

6
WORLD
7
NATION

- US strikes Iran's Revolutionary Guard over attack that killed troops in Jordan
- Rescuers in China search rubble for survivors of landslide that killed 8
- J-K: Flash floods, landslides wreak havoc in Poonch-Rajouri belt; 11 dead
- Opposition stages symbolic walk out from all-party meet



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Monsoon session of Parliament begins today ● Govt defends rebel TMC MPs to all-party meet

Temple 'theft', ethanol, NEET in Oppn agenda

NEW DELHI, July 19: A combative opposition staged a symbolic walkout on Sunday at an all-party meeting against the government's invitation to rebel TMC MPs and demanded discussions on issues of Ram temple donation "theft", NEET paper "leak" and E20 petrol in Parliament, setting a fiery tone for the Monsoon session.

After the meeting, Parliamentary Affairs minister Kiren Rijiju said people of the country want smooth functioning of Parliament and "not any turmoil", as he urged all parties to "give their support to bills after positive discussions".

He also defended the decision to invite Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Kakoli Ghosh Dasgupta, the leaders of the 20-MP rebel TMC group that had joined Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI).

"The NCPI requested recognition from the Lok Sabha Speaker; how can you ignore them? It is the government's duty to invite everyone," the minister told reporters.

The meeting, chaired by Defence minister Rajnath Singh, was attended by Health minister JP Nadda and 58 leaders from 40 po-



litical parties.

Opposition parties including the TMC, Shiv Sena (UBT) and AAP, which have been rocked by desertions since the last session of Parliament, Congress, SP, Left, RJD, DMK and JMM walked out at the start of the meeting, but soon returned after registering their protest against what they described as "miscarriage of justice".

TMC MP Mahua Moitra questioned the government's decision

to invite the rebel TMC MPs and said it went out of the way "to recognise them" when the Lok Sabha Speaker has not yet decided on their status.

The Monsoon Session of Parliament will commence on Monday and will conclude on August 13.

Rijiju said the government has listed eight bills for the session, and if there is additional business, it will follow necessary procedures.

Asked whether the government intends to bring the earlier-rejected delimitation bill in this session, he said it will discuss the bills in the meeting of the Business Advisory Committee.

"We appealed to everyone to work together for the country. Several parties put forward their points and we have taken note of their suggestions. We have urged all parties for their support in the passage of various bills brought by the government after positive discussions. If political parties do not participate in the discussions and indulge in sloganeering, then they face political loss," he said.

"People of the country want Parliament to function smoothly. We also want this. By protesting, no one is going to benefit politically. That is why I request members of all political parties to take part in the proceedings wholeheartedly," Rijiju said.

He said if the opposition protests and creates chaos, the country suffers, and "that is why we want the opposition to take part in the discussions".

Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi

said the opposition has sought discussions on the "theft" of donations at Ram Temple, ethanol blending, student issues and the situation in Manipur during the Monsoon session.

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh earlier told the meeting that it was "meaningless" to discuss issues at the meeting "as 40 leaders present their views and five leaders hear them out, but those taking decisions do not attend".

Samajwadi Party MP Dharmendra Yadav said he sought discussions on the alleged theft of Ram temple donations and activist Sonam Wangchuk's hunger strike over the NEET "paper leak" issue.

He said the government can't evade responsibility over the alleged theft of Ram temple donations.

The DMK urged the government to come out with a clear formula on the Constitution amendment bill for providing 33 per cent reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, asserting that the quota should be given on the current strength of the Lower House. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Govt to bring bill in RS to make insult to 'Vande Mataram' criminal offence



NEW DELHI, July 19: The government intends to bring a bill in the Rajya Sabha to make any obstruction or insult to the national song 'Vande Mataram' a criminal offence on Monday, the first day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament.

The Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Bill, 2026, has been listed in the agenda of the Rajya Sabha for Monday, with Home Minister Amit Shah set to introduce the bill.

The bill will amend the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, which makes desecration of or disrespect toward the country's national symbols – including the national flag, the Constitution, and the national anthem – a criminal offence, carrying a punishment of up to three years' imprisonment. The bill seeks to give 'Vande Mataram', the national song, the same statutory (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Amarnath Yatra suspended as J&K braces for heavy rain



SRINAGAR, July 19: Authorities on Sunday temporarily suspended the Amarnath Yatra from both the Pahalgam and Baltal routes in view of the Met department's forecast of widespread rainfall across Jammu and Kashmir over the next few days.

Officials said no onward movement will be permitted from the Baltal and Nunwan/Chandanwari base camps in the Kashmir region, and the Bhagwati Nagar Yatri Niwas in Jammu.

"In view of the inclement weather forecast issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), Shri Amarnathji Yatra shall remain temporarily suspended from all base camps, including the Pahalgam and Baltal routes, with effect from 19.07.2026 as a precautionary measure to ensure the safety and well-being of the pilgrims," an official said here.

"Updates regarding the resumption of (Amarnath) Yatra shall be issued in due course of time after ensuring route safety and comprehensive assessment of the weather conditions," he said. The rain began early Sunday with cloudbursts taking place in the forests of Kashmir. The weather department has forecast moderate to widespread rainfall from July 19 to 23 across Jammu and Kashmir.

So far, more than 3.76 lakh pilgrims have paid obeisance at the holy cave shrine during the ongoing yatra. (PTI)

Book documents 281 butterfly species at India's only gibbon sanctuary in Assam

NEW DELHI, July 19: Assam's Hoollongapar Sanctuary, which is home to the endangered western hoolock gibbon, is also one of the richest butterfly habitats in the state where several of the rare winged beauties are found, says a new book.

In his book "Butterflies of Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary", naturalist and wildlife photographer Sarangpani Neog documents 281 butterfly species seen in the sanctuary in Assam's Jorhat district.

Many of these species are considered "dream butterflies" by lepidopterists because of their rarity and elusive nature. Neog says rare species like Assam Forest Bob (Scobura parawoolletti), Red-veined Lancer (Pyronura niasana) and Yellow-veined Lancer (Pyronura latoia) are found at the Hoollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary also supports numerous other uncommon and forest-dependent butterfly species, he adds.

According to Neog, several ecological factors make the Hoollongapar Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary an ideal home for butterflies.

"It possesses a well-developed multi-layered forest canopy, from towering Hollong trees forming the upper canopy to dense shrubs and herbs in the understorey. This complex vegetation structure creates a variety of microhabitats suitable for different butterfly species," Neog told PTI.

"The rich diversity of trees, shrubs, climbers,

grasses, and herbs provides abundant host plants for caterpillars and nectar sources for adult butterflies. The shaded forest trails, sunny openings, streams, and mud-puddling spots further enhance butterfly diversity and make the sanctuary an excellent location for butterfly watching," he says.

Although the sanctuary is relatively small at 20.98 sq km, it is home to seven species of primates, including the western hoolock gibbon, along with Asian elephants, leopards, leopard cats, fishing cats, civets, wild boars, barking deer, pangolins, numerous reptiles, birds, squirrels, and countless invertebrates.

Neog says the sanctuary has excellent accessibility for butterfly watching.

"Its well-maintained forest trails and permitted guided trekking provide visitors, researchers, photographers, and naturalists with excellent opportunities to observe and photograph butterflies in their natural habitat with minimal disturbance," he says.

One of the highlights of Neog's book, which is a second edition, is its photographic-based identification system, designed to make the process easier, faster and more accurate for everyone.

"The images highlight the real field appearance, wing patterns, colour variations, posture, and other distinguishing features that observers encounter during field surveys," he says. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)



Shah calls Bengal's political change unprecedented

KOLKATA, July 19: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday said the political transformation in West Bengal was unlike any witnessed in the country since Independence, asserting that the new BJP government led by Chief Minister Suvenudh Adhikari had revived the quest for "Sonar Bangla" after decades of misrule of the Left and TMC.

While virtually laying the foundation stone and performing the bhoomi puja for the Rs 700-crore Amul Bengal Dairy Project at Sankrail in Howrah, Shah said he had come to West Bengal "on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to sweeten

the mouths of the people with Mishti Doi" after the BJP's victory in the assembly elections.

The project will house the world's largest curd production plant. "The change that the people of West Bengal have brought about is unlike any political change witnessed in any state of the country since Independence," Shah said.

Chief Minister Suvenudh Adhikari, senior ministers attended the programme.

Drawing a contrast between the state's past and present, he said West Bengal was once "a beacon of light" for the entire country in education, culture, spirituality,



the freedom movement and nationalism. "West Bengal was once a beacon for the entire country in every field. In education,

it remained decades ahead of the rest of the nation. Whether it was the freedom struggle or the country's cultural and spiritual renaissance, West Bengal gave India some of its greatest leaders and freedom fighters," he added.

"Whether it was Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Swami Vivekananda, Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Maharshi Aurobindo, the state created an extraordinary tradition. Whether it was Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose or Khudiram Bose, West Bengal never hesitated to sacrifice for the nation," he said. Shah, however, alleged that the state subsequently suffered

decades of political decline.

"West Bengal remained under a Communist government influenced by foreign ideology for three decades. After breaking free from that, it fell into the clutches of the TMC, who are devoid of ideology, corrupt and criminal. Before our eyes, the dream of 'Sonar Bangla' envisioned by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was destroyed," he said.

Claiming that the BJP government had revived that aspiration, Shah said, "After a decade-long struggle and responding to Modi's call, the movement for Sonar Bangla has begun (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'These are the kinds of discoveries that make field visits so rewarding' Ancient sculptures, inscriptions found in Karbi Anglong shed new light on Assam's heritage

DIPHU, July 19: Recent excavations in Assam's Karbi Anglong district have revealed a remarkable collection of ancient stone sculptures and inscriptions, shedding new light on the state's rich archaeological heritage.

The diggers and excavators found the rare items at Sarthe Rongphar village, located in Phuloni area of the central Assam district, showcasing the area's importance in unearthing the past legacy.

Archaeologists and local villagers working around two centuries-old ponds have uncovered an array of artefacts, including intricately carved images of dancing figures, deities, Shiva lingams, temple fragments and a striking depiction of Lord Ganesha etched onto a large rock.

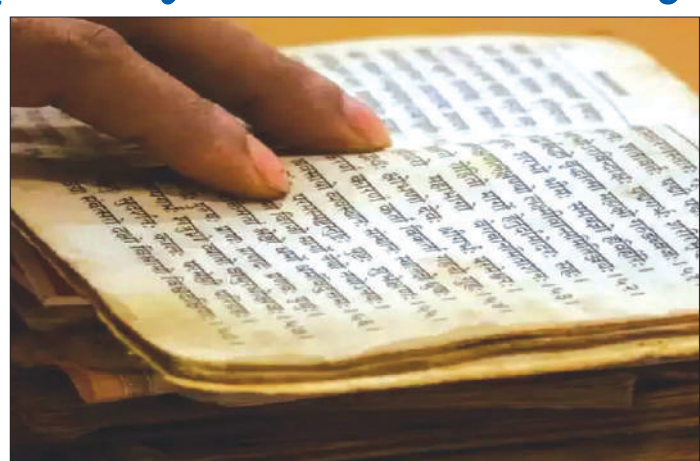
"During a recent visit to Sarthe Rongphar village, I had the oppor-

tunity to witness a remarkable yet little-known chapter of Assam's archaeological heritage. Excavations around two ancient village ponds have unearthed an impressive collection of stone sculptures and inscriptions," Karbi Anglong District Commissioner Aranyak Saikia told PTI.

Experts believe many of these artefacts date back to the 10th-12th centuries, though local traditions link them to the era of the Mahabharata and the fabled Ashvamedha Yajna, he added.

"Although locals link them to the period of the Mahabharata, historically it appears more likely that they were constructed during the Ahom period. However, clear records are lacking," he added.

What intrigued most was the villagers' observation that the water level of the pond remains constant, regardless of season, he said.



"Several of these priceless finds have been preserved at the Hojai Archaeological Museum and the district museum in Diphu," Saikia said.

He, however, has acknowledged that most of these relics have been

in a dilapidated state, but the administration has now taken necessary steps to preserve them.

"Several remnants are still scattered around the village. We have noticed that some items have even found their way into everyday

household use of the locals," Saikia said.

These discoveries are not isolated as the broader Phuloni-Dokmoka-Howrah region is home to numerous similar archaeological sites, a testament to its historical significance during the rule of the Kachari and Dabok dynasties.

"Among the most notable landmarks is the Mahamaya Hill in Dokmoka, where the remnants of an 11th-12th century stone temple still stand, despite suffering damage during the devastating earthquakes of 1897 and 1950," the DC said. He further said that other significant sites include Buragohain Than, which has yielded ancient idols of Shiva and Parvati; and Bargonga, where rare Gupta-era Shiva sculptures and rock inscriptions have been discovered.

"Together, these monuments re-

veal a flourishing religious and artistic tradition that once shaped the cultural landscape of Karbi Anglong," Saikia stressed.

Heritage experts and locals alike are calling for greater documentation, conservation and public awareness of these sites to ensure that this unique chapter of Assam's history is preserved for future generations.

The DC said, "These are the kinds of discoveries that make field visits so rewarding. Beneath its hills and villages lie stories, traditions and remnants of a past that often receive little attention."

"It is important that we learn about these places, document them and preserve them, because they represent a history that extends far beyond the narratives we commonly discuss," he said.

Last month, the Karbi Anglong district administration said it was

considering contacting experts from the Institute of Tai Studies and Research (ITSAR) to decode two rare Tai manuscripts as well as including the treasure in the central government's 'Gyan Bharatam' scheme.

A trove of rare manuscripts in the district, believed to hold unknown secrets from the medieval period, is likely to provide an understanding of the region's history, culture and indigenous knowledge once the scripts are decoded.

The fragile folios, preserved in two museums in Karbi Anglong, have survived the ravages of time but remain unread, drawing interest from historians and linguists eager to unlock the mysteries inked on palm leaves and copper plates. Out of these, the two Tai manuscripts, containing 67 and 158 folios (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

ABSU condemns alleged mistreatment of journalists by BTC Forest Department

'ABSU strongly condemns the degrading behaviour of the Forest Department'



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 19: The All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) has condemned the alleged mistreatment of journalists by officials of the BTC Forest Department and expressed solidarity with the Kokrajhar Press Club.

