was to find foreigners, it was very easy, just add one more question to BLO's list of questions. Ask the neighbour,"

he said. The Bihar SIR exercise started in the name of finding illegal immigrants and about eight crore people were made to run around but how many foreigners were found, he asked.

"Till today, the Election Commission has not told us the figure. Why? Child's play? Their discretion? The nation wants to know, we want to know, everybody wants to know, please tell us how many foreigners you found," Quraishi said.

"From the media we hear that 500 foreigners were found of which 150 were Bangladeshi and 350 were Nepali Hindu women who had come by marriage to Bihar. Now to find 150 Bangladeshis, you made eight crore people run around and in the process deleted lakhs and lakhs of voters. So what purpose have you achieved? Is that fair? Absolutely not," he asserted. On the UN Special Rapporteurs' criticism of the SIR, Quraishi said it was unfortunate because nobody from outside the country should be telling us how to conduct elections.

"And it is a very sad situation that we have come to such a path that some foreign group has written to us, it should not have happened. But at the same time, we should not just dismiss it as our domestic matter, internal matter, it is a serious matter, investigate and answer," he said.

Quraishi said that with this becoming interna-

tional news, if India just keeps quiet, the suspicion will get confirmed.

"You have to give a convincing answer to the whole world because people around the world would be waiting for an answer," he said.

On the EC making it mandatory to attach SIR details of parents for new voters filling Form 6 for inclusion in the electoral rolls, Quraishi said it is a continuation of the exercise to make life "difficult and miserable" for the voters.

"If you read Article 326, it says subject to certain limitations, everybody shall be registered as a voter," he said. Being registered as a voter is a person's constitutional right.

"Instead of that, a situation is being created that it is a favour granted to you by the Election Commission," Quraishi said.

The EC has rolled out phase 3 of the SIR of electoral rolls in 16 states and three Union Territories involving 36.73 crore voters in a phased manner.

The states and UTs where the SIR is being carried out are Delhi, Odisha, Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, Telangana, Punjab, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Tripura, Dadar and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. (PTI)

'Govt cruel for ignoring Wangchuk's fast,' says Dipke

Activist completes day 18 of hunger strike

NEW DELHI, July 15: Activist Sonam Wangchuk was under round-the-clock medical supervision on Wednesday as he completed the 18th day of his hunger strike, with Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke accusing the government of being "cruel" for refusing to engage in dialogue with the protesters.

The CJP's protest at Jantar Mantar against alleged irregularities in the NEET examination entered its 26th day on Wednesday.

According to the medical bulletin issued by the CJP, Wangchuk remains "very weak" and is under 24-hour medical vigilance.

His weight has fallen to 57.15 kg, a drop of 400 grams in the last 24 hours, taking his total weight loss since the beginning of the fast to 8.9 kg. His blood pressure was recorded at 103/76, blood sugar at 80 mg/dL, oxygen saturation at 97 per cent, while hydration was described as fair.

Doctors said he remained conscious and mentally alert but required continuous monitoring.

"Day 18 of Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike. The man who chose to put his own life on the line to seek justice for students who died by suicide has received nothing but



silence from the government. The government is not just unaccountable; it is also cruel," Dipke said on X.

Dipke said the questions that deserved answers were why Prime Minister Narendra Modi was refusing to engage in dialogue and why Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan had still not been held accountable.

"Instead of asking why opposition leader hasn't supported CJP, or why every CJP team member isn't on a hunger strike alongside Sonam sir, ask the questions that actually matter," he said.

"Why is the Prime Minister refusing to engage in a dialogue?

Why is the Education Minister still not being held accountable? These are the questions that deserve answers, not distractions that only help shield those in power from accountability," he said.

The CJP also announced a one-day mass hunger strike on July 16 in solidarity with Wangchuk and students protesting at Jantar Mantar.

The outfit that was born online renewed its appeal to people to join its "Chalo Sansad" march on July 20, demanding a transparent examination system, accountability for repeated paper leaks, and Pradhan's sacking.

At a separate stage, the All India

Students' Association (AISA) leaders Neha, Manish, and Aameen continued their fast despite worsening health.

The Left-backed organisation said a delegation comprising academics Nivedita Menon, Aditya Nigam, Anuradha Cheno, and Radha Kumar visited the students. Samajwadi Party MP Priya Saroj, MLA Atul Pradhan, and MLC Man Singh Yadav also extended support and urged people to join the July 20 Parliament march.

On Tuesday, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee, Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray, and AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal appealed to Wangchuk to end his fast, while veteran actor Zeenat Aman urged the government to initiate dialogue with the activist.

Former Gujarat chief minister Shankersinh Vaghela was among those who visited Jantar Mantar on Tuesday to express solidarity with Wangchuk and the CJP protesters. Actor Swara Bhaskar also joined the protest. The CJP thanked Congress MP Shashi Tharoor for extending support to the agitation. (PTI)

99% of exports to become duty-free with India-UK trade treaty: Shah

NEW DELHI, July 15: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said that the India-UK free trade agreement is set to unlock untapped potential across labour-intensive industries, offering zero-duty market access for 99 per cent of the country's exports.

He said the agreement that comes into force on Wednesday is the key to a Viksit Bharat as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"The treaty is set to unlock untapped potential across labour-intensive industries, offering zero-duty market access for 99% of Indian exports, including those in textiles, leather, engineering, food processing, pharmaceuticals and MSME," Shah said on X.

He said the treaty stands as a testament to the Centre's pro-people diplomacy.

The treaty will also extend significant exemptions to Indian professionals in the UK, he said.

The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) that came into force on Wednesday was signed between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his UK counterpart Keir Starmer in July last year. (PTI)

Ayodhya incident hurt faith of Ram devotees: Adityanath on donation theft issue

LUCKNOW, July 15: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday said the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple had hurt the faith of devotees, but the opposition move to defame Ayodhya and Ram Janmabhoomi was not justified.

He also took a swipe at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, saying they are "two princes" accustomed to privilege who travel abroad to the US for FIFA events and also to Australia, and return to "divide society" on caste lines for political gains.

"They were born with silver spoons, wake up late and don't know what heat, rain or hardship means. One keeps travelling to Australia, another goes to the United States on a tourist visa to enjoy FIFA events. They travel abroad and then return to divide society on caste lines for political gains. The people understand all this and will not forgive them," he said addressing the "Panchayat Aaj Tak" programme organised by the India Today Group here.