In an official statement issued on Sunday, ABSU president Khwmdao Wary alleged that the gen-

eral secretary of the Kokrajhar Press Club was verbally abused by the Chief Head of Department (CHD) of the BTC Forest Department and subsequently removed from the department's media WhatsApp group.

He also referred to an incident during the observance of World Snake Day two days ago in which some journalists were allegedly ill-

treated. Stating that such incidents had never occurred in Kokrajhar before, the students' body described the alleged conduct of the department as an affront to the media, which it termed the "fourth pillar of democracy".

"ABSU strongly condemns the degrading behaviour of the BTC Forest Department CHD. Such alleged attempts by government officials to abuse or suppress journalists deserve the strongest condemnation, as they set a bad example in a democratic society," Wary said in the statement.

The union also expressed support for the resolutions adopted by the executive committee of the Kokrajhar Press Club at its meeting held on July 18.

ABSU appealed to the authorities concerned to apologise to the journalist fraternity over the alleged incident and ensure that such incidents do not recur in future.

Meritorious students urged to become responsible citizens: CM



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 19: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday urged students to strive for excellence in academics while also becoming good human beings and responsible citizens.

Addressing a felicitation ceremony at Dr Shyama Prasad Mookerjee Town Hall in Agartala, where meritorious students from the Town Bardowali Assembly Constituency were honoured, Saha said the younger generation has an important role to play in nation-building and shaping society.

"Today's students are the architects of tomorrow. The younger generation has an important role to play in nation-building and shaping society. Keeping this in mind, along with excelling in academics, the students must strive to become good human beings and responsible citizens," he said. Saha also congratulated the meritorious students and extended his best wishes to them.

He further said their achievements would inspire many others to pursue excellence in the future.

Book on Khasi-Jaintia, Karbi historical ties released in Shillong



HT Bureau

SHILLONG, July 19: A book exploring the historical relationship between the Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi communities was released at the Karbi Hemtun (Karbi Anglong Guest House), Laban, Shillong on Saturday.

Titled Khasi-Jaintia and Karbis: From Symbiotic History to an Ongoing False Dispute—Karbi Youth Festival as the Confluence of Two Communities, the book was unveiled during a programme held in the presence of representatives from Diphu and Shillong.

The event was attended by chief guest Paitem Laborious Manik S Syiem and guest of honour Jones Ingti Kathar, IAS (Retd.). Special guests included Deivica Dkhar, a PhD scholar in Physics at Assam University,

Silchar, and president of the Khasi Students' Union's Assam University unit, and John Engti Kathar, president of the Karbi Students' Association, Shillong.

The book has been authored by Hirofberg Rongphar, an assistant professor in the Department of History at Nehru College, Pailapool, Cachar. He is also a PhD scholar in the Department of History at Assam University Diphu Campus, Karbi Anglong.

According to the author, the book examines the historical ties between the Khasi-Jaintia and Karbi communities and presents the Karbi Youth Festival as a platform for cultural convergence. It says that the two communities have shared a long history of coexistence and seek to challenge narratives portraying their relationship as one of conflict.

Heavy rain triggers flood-like situation in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 19: Continuous heavy rainfall since Saturday has triggered flood-like conditions in parts of the district, significantly driving up the water levels of the Difoloo River.

The surging waters have inundated the Dolamara and Malasi areas, severely disrupting normal life and cutting off critical road communications to at least three local villages.

In response to the rapid rise in water levels, the local administration has swung into immediate action. All Village Defence Organisation (VDO) members have been officially alerted to monitor the situation on the ground. Additionally, police patrol personnel have been briefed and directed to maintain strict vigilance along the vulnerable river stretches to prevent any untoward incidents.

Meanwhile, heavy downpours have also led to an increase in the water levels of the Doigrung and Kaliyoni rivers, both flowing under the jurisdiction of the Chowkiola Police Station. Au-

thorities have confirmed that while these rivers are swelling, the situation in the Chowkiola sector currently remains stable and under control.

Taking stock of the escalating situation, the district commissioner (DC) has issued an official alert notice to all teams of the District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA), specifically highlighting readiness in the flood-prone Bokajan region.

The DC has ordered Field Officers (FOs) across the respective circles and blocks to report to their stations immediately. To ensure seamless coordination and timely intervention, the administration has mandated the submission of hourly progress updates directly to the disaster management headquarters.

Furthermore, the DC has directed administrative teams to immediately initiate comprehensive field assessments of the affected zones to map out necessary relief, rescue, and rehabilitation operations.

3 killed as flash floods, landslides wreak havoc in Nagaland's Mon



KOHIMA, July 19: Torrential rain triggered flash floods and landslides that wreaked havoc in the district headquarters of Mon in Nagaland on Sunday, killing at least three people as it washed away houses, blocked roads and trapped several people underneath debris, officials said.

Bodies of a woman and a man have been recovered as rescue teams sifted through the rubble in search of survivors, notwithstanding inclement weather and difficult terrain, they said.

Extensive damage to homes, roads and public infrastructure has been reported in Mon town, with

several areas inundated and major routes blocked by landslides following hours of heavy rainfall.

Authorities have not ruled out the possibility of the death toll rising as several people are still reportedly trapped under the debris brought in by flash floods and landslides.

Incessant rainfall since early Sunday caused flash floods and waterlogging in the low-lying areas, while landslides along hill slopes blocked key roads, disrupting traffic, said Johnny Ruangmei, the joint CEO of Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority.

Families from the affected areas

have been shifted to safer locations while relief measures have been initiated. Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio expressed "deep distress" over the loss of lives and damage caused by the disaster and expressed condolences to the bereaved families.

In a post on X, he said the state government was closely monitoring the situation and that the Nagaland State Disaster Management Authority, district administration, State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), police, and Assam Rifles were engaged in search and rescue operations.

Deputy Chief Minister Yanthungo Patton also expressed grief over the incident and said the state government was closely monitoring the situation, with all authorities concerned coordinating in search, rescue and relief efforts.

The district administration has urged residents to stay away from landslide-prone areas, riverbanks and flood-affected places as heavy rainfall is expected to continue. (PTI)

Heavy rain inundates Jorhat, exposes worsening artificial flood problem

HT Correspondent

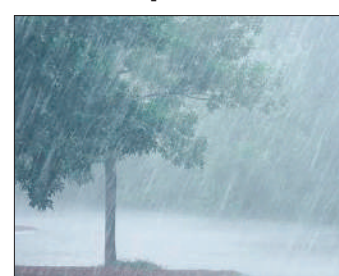
JORHAT, July 19: Unrelenting rainfall over the past 18 hours inundated large parts of Jorhat town on Sunday, disrupting normal life and affecting vehicular movement in several areas.

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, along with clogged drains, aggravated the situation as overflowing drains spilled onto roads and floodwater entered houses and shops in several localities.

Although it was a Sunday and most shops remained closed, several shopkeepers were forced to open their establishments to remove water that had entered their shops and damaged goods.

Vehicular movement remained affected until late afternoon in several areas as roads and streets were submerged.

Residents said Jorhat had been witnessing artificial flooding frequently in recent years, including three such incidents within the past couple of months. They called for better urban planning and the implementation of both short- and



long-term measures to address the problem.

They also demanded regular cleaning of drains and natural streams passing through the town to prevent waterlogging and artificial flooding, which they said occurred not only after heavy rainfall but even following moderate showers.

Artificial flooding has worsened in Jorhat over the years despite the district administration spending several lakhs of rupees on cleaning drains, streams and waterbodies, residents claimed.

Compared to previous monsoons, more localities are now witnessing severe waterlogging even after moderate rainfall.

DC reviews strategic road project, Vibrant villages works in Dibang Valley

HT Correspondent

ANINI, July 19: Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Dibang Valley Bekir Nyorak conducted a two-day inspection tour across Arzoo, Mipi and Anini circles on July 18 and 19 to review the progress of key infrastructure, tourism and healthcare projects in the district.

As per an official statement, during the visit, the DC inspected the Roing-Hunli (Greenfield Alignment) Road Project under the Special Accelerated Road Development Programme for the North East (SARDP-NE), being executed by M/s DRA-ITL (JV) under the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL).

Expressing concern over delays, Nyorak directed NHIDCL officials and the contractor to expedite construction by deploying adequate manpower and machinery to ensure timely completion.

Describing the project as strategically important, he said the road would improve connectivity, facilitate the movement of heavy machinery for the proposed Etalin and



Athunli hydroelectric projects, and strengthen access to border areas. NHIDCL officials informed that the project has achieved 82.32 per cent physical progress and is expected to be trafficable for light motor vehicles by October 2026.

The Deputy Commissioner also visited the proposed site for the Sub-Divisional Officer's headquarters at Arzoo and appreciated the Melo clan for donating land for the project. He directed the Land Management Branch to conduct a preliminary survey and prepare a master plan to ensure sufficient land is earmarked for future educational, healthcare, administrative and security infrastructure.

On the second day of the tour, Nyorak reviewed the progress of eco-tourism resort projects at Gipulin, Emuli and Mipi under the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP-I).

He further stressed the need for quality execution and timely completion and stated that the projects would promote sustainable tourism, generate local employment and strengthen the economy of border villages.

Officials said the projects are targeted for completion by August 2026.

Nyorak also inspected the Health and Wellness Centre at Mipi, where he reviewed healthcare services and directed the concerned departments to address issues such as waterlogging, construction of a boundary wall and improvement of existing infrastructure on priority.

The inspection, officials said, reflects the district administration's focus on expediting key infrastructure projects and improving connectivity, tourism and public services across Dibang Valley.

Mizoram pitches itself as emerging hub for event tourism



AIZAWL, July 19: Pitching Mizoram as an emerging destination for event tourism, Tourism Minister Lalnghinglova Hmar said the state has immense untapped potential in the sector.

Addressing the North East Events and Entertainment Leaders' Summit in Guwahati on Saturday, he invited event management professionals to explore the state as a venue for large-scale events and stated that improved rail and air connectivity had made Mizoram more accessible than ever.

"Come and host your events in Mizoram, amid our scenic hills and valleys, pristine rivers and clean environment. We will warmly welcome you," Hmar said, according to a statement. The minister said event tourism could create substantial employment opportunities and generate economic benefits for local communities, adding that the state government was committed to developing the sector as a key growth driver.

During the summit, Mizoram showcased its tourism potential through a video presentation, highlighting the state's tourism calendar, major attractions and initiatives undertaken by the government.

The presentation, jointly prepared by the Tourism Department and the Information and Public Relations Department, emphasised the state's readiness to host major tourism and entertainment events, the statement said.

The two-day summit concluded on Sunday after deliberations on strategies to promote event tourism across the northeastern states, it said. (PTI)

Charaideo Batori announces annual awards for 2025-26

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, July 19: Charaideo Batori, a popular fortnightly publication of the district, has announced its awards for 2025-26, recognising contributions in literature, journalism, public service and social work.

As per an official statement on Saturday, editor Mridul Shahu said Dr Bhaskariyoti Borgohain has been selected for the Manobiram Barua Charaideo Ratna title for 2025-26. Social worker Mon Mout will receive the Social Reformer Suphal Tasha Memorial Award, while Dr Dipawali Kuri,

ACS, has been chosen for the Binarani Bhumij Mahiyashi Nari Award.

Journalist Nabil Konwar of Doordarshan will be honoured with the Yuva Sambadik Award, and former Sonari College principal Dr Sunil Dutta will receive the Pragya-Sadhak Award.

Palash Kalita has been selected for the Most Efficient Employee of the Year Award. The publication has also selected Assam Cabinet minister Bimal Bora for the Minister of the Year Award 2025.

The awards will be presented at a special function to be held in August, the release added.

Floods affect 34 villages in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, July 19: Altogether 2378 people of 34 villages in villages in Jorhat district have been affected by floods due to heavy rains in the past 24 hours.

A district administration official on Sunday stated that the affected villages are in three revenue circles -- Mariani (12), Teok (9) and Titabor (13).

The number of male population is 1004, female 942, and children 432. The total crop area affected is 51.27

hectare. The official further stated that no relief camps have been set up but the district administration is monitoring the situation. Apart from this, all concerned departmental agencies are in coordination with the District Disaster Management Agency to undertake rescue and relief operations.

Meanwhile, officials of the Water Resources department inspected a stretch of the Bhogdol river embankment in the western outskirts here which is reportedly facing a threat of being breached.

Demow's Dr Ananta Borgohain promoted to 'Outstanding Scientist' at BARC



HT Correspondent

DEMOW, July 19: Dr Ananta Borgohain, a noted nuclear scientist from Demow in Assam's Sivasagar district, has been promoted to the prestigious rank of Outstanding Scientist at the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).

The son of Gunendra Nath Borgohain and Ranu Borgohain, Dr Borgohain is an alumnus of Assam Engineering College and joined BARC in Mumbai in 1998. His promotion has been widely hailed as a matter of pride for Demow and Assam.

Earlier, he was conferred the Scientific and Technical Excellence Award, 2016 by the Department of Atomic Energy, Government of India, in recognition of his contributions to scientific research. State Water Resources minister and Demow MLA Sushanta Borgohain congratulated Dr. Borgohain on his achievement.

Minister Bimal Borah visits industrial site in Jamugurihat

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, July 19: State Industries, Commerce & Public Enterprises, Cultural Affairs, and Act East Affairs Minister Bimal Borah on Sunday visited the industrial park at Dighali Chapari in western Jamugurihat and reviewed the progress of the newly established tiles manufacturing unit.

An industrial park has been proposed over an area of 973 bighas at Dighali Chapari. Of this, 645 bighas have been allotted to seven industries under the state government's Customised Policy. Among them is ALLEMBY CERAMIC Pvt. Ltd., which signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the state government in 2024 to establish a tiles manufacturing unit at Dighali Chapari under the Naduar Legislative Assembly Constituency in Sonitpur district.

The minister said Naduar MLA Padma Hazarika had informed him that an additional 1,342 bighas at Dighali Chapari would be incorporated into the proposed industrial park, increasing its total area to



2,315 bighas.

He further said the expanded industrial park could accommodate nearly 100 small and medium industries, creating significant employment opportunities for local youth.

Addressing the media, Borah said ALLEMBY CERAMIC Pvt. Ltd. would manufacture tiles using locally sourced raw materials from Karbi Anglong.

"The project would generate employment and would be the first tiles manufacturing unit in the Northeast to produce tiles using raw materials sourced entirely from Assam," he added. The minister also praised the ef-

forts of Naduar MLA Padma Hazarika in facilitating the eviction of illegal settlers from the project site in 2019. Around 300 families were evicted from the Dighali Chapari area by the Sonitpur district administration that year, making way for the industrial project.

Borah announced that the first tiles manufacturing unit in the Northeast would be inaugurated by Chief Minister Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma on August 17.

The minister was accompanied by Naduar MLA Padma Hazarika, officials from various government departments, and members of the district administration during the visit.

Cachar gears up for Census 2027 as training of field staff begins today

The first phase will be held on July 20, 21 and 22

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, July 19: The groundwork for the Census of India 2027 is set to begin in Cachar with the launch of a district-level training programme for Supervisors and Enumerators at Cachar College, Silchar, from Monday.

The exercise marks an important step in preparing the field workforce that will be responsible for carrying out census-related activities across the district. Spread over four phases, the programme will train Supervisors and Enumerators in the procedures and practical aspects of field enumeration.

Officials said the sessions have been designed to familiarise participants with census schedules, data collection methods, verification procedures, reporting formats and the responsibilities expected of field



personnel during the census exercise. Training will be conducted from 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. each day. The first phase will be held on July 20, 21 and 22, followed by the second phase on July 24, 25 and 27. The third phase is scheduled for July 29, 30 and 31, while the fourth and final phase will take place on August 3, 4 and 5.

Officials associated with the programme said thorough preparation of field staff is essential to ensure that information collected during the census is accurate, complete and consistent. Alongside classroom

sessions, participants will also receive practical training in fieldwork to equip them to carry out their responsibilities effectively at the grassroots level.

The Census is the country's largest statistical exercise, providing vital demographic and socio-economic data that forms the basis for planning, resource allocation and the formulation of public welfare programmes.

With preparations now underway, the district administration has begun building a trained workforce to carry out the exercise efficiently when the nationwide enumeration begins.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Memories of our lives, of our works and our deeds will continue in others. - Rosa Parks

UK-India free trade pact

The United Kingdom and India have crossed a historic milestone in their economic relationship with the long-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) coming into force on July 15, 2026, transforming years of negotiations into a commercially binding pact that promises to reshape trade, investment and business opportunities between the world's fifth and sixth largest economies. Unlike many trade agreements that remain political declarations for months before implementation, the UK-India FTA has become operational immediately, allowing businesses in both countries to begin claiming tariff concessions from the very first day. The agreement therefore marks not merely another diplomatic achievement but a practical commercial framework that companies can use from now onwards. For India, the agreement represents one of the most comprehensive free trade deals it has signed with a major Western economy since liberalisation. For Britain, it is among the most significant trade agreements concluded after Brexit, reinforcing London's strategy of building deeper economic partnerships beyond Europe. The timing is significant. Even as India concludes difficult negotiations with the United States over an interim trade arrangement, New Delhi now has in hand a fully negotiated and legally enforceable agreement with Britain.

The scale of the agreement is impressive. Bilateral trade between India and the United Kingdom reached approximately £48 billion in 2025, making Britain one of India's largest trading partners in Europe. Officials from both governments expect the agreement to increase bilateral trade by an additional £25.5 billion annually over the coming years. That's a whopping 73 billion pounds. Economists estimate that the FTA could contribute nearly £5.1 billion to India's annual GDP while adding around £4.8 billion to the British economy every year, illustrating that the benefits are expected to flow in both directions rather than favouring one side alone. One of the most attractive features of the agreement is its sweeping tariff liberalisation. From the very first day, 99 percent of Indian exports entering the United Kingdom will enjoy duty-free access or significantly reduced tariffs. This gives Indian exporters unprecedented access to a high-income consumer market where demand for quality products continues to grow. Indian industries expected to benefit include textiles and garments, leather products, footwear, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, automobiles and auto components, marine products, gems and jewellery, chemicals and processed food products.

Many of these sectors are labour-intensive, meaning increased exports could translate directly into higher employment across India's manufacturing hubs. Small and medium enterprises, often unable to absorb high import duties, stand to become some of the biggest beneficiaries. For India, it signals growing confidence as a global economic power willing to engage major developed economies on equal terms. As the first consignments benefiting from lower tariffs arrive at ports and airports across both countries, the agreement moves beyond diplomatic rhetoric into commercial reality.

India-UK trade deal: The story behind CETA's evolution

By: Dipak Kurmi

At the stroke of midnight on 15 July 2026, the bilateral architecture between India and the United Kingdom underwent a fundamental transformation as the India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement officially entered into force. Concurrently implemented with the landmark Double Contribution Convention on social security, this comprehensive regulatory pact marks the official commencement of an ambitious new paradigm for cross-border commerce. By dismantling long-standing tariff barriers across thousands of distinct product lines, expanding mutual market access within highly specialized services sectors, and instituting modern, predictable frameworks for capital investment and professional mobility, the treaty signals a historic realignment. For a bilateral relationship previously defined by historical complexities, this implementation firmly anchors the future of the two nations in commercial cooperation. Current annual bilateral trade, which stands at approximately fifty-six billion United States dollars, is statistically projected to double, reaching an estimated value of one hundred billion to one hundred and twenty billion dollars by the conclusion of the year 2030.

The implementation of this treaty represents the culmination of a rigorous five-year diplomatic journey that tested the resilience of negotiators in both London and New Delhi. The initial institutional foundation for the agreement was laid during the 2021 India-UK Virtual Summit, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his British counterpart at the time, Boris Johnson, formally established the Enhanced Trade Partnership. This high-level dialogue yielded the India-UK Roadmap 2030, which elevated bilateral ties to a formal Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and committed both sovereign administrations to the negotiation of a comprehensive free trade agreement. Official rounds of negotiations commenced in January 2022, initiating an intensive process that eventually spanned fourteen highly technical, demanding rounds held across the two capitals. The progression toward consensus was frequently interrupted by challenging structural divergence on deeply sensitive policy matters, including the liberalization of professional mobility, highly protective Scotch whisky duties, British automobile tariffs, complex carbon border adjustment measures, and symmetric market access demands.

Domestic political developments within both democratic nations further complicated the timeline, as national elections in 2024 necessitated a protracted, multi-month pause in active intergovernmental discussions. The diplomatic momentum was subsequently restored when Prime Minister Modi met with the newly elected British Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, where both leaders reached a definitive consensus to conclude the remaining chapters. Negotiators finalized the technical text on 6 May 2025, clearing the way for Indian Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and United Kingdom Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds to officially execute the treaty in London on 24 July 2025 in the presence of their respective heads of government. As explicitly



outlined in an accompanying side letter, the complementary Double Contribution Convention was concluded shortly thereafter on 10 February 2026. The final obstacle materialized in early 2026 regarding the United Kingdom's proposed steel safeguard quotas, which threatened to severely restrict the market access of primary Indian industrial exporters. A critical, last-minute compromise was achieved by providing immediate duty-free access for approximately eighty-five percent of eligible Indian steel exports, combined with an enhanced country-specific quota for the remaining volumes, which successfully removed the final regulatory hurdle prior to the July 2026 implementation date.

The structural breath of this accord has led international trade analysts to classify the agreement as India's most ambitious modern trade instrument, establishing a new gold standard for the nation's future free trade agreements. Spanning thirty meticulously detailed chapters, the scope of the treaty extends far beyond traditional reductions in import duties to incorporate forward-looking regulations on digital trade, state public procurement, technological innovation, cross-border telecommunications, intellectual property rights, environmental sustainability, labor protection, and gender equality. This landmark framework represents the very first comprehensive free trade agreement that India has negotiated from the ground up with a member nation of the Group of Seven industrial economies under its modernized, highly calibrated foreign trade strategy. This strategic approach emphasizes targeted engagement with economically complementary partners to systematically expand India's aggregate share of international trade while securing domestic manufacturing supply chains.

From an institutional standpoint, the treaty introduces several significant structural innovations into the historical canon of Indian trade policy. Most notably, Indian negotiators agreed to extend

Guwahati has long been regarded as the gateway to Northeast India, a city that symbolizes the region's economic aspirations, cultural diversity, and strategic importance. Situated gracefully between the mighty Brahmaputra River and a chain of picturesque hills, the city once possessed a unique natural charm that distinguished it from other urban centres in the country. Over the past few decades, however, Guwahati has undergone an unprecedented transformation driven by rapid urbanization, commercial expansion, and continuous population growth. While these developments have undoubtedly strengthened its position as the economic capital of the Northeast, they have also exposed the city to a range of urban challenges that now threaten its future. Infrastructure has failed to keep pace with demographic expansion, ecological balance has steadily deteriorated, and civic amenities have become increasingly inadequate. The result is a city struggling to reconcile development with sustainability. Every monsoon exposes glaring weaknesses in urban planning, while daily traffic congestion, deteriorating environmental conditions, and mounting pressure on public services diminish the quality of life for its residents. The future of Guwahati will therefore depend not merely on constructing more roads or buildings, but on adopting a comprehensive vision that balances economic progress with environmental conservation and responsible governance. Without decisive intervention today, the city's remarkable potential could gradually be overshadowed by avoidable crises that continue to deepen with every passing year.

The most pressing concern confronting Guwahati is the absence of integrated and long-term urban planning. For years, development has largely been reactive rather than strategic, allowing the city to expand without sufficient attention to infrastructure, drainage, transport, housing, and environmental sustainability. Areas that were once sparsely populated have rapidly transformed into dense residential and commercial zones, often lacking adequate roads, sewerage systems, storm-water drains, and essential civic services. Existing infrastructure, originally designed for a much smaller population, now struggles to accommodate the city's growing demands. Administrative coordination among various government agencies has frequently remained inadequate, resulting in overlapping responsibilities, delayed execution of projects, and inconsistent policy implementation. Such institutional fragmentation has prevented the city from developing according to a unified master plan. Consequently, residents experience recurring civic inconveniences that could

have been avoided through better planning and coordinated governance. Sustainable urban development requires not only financial investment but also transparent decision-making, scientific assessment, and continuous monitoring of developmental activities. Guwahati's future cannot be secured through isolated infrastructure projects alone; it demands an integrated governance framework capable of anticipating future challenges while addressing present deficiencies.

Among the most visible manifestations of planning failure is the recurring problem of urban flooding. What should have been manageable seasonal rainfall has increasingly become a citywide crisis, disrupting transportation, commerce, education, healthcare, and everyday life.

The flooding witnessed across Guwahati is largely the consequence of human intervention rather than natural inevitability. Over the years, wetlands that once functioned as natural reservoirs have been encroached upon or filled for urban expansion, significantly reducing the city's capacity to absorb excess rainwater. Traditional drainage channels have become obstructed by unplanned construction, solid waste, and accumulated silt, preventing efficient water flow during heavy rainfall. Rivers such as the Bharalu and Bahini, once integral to the city's drainage network, have suffered from pollution, encroachment, and neglect. Temporary pre-monsoon cleaning operations offer only limited relief because the underlying structural deficiencies remain unaddressed. Every episode of flooding causes substantial economic losses, damages public and private property, contaminates drinking water sources, and increases the risk of waterborne diseases. Addressing this challenge requires scientific restoration of wetlands, modernization of drainage infrastructure, strict prevention of encroachments, improved solid waste management, and continuous maintenance rather than seasonal emergency responses. Climate change has already increased the frequency of intense rainfall events, making comprehensive flood resilience an urgent priority for Guwahati's long-term sustainability.

Equally alarming is the continued degradation of the hills that surround the city. These hills have historically served as natural barriers, ecological habitats, and defining features of Guwahati's landscape. Today, however, extensive hill cutting, unauthorized settlements, and deforestation have significantly weakened their ecological stability. As vegetation disappears and slopes are altered through unscientific construction, the likelihood of landslides during the monsoon increases substantially. Every year, heavy rainfall triggers tragic inci-

dents that result in loss of life, destruction of homes, and displacement of vulnerable families. Beyond the immediate human consequences, hill degradation also accelerates soil erosion, contributing to the silting of drainage channels and intensifying urban flooding in lower areas. Protecting these fragile ecosystems is therefore not merely an environmental concern but a fundamental requirement for public safety and sustainable urban development. Authorities must strictly enforce environmental regulations, prevent further illegal encroachments, undertake scientific afforestation programmes, and promote planned housing solutions that discourage settlements in high-risk zones. Equally important is the need to involve local communities in conservation initiatives, ensuring that environmental protection becomes a shared civic responsibility rather than solely a governmental obligation. Preserving Guwahati's hills is essential not only for maintaining biodiversity but also for safeguarding the city's long-term resilience against natural disasters.

Transportation presents another major obstacle to Guwahati's future growth. Rising incomes and expanding commercial activity have led to a dramatic increase in private vehicle ownership, while the city's road network has expanded far more slowly. Narrow roads, inadequate parking facilities, poorly regulated intersections, and inconsistent traffic management contribute to severe congestion throughout the day. Public transport, despite serving thousands of commuters, remains fragmented and often unreliable, encouraging greater dependence on personal vehicles. Ongoing fly-over construction and road expansion projects may provide partial relief, but isolated infrastructure initiatives cannot solve systemic mobility challenges. Modern cities increasingly recognize that efficient public transportation, pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, cycling facilities, and intelligent traffic management systems offer more sustainable solutions than simply widening roads. Guwahati must similarly embrace integrated urban mobility planning that prioritizes accessibility, safety, and environmental sustainability. Efficient transport networks reduce travel time, improve productivity, lower fuel consumption, and significantly reduce vehicular emissions. Furthermore, well-designed transport infrastructure enhances economic competitiveness by facilitating the smooth movement of goods, services, and people. As Guwahati continues to grow as the commercial capital of Northeast India, investing in modern, reliable, and environmentally responsible transportation systems will become indispensable for sustaining future development.