Further targeting the opposition, he accused them of politicising matters of faith despite their past record.

"Recall the period before 2017. During the Samajwadi Party government, Kanwar Yatra, Ram Navami processions, Janmashtami celebrations and Durga Puja pandals were not allowed. Those who imposed restrictions on such festivals are today talking about faith. It is ironic," he said.

Without naming anyone, he alleged that those responsible for firing on kar sevaks in Ayodhya were now speaking about religious faith.

He also accused previous governments of allowing attempts to "vitiolate the atmosphere" by permitting namaz on the steps of Hanuman Garhi. "If they were truly secular, they should have also allowed Hanuman Chalisa to be recited inside a mosque but it was a one-way approach," he said.

The chief minister said those now raising questions over the Ram temple had earlier filed affidavits in the Supreme Court questioning the existence of Lord Ram and Lord Krishna and had attempted to obstruct the construction of the Ram temple through legal means.

"They opposed the Ram temple at every stage and today they are making the donation theft issue their biggest concern while remaining silent about the corruption and scams during their own tenure," he said.

Adityanath noted that the alleged theft of donations had hurt the faith of devotees.

"The Ayodhya incident has certainly hurt the faith of all of us, of Ram devotees like us. The Ram temple trust is an independent body and the government has no authority to interfere in its affairs. The trust requested a probe and the state government constituted an SIT. As soon as the SIT report came, action was initiated," he said.

The chief minister said six people allegedly involved in the theft had been arrested, while two others accused of assisting them had also been taken into custody.

"Along with the arrests, two resignations have also taken place on moral grounds (former Trust general secretary Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra). But using this incident to defame Ayodhya, the Ram Janmabhoomi and the faith of



Hindus is not justified," he said.

The alleged embezzlement of Ram temple donations came to light in the first week of June, following which the state government constituted a Special Investigation Team (SIT).

An FIR was registered on June 25 on the basis of the SIT's preliminary report. Eight persons associated with the temple's donation-counting process have been arrested in the case so far.

Speaking about the development of Uttar Pradesh, Adityanath said the state had undergone a transformation after 2017, with major religious centres emerging as models for the country.

"I understand why the Samajwadi Party is upset. They once claimed that not even a bird could fly in Ayodhya, but today lakhs of devotees visit the Ram temple every day to offer prayers," he said.

The chief minister said the development of Ayodhya had also boosted the local economy.

"Whether it is flower sellers, rickshaw pullers, tea vendors, restaurant owners, hotel operators, taxi drivers or boatmen, everyone has benefited economically and gained respect and recognition," he said.

Referring to the Maha Kumbh, Adityanath said last year's event had generated significant economic activity.

"Crores of devotees attended the 45-day Maha Kumbh. A single boatman's family earned nearly Rs 30 crore during the event," he claimed.

He alleged that such prosperity was disliked by opposition parties, saying they wanted economic growth to remain confined to "only two families".

The chief minister asserted his government's nine-year tenure had been marked by transparency. "Our nine years of governance are before the people, just as the tenure of previous governments is before them. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary and dynamic leadership, we have advanced the vision of a developed India. The double-engine BJP government has benefited from his guidance and leadership," he said.

Adityanath said the concept of a developed India meant prosperity and opportunities for all citizens without discrimination.

"Every citizen should have prosperity, every hand should have work, women should become self-reliant and traders should contribute to nation-building. We are committed to building a developed Uttar Pradesh as part of a developed India," he said.

Expressing confidence about the next Assembly elections, Adityanath said Uttar Pradesh would create a new political record in 2027.

"In 2027, Uttar Pradesh will witness a new record when a party returns to power for a third consecutive term. It will be the National Democratic Alliance government led by the BJP. There should be no doubt about that," he said. (PTI)

PM hails operationalisation of India-UK CETA

NEW DELHI, July 15: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday termed the operationalisation of the India-United Kingdom Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) and the Agreement on Social Security a significant moment in the bilateral ties.

He said the economic linkages between the two nations are going to get even deeper and will translate the shared ambition into tangible opportunities for the people.

Modi also said that the CETA will give a fresh momentum to farmers, entrepreneurs and MSMEs, besides several vibrant sectors will gain stronger access to the UK market. He said it will also deepen cooperation in technology, professional services and innovation, while supporting greater mobility for skilled Indian talent.

"This is a significant moment in the India-United Kingdom partnership! With the coming into force of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement and the Agreement on Social Security, our economic linkages are going to get even deeper. Together, these agreements translate our shared ambition into tangible opportunities for our people," he said in a post on X.

The prime minister said the social security agreement will provide invaluable support to Indian professionals working temporarily in the UK and strengthen the competitiveness of Indian enterprises.

"This moment reflects the trust between our democracies and our resolve to build a forward-looking partnership driven by trade, technology, investment and innovation. India and the UK will continue working together for shared prosperity," he said.

The free trade agreement between the UK and India came into force on Wednesday and is set to unleash a flurry of tariff cuts that will catalyse bilateral trade through greater two-way movement of goods and services. The CETA was signed in July last year.

It is expected to at least double the trade between the two countries from the current annual levels of estimated 48 billion pounds by 2030, and also boost their GDPs by nearly five billion pounds every year in the long run. (PTI)

India-UK trade pact 'new gold standard' of trade deals: Cameron

NEW DELHI, July 15: The UK-India free trade agreement that came into force on Wednesday is a "new gold standard" of trade deals and it sends a message to the rest of the world that rules-based order works, British High Commissioner Lindy Cameron said.

The mega trade deal, officially known as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), secures zero-duty market access for nearly 99 per cent of India's exports.

It is expected to help the Indian economy in sectors like textiles, leather, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, marine products, chemicals and processed foods.

A bilateral social security agreement too has been operationalised along with the trade deal.

Cameron, interacting with the media, said India and the UK have "unlocked the combined economic might of two global economic powerhouses".

It sends a message to the rest of the world that the rules-based order works, she said, adding the trade pact is the new gold standard of trade deals.

It is a force multiplier and template for future trade agreements, she said.

In sectoral terms, the India-UK trade deal brings really sweeping benefits for a wide range of sectors, the High Commissioner said.

"The UK-India trade deal brings sweeping ben-



efits for a wide range of sectors. From today, import duty on Scotch whisky has been cut from 150 per cent to 75 per cent which should make a really significant difference to the price the consumer pays," she said.