Environmental sustainability must occupy the centre of Guwahati's developmental agenda. Air pollution has become increasingly noticeable due to rising vehicular emissions, construction activities, industrial expansion,

and inadequate waste management practices. Simultaneously, the city faces growing challenges in ensuring a reliable supply of clean drinking water despite being located alongside one of Asia's largest rivers. Delays in major water supply projects have compelled many residents to depend on groundwater extraction, placing considerable pressure on underground aquifers while increasing concerns about water quality. Solid waste disposal also remains an unresolved challenge, with improper segregation and disposal contributing to environmental degradation and public health risks. Expanding green spaces, restoring wetlands, promoting sustainable construction practices, strengthening waste recycling systems, and improving water treatment infrastructure should therefore become integral components of future urban policy. Climate resilience, environmental conservation, and economic development are no longer competing objectives but complementary necessities for responsible city planning. Guwahati has the opportunity to become a model of sustainable urban development if ecological preservation is integrated into every stage of policymaking and infrastructure development.

The future of Guwahati ultimately depends upon visionary leadership, institutional coordination, and active public participation. Urban transformation cannot be achieved solely through government initiatives; it also requires responsible citizenship, community awareness, and collective commitment toward preserving public spaces and natural resources. Citizens must recognize that civic discipline, proper waste disposal, respect for environmental regulations, and participation in conservation efforts are essential contributions to the city's well-being. At the same time, policymakers must demonstrate the courage to implement evidence-based reforms, enforce planning regulations impartially, and prioritize long-term public interest over short-term political considerations. Investment in smart infrastructure, disaster preparedness, digital governance, affordable housing, efficient public transport, and environmental restoration can transform Guwahati into a resilient, inclusive, and globally competitive city. The challenges confronting Guwahati are undoubtedly serious, but they are not insurmountable. With thoughtful planning, scientific policymaking, transparent governance, and sustained public cooperation, the city can successfully overcome its present difficulties and build a future worthy of its immense historical, cultural, and economic significance. The choices made today will determine whether Guwahati evolves into one of India's most livable and sustainable urban centres or continues to struggle under the weight of unplanned expansion. The responsibility rests equally with governments, institutions, businesses, and citizens to ensure that the future of Guwahati reflects not missed opportunities, but fulfilled promise.

percent of its internal tariff lines immediately, with an additional twenty-one percent scheduled for gradual elimination over a ten-year implementation horizon. This opening offers immediate benefits to iconic British exports, including Scotch whisky, gin, luxury automobiles, cosmetics, chocolates, specialized medical devices, and advanced industrial machinery.

The specific mechanism governing the liberalization of sensitive consumer imports demonstrates the highly protective engineering utilized by the negotiators to prevent domestic market disruption. For instance, India's historical one hundred and fifty percent import duty on Scotch whisky will be gradually lowered to forty percent over a ten-year transition period, mitigating sudden competitive pressures on domestic distillers. Similarly, the baseline one hundred and ten percent tariff on fully built British automobiles will be systematically reduced to ten percent under a strictly managed, expanding tariff-rate quota system. This quota initiates at approximately twenty thousand vehicles per annum before gradually scaling up to thirty-seven thousand vehicles by the fifth year of the agreement. To afford domestic automobile manufacturers valuable adjustment time to scale their own capabilities, electric and hybrid vehicles are excluded from these concessions until the sixth year of operation. Furthermore, the automobile quota is structurally stratified across distinct price bands, ensuring that foreign imports remain concentrated within ultra-luxury segments where domestic manufacturing footprint is historically minimal.

Within the high-value services domain—which represents India's foremost international comparative advantage—the agreement secures deep, unprecedented commitments. The United Kingdom has legally guaranteed market access across one hundred and thirty-seven of the one hundred and sixty-four total General Agreement on Trade in Services subsectors. In return, India has extended commitments across approximately one hundred and eight high-growth subsectors, establishing new frameworks for information technology, financial services, telecommunications, engineering, corporate accounting, higher education, and specialized healthcare delivery. The dedicated mobility provisions facilitate the temporary cross-border movement of business visitors, intra-corporate transferees, and contractual service suppliers for authorized periods ranging from ninety days to three years, completely liberated from restrictive numerical quotas or economic needs tests. The cultural economy also receives targeted support through a new annual allocation of one thousand eight hundred specialized visas for Indian chefs, yoga instructors, and creative artists.

The accompanying Double Contribution Convention yields highly tangible financial relief for the corporate services sector. By legally exempting temporary Indian professionals stationed in the United Kingdom from paying double social security contributions for a maximum duration of five years—the longest exemption period India has successfully secured in any bilateral trade negotiation—the convention dramatically reduces the operational cost structure for Indian tech conglomerates and professional service providers. Together, these unified mobility frameworks and the

social security exemptions establish a highly lucrative operational environment for India's globally dominant information technology sector, reinforcing the country's status as the world's premier destination for corporate Global Capability Centres.

Despite its unprecedented liberalization, the structural integrity of the agreement relies heavily on its defensive safeguards, designed to fully insulate vulnerable segments of the domestic economy. India has completely excluded highly sensitive agricultural and manufacturing sectors from any tariff concessions, maintaining full protection for domestic dairy, poultry, sugar, edible oils, apples, walnuts, gold bars, specific smartphone categories, and critical information technology hardware. These exclusions ensure that vulnerable rural communities and high-priority domestic production lines supported under the Production Linked Incentive programs remain fully protected from foreign displacement. By phasing nearly one-fifth of its total tariff concessions over a decade, India has successfully provided its domestic industrial base with an extended adjustment window while simultaneously granting local manufacturers structured access to high-quality, cost-effective industrial inputs.

The realization of the treaty's immense potential now depends heavily on the capacity of Indian exporters to successfully convert institutional market access into sustainable global market share. Industrial manufacturing hubs such as Tirupur, Surat, and Ludhiana, alongside leather manufacturing centers in Agra and marine processing zones across the coastline, now possess a decisive tariff advantage over long-standing regional competitors. However, the elimination of basic customs duties does not automatically guarantee commercial dominance, as Indian businesses must continue to rigorously comply with the United Kingdom's stringent technical regulations, product safety protocols, and complex labeling certifications. The explicit commitment by both sovereign governments to aggressively pursue comprehensive Mutual Recognition Agreements covering professional qualifications and laboratory testing standards will be critical to lowering compliance costs and ensuring long-term success.

The historical trajectory of this agreement underscores the reality that the treaty is fundamentally a triumph of highly sophisticated, patient diplomacy between two radically different economies operating at distinct stages of industrial development. The successful harmonization of separate regulatory frameworks, divergent domestic political priorities, and deeply entrenched socioeconomic sensitivities required extraordinary flexibility from both negotiating teams. The outcome demanded that India enter entirely new regulatory frontiers while safeguarding the policy space essential for its inclusive developmental mandates. Ultimately, the entry into force of this comprehensive trade agreement marks the beginning of a modern economic relationship, where the true measure of success will be determined by the capacity of businesses to create high-value jobs, expand real physical exports, and elevate India's position within the global value chain. (The writer can be reached at dipakkurmigpltd@gmail.com)

Building trust in science: Research integrity for India's R&D

By: Lakshmy Ramakrishnan

Trust forms the bedrock of all research findings and underpins any research inquiry. Expenditure on research and development (R&D) has increased globally since 2008, with a focus on innovation and global collaboration. However, as countries embark upon rigorous scientific studies, scientific competition becomes the norm, resulting in a 'publish or perish' culture that tends to emphasise the quantity of publications over their quality. While academic publications form part of the metrics for assessing research competency, the pressure to publish can compromise research quality and, at times, the credibility of the work. Good research practice rests on research integrity, which, in turn, instils trust and confidence in both the research process and its findings. An in-depth study using the Retraction Watch database found that India ranks third globally in retractions of life science publications. Retractions are only one visible indicator of weaknesses in a research integrity ecosystem. The broader challenge lies in ensuring that institutional practices, oversight, and research governance evolve alongside India's expanding R&D ecosystem.

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Foundations of Research Integrity

Research integrity encompasses the entire research endeavour, from idea generation to the conduct of research and its dissemination. The United Kingdom Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), an independent body established in 2006 to support good research practices and to assess allegations of questionable research conduct, identifies five key areas—honesty, transparency, accountability, respect, and rigour—as the hallmarks of research integrity. Honesty involves truthfulness in reporting the methods and procedures used, while transparency includes acknowledging potential competing interests and sharing all findings. Accountability requires creating an environment that empowers researchers and the organisations they work in to be accountable. Respect extends to respecting participants and animals involved in the research process, as well as ensuring the integrity of the scientific record, while rigour ensures that interpretations drawn from findings are consistent with established norms and standards of practice. The extent to which these tenets are upheld can be assessed through indicators of research quality, one of the most prominent of which is journal article retractions.

What Retractions Reveal

Retraction in academic publishing refers to the formal process by which a peer-reviewed article is withdrawn from the scientific record because its findings are no longer considered reliable, or the data is seriously flawed or erroneous. Retraction

is part of the research process, allowing researchers to correct the literature, serving as a means to preserve scientific integrity. Retractions typically occur when findings are unreliable—whether due to honest errors, inadvertent mistakes, research misconduct, redundant publication, or peer review fraud. Corrections to articles take different forms: an erratum is issued to address typographical errors, while a corrigendum enables authors to correct errors that affect a study's validity or reproducibility.

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Globally, retractions in academic publishing have dramatically increased, with a study showing that retraction rates in European biomedical science quadrupled between 2000 and 2021. Another study, carried out by Indian researchers using the publicly available Retraction Watch database—a website owned by CrossRef that collates retracted and corrected publications—found that of the 13,567 retractions in life sciences over 40 years, India's share was 5.03 percent, ranking third, after China and the United States (US).

The Drivers of Retraction

Retractions may be caused by honest errors, such as differences in the interpretation of results, the inappropriate use of a statistical test, or scientific disagreement, and do not constitute misconduct. Weaknesses in research integrity ecosystems become visible through patterns such as systematically high retraction rates, which may point to underlying shortcomings in research governance. This could range from scientific misconduct (intentional deviation from accepted scientific practices) to lapses in institutional oversight. Forms of scientific misconduct include fabrication or falsification of data, manipulation of images, and plagiarism.

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Other concerns, such as failures in reproducibility—the process by which researchers generate similar findings from replicate studies—undermine the credibility and reliability of research findings. Ethical breaches, such as conducting experiments without prior institutional ethics approval or informed consent, are also serious violations of the principles of research integrity. Accountability can also be compromised through authorship disputes, including the omission of key contributors, honorary authorship, or the inclusion of contributors without their consent. Editorial practices, too, can undermine research integrity—



through undisclosed conflicts of interest, peer review fraud, and compromised or 'friendly' peer review—all of which weaken confidence in the publication process.

Challenges to research integrity reflect systemic weaknesses in research culture, rather than solely isolated instances of individual misconduct. Studies have observed that retractions can centre around a network of authors, suggesting that data integrity issues can become rooted within tightly knit research groups. This demonstrates that while collaboration in scientific research is beneficial to the advancement of knowledge, it alone cannot guarantee ethical research practices, particularly in the absence of a strong culture of responsibility.

Research practices can also be shaped by institutional factors. In countries making sustained investments in R&D, for instance, institutions may closely link publication counts to recruitment, promotion, career progression, and funding. This pressure to 'publish or perish' may encourage unethical research practices and drive risky behaviour. Collectively, these patterns point to issues such as a lack of awareness of good research practices, inconsistent institutional oversight, and uneven compliance with research integrity norms.

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Emerging Risks in the Research Ecosystem

Emerging technologies pose additional challenges for research integrity. The use of artificial

intelligence (AI) in scientific research is poised to be transformative, increasing the accuracy and efficiency of research methodologies. Alongside this transformative potential, however, AI can also introduce new forms of research misconduct, such as data falsification or fabrication, and the generation of pseudo-original content—content falsely presented as having originated from genuine scientific research—using AI algorithms. Globally, the development of guidelines and standards for the use of AI in research is underway, intending to foster its responsible and ethical use.

More recently, the Fast and Fair peer review initiative—an experiment carried out by the journal *Biology Open*, in which reviewers were compensated for manuscript reviews—sparked debate over whether financial incentives could influence reviewer objectivity or lead to faster decision times in the peer review process.

Paper mills—commercial entities that produce large volumes of publications and engage in 'authorship for sale'—form another challenge to maintaining research integrity. More recently, the Fast and Fair peer review initiative—an experiment carried out by the journal *Biology Open*, in which reviewers were compensated for manuscript reviews—sparked debate over whether financial incentives could influence reviewer objectivity or lead to faster decision times in the peer review process. This demonstrates how research and publishing practices continue to evolve, requiring research integrity frameworks to adapt to preserve trust in the scientific process.

Strengthening Trust

Safeguarding the research process is essential to ensuring that findings remain credible and that

science continues to garner public trust. As India expands its R&D ecosystem, it needs to take cognisance of vulnerabilities in its research integrity ecosystem. Recent steps signal progress: the University Grants Commission (UGC) has recommended that higher education institutions in the country set up academic research integrity offices; the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) has announced steps to penalise universities for retractions; and the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) has recently mandated that Principal Investigators and Co-Principal Investigators applying for its Advanced Research Grant disclose any retractions from the past five years.

As India expands its R&D ecosystem, it needs to take cognisance of vulnerabilities in its research integrity ecosystem.

These measures can be complemented by additional reforms, such as the establishment of an autonomous national research integrity office to support institutions in developing research integrity policies and investigating serious allegations of misconduct. Research assessment systems should also reduce their emphasis on publication counts for institutional accreditation, funding decisions, and career progression, and instead introduce measures that reward researchers for factors such as research quality, reproducibility, and openness. A penalty-based or ranking-linked approach to retractions should distinguish between deliberate misconduct and the good-faith correction of honest errors, to ensure that researchers and institutions remain encouraged to uphold the integrity of the scientific process. Inculcating a culture of responsibility will also require integrating research integrity courses at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and providing training and capacity-building measures for researchers, publishing houses, and institutional ethics committees. Institutions should further strengthen the research integrity ecosystem by encouraging open science, fostering mentorship programmes that promote the adoption of good research practices, and developing measures to protect whistleblowers—whether through confidential reporting or mechanisms to guard against retaliation.

India is making strides in expanding its R&D ecosystem through significant investment, with a strong emphasis on frontier technologies and translational research. This must be accompanied by a parallel effort to strengthen its research integrity ecosystem by fostering a culture of responsibility. This can be achieved through stronger institutions, reforms to research assessment systems, and sustained capacity-building measures. Scientific progress cannot be measured through publication volume alone; it must also reflect the quality, reliability, and integrity of the knowledge produced. Only then can India ensure that as its R&D ecosystem grows, it is founded on trust and credibility—essential to its long-term ambitions in scientific advancement. (Courtesy: ORF)

Can Ozempic prevent cancer? A doctor explains why the headlines are easy to misread



By: Ziyad Al-Aly

In the weeks around the 2026 annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology, my phone kept buzzing with alerts about GLP-1 drugs and cancer. The headlines were everywhere—from NPR and The Washington Post to Substack and heated exchanges on social media—all circling the same claim: Ozempic might lower the risk of cancer.

Behind those headlines is a real wave of studies, involving millions of patients. I'm a physician and clinical epidemiologist, and my team and I design and interpret these same kinds of studies that test what widely used drugs actually do.

The excitement around the idea that GLP-1 drugs can prevent cancer is running well ahead of the evidence. Not wrong, necessarily. Just not yet earned.

Cancer is among the hardest things to study, because it is not one disease but more than a hundred. Breast cancer, lung cancer and blood cancers are not variations of the same disease; each has its own distinct biology and its own mix of genetic, environmental and behavioral risks.

A single drug never gets one verdict on how it affects cancer. It gets a hundred, raising the risk of some, lowering it for others and leaving most untouched.

Early cancer concerns

Before the current buzz that GLP-1 drugs could reduce cancer risk, the worry ran in the opposite direction: that they might raise

cancer risk.

Researchers were originally concerned about thyroid cancer. Studies in rodents found that Ozempic caused thyroid C cell tumors, which is why U.S. regulators added a black box warning in June 2026 to the drug that advises against its use among those with a personal or family history of related conditions.

But rodents are not people. Human thyroid C cells are less sensitive to GLP-1 drugs compared to rodent C cells because they have far fewer GLP-1 receptors. Long-term studies in monkeys did not show the same abnormal thyroid cell growth seen in rodents.

A 2025 analysis of data from 93 clinical trials found no clear link between taking certain GLP-1 drugs and thyroid cancer. European regulators reached the same conclusion in 2023 after reviewing available research on GLP-1s.

Pancreatic cancer was another concern. Here, too, researchers found no consistent increased risk from taking GLP-1 drugs in a 2025 analysis of data from 62 studies.

The reassurance is real but provisional. These drugs are young, and cancer can take decades to surface.

The cancer story turns on its head

GLP-1 drugs, once scrutinised for possibly causing cancer, are now being discussed as drugs that might prevent or even treat cancer.

A 2024 study of more than 1.6 million people with Type 2 diabetes found lower rates of 10 out of 13 obesity-related cancers in people

treated with a GLP-1 drug compared to insulin.

A 2025 study of about 87,000 adults found that overall cancer rates among those who started a GLP-1 drug were roughly 17 per cent lower, with the clearest reductions in endometrial and ovarian cancers as well as a type of brain cancer called meningioma. The risk of kidney cancer was 38 per cent higher among patients taking GLP-1 drugs, though larger studies are needed to confirm its significance.

A 2026 study of more than 110,000 women undergoing breast imaging found a roughly 30 per cent lower risk of breast cancer among those who used GLP-1 drugs compared to those who do not.

Researchers are also studying how GLP-1 drugs affect a patient's chances of surviving cancer. Among more than 6,800 colon cancer patients in a 2024 study, around 16 per cent of the 103 on a GLP-1 drug died within five years compared to 37 per cent of those who were not taking one. A study presented at the 2026 American Society of Clinical Oncology reported a 34 per cent lower risk of death across six cancer types for those taking GLP-1 drugs.

Why the evidence is so easy to misread

While these findings are exciting, studies on the effects of GLP-1 drugs on cancer risk have three features that make them especially easy to misread.

The first is healthy user bias. People who start a GLP-1 drug tend to be healthier and wealthier than those who do not. A person

with obesity who has insurance, sees doctors regularly and can afford Ozempic is far more likely to start the drug than someone with the same height and weight who lacks those advantages.

Healthy user bias is very difficult to scrub out of observational studies, which compare people as they are treated in real life rather than assigning the drug at random. The very advantages that made it possible to receive a GLP-1 prescription, not the drug itself, may be what lowered a patient's cancer risk. The second is the choice of the comparison drug. To understand the effect of a drug, it has to be measured against something else. What it's measured against will shape the results of the study.

The 2024 study reported that patients taking GLP-1 drugs saw large reductions in cancer risk compared to those taking insulin. But comparing patients on GLP-1 drugs with patients taking the diabetes drug metformin showed no clear reduction in cancer risk.

Insulin is reserved for patients with more advanced diabetes, a condition that is itself a risk factor for cancer. In these studies, patients on insulin start out with a higher risk of cancer. Measured against a group at higher risk of developing cancer, almost anything can look protective. The apparent benefit came from the comparison drug, not the GLP-1 drug.

The third is timing. It is not so much another source of bias as a clue that other biases may be at work. Cancer can take decades to develop, yet most GLP-1 studies follow people for only a handful of years. In some studies, the apparent cancer benefits of GLP-1 drugs show almost immediately. But prevention doesn't work that quickly. A drug that truly lowered the risk of developing cancer would show its effect gradually as fewer tumors surface over time, not within the first few months of taking a drug.

When cancer risk appears to drop almost as soon as a patient starts treatment, the speed is not a magical triumph of GLP-1 drugs. Rather, in my view, it is the tell: People who start these drugs were already at lower cancer risk, and the GLP-1 drugs are getting credit for that preexisting advantage.

Moreover, almost all of this research comes from a handful of high-income countries, even as uptake of these drugs is increasing

globally and the burden of cancer has disproportionately grown in lower-income countries. The idea that GLP-1s may reduce cancer risk for much of the world is being inferred from data generated almost entirely in a few rich ones.

What do randomised trials show?

The cleanest way around these study biases is randomised trials, which by design make comparison groups alike from the start.

Available clinical trials tell a quieter story than the headlines. Two 2025 meta-analyses, which pool data from multiple studies—one covering 50 trials and a second covering 48—found little evidence that GLP-1 drugs either raise or lower cancer risk.

The findings of these meta-analyses are generally more reliable than those of observational studies because their total amount of data increases their statistical power. Despite their strengths, these analyses inherit the limitations of the trials they include. Most of the trials in these 2025 studies had a short follow-up of a year or two and recorded too few cancer cases to settle the question.

Randomised clinical trials designed to answer the question of whether GLP-1 drugs affect cancer risk would need to enroll tens of thousands of people and follow them for many years. Short of that, the next best evidence will come from observational studies designed to emulate randomised trials. Until then, the idea that GLP-1 drugs lower cancer risk is a hypothesis worth testing but not a conclusion to act on.

The bottom line

Based on the available evidence, the clearest conclusion is the reassuring one: GLP-1 drugs do not appear to raise overall cancer risk. However, more ambitious claims that GLP-1s actively prevent cancer or improve survival after diagnosis remain unproven.

Suppose GLP-1s do have an effect on cancer risk. Researchers still would not know where that effect comes from: Weight loss itself, broader improvement in metabolic function, or a more direct effect on inflammation, the immune system or tumors.

The surest thing I can say is also the least satisfying: It's still too early. These drugs are far younger than the cancers they are being credited with preventing. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

The case of the missing Egg from the mid-day meal



By: Samra Maimoon Usmani

There are many ways to understand a society—through its languages, festivals, literature, music, and perhaps most revealingly, through its food. Food is never merely food. It carries memories, identities, histories, and power structures. In Bengal, the humble egg served in a mid-day meal is not just a source of protein; it represents a long-standing relationship with diversity, choice, and a culture that has rarely been afraid of complexity.

Therefore, when an egg disappears from a child's plate, the issue is not limited to nutrition. It becomes a political question: who decides what a child should eat, and whose cultural imagination is being placed above others?

The debate around introducing vegetarian meals through organisations such as ISKCON enters this larger conversation about culture, ideology, and social control. Food choices, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argued through the idea of symbolic power, are often shaped by dominant groups that define what is considered "pure," "appropriate," or "superior." A plate of food can quietly become a battlefield of identity.

From the perspective of Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony, power does not always operate through direct force; it often works by making certain ideas appear natural and unquestionable. A child eating an egg may appear like a simple dietary choice, but repeated attempts to redefine what is acceptable food can influence larger ideas of morality, tradition, and belonging.

The irony, of course, is almost too obvious to ignore. For decades, India actively encouraged egg consumption through the famous "Roz

Khao Ande" campaign of the 1980s, with the unforgettable message "Sunday ho ya Monday, roz khao ande." Led by the National Egg Coordination Committee under Dr. B.V. Rao, the campaign was not simply clever advertising—it was a public health initiative promoting eggs as an affordable source of protein while supporting millions of poultry farmers. The campaign even adapted with changing times, bringing in celebrities like Kareena Kapoor Khan to keep the message relevant for younger audiences. Its success was reflected in the rise of per capita egg consumption from around 18 eggs annually in 1982 to nearly 38 eggs by 2002.

And yet, decades later, the same egg that was once celebrated as a weapon against malnutrition has suddenly become a subject of ideological negotiation. A food item that was promoted through science and public policy is now being examined through the lens of culture and politics. Perhaps the egg has gained a new identity—it is no longer just a source of nutrition; it has become a symbol of a much larger debate.

Bengal's history has always been shaped by plurality—of tastes, traditions, and ideas. The concern is not about one meal being vegetarian or non-vegetarian; it is about whether diversity itself is slowly being replaced by a single approved version of culture.

So, the question remains: when an egg disappears from a child's plate, are we only losing a nutritional item, or are we also losing the freedom to choose? Because sometimes, a missing egg is not just about an egg. Sometimes, it is about who gets to decide what or who belongs on the table. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

US strikes Iran's Revolutionary Guard over attack that killed troops in Jordan

Iran has provided no overall information on its losses in the American campaign

DUBAI, July 19: The US military launched airstrikes Sunday targeting Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard to retaliate for the killing of American troops in Jordan, further widening crossfire between the nations as an interim deal seeking an end to their war has collapsed.

The strikes are part of a week-long campaign that began with a struggle over control of the Strait of Hormuz and has seen Iran strike US-allied countries across the Middle East. The US has targeted bridges, electrical facilities and other targets in Iran, and Tehran has retaliated by hitting power and desalination plants in Kuwait, threatening daily life in that small, oil-rich desert nation. Iran also has stepped up its threats to further expand the strikes, drawing a warning overnight from the United Arab Emirates.

Kuwait again activated air defenses Sunday morning as its military warned of incoming Iranian drones and missiles. The US military's Central Command in its statement also said it hit "Iranian military coastal surveillance and



air defense facilities, maritime capabilities and missile and drone storage sites." It also said for the first time it specifically targeting the Guard, a key power base in Iran's theocracy that controls its ballistic missile arsenal.

Footage released by the US military appeared to show strikes carried out by fighter jets and by Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from the sea. One target site appeared to be in a valley of a mountainous region. The Guard often has missile bases and other military equipment tucked into mountain ranges.

Iran has provided no overall information on its materiel losses in the American campaign, which is

now in its eighth day as the nations vie over control of the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which a fifth of all oil and natural gas traded passes in peacetime.

An Iranian attack on a base in Jordan killed two American service members, left one missing and four requiring hospitalisation, the US military said. Since the war began, 16 US service members have been killed and over 430 wounded.

Iranian authorities said Saturday that at least 50 people have been killed and more than 500 wounded in the latest US strikes.

Nearly every Gulf Arab state has been targeted by Iran for retaliation

strikes, with a missile alert sounding Saturday in Saudi Arabia. However, the United Arab Emirates has yet to be targeted.

The semiofficial Iranian news agency Fars, believed to be close to the Guard, issued a threat against the UAE on Saturday. Quoting an anonymous official, Fars said that continued strikes on Iranian civilian infrastructure would mean that the "airports of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, as well as the ports of Fujairah and Jebel Ali, must be immediately evacuated."

Apparently responding to the threat, the Emirates' Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling "for exercising the utmost restraint in order to avoid dangerous repercussions and the region being pulled into new levels of violence and instability."

"The UAE emphasized that the targeting of civilian infrastructure and civilian facilities in the region ... constitute a flagrant and grave violation of the established principles and provisions of international law, and cannot, under any circumstances, be accepted or justified," the statement added. (AP)

Rescuers in China search rubble for survivors of landslide that killed 8, left 34 missing

CHONGQING(CHINA), July 19: Rescue crews used excavators on Sunday to comb through the rubble in search of survivors from a landslide in the southwestern Chinese city of Chongqing that killed at least eight people and left another 34 missing.

Massive amounts of rocks and soil roared down a slope and buried more than 10 residential buildings early Friday in Pengshui County on the outskirts of Chongqing.

On Sunday morning, about nine rescuers were seen carrying a sealed orange bag from the scene. It was not immediately clear if a victim had been pulled out.

State broadcaster CCTV reported that all the residents staying in 21 buildings in the potential impact zone had been evacuated. Authorities carried out the evacuations from buildings on slopes and in low-lying areas within a kilometer radius of the disaster site, relocating over 1,100 people, Chongqing authorities said in a WeChat post published Sunday.