Cameron also said that import duties on premium UK-built cars will also begin to fall from over 110 per cent to 10 per cent, making iconic British cars cheaper for Indian consumers. (PTI)

Centre approves 2 highway projects for Varanasi with ₹25,000 cr investment

NEW DELHI, July 15: The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved two highway projects for Varanasi, entailing a total investment of nearly ₹25,500 crore.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the development of a 43.218-kilometre link connecting NH-31 and the Varanasi Ring Road along the River Varuna to decongest Varanasi city in Uttar Pradesh.

The project comprises a 6/4-lane predominantly elevated corridor, including the main carriageway, flyovers, loops, ramps, and service roads, and will be implemented by the NHAI under the Hybrid Annuity Model (HAM) at a total capital cost of ₹10,998.32 crore. I&B Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw informed.

According to an official statement, the corridor is a major component of the Varanasi Decongestion Plan and will provide seamless connectivity between NH-31 and Kashi Railway Station, while substantially improving access to Varanasi Ring Road, Varanasi Airport, Kashi Railway Station, Varanasi City Railway Station, Varanasi Junction, Deen Dayal Upadhyaya



Junction, Ramnagar Port, Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, the ghats of Varanasi and the adjoining Chandauli region.

The statement said that the project, designed for an operating speed of 80-100 km/h, will reduce travel time between NH-31 and Kashi Railway Station from approximately 40 minutes to 20 minutes, representing a reduction of nearly 50 per cent.

It will significantly decongest the city's road network, improve road safety, reduce

vehicle operating costs and facilitate faster, uninterrupted movement of passenger and freight traffic, the statement added.

The project will also strengthen regional connectivity by improving access to one Economic Node (Chandauli Social Economic Zone), one Social Node (Chandauli) and six major Logistics Nodes, thereby enhancing multimodal integration in line with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

The CCEA also approved the development of a corridor between National Highway-19 and the Varanasi Ring Road with riverbank connectivity along the River Ganga for the decongestion of Varanasi city, the minister said while briefing the media about the various Cabinet decisions.

The 46.039-km project, comprising a six-lane elevated main carriageway, an iconic cable-stayed bridge, an extradosed foot-over bridge-cum-major bridge, loops, ramps, link roads and service roads, will be implemented under HAM at a total capital cost of ₹14,447.64 crore.

According to a separate official statement, the project will provide seamless connectivity between NH-19 and the Varanasi Ring Road, significantly decongesting the city's

Flood situation in Arunachal worsens

Over 1 lakh affected across 26 districts

ITANAGAR, July 15: The flood situation in Arunachal Pradesh worsened on Wednesday, with 26 of the state's 28 districts affected and the number of people hit by the deluge crossing one lakh, an official bulletin said.

The rain-triggered floods and landslides have so far claimed seven lives and injured 29 people across the state, said the bulletin issued by the State Emergency Operation Centre (SEOC).

Upper Subansiri, Upper Siang, Kra Daadi, Kamle and Papum Pare were the districts that reported fresh flood and landslide incidents over the last 24 hours.

In Upper Subansiri, floods and landslides affected Limeking, Nacho, Siyum and Daporijo circles.

Upper Siang reported fresh damage in Mariyang, Yingkiang, Palling and Jengging circles. Fresh incidents were also reported from Tali circle in Kra Daadi district, Raga circle in Kamle district and Kimin circle in Papum Pare district.

During the last 24 hours, Upper Subansiri recorded three flood incidents and three landslides, while Upper Siang witnessed 15 landslides, seven heavy rainfall incidents and four floods.

Kra Daadi reported two landslides, while



Kamle and Papum Pare recorded one flood incident each.

The SEOC said 250 more people were affected in Upper Subansiri, taking the cumulative number of flood-hit people in the state to 1,03,167 across 306 circles and 485 villages.

Upper Siang remained the worst-affected district with 49,259 people impacted, followed by Siang (25,365), Kra Daadi (13,731), East Kameng (6,146), Upper Subansiri (3,467) and Namsai (2,657).

According to the bulletin, 622 houses have been damaged across the state, includ-

ing 454 kutchha houses, 100 pucca houses, 44 huts and 24 other structures.

Among the fresh losses reported, a kutchha house was completely destroyed in Kra Daadi due to a landslide, while another was severely damaged in Kamle following flooding.

Infrastructure damage was also reported from several districts. In Upper Subansiri, floods damaged a bridge in Limeking circle, besides roads, a flood protection wall and a retaining wall at Rapenrijo, while landslides damaged roads in Rakmi and Jingmuri villages.

In Upper Siang, floods and landslides damaged retaining walls, water supply systems, flood protection structures and minor irrigation infrastructure at several locations.

Kra Daadi reported damage to two schools, a hostel and a boundary wall due to landslides, while floodwaters damaged a minor irrigation structure in Upper Sher village of Papum Pare district.

The cumulative damage to agriculture and horticulture has risen to 561.75 hectares, including 224 hectares of agricultural land and 337.75 hectares of horticulture plantations.

Meanwhile, the IMD has forecast thunderstorms accompanied by lightning and heavy to very heavy rainfall in parts of the state on Thursday, with isolated areas of Papum Pare likely to receive 12-20 cm of rainfall in 24 hours.

On Friday, East Kameng and Papum Pare districts are expected to receive very heavy rainfall, while Changlang is likely to witness heavy rain accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning.

Weather conditions are expected to improve from Saturday, though East Kameng, Kurung Kumey, Papum Pare and Changlang will remain under a heavy rainfall alert.

By Sunday, only Papum Pare is expected to remain under watch for heavy rain, while no significant weather warning has been issued for Monday. (PTI)

Surrender fraudulent pension orders by Sept 30 or face action: Mizoram CM

AIZAWL, July 15: Those drawing family pensions fraudulently must surrender their pension orders during a three-month amnesty period announced by the government or face legal action, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma said on Wednesday.

The government has announced a scheme allowing ineligible family pension beneficiaries to surrender their annuity orders between July 1 and September 30 without having to refund the money already received.

Launching a statewide "Sensitisation of Voluntary Surrender of Pension Payment Order" programme here, Lalduhoma said the government is determined to eliminate misuse of public funds while ensuring genuine pensioners continue to receive benefits smoothly.

He warned that once the amnesty period ends, a government-appointed task force will conduct comprehensive field verification of all family pension beneficiaries.

Anyone found to have secured family pensions using forged or invalid documents will have their pension discontinued and face legal proceedings, Lalduhoma said.