Authorities said one of 10 survivors was discharged from the hospital while the other nine were



in stable condition. Eight people pulled from the rubble had died.

On Saturday, rescue crews aided by dogs and detectors found signs of life, confirming that at least one survivor was still trapped beneath the rubble. But authorities said the crews needed to carefully map out a rescue plan since a reckless excavation could risk triggering a secondary collapse, especially with the boulders at the scene.

The landslide contained about 18,000 cubic metres (635,500 cubic feet) of rocks and debris, with one boulder being around

3,000 cubic metres (106,000 cubic feet), Wang Chuanjun, head of Planning and Natural Resources in Pengshui County, told reporters Friday.

More than 120 experts were deployed to the scene to help with the operation. The rain-triggered landslide occurred near a stretch of the Wujiang River that cuts through karst mountains peppered with small towns and terraces.

Pengshui County is located in the southeast part of Chongqing, bordering the provinces of Hubei and Guizhou. (AP)

Ukrainian drones hit warehouses, killing 9 and wounding over 80



MOSCOW, July 19: Ukrainian drones struck two sprawling warehouses, one of them just east of Moscow, as part of attacks overnight and on Saturday afternoon that killed nine people and wounded more than 80, Russian officials said.

Kyiv's forces have pressed their relentless aerial campaign against energy infrastructure and military targets inside Russia, aiming to undermine Moscow's war effort and make Russians feel the consequences of the Kremlin's all-out invasion of Ukraine that is well into its fifth year.

Two sprawling warehouses of Russia's major online retailer, Wildberries, were hit by Ukrainian drones overnight, according to Russian officials — one in the town of Kotovsk in the Tambov region, some 360 kilometers (220 miles) from the border with Ukraine, and another in the city of Elektrostal, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) east of Moscow.

A Ukrainian drone also hit an oil depot in the city of Noginsk, just north of Elektrostal, sparking a fire and prompting evacuations of a nearby maternity hospital and a residential building, according to the governor of the Moscow region, Andrei Vorobyov. Drone debris also hit a kindergarten building, Vorobyov said, sparking a fire that has since been put out.

Seven night shift workers were killed at the warehouse in Kotovsk and 25 others were wounded, Tambov regional Gov. Yevgeny Pervyshov said. A total of 61 people were wounded in the Moscow region, Vorobyov said: 20 sought outpatient care, while 40 others were hospitalized. One person died of their injuries, he said.

One more person was killed and another wounded in a Ukrainian drone attack on Russia's Belgorod region on Saturday afternoon, according to local authorities.

Both warehouses caught fire, Wildberries founder Tatyana Kim said, and the blaze in Kotovsk was put out. Images and footage released by Russian online outlets showed a fire raging at the Elektrostal facility, with massive plumes of smoke towering over it.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a Telegram post on Saturday that Ukrainian long-range strikes hit two "significant logistical facilities in the Moscow and Tambov regions."

"These facilities were used by the aggressor to supply sanctioned components for the production of drones and navigation equipment," he wrote. An oil facility was also hit, he said. In the city of Vladimir, some 180 kilometers (110 miles) east of Moscow, a Ukrainian drone hit a residential building, sparking a brief fire, Vladimir Gov. Alexander Avdeyev said. There were no casualties, he added.

Ukrainian special operations also conducted strikes against targets in the Sea of Azov and in occupied territory, Zelenskyy said.

Ukraine's General Staff said in a statement on Saturday that the fuel depot in Noginsk that was targeted overnight supplied the Russian armed forces. It also reported hitting two tankers, two floating cranes and a tugboat in the Black and Azov seas, saying the vessels were used to transport oil, fuel and military cargo.

Separately, the military said it struck a Project 10410 Svetlyak-class patrol ship in Kerch, describing it as the second vessel of that class hit in two days, as well as a railway bridge over the Bila River near Sabivka in the occupied Luhansk region that it said Russia uses for military logistics. (AP)

Afghanistan-Pakistan transit trade plunges to USD 367 million

ISLAMABAD, July 19: Afghanistan-Pakistan transit trade plunged to USD 367 million in the outgoing fiscal year from USD 5 billion in 2021, according to a media report.

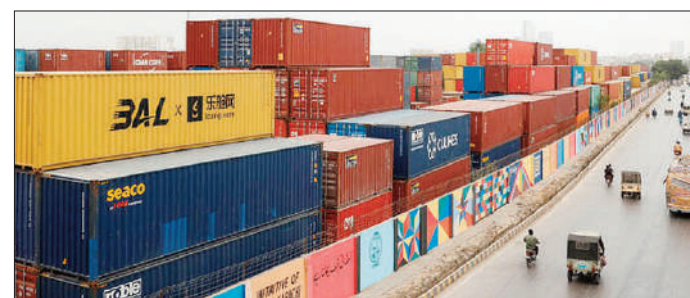
The transit trade between the two countries has suffered one of its steepest declines, plummeting to just 11,592 containers worth USD 367 million in FY-26, the Dawn reported on Sunday.

The trade declined from nearly 89,000 containers valued at USD 5 billion before the Taliban returned to power in 2021, as Kabul's growing reliance on Iranian routes increased in recent years, the report said.

Pakistan closed its border with Afghanistan in October 2025 over security concerns, which impacted the transit trade to some extent.

However, the data shows that transit trade had begun losing momentum well before Islamabad implemented restrictions, the report said.

Container traffic increased from about 60,500 containers in FY-17 to nearly 89,000 containers in FY-21, immediately before the Taliban returned to power.



The growth between FY-17 and FY-21 occurred despite strained political relations between Pakistan and the former Afghan government led by Ashraf Ghani.

Kabul continued to rely on Pakistani ports as its primary gateway for international trade and did not discourage importers from using them. One reason may have been to help Afghan businesses import essential goods at lower transport costs and limit inflationary pressure in a highly import-dependent economy, according to Dawn.

Following the Taliban's return to power, transit cargo via Pakistan initially recovered, with container traffic reaching 1,02,886 and cargo valued at USD 6.7 billion in FY-23.

However, the transit volumes fell to 54,114 containers in FY-24 and 42,959 containers worth USD 1.36 billion in FY25, well before Pakistan closed the border in October 2025.

According to trade analysts, the border closure did not initiate Kabul's search for alternative trade routes. Rather, it marked the culmination of a strategy the Afghan Taliban had already begun to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistani ports, report said.

This diversion reduced Pakistan's leverage but carried economic costs for Afghanistan.

The higher transport and logistics costs are ultimately passed on to consumers, adding to inflationary pressure. (PTI)

Tanzanian-flagged tanker from Yemen hijacked by suspected Somali pirates

MOGADISHU (SOMALIA), July 19: A Tanzanian-flagged tanker was hijacked by suspected Somali pirates off Yemen's coast, security sources and local officials familiar with the incident said on Sunday.

The commercial tanker has since been moved to waters off Somalia's northeastern Bari region, according to local officials. The MT ASANA, a general tanker, was seized on Friday after departing from Mukalla, Yemen, according to the sources. The vessel is now being held off the coast of Caluula in the semiautonomous state of Puntland's Bari region.

According to sources who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to discuss the incident publicly, the ship was hijacked by seven armed Somali pirates. Public vessel-tracking data reviewed by The Associated Press showed the MT ASANA transmitting its position on Friday as it moved slowly in the Gulf of Aden, listing Bosaso, Somalia, as its destination. The vessel was travelling at about 2 knots, an unusually slow speed consistent with earlier reports that it had transmitted a distress signal during the incident.

It was not immediately clear how many crew members were aboard the tanker or whether anyone had been injured. There was no immediate information on the nationality of the crew. Puntland authorities have not publicly commented on the reported hijacking, and there was no immediate statement from the vessel's owner or manager. International naval forces operating in the region have also not issued an immediate public update. (AP)

India ties expected to stay the course with Andy Burnham as new UK PM

LONDON, July 19: Strategic experts forecast that the strength of the India-UK partnership will stay the course under incoming British prime minister Andy Burnham, who clinched the Labour Party leadership in the same week as the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) entered into force. Burnham, 56, was elected unopposed on Friday and will take over from Keir Starmer at Downing Street on Monday after the formal choreography of the handover of power is completed. While much is expected to change, given the former mayor of Greater Manchester's pledge to do things differently, the one major constant in terms of foreign policy is expected on the India front.

"Over this past year, we have valued close engagement with the Greater Manchester authorities, particularly Mr Andy Burnham, whose energy and warm support has done much to strengthen India-North-England ties," Vishakh Yaduvanshi, the Consul General of India in Manchester, told PTI. As the first head of India's new



diplomatic mission in the UK, Yaduvanshi views the Consulate's opening in March last year as a "landmark moment" that spotlights the tremendous potential of the north of England — "its industries, academia and sporting ethos" — within the India-UK relationship.

"His [Burnham's] 2019 visit to India, meeting with the former Indian high commissioner [Vikram Doraiswami] in December 2025, and his virtual participation in the India-North England Opportunity Summit [March 2026] reflect a longstanding commitment to this partnership," she said. Burnham has spoken of "fond memories" from the visit that took in Mum-

bai, Bengaluru and Delhi seven years ago, coordinated by the Manchester India Partnership (MIP) — an organisation set up for businesses and universities to engage with India.

"India is a key market in Greater Manchester's internationalisation strategy as it presents significant opportunities to the city-region, but these opportunities are mutual, and Greater Manchester is also helping India with its own economic growth plans," he said at the time. He highlighted "digital technology, engineering, advanced manufacturing, healthcare and academia" as well as "opportunities for tourism, sport and cultural collaboration" as some of the sectors of focus.

"Andy understands that growth comes from longer-term relationships. If you look at his own track record in Manchester, he's worked to strengthen links with India through businesses, universities, innovation and improving connectivity with a direct flight between India and Manchester," shared Rajesh Agrawal, chair of the Labour Friends of India (LFNI) diaspora group. (PTI)

Mali rebels ambush an army convoy, killing or capturing scores of soldiers

BAMAKO, July 19: Jihadi militants and a separatist group ambushed a Malian army convoy in the country's hard-hit north on Saturday, resulting in the killing or capture of scores of soldiers, the rebels said.

The Malian army confirmed the attack, saying in a statement that armed groups ambushed the convoy of Malian soldiers and their partners in a remote part of the northern Gao region. It did not give further details, only saying that "a counterattack is underway."

Both the regional al-Qaida affiliate JNIM and the separatist Azawad Liberation Front, or FLA, separately claimed responsibility for the attack as a joint operation in statements that spoke about "great human losses" and "serious material damage" on the side of the Malian army.

The groups said the convoy was made up of both the Malian army and Russia's Africa Corps, whose forces have been supporting Mali's



military on the ground.

It is the latest such partnership between the two groups that observers say poses great risks to Mali's stability and its ruling junta.

"There were many soldiers killed, others captured alive. Army cars including armoured cars were destroyed and others seized in good condition," said FLA spokesperson Mohamed El-maouloud Ramadan.

The military convoy was leaving the northern town of Anefis and headed to Gao city when it was ambushed in the Sahara

desert. The nature of the convoy wasn't immediately clear, although fuel tankers could be seen as part of it, suggesting it could be a Malian logistics convoy.

The rebels shared videos purportedly showing the soldiers lined up as they appear to be surrendering while surrounded by the militants and Malian military vehicles. In one of the videos, the rebels were seen opening fire on some soldiers lying on the ground. The soldiers were also seen being transported in vehicles belonging to the armed groups. (AP)

Hungary's president signs constitutional amendment ending his term

BUDAPEST, July 19: Hungary's president signed a constitutional amendment into law on Saturday that ends his term in office, bringing to a close a dispute between him and the country's new government that was seeking to oust him as part of a purge of officials appointed during the reign of Viktor Orbán.

Hungarian Prime Minister Péter Magyar, who defeated the long-serving Orbán in a blowout election in April, had repeatedly called on the Orbán-appointed president, Tamás Sulyok, to resign, arguing he had failed to live up to his role as president by neglecting to stand in the way of antidemocratic steps by Orbán's government.

When Sulyok refused, lawmakers with Magyar's pro-European, center-right Tiszta party passed a constitutional amendment this week that called for an immediate end to his term. Sulyok had five

days to sign the amendment into law, which he did on the final day before the deadline.

In a video posted to Facebook Saturday evening, Sulyok — whom Magyar had frequently referred to as Orbán's "puppet" — said that being made to sign the amendment was "lasting proof that the fundamental values of a free society, the rule of law, democracy, the principle of power-sharing, have been trampled on in the interest of power."

Sulyok's term will officially end at midnight on Monday, when speaker of Parliament, Agnes Forsthofer, will automatically assume his duties until lawmakers elect a new president, a task which has a 30-day deadline.

Since taking office in May, Magyar's administration has quickly gone to work dismantling what he calls Orbán's "mafia" by removing numerous political ap-



pointees and heads of institutions viewed as having facilitated Orbán's autocratic government.

The new government suspended the news service of Hungary's public television and radio — which Magyar has argued served as a "propaganda factory" for Orbán's party — and shuttered Hungary's Sovereignty Protection Office, an authority seen by Orbán's opponents as a tool for in-

timidating critics and silencing independent media.

The amendment which removed Sulyok also made some judicial reforms, set up an office aimed at investigating financial abuses under the Orbán government, and imposed a 12-year term limit on lawmakers. In a Facebook post on Saturday, Orbán responded to Sulyok's signing of the amendment by writing that "tyranny is no longer a threat, but a reality."

"If this could be done to the president of the republic, then tomorrow no one will be safe," Orbán wrote.

But in a video statement on Facebook on Saturday, Magyar said that by passing the amendment, "we have fulfilled several of our important commitments and returned what the Orbán regime tried to take away from the Hungarian people for many years." (AP)

Kerala Health Minister bars political activities in hospitals; CPI(M), BJP object



PATHANAMTHITTA (KERALA), July 19: Kerala Health Minister K. Muraleedharan on Sunday said political activities, including the distribution of free food under party banners, would not be allowed inside government hospitals, triggering sharp reactions from the CPI(M) and the BJP.

The minister said the UDF government's policy was to ensure that free food for patients and their attenders was distributed only through community kitchens to be set up in government hospitals.

"The authority inside hospitals rests with the Health Department, not with any political organisation. They can distribute food outside the hospital premises if they want, but inside, the government has the responsibility," Muraleedharan told reporters here. He said no political party or organisation would be allowed to carry out activities inside hospital premises and that food should not be distributed under party banners or flags.

"If organisations want to help, they can contribute to the commu-

nity kitchens," he said, adding that the scheme would be launched first in Alappuzha before being expanded to other government hospitals after consultations with voluntary organisations.

The minister's remarks drew criticism from the opposition CPI(M) as well as the BJP.

Former minister P. Rajeev said preventing the distribution of free food in hospitals in the name of politics would prove counterproductive for the government.

CPI(M) MLA P. A. Mohammed Riyas urged the minister to shed his "ego" over the issue and hold discussions with youth organisations, including the DYFI, to evolve a consensus. He said providing food to people while following all norms was a humanitarian initiative and questioned why it was being viewed with hostility.

CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP A. A. Rahim also criticised the move, saying no humane person could oppose the distribution of free food, and asserted that the DYFI would continue the initiative. (PTI)

J-K: Flash floods, landslides wreak havoc in Poonch-Rajouri belt; 11 dead, several missing

JAMMU, July 19: At least 11 people were killed and seven others went missing as torrential rains triggered landslides and flash floods in the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday, prompting a multi-agency rescue operation.

The worst devastation was reported from Surankote tehsil in Poonch district, where most of the fatalities occurred, while rescue teams raced against time to trace the missing amid continuing rain and damaged roads, the officials said.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who was in Delhi for the proposed statehood protest, decided to cut short his stay in the national capital and return to Jammu in the afternoon in view of the worsening situation across parts of the division following heavy rains.

Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha reviewed the situation in the rain and flash flood-hit districts and directed officials to ensure im-



mediate relief and assistance to the affected families.

A landslide triggered by torrential rains struck a house in Lower Murrah village of Surankote early Sunday, burying all eight occupants under the debris, the officials said.

While bodies of five persons, including a two-year-old boy Sofian Yasar were retrieved from the debris, a search operation was continuing to trace the remaining missing persons, the officials said.

Four members of another family were reported missing after their house was washed away by flash floods at Sangla village, they said, adding the missing persons include Abdul Hameed, his wife Sharifa Begum, daughter Areeba and sister Manira Begum.

A 28-year-old woman, Nazia Kousar, was killed when her house collapsed in Noonabandi village. Her husband, Mohd Hafiz, and three children, aged between two and six years, were rescued with

injuries and shifted to a hospital, officials said.

Shahzaib Ahmad (22) lost his life when his house collapsed at Sanglani-Surankote, while a minor girl identified as Iram drowned in a stream at Marhote. An unidentified body of a woman was also fished out from a stream near Dhundak Lathoong bridge, officials said.

One person was killed and another critically injured following collapse of nearly half-a-dozen houses in Haveli tehsil of Poonch district, the officials said.

They said body of a woman was also fished out from a river in Rajouri town which was hit by flash floods following incessant overnight rainfall, forcing hundreds of residents to move to safer locations as floodwaters inundated low-lying areas.

Dozens of vehicles were swept away or submerged after overflowing rivers breached their banks, causing widespread disruption, the officials said. (PTI)

Sonam Wangchuk's wife moves Delhi HC to shift activist from Safdarjung Hospital

NEW DELHI, July 19: The Delhi High Court on Sunday agreed to hear on an urgent basis a petition by activist Sonam Wangchuk's wife seeking permission to shift him from Safdarjung Hospital to a private facility.

The petition by Gitanjali J. Angmo is expected to be heard by Justice Mini Pushkarna at 2:30 pm.

Earlier, Angmo has said she has "lost faith" in Safdarjung hospital and wants to move the activist to a private facility of her choice before his health further deteriorates.

Angmo, in her petition before the high court, said despite repeated requests, the Safdarjung authorities disclosed "only selective information" to her, and their refusal to let Wangchuk shift to another hospital has prevented an "independent verification of his medical condition".

Expressing "dire concern" over her husband's health, Angmo said she is "aggrieved by the clandestine and completely opaque nature" of the medical intervention, despite Wangchuk's vital parameters being stable when he was re-

moved from the protest site.

She added that the high court's July 16 order to authorities to monitor Wangchuk's health and medically intervene, if necessary, was passed ex-parte, and that the police forcibly removed the fasting activist from Jantar Mantar on Saturday by taking "colourable advantage" of the direction in the absence of any medical emergency.

"There existed no medical emergency or other circumstance warranting such abrupt and coercive intervention. The forcible removal was neither medically necessitated nor legally justified and constitutes a manifest infringement of Shri Sonam Wangchuk's fundamental rights," the petition filed through lawyers Bahuli Sharma, Susan Maria Mathew, Ridhi Arora, Suryaansh Kishan Razdan and Yoshit Jain states.

The plea also alleged that there is a "discrepancy" in Wangchuk's potassium levels in the test done by Safdarjung and by "an independent agency at the behest of the Petitioner". (PTI)

Murmu embarks on 3-nation Europe tour to deepen ties



NEW DELHI, July 19: President Droupadi Murmu on Sunday embarked on state visits to Moldova, North Macedonia, and Romania to deepen India's ties with the three European countries across a range of sectors, including trade and technology, and to boost people-to-people ties.

The first leg of her tour begins with a visit to Moldova on Monday, marking the first-ever visit by an Indian President to the Eastern European nation.

Shortly after her departure, the Rashtrapati Bhavan posted a message on X, saying, "President Droupadi Murmu embarks on state visits to the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia and Romania."

"This is the first-ever visit by an Indian President to Moldova and North Macedonia. The visit to Romania by the President of India is taking place after a gap of over three decades," it said.

Murmu will hold delegation-level talks with Moldovan President Maia Sandu and meet the President of the Parliament, Igor Grosu. She is also scheduled to interact with members of the Moldova-India Parliamentary Friendship Group, address a Business Forum, and meet with members of the Indian community. According to a statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday, India and Moldova enjoy warm and friendly relations and Murmu's visit would mark a significant and historical milestone and elevate bilateral ties to a broad-based partnership.

"There is good scope for mutually beneficial cooperation in the areas of agriculture, healthcare and pharmaceuticals, IT and education," it said.

At the invitation of the President Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, Murmu will visit North Macedonia from July 21 to 22, becoming the first Indian president to travel to the country.

Murmu will hold bilateral talks with President Siljanovska-Davkova, meet Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski, the President of the Assembly and also address the Assembly of North Macedonia. (PTI)

Govt defends invitation to rebel TMC MPs for all-party meet

NEW DELHI, July 19: After protests by the opposition, the government on Sunday defended the invitation extended to rebel TMC MPs, who had joined little-known NCPI, to an all-party meet, saying they cannot be ignored as they have petitioned the Lok Sabha Speaker for recognition and separate seats.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju also said that the people of the country want smooth functioning of Parliament and "not any turmoil" in the House, while urging all parties to "give their positive support to bills".

He was speaking after the all-party meeting convened ahead of the Monsoon session.

As many as 20 out of 28 TMC MPs have revolted against the party leadership following its defeat in assembly elections in West Bengal and joined the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI). Rebel TMC MPs Sudip Bandyopadhyay and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar attended the all-party meeting, drawing protests from the opposition parties, which staged a symbolic walk-out. The opposition later returned to participate in the meeting.

"The NCPI requested recognition from the Lok Sabha Speaker; how can you ignore them? It is the government's duty to invite everyone," Rijiju told reporters.

Rijiju said the government has listed eight bills for the Monsoon Session, and if there is additional business, it will follow necessary procedures. He said in the past, protests by the opposition led to disruptions in the House, harming the interests of the country and its people. (PTI)

'Over 4,000 killed in human-animal conflict': UP CM



LUCKNOW, July 19: Asserting that Uttar Pradesh is the first state to declare human-animal conflict a disaster, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Sunday called for raising public awareness and also pressed the need for leveraging technology to minimise the loss of lives.

The chief minister also said that over 4,000 people have lost their lives in human-animal conflict, while more than 5,000 others died in natural disasters.

Yogi Adityanath was speaking at the inauguration of the new headquarters building of the Uttar

Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority in Lucknow.

Referring to the recent death of a 12-year-old boy in a crocodile attack in Bahraich district, Adityanath said, "Barely two days ago, near Bahraich, a crocodile completely swallowed a 12-year-old boy. If we had exercised a little caution... After all, people already know which areas are prone to crocodile attacks. It's not as if crocodiles travel vast distances. They generally stay within a range of just 3 to 5 kilometres throughout their lives."

On Thursday evening, Sunil

(12), a resident of Tikuri village in Bahraich, went to the banks of the Ghaghara river to relieve himself after helping his uncle, Vijay Raj Singh, with paddy sowing in the fields. Later, a crocodile emerged from the river and attacked him.

Speaking about leopards rescued in Bijnor, Adityanath said, "A day before yesterday, I was in Bijnor. We have rescued 80 leopards in Bijnor in the past two years. I asked how so many leopards ended up here on a large scale. They (officials) explained that their numbers have increased and, secondly, they are commonly found in the sugarcane belt. People have even started calling them 'sugar leopards'. Now, if a person isn't aware of this, he could easily fall prey to one."

"If we can raise public awareness by identifying the nature of the threat and the areas at risk, we can prevent the loss of human lives on a massive scale," Adityanath added.

The chief minister also emphasised the use of technology to prevent loss of life from lightning strikes. (PTI)

Shah inaugurates India's first immersive language museum in Kolkata

KOLKATA, July 19: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday inaugurated the Museum of Word at the National Library campus here and said a country's language carries its heritage and offers a window into its culture. Developed by the National Library under the aegis of the Union Culture Ministry, India's first immersive language museum, also known as Shabdlok, celebrates the country's rich linguistic heritage and showcases the evolution of its oral and written traditions through interactive and technology-driven exhibits.

Addressing the gathering, Shah said that besides learning one's mother tongue, every student should also learn at least another Indian language to better appreciate the country's cultural diversity.

"Our language carries our heritage, and through languages you can understand a country's culture," he said. The home minister also stressed the importance of libraries in nation-building, saying the country's future does not depend only on the number of students in colleges and universities, but also on how many people make use of libraries. Referring to Bengal's intellectual legacy, Shah said the state had produced some of the country's greatest litterateurs, scientists, revolutionaries and scholars, and expressed confidence that it would once again emerge as a guiding force for the nation.

"I have been closely monitoring West Bengal for the last nine months, and it is becoming the 'prakash stambh' (guiding light) of the country," he said.

Praising the BJP government in the state, Shah said he was confident that the vision of a "Sonar Bangla" (golden Bengal) would be realised under the leadership of Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari. (PTI)

'Prohibiting polygamy, nikah halala, and registration of live-in relationships'

BHOPAL, July 19: The Madhya Pradesh cabinet on Sunday approved the draft Uniform Civil Code bill, paving the way for a common civil law that criminalises triple talaq and 'nikah halala', prohibits polygamy, and proposes three-month imprisonment if live-in relationships are not registered within a month. The bill will be introduced during the monsoon session of the assembly beginning Monday. It also proposes equal legal rights for children born to married parents, whether biological, adopted, or born through surrogacy or ART, equal inheritance rights to all children regardless of their marital status, while exempting Scheduled Tribes from the bill's scope.

Under the proposed legislation, children born out of live-in relationships will be granted legal status, and if the male partner abandons the female partner, she can claim maintenance (alimony) through the competent court, just like a legal wife.

It also mandates the registration of marriages and divorces for all faiths, barring tribal communities. After the cabinet approved the bill during a special meeting held at Jagdishpur, (previously Islam Nagar), near Bhopal, CM Mohan Yadav said the state will now have a uniform law for everyone, including "Ram and Rahim".

Notably, the state government in 2023 changed the name of Bhopal's Islam Nagar



village to Jagdishpur.

Yadav said, in deference to Constitutional safeguards, the bill would not apply to Scheduled Tribes covered under Articles 342 and 366 (Clause 25) of the Constitution. The proposed law makes it mandatory for couples in a live-in relationship to submit a "Statement of Live-in Relationship" to the Registrar within one month of commencing cohabitation.

Partners must be at least 18 years of age. They must not fall under prohibited categories, should not be previously married, and their consent must be voluntary, it said.

The bill prescribes imprisonment up to three months or a ₹ 10,000 fine for living together for more than a month without registration, three months' jail and a fine of ₹ 25,000 for providing false information, and up to six months' imprisonment and a fine of ₹ 25,000 for failing to provide a statement despite notice from the Registrar. (PTI)

Asia largest marble waste dumping yard in Rajasthan's Kishangarh- a pollution hotspot: Study

NEW DELHI, July 19: Asia's largest marble waste dumping yard in Rajasthan's Kishangarh, which has become a popular tourist destination, is a pollution hotspot with PM 2.5 concentrations 4-12 times higher than CPCB limits and 20-50 times higher than WHO recommendations, a new research has found.

The research, which is the first study documenting the hazardous effects of the pristine looking dumpyard, has been conducted by researchers at Central University of Rajasthan. The study titled "Industrial pollution to environmental degradation and human health: Evidence from the marble industries in Kishangarh, India" has been published in the prestigious "Journal of Hazardous Materials Advances".

According to Laxmi Kant Sharma, Environmental Science professor at Central University of Rajasthan, who led the research, this is the first study conducted in a 15 km buffer around the marble



waste dumping yard to assess irrigated and rain-fed agricultural soil, groundwater, and air quality, evaluate pollutant concentration by using Atomic Absorption Spectroscopy (AAS), and determine the mineralogical signature of contamination by X-ray diffraction (XRD) analysis.

The findings suggest that marble dust exposure may be associated with environmental degradation and self-reported health symptoms, underscoring the importance of environmental monitoring, reg-

ulatory oversight, and public health interventions.