He said that fraudulent pension claims are often supported by forged birth, marriage, divorce, life and income certificates, ration cards and other such documents.

The chief minister cautioned authorities responsible for issuing such certificates to exercise utmost caution, adding that legal action could also be initiated against officials found involved in issuing fraudulent documents.



Lalduhoma reiterated the government's commitment to improving pension administration, noting that inadequate training of officials handling pension files often delays processing of pension.

To address this, the government will set up a dedicated training wing for officials dealing with pension matters, he said.

Adviser to the Chief Minister (Finance & Planning) and MLA TBC Lalvenchunga said pension payments now constitute the largest component of the state's revenue expenditure.

While the government remains committed to supporting all eligible beneficiaries, fraudulent claims would not be tolerated, he said. According to official data, 39,954 people receive pensions from the Mizoram government.

This includes 22,139 superannuation pensioners, 11,194 family pension beneficiaries, 5,629 pensioners under the Centralised Pension Processing Centre, 594 voluntary retirement pensioners, 289 Voluntary Retirement Scheme pensioners, 69 invalid pension beneficiaries, and 40 compulsory retirement pensioners. (PTI)

Nagaland Human Rights Commission chairman calls for stronger action against stalking, cyber stalking

KOHHIMA, July 15: Chairman of the Nagaland State Human Rights Commission Justice Lanusungkur Jamir on Wednesday stressed that stalking and cyber stalking are serious violations of human dignity and called for stronger legal, institutional and societal measures to combat the growing menace.

Addressing a state-level awareness programme on "Prevention of Stalking & Cyber Stalking", organised by the National Commission for Women (NCW) in collaboration with Nagaland State Commission for Women (NSCW), Justice Jamir said India has moved away from treating stalking as a "harmless pursuit" to recognising it as a grave crime capable of causing lasting psychological and emotional harm.

He said Section 78 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) recognises both physical stalking and cyber stalking as offences, but observed that the law still identifies the perpetrator only as a "man" and that the first offence remains bailable.

In an era where digital harassment is increasingly gender-neutral, he said the law must evolve to provide equal protection to all citizens.

Justice Jamir also urged society to reject cultural narratives that glorify persistence over consent, stressing that "no means no" and that healthy relationships are founded on respect, trust and consent rather than control or obsession.

Highlighting the rapid rise of digital threats, he said technology, social media, spyware and other online tools have made stalking easier than ever before.

Cyber stalking, he noted, includes repeated online harassment, monitoring, identity theft, threats, fake accounts and the unauthorised sharing of private information.

While acknowledging that India has strengthened its legal framework through the BNS and the Information Technology Act, he said challenges such as cross-border investigations, rapidly evolving technology, low digital literacy and the stigma surrounding online harassment continue to hinder effective enforcement.

Calling privacy and the right to live without fear fundamental rights, Justice Jamir urged victims to preserve evidence, avoid engaging with harassers, block offenders, report abusive content to online platforms and immediately approach law enforcement authorities if the harassment persists or escalates. He expressed hope that the awareness programme would equip especially young people with the knowledge needed to prevent stalking and cyber stalking.

Earlier, NSCW Chairperson V Ngingyeth Konyak said Nagaland may have one of the country's lowest rates of crimes against women, but warned that cyber stalking and other forms of digital abuse are emerging threats requiring urgent attention.

She called for stronger digital literacy, improved cyber infrastructure, institutional support in educational establishments and an end to victim-blaming. (PTI)

Hundreds join rhododendron plantation drive in North Sikkim

GANGTOK, July 15: More than 300 people participated in a rhododendron plantation drive in North Sikkim's Lachen on Wednesday, in a community-led initiative aimed at conserving the fragile Himalayan ecosystem.

The plantation drive, organised along the Lachen Gumpa Road, was led by Social Welfare Minister Samdup Lepcha.

Addressing the gathering, Lepcha said planting indigenous species was crucial for preserving the Himalayan ecosystem. "Planting indigenous species like the rhododendron is essential for conserving biodiversity, preventing soil erosion, protecting natural water sources and strengthening our fragile mountain ecosystem," he said.

Stressing that environmental con-

servation is a collective responsibility, the minister lauded the enthusiastic participation of local residents and urged them, particularly the youth, to ensure the survival of the newly planted saplings.

"The real success of such drives lies not merely in planting trees but in nurturing them into healthy forests for future generations," he added. (PTI)

Nagaland launches Japanese Language Centre to boost global job prospects for Naga youth

KOHHIMA, July 15: The Nagaland Skill and Entrepreneurship Development Mission (NSEDMD) on Wednesday launched the Japanese Language Centre during the observance of World Youth Skills Day, marking a major step towards enhancing the global employability of Naga youth.

Launching the centre, Advisor for Higher Education and Technical Education, Temjenmenba, said the initiative would equip young people with Japanese language skills, opening up employment opportunities in Japan and other international markets.

He urged the youth to embrace skill development and entrepreneurship to remain competitive in a rapidly evolving global economy.

He said the state government, under the leadership of Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio, has prioritised skill development through various initiatives, with NSEDMD playing a key role in equipping young people with industry-relevant skills.

Observing that government employment alone cannot absorb the growing number of educated youth, Temjenmenba encouraged students and job seekers to look beyond government jobs and explore entrepre-



neurship and private-sector opportunities.

He stressed the need to acquire practical skills in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, machine learning and other technology-driven sectors to remain globally competitive.

He also called on departments and stakeholders to work together to create more livelihood opportunities through skill development and urged the 15 youth achievers honoured during the programme to inspire others to pursue skill-based careers.

Sharing the vision of the Mission, Additional Secretary and Project Manager, NSEDMD under IDAN (Investment & Development Authority of Nagaland), Vineet Kumar, said skill development and entrepreneurship would be central to Nagaland's economic future, par-

ticularly at a time when government employment opportunities are limited.

He said that since its establishment in October 2025, NSEDMD has trained more than 3,500 youth, while around 800 trainees are currently undergoing various skill development programmes.

Of those trained, over 1,000 beneficiaries have either secured employment or become self-employed, he said.

Kumar said the newly launched Japanese Language Centre reflects the growing partnership between Nagaland and Japan and is aimed at equipping youth with marketable language skills for overseas employment. He noted that skill development has emerged as one of the key areas of cooperation between Nagaland and Japan.

Referring to the programme's

theme, "Honouring Skills and Celebrating Success," Kumar said the 15 youth achievers felicitated during the event represent the growing number of young people choosing careers beyond government employment. He said they would serve as role models for others to pursue skill development and entrepreneurship.

Reaffirming the mission's commitment, Kumar said NSEDMD would continue expanding its skilling initiatives with the support of training partners and stakeholders to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for the youth.

The occasion was also marked by the felicitation of 15 Naga youth achievers who, after receiving training under various government skill development programmes in trades such as masonry, automobile servicing, hospitality, beauty and wellness, and other vocational sectors, have successfully established themselves as entrepreneurs and self-employed professionals.

Several of them have also gone on to create employment opportunities for others, reflecting the impact of skill development in fostering sustainable livelihoods. (PTI)

Web portal launched to address social issues in North Tripura CM hails innovative initiative

AGARTALA, July 15: A web portal was launched on Wednesday to strengthen public participation in addressing social issues across North Tripura district, an official said.

The 'Yoddha' portal is designed to empower citizens to play an active role in combating social evils while ensuring complete confidentiality.

"Through the 'Yoddha' portal, residents can anonymously report cases related to child marriage, drug abuse, domestic violence, child labour, and other social issues without revealing their identities", said North Tripura District Magistrate Chandni Chandran.

Chief Minister Manik Saha thanked the North Tripura district administration for taking the innovative initiative to address the citizens' problems.

"If the 'Yoddha' appears successful, we will urge the other district magistrates to follow the concept to address the unaddressed problems of the people. Today, I heard the problems of around 26 people living in North Tripura district through Mukhyamantri Samapeshu. It is not possible to solve the problems of people by sitting in Agartala," he told reporters.

The Mukhyamantri Samapeshu is a weekly programme where the CM listens to the problems or grievances of people in the presence of top officials and asks for remedial measures. Now, the programme has been extended up to the district level based on its growing feedback and success rate.

"The Yoddha portal also provides support for individuals struggling with drug addiction. Those seeking help can confidentially access counselling and medical treatment through the platform, ensuring their privacy is fully protected," the district magistrate said in a social media post. (PTI)

Ziro Royal Enfielders raise ₹4.51 lakh for flood victims

HT Correspondent

ZIRO, July 15: The Ziro Royal Enfielders (ZRE) Motorcycle Club organised two charity initiatives within a week, raising ₹4.51 lakh for flood victims in Keyi Panyor district and extending support to inmates of the Grace Rehabilitation Centre in Ziro.

ZRE Club Chief Nending Ommo said the club launched an online fundraising campaign on June 25, a day after a cloud-burst-triggered flash flood devastated the Posa area of Keyi Panyor district.

He said the initiative was inspired by the long-standing Baro-Manyang bond of friendship between the Apatani and Nyishi communities.

An offline donation campaign planned in Ziro was later deferred due to the absence of prior permission from the Lower Subansiri district administration.

The club subsequently continued its relief efforts through online fundraising, especially after the Apatani Students' Union launched a separate donation campaign.

With contributions from individuals, organisations, friendship groups and motorcycle clubs from across the country, 16 members of ZRE rode to Yazali on July 9 and handed over ₹4,51,014 to Yachuli MLA Toko Tatung for the MLA Relief Fund.

The cheque was presented at the Inspection Bungalow in Yazali in the presence of district officials and Zilla Parishad Members. The riders were flagged off from Ziro by Ziro-Hapoli MLA Hage Appa.

Ommo expressed gratitude to all donors and made special mention of the Open Road Wanderers Motorcycle Club, Sikkim, for organising a separate



fundraising campaign in support of the relief effort.

He also extended best wishes to the club for hosting the 16th North East Riders Meet 2026.

ZRE Vice Chief Hage Duyu said the club organised another charity ride on July 11 in collaboration with the Red River Odyssey Motorcycle Club during the inaugural North East Monsoon Odyssey 2026.

Around 70 riders participated in the ride to the Grace Rehabilitation Centre, managed by the Apatani Baptist Association, where they donated cash, food items and other essentials for the residents.

General-in-Command Duyu Deilyang said the club views motorcycling as a platform for promoting tourism, communal harmony and social responsibility.

He highlighted several initiatives undertaken by the club, including voluntarily surrendering aftermarket loud silencers to the district administration, or-

ganising plantation and plogging drives, participating in Mission Clean Kley River, supporting environmental campaigns, joining solidarity marches, visiting orphanages and assisting visiting motorcycle clubs while promoting Apatani culture and tourism.

Concluding the programme, Ommo thanked all members of ZRE for their commitment to community service.

He said the club comprises members from diverse backgrounds, including armed forces personnel, entrepreneurs, government employees and professionals, representing communities such as the Apatani, Galo, Adi, as well as members from Assam, Kerala and other parts of the country.

"These achievements are possible because of the dedication and collective efforts of every member. We will continue to ride with purpose, serve society and strengthen the spirit of unity and brotherhood," he said.

Citizen Action Party-Sikkim calls for 'constructive dialogue' as Wangchuk's fast enters day 18

GANGTOK, July 15: The Citizen Action Party-Sikkim on Wednesday expressed deep concern over the health of activist Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on hunger strike in the national capital over the past 18 days, and called on the Centre to engage in a "constructive dialogue" with the protesters.

Wangchuk was under round-the-clock medical supervision, with a medical bulletin issued by the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) stating that the activist remains "very weak".

His weight has fallen to 57.15 kg, a drop of 400 grams in the last 24 hours, taking his total weight loss since the beginning of the fast to 8.9 kg. His blood pressure was recorded at 105/76, blood sugar at 80 mg/dL, oxygen saturation at 97 per cent, while hydration was described as fair.

In a statement, the Citizen Action Party-Sikkim said it was praying for Wangchuk's

well-being and hoped the Centre would engage in a "constructive and meaningful dialogue" on the issues he has raised.

"We offer our sincere prayers for his safety, good health, and well-being, and remain hopeful that the Union government, in keeping with the finest traditions of Indian democracy, will give due consideration to his concerns and initiate a constructive and meaningful dialogue at the earliest," it said.

The statement described Wangchuk as one of India's foremost voices on sustainable development, climate resilience and community-led innovation.

"The Citizen Action Party-Sikkim firmly believes that dialogue, mutual respect, and democratic engagement remain the strongest pillars of our republic. We are confident that through sincere and meaningful discussions, an amicable and honourable resolution can be achieved," it added. (PTI)

No:TECH-213/NTI/KOK (BLDG)/2023-24/1955
Dated. Kokrajhar the 15/07/26

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty five) only with a validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently to be converted and drawn up in the printed F-2 form are invited from the registered contractors under PWD of all classes of the Assam PWD Building and BTC according to their eligibility for submitting tenders for the works stated below. The tenders will be received by the undersigned up to 1.30 P.M on 30/07/2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 2.30 P.M.

Sl. No.	Name of Work	Estimated Amount	Earnest Money(2% for GNL and 1% for ST&SC)	Cost of Tender Document	Time of Completion
1	Construction of Temporary VIP Dias Public Pandel with Siting Arrangements, for 5 Guarantee Meeting Programme of Hon'ble Chief of BTC at Kashibari on the 8 th February 2026	Rs. 9,97,000.00	Rs.19, 940.00 (2%) and Rs.9, 970.00 (1%)	Rs 500.00	1(One) Month

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent upto 1.30 PM on all working days from 15/07/26 to 30/07/2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment in the form of Bank Draft Demand Draft, duly pledged to the Principal Secretary, BTC.
Sd/- Executive Engineer, P.W.D., Kokrajhar Dist. & Chirang Dist.
Territorial Building Division, Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/806

Spanish team shuts down France and Kylian Mbappé

Spain advances to World Cup final with 2-0 victory

ARLINGTON (TEXAS), July 15: Spain's defensive prowess and swagger were just too much for an attacking trio led by France great Kylian Mbappé, and just enough to get the 2010 champions into another World Cup final.

The Spanish team managed a sixth shutout in seven games so far, winning 2-0 in the semifinals Tuesday against one of the most prolific scorers in World Cup history.

Teenager Lamine Yamal certainly was correct when he said France should fear Spain. That despite FIFA's top-ranked team being led by Mbappé — their captain with 20 goals in his 20 World Cup games before the semifinals — Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembélé and Michael Olise, who has a tournament-high five assists.

"They were facing the best team in the world," Spain coach Luis de la Fuente said of his players.

Mikel Oyarzabal scored from the penalty spot after a heady play by Yamal drew a foul, and Pedro Porro added another goal to put Spain in its second World Cup final.

A day after his 19th birthday, Yamal was denied a goal on a close offside call that came soon after Porro's give-and-go with Dani Olmo in the 58th minute had put Spain up 2-0. But it was Yamal's smart play against a veteran defender that gave Spain the early lead.

Spain will face either defending champion Argentina or England on Sunday in East Rutherford, New Jersey, across the river from New York City.

"So difficult to get to this moment, but we want more," Spain midfielder Rodri said. "We want to win this World Cup."

After trying to become only the third team to reach three consecutive World Cup finals, France instead will play in the third-place game in Miami Gardens, Florida, on Saturday.



"Spain has been able to defend well," departing France coach Didier Deschamps said through a translator. "They've closed out all the spaces and also we've made some technical mistakes. So it is difficult to create problems when the technical level is below standard."

Argentina and England play Wednesday in Atlanta in the second powerhouse semifinal match.

This win on soccer's biggest stage marked the third summer in a row that Spain beat France in a tournament semifinal match. Yamal scored in a 2-1 win in the 2024 European Championship semifinals just days before his 17th birthday, and La Roja won 5-4 in Nations League play last year.

Yamal was quick to point out that France should be concerned after Spain's quarterfinal win over Belgium set up another semifinal matchup.

"It's a team who loves to have control of the game, control of the ball. That's what we

let them do," said Mbappé, who got none of his three shots on target. "It's difficult when you don't change the play of Spain."

Spain has outscored opponents 12-1 since a scoreless draw against surprising Cape Verde to open group play. The lone goal allowed by goalkeeper Unai Simón was in the quarterfinal game against Belgium that snapped his World Cup record of 650 scoreless minutes.

This World Cup run has extended Spain's unbeaten streak in regular time to 37 matches (28 wins and nine draws) since March 2024. That broke the country's previous record of 35 in a row from 2007-09.

The loss broke France's record-matching streak of six consecutive World Cup wins, which the team also accomplished in the 2018 and 2022 tournaments.

Oyarzabal's penalty kick in the 22nd minute came after Yamal drew a foul when kicked by defender Lucas Digne.

After a poor first touch with his head,

Digne was trying to clear the ball when Yamal raced in from behind to challenge in the penalty area. The ball hit off the elbow of the leaping teen before he was kicked by Digne, playing in his 63rd game for France only six days before his 33rd birthday.

Oyarzabal's fifth goal of this year's World Cup marked the first time either team had trailed in their seven games in this tournament. It was his 30th goal in 60 international games for Spain.

For the second goal, Porro broke free and received a pass back from Olmo, who got the touch just before getting knocked off his feet by defender Dayot Upamecano.

"We knew that we're a very tough team, we're doing things really well," Porro said. France allowed only two goals in its first six games in this tournament.

Spain had two other real scoring chances in the first half.

There was a free kick from just beyond the box after Adrien Rabiot drew a yellow card for a foul on Olmo in the eighth minute. Alex Baena's kick went directly into the wall of French players.

After France goalkeeper Mike Maignan's attempted clearing pass in the 38th minute instead went straight to Baena, there were several quick passes before Fabian Ruiz's close-range shot was denied on a nifty play by Upamecano.

Mbappé, who is tied with Argentina great Lionel Messi with a tournament-high eight goals and leads the race for the Golden Boot on the assist tiebreaker, still has the third-place match to add to his tally. Messi has two games left in his sixth World Cup to try to win the Golden Boot and also increase his overall record of 21 goals at the tournament.

"As the captain, I have to take all the responsibility and I have no problem with that," Mbappé said. "We wanted to go to the final. We didn't go." (AP)

Gill's fitness, Rohit's form in focus as India eye series win over England in 2nd ODI



CARDIFF, July 15: Skipper Shubman Gill's fitness and Rohit Sharma's form are major concerns for India as they seek to lock a much-needed series victory over England in the second ODI here on Wednesday.

India's six-wicket win in the first match in Birmingham gave them a 1-0 lead in the three-match series, but it also highlighted some worrying aspects of the team's performance.

Batting on 80, Gill had to walk off the field in palpable pain and India would hope that it was nothing more than cramps.

A similar exit by Gill last year during the first Test against South Africa at Kolkata had led to hospitalisation, rendering him unavailable for the remainder of that engagement.

So, the Men in Blue will not want an encore as Gill's presence is imperative as leader and a tone-setting opener.

While his opening partner Rohit does not carry any such fitness issues, the management will certainly look at his batting numbers.

The Mumbai man seemed to have shelved his brazen aggression since losing captaincy, but the changed approach has not brought any bigger dividend yet.

The 'Hitman' has played 13 ODIs just as a senior member in the team since October last year, making 563 runs at an average of 46.91 with a hundred and four fifties.

It's not a record to scoff at. But the current dynamics within the Indian dressing room and the absence of the safety net of captaincy around him have made it mandatory for Rohit to deliver on almost every outing.

It will be a stretch of imagination to think that Rohit will be out of contention in the race to 2027 ODI World Cup even if he courts a couple of more failures, but the way the think tank looked over Suryakumar Yadav and Sanju Samson recently offers a warning note to him.

At 39, Rohit would not like to leave anything for chance as India also have an explosive top-order option in Ishan Kishan in the shed.

Comparatively, Kohli, another one-format player, is in a better place both in terms of fitness and statistics. (PTI)

Saikia to head ICC's Governance Review Committee

EDINBURGH, July 15: BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia was on Wednesday appointed as the head of the Governance Review Committee, a new sub-committee formed by the ICC, which also approved a USD 12.82 million loan to Cricket West Indies.

Apart from Saikia, the other members of the committee are: Dr Mohammed Moosajee of Cricket South Africa and Dr Ros Rivaz, the newly-appointed Independent Director of the ICC.

Saikia is also a member of another freshly-constituted committee — the Franchise Leagues Committee which will be headed by former Bangladesh skipper Tamim Iqbal.

Other members are: Dr Rudie van Vuuren (Cricket Namibia), Richard Gould (England and Wales Cricket Board) and Todd Greenberg (Cricket Australia).

The loan that ICC sanctioned to CWI is to support the board, which has been struggling for regular cash inflow.

The ICC also reviewed the progress made by Sri Lanka Cricket towards a revised constitution.

"...Reiterated the need for elections to be held as soon as possible and agreed that SLC would continue to be unable to be represented at ICC Board meetings for the time being," the ICC said in a statement at the conclusion of its Annual Meetings here. (PTI)

Ayush, Unnati, Lakshya bow out in dismal day for India at Japan Open

TOKYO, July 15: Young shuttlers Ayush Shetty and Unnati Hooda put up gallant fights before bowing out, while Lakshya Sen went down in straight games as India endured a disappointing second day at the Japan Open Super 750 badminton tournament here on Wednesday.

Ayush, a finalist at the Asia Championships, showed grit to recover after losing the opening game but ran out of steam in the end, going down 19-21 25-23 15-21 to second seed and former world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn of Thailand in an 82-minute clash.

World No. 24 Unnati, a two-time Odisha Open Super 100 champion, once again lost to Huang Yu-Hsun, going down 21-16 16-21 15-21 to the Chinese Taipei shuttler for her second defeat in as many meetings.

Lakshya, a runner-up at the All England Championships, was no match for local favourite Koki Watanabe, losing 16-21 14-21 in just 38 minutes as the Japanese improved his head-to-head record against the Indian to 4-3.

It was a disappointing day for India as all three shuttlers in action failed to cross the opening hurdle. The first-round exits do not reflect well on India, which is set to host the World Championships in New Delhi next month after a gap of 17 years.

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu and the mixed doubles pair



of Dhruv Kapila and Tanisha Crasto remain India's only hopes in the USD 950,000 tournament.

While Sindhu will face fifth seed Han Yue of China, Dhruv and Tanisha will take on top seeds Feng Yan Zhe and Huang Dong Ping in the second round on Thursday.

Ayush vs Kunlavut
Ayush, the 21-year-old from Mangaluru, came into the match after his sensational win over Kunlavut en route to the Asia Championships final, but knew it would not be a cakewalk against the Thai, a three-time world junior champion.

The Indian made a decent start, opening up a 7-4 lead early on, but it disappeared in no time as Kunlavut surged ahead to 12-9.

Ayush fought back to make it 13-12, but the Thai again moved ahead

at 19-16. Three straight points gave Ayush hope, but Kunlavut sealed the opening game by winning the next two points.

After the change of ends, Kunlavut continued to hold the upper hand, but Ayush stayed in touch and managed to take a slender 11-10 lead at the interval.

The Thai, however, regained control and earned four match points, with the writing seemingly on the wall. But Ayush showed tremendous resolve, saving all four match points before prevailing in a tense exchange and converting his second game point.

The resurgence, however, proved short-lived as Kunlavut came back strongly in the decider, racing to an 8-5 lead and then extending it to 14-8 before sealing the contest comfortably. (PTI)

Fitness in focus as Indian hockey teams gear up for World Cup

NEW DELHI, July 15: Strength and conditioning has emerged as the central focus as India prepares for next month's FIH Hockey World Cup, with chief coaches Craig Fulton and Sjoerd Marjine saying the ongoing national camps are aimed at ensuring the men's and women's teams peak physically for the marquee event.

The World Cup will be held in Belgium and the Netherlands from August 15 to 30, marking the first time that the men's and women's tournaments will be staged simultaneously.

The men's team heads into the showpiece after an encouraging FIH Pro League campaign in Europe, where it registered wins over reigning world champions Germany, Olympic champions the Netherlands and Pakistan.

"The players have come into the camp fresh after the break and you can see it in the energy on the pitch. The sessions have been sharp and competitive, with everyone eager to be back together," Fulton said in a Hockey India release.

"The first few days have been about getting the legs moving again, re-establishing our standards and now we are gradually building the intensity as we prepare for the World Cup."

India, the 1975 world champions, have been drawn in Pool D alongside England, Pakistan and Wales. They begin their campaign against Wales on August 15 before taking on England and Pakistan on August 17 and 19 respectively.

Fulton said the camp has struck the right balance between physical conditioning and tactical refinement.

"We're doing strong conditioning work early in the week to build our physical base, before moving into more tactical, unit-based sessions as the week progresses," said Fulton.

"We're also doing a lot of small-sided games to keep decision-making sharp under fatigue, alongside daily video reviews to reinforce learning and specific work on our press and counter."

"It's about improving what we're already good at and continuing to build on those strengths. It's about improving what we're already good at and continuing to build on those strengths."

The women's team, meanwhile, enters the World Cup on a high after clinching the FIH Nations Cup title with an unbeaten campaign, earning promotion to next season's Pro League.

Placed in Pool D, India will

open against China on August 16 before facing South Africa and England.

"The team is very motivated for the upcoming period with the two major tournaments ahead. The players are excited and you can clearly see that energy during our training sessions," Marjine said.

"Everyone is working hard every day and there is a real hunger within the group to keep improving."

The Dutch coach said fitness remains one of the key focus areas heading into the World Cup and the Asian Games later this year.

"Our focus remains on ourselves. We want to take another step forward, especially in terms of fitness, while continuing to improve the areas we have been working on over the past few months."

"We have a good balance of high, medium and low-intensity sessions because you cannot train at maximum intensity every day. Our strength and conditioning coaches closely monitor every player to make sure the team is ready."

"I can see the progress we are making, both individually and as a team, and that gives me a lot of confidence going into the World Cup," he added. (PTI)

Atiqa sizzles in Italy heat, outqualifies two Mercedes F1 juniors for pole position



VITERBO (ITALY), July 15: India's 11-year-old racing prodigy Atiqa Mir gave another compelling example of her precocious talent by out-qualifying two Mercedes F1 junior drivers for pole position in the Champions of the Future Academy Program Round 3 here.

Despite no testing on a rather technical Leopard Circuit, Atiqa, the first Indian to be backed by Formula 1 Academy, set sizzling pace in qualifying of the karting series.

She beat established Mercedes F1 Junior drivers like Niccolò Perico of Italy and Devin Titz of Germany for pole position besides setting an event record, earning the

plaudits from one and all in the paddock.

Atiqa's special performance in qualifying came after she swept Round 2 of the COTFA series in Greece last month.

Post the stellar pole position, Atiqa secured P2 and P3 in the Heats after engrossing battles.

In the final, Atiqa started P2 and passed Niccolò for the lead. However, due to an engine mis-fire, she couldn't hold on to the lead and lost places finally before recovering to finish P6.

The results don't reflect Atiqa's sensational speed but she did make a mark with the audacious move for the lead on Lap 1 against Niccolò after outpacing him in qualifying.

On Day 2, Atiqa was hit by engine trouble and qualified 27th. The organisers were quick to change her engine but the damage was done by then.

A recovery drive followed and she charged through the field in every heat to start the final 18th on the grid.

In the Final, Atiqa passed as many as nine karts in only one and a half laps before a fellow driver forced her out of the race with a collision from the side. The errant driver was duly penalised. (PTI)

Super 10 instead of Super 8 at T20 World Cup

ICC adds Super 7 stage at ODI World Cup

EDINBURGH, July 15: The 2027 ODI World Cup will be a three-stage competition leading to the finals and the 2028 T20 World Cup's Super 8 phase will be expanded to accommodate 10 teams, the ICC announced on Wednesday as it unveiled a revamped structure for the marquee events to achieve "greater context and consequence".

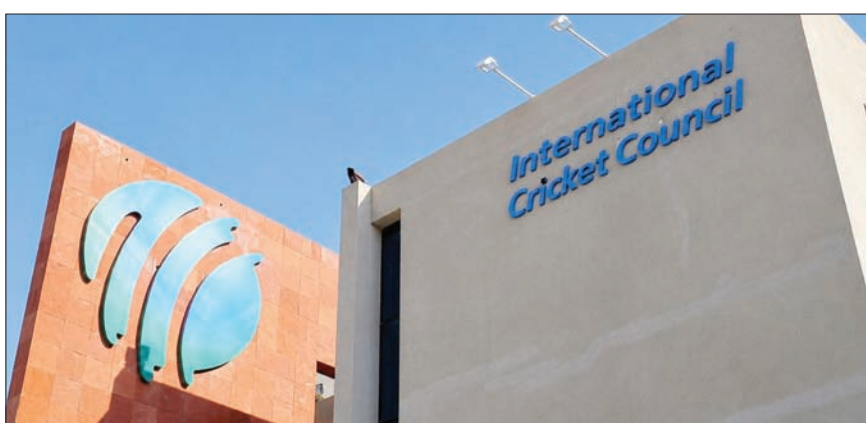
The decisions were taken at the ICC Annual Conference here. The 2027 ODI World Cup in South Africa will feature have 14 teams as planned before, up from the 10 in the previous edition, but the governing body has added a Super Series round prior to the 'Group round' and a Super 7 stage before the semifinals in its bid to spice up the competition.

"...the revised format will entail a three-stage competition leading to the Finals, which creates greater context, competitiveness and consequence during the event, ensuring meaningful competition from the opening match through to the Finals," said the ICC in a statement.

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.

"The increased consequence and enhanced competitive intensity promises to enhance the overall experience for fans while continuing to provide emerging teams with the opportunity to compete on cricket's biggest stage," said the ICC.

The tournament will feature 10 automatic qualifiers. Among the three co-hosts South Africa and Zimbabwe will be automatic qualifiers for being full members.

The third co-host, Namibia, has not received an automatic qualification as it is an associate member. The eight highest teams on the ODI rankings will complete the top 10 line-up.

The remaining four teams will be decided by a global qualifier.

Super 10 instead of Super 8 at T20 World Cup

For the T20 showpiece in the Australia and New Zealand in 2028, the ICC has decided to try Super 10 instead of the Super 8 after the Group stage.

Five groups of four teams will be created and top two from each 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. "Encouraged by the performance of emerging teams in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026, the ICC has decided to increase the number of teams competing in the second stage of the tournament from 8 to 10," said the ICC.

Scotland will enter directly into the Europe Regional Final, recognising the exceptional circumstances surrounding its participation in the 2026 tournament, having replaced Bangladesh in the 11th hour.

The remaining teams that competed at the T20 World Cup 2026 but did not secure automatic qualification will advance directly to the Global Qualifier.

The other eight places in the Global Qualifier will be filled through regional qualification, with two teams each qualifying from Africa, Asia and Europe, and one team each from the Americas and East Asia-Pacific regions. The highest placed team from each region at the Global Qualifier, together with the next three highest-placed teams overall, will qualify for the T20 World Cup 2028.

"The new marquee tournament has been endorsed by the Board after being recommended by the ICC Development and Chief Executives' Committees. However, it will be finally approved by the Board after review by ICC's Finance & Commercial Affairs committee in the November meetings," the ICC added. (PTI)