"PM 2.5 concentrations were 4-12 times higher than CPCB limits and 20-50 times higher than WHO recommendations. These results indicate chronic exposure to respirable dust particles in areas surrounding marble processing facilities. The extreme values coincided with peak industrial activity and strong surface winds, suggesting that resuspension of marble dust is a critical source," Sharma told PTI.

"The link to health outcomes is evident that 53 pc of residents and 70 pc of marble workers reported breathing difficulties, while 56 pc to 84 pc reported throat-related issues," he added.

The study found that the pollution findings are consistent with the high prevalence of skin disease and respiratory problems reported in the health survey, both of which are commonly associated with heavy metal exposure and inhalation of contaminated dust.

"XRD analysis of soil results support mineralogical evidence that marble waste disposal can be a contributor to heavy metal enrichment in nearby soils, with contamination intensity diminishing as distance from the source increases," Sharma said.

The dumping site, where over 700 tankers carrying around 22 lakh litres of marble slurry are emptied every day, attracts at least 5,000 visitors on a daily basis, with the footfall going up to 20,000 on weekends and holidays. (PTI)

Technology that succeeds in India can succeed anywhere in world: BITS VC

NEW DELHI, July 19: Technology that succeeds under Indian conditions can often succeed anywhere in the world, but the challenge is that deep technology does not run on normal startup timelines, according to BITS Group Vice Chancellor Ramgopal Rao.

In an interview with PTI, the renowned academician said India cannot become a global innovation hub merely by building more companies around technologies developed elsewhere.

"We must build companies around science and intellectual property created in our own universities. India has two enormous advantages: talent and problems at scale. Both can become the basis for globally important companies," Rao said.

He said India needs homegrown solutions in semiconductors, healthcare, agriculture, space, energy, water, advanced materials, artificial intelligence, defence and manufacturing.

"A technology that succeeds



under Indian conditions can often succeed anywhere in the world. The difficulty is that deep technology does not run on normal startup timelines," he told PTI.

Rao explained that while a software product can be developed or improved in weeks, a medical device, semiconductor technology or new material may require years of research, repeated testing, certification and substantial capital before the first customer arrives.

"The weak link is often not the idea or even the prototype. It is the

long middle between a laboratory result and a dependable product. Industry and government must be willing to provide test beds and become early customers. For a deep technology startup, the first serious customer is often more valuable than the first investor," he said.

Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS), Pilani, has emerged as the leading undergraduate institution represented in the Avendus Wealth-Hurun India U30 List 2026, with 11 alumni founders getting featured this year. (PTI)

Kylian Mbappe passes Lionel Messi for career World Cup scoring record with 22 goals

MIAMI GARDENS, July 19: Kylian Mbappé made history at the World Cup on Saturday. He would have preferred a different outcome.

The France star moved past Argentina's Lionel Messi for the career World Cup scoring record with 22 goals, scoring twice in a 6-4 loss to England in Saturday's third-place match.

Mbappé finished this World Cup with 10 goals, two more than Messi in the race for the Golden Boot, which is awarded to the tournament's top scorer. Should he remain ahead of Messi after Argentina plays Spain in Sunday's final, he would become the first player to win the Golden Boot twice.

"I would have preferred not to be the top scorer in history," Mbappé told Fox Sports in French, "and play in the match tomorrow."

Les Bleus missed out on a chance at playing in their third straight World Cup final when they lost to Spain in the semifinals.

Mbappé scored eight goals to win the Golden Boot four years ago in



Qatar, where France lost to Messi and Argentina in a penalty shootout in the final.

His 10 in this year's tournament matched the third most in a World Cup. Just Fontaine had a record 13 goals for France in 1958, Sandor Kocsis of Hungary scored 11 in 1954, and West Germany's Gerd Müller had 10 in 1970.

Mbappé's quest for the Golden

Boot appeared to be going nowhere when France trailed 4-0 at halftime.

Then Mbappé and France came alive in the second half. He flicked a shot past England goalkeeper Dean Henderson in the 48th minute to begin a rally for Les Bleus, who also got goals from Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembélé. Michael Olise added two assists, setting a record with seven in this World Cup, one

more than Brazil's Pelé, who had six assists in 1970.

France pulled within 4-3 on Mbappé's second goal, when he beat Henderson again with a left-footed strike from about 14 yards in the 66th minute to pass Messi's career mark of 21 goals.

"There were two very different halves," Mbappé said. "During the first one, I can understand why some people think we made fools of ourselves and didn't do the jersey justice. I'd say instead that we were human — and we can't afford to be. We were completely stunned, and they really shook us awake."

He said French players wanted to win for Didier Deschamps, who coached his final game with the national team.

"In the end, we didn't win, and that's a shame for the coach," Mbappé said. "The first half gives the impression that we let him down — that's not at all how we wanted him to feel. This match isn't going to tarnish Didier Deschamps' legacy." France won the World Cup under

Deschamps in 2018, lost a gut-wrenching final to Argentina on penalties in 2022, and was shut down offensively by Spain in the semifinals. It was a disappointing end to Deschamps' 14-year tenure after his star-studded squad was among the favorites to win another World Cup.

Zinedine Zidane is widely expected to be confirmed as Deschamps' successor in the coming days by the French soccer federation.

"It is the end of a journey which represented the most beautiful period," Deschamps said. "When I started in 2012 ... I put the put the French team first."

Deschamps embraced players on the pitch before exiting, and he defended Mbappé in his news conference.

"I know he has been given an image that is not true to reality," the coach said through an interpreter. "He is an incredible captain, and like many of these players, he has evolved. He is disappointed that he did not manage to compete in the final." (AP)

Saka's hat trick lifts England past Mbappe and France 6-4 in wild WC 3rd-place game



MIAMI GARDENS, July 19: England and France delivered a thriller in a World Cup match that was supposed to be an afterthought.

A day before Lionel Messi and Argentina were set to try and defend their title in a highly anticipated final, Bukayo Saka scored three goals to lead England past Kylian Mbappé and France 6-4 in a wild third-place game. Mbappé surpassed Messi's record for World Cup goals, scoring twice in the second half. The 27-year-old star has 22 goals in his career and 10 in this World Cup, two ahead of Messi in the Golden Boot race.

It was the highest-scoring World Cup game since Hungary beat El Salvador 10-1 in 1982, and the 10 goals were the most in a third-place match.

Saka had goals in the 37th minute and in first-half stoppage time, then added his third on a penalty in the 87th for his second career hat trick with England. The Three Lions also got goals from Declan Rice and Ezri Konsa to build a 4-0 halftime lead, and they hung on against a relentless France attack in the second half to secure their second-best finish in the World Cup. England won its only title in 1966.

"I hope that the players can be proud of that in some time," England coach Thomas Tuchel said. "We are fiercely competitive, so we almost don't allow ourselves to be proud of third place because 18 months ago we set the highest goal. We set the highest dream to chase, and we were very, very ambitious with our dream to make it to the final and win the World Cup. So it's very, very painful if you miss out."

Tuchel said he viewed England's World Cup run as a success despite its collapse in the semifinals. The Three Lions blew a 1-0 lead against Argentina and lost 2-1 when Messi assisted on two late goals.

Tuchel was criticized for his tactical decisions in the loss, with many wondering what it will take for England to end its decades-long wait for another

trophy. He said Saturday's result was the first step toward closing the gap with teams like Argentina and France.

"This game will help us for sure," he said, "even if a part will never allow you to fully celebrate the bronze medal." Jude Bellingham capped the scoring in the eighth minute of second-half stoppage time, his seventh goal of the tournament and the most in a World Cup by an England player. Captain Harry Kane scored six this year and in 2018, and Gary Lineker had six in 1986. Bradley Barcola and Ousmane Dembélé also scored in the second half for France, which pulled within 4-3 on Mbappé's second goal. Messi — with 21 career World Cup goals and eight in this tournament — will get one last shot to pass Mbappé for the scoring title when he and defending champion Argentina face Spain on Sunday in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Mbappé also won the Golden Boot four years ago, when France lost the final to Argentina on penalties.

"Leo scores all the time," Mbappé told Fox Sports in French. "Tomorrow he will score for sure. I just try to help my team every time to score. It's certain that when you score so many goals in the World Cup, it elevates you to certain levels. I would have preferred not to be the top scorer in history and play in the match tomorrow."

Both teams had said they'd rather be playing in Sunday's final. France had enough offensive firepower to potentially win the tournament, but Les Bleus lost to Spain in the semifinals and squandered their chance at reaching a third straight World Cup final.

Still, a sellout crowd of 64,478 showed up to watch the seventh and final match of this World Cup at Hard Rock Stadium.

Plenty of supporters were cheering for both teams. Many were there simply for the atmosphere of the low-stakes match, and it more than delivered. (AP)

Scottie Scheffler's hopes for another British Open are hurt by a lack of birdies

SOUTHPORT (ENGLAND), July 19: Scottie Scheffler rapped an 8-foot birdie putt on the 17th hole and gave a fist pump, which about summed up a third straight day for the defending British Open champion.

It was a mock fist pump. He missed another one.

That's been the story all week for Scheffler, the No. 1 player in the world on the verge of getting shut out of the majors. He has made only one bogey over the last 37 holes but could manage only three birdies during that span. He shot 70 on Saturday and was six shots behind.

Asked what he needed to do, Scheffler replied, "Just make more birdies."

"I feel like I'm hitting the ball the way I need to in order to score," he said. "That part is frustrating, but knowing my game is in a good spot is a good feeling as well. There's been times this year where I feel like I was getting a lot out of my game. This week feels I'm playing a lot better than my score."

"A little bit frustrating, but if I continue to do this and hole some putts tomorrow, I could shoot a really low round and move my way up the leaderboard."

Scheffler won his first tournament of the season at The American Express, and it was looking like a third sequel to the previous two years. But that remains his only victory, and last week he ended his cut streak at 78 tournaments when he missed the cut in the Scottish Open.

"All I can do is continue to try and execute and give myself opportunities, which I did another good job of today," he said.

The Scheffler effect: Two players atop the leaderboard spent a lot of time with the No. 1 player in the world.

Sam Burns, the 54-hole leader, has been a close friend of Scottie Scheffler since they competed against each other in college. They are frequent practice round partners. Burns said it has taught him to throttle back when necessary if he's being too aggressive.

"It helped that I got to play a lot of golf with the best player on the planet and watch what he does," Burns said. "He makes so few mistakes, and he doesn't take on unnecessary risks very often, if

ever, and seems to always hit the correct shot in the moment."

Si Woo Kim is tied for second and is part of Scheffler's money games at home in Dallas. Scheffler even helped the 31-year-old from South Korea get a membership at Royal Oaks.

Kim said earlier this year the matches have been one-sided. He said of Scheffler, "He calls me ATM."

"I could lose my money, but I want to watch his shot and learn," Kim said. "I ask questions. He always give me his opinion, so it helps me a lot."

Herbert's gamble pays off: Lucas Herbert's British Open challenge was already going off the rails thanks to back-to-back bogeys when he was forced to take an unplayable penalty at the par-5 17th after hitting his tee shot way left and into a dune.

The Australian stood over his third shot thinking: "This is either going to be unbelievable or this could be the end of my tournament."

With one slash of a 3-iron, Herbert stayed in contention. His blind shot of some 238 yards somehow found its way onto the green — nearly hitting the flagstick — and he two-putted for par, eventually signing for a 71.

"I think that slots into the top 10 of shots that I've hit," he said.

Herbert, who tied the scoring record of a major with a 62 on Friday, started the third round with a two-shot lead. He finished it three back from Sam Burns.

Fox is in the money: Ryan Fox felt pretty smug after his third round at the British Open — and it wasn't just because he'd tied the lowest score at a major championship.

After going out early and becoming the latest player to shoot 62 at Royal Birkdale, Fox said he'd spend the rest of the day watching some golf but also taking in a replay of a rugby international between his native New Zealand and Ireland.

Seems Fox and Shane Lowry, an Irishman, had a wager on it. With New Zealand winning 40-21, Fox had come out of it richer.

"I watched a decent chunk of that this morning and I was pretty happy with that result, too," Fox said. (AP)

All-rounder Denish Das emerges as most expensive player at APL's inaugural auction

GUWAHATI, July 19: All-rounder Denish Das emerged as the most expensive buy during the inaugural Assam Premier League (APL) player auction on Sunday, with Barpetta Braves securing his services for ₹ 12.60 lakh.

Sumit Ghadigaonkar was the second-highest buy among the marquee players, joining Charaideo Sunrisers for ₹ 12.20 lakh, while experienced batter Sibsanakar Roy was acquired by Barak Legends for ₹ 12 lakh.

Ayushman Malakar and Swarupam Purkayastha completed the top five marquee buys, with Tezpur Titans and Jorhat Stallions securing them respectively for ₹ 11.80 lakh each.

The marquee player round saw the franchises compete for some of Assam's leading domestic cricketers as they began assembling their squads for the APL, which will commence on August 1.

The APL was launched by the Assam Cricket Association in June with the objective of creating a professional and sustainable platform for emerging cricketers while also elevating the standard of domestic cricket across the state.

The eight franchises in fray are



Jorhat Stallions, Tezpur Titans, Dibrugarh Warriors, Barak Legends, Nagaon Rangers, Barpetta Braves, Guwahati Royals and Charaideo Sunrisers.

Among the other notable acquisitions from the marquee player pool, Barak Legends added Abdul Ajj Kuraishi for ₹ 8.40 lakh and Bhargab Lakhar for ₹ 5.20 lakh.

Barpetta Braves secured Saurav Dillingia for ₹ 7.80 lakh, while Dibrugarh Warriors added Saahil

Jain for ₹ 7.20 lakh and Jitumoni Kalita for ₹ 6.20 lakh.

The auction continued through the day with franchises looking to build balanced squads from the wider pool of players going under the hammer.

Altogether 275 players, drawn from across the state, were listed for the auction.

The matches of the inaugural edition will be broadcast live on Star Sports and streamed on JioHotstar. (PTI)

Rohit is good enough to play for couple of years: Lalchand Rajput

NEW DELHI, July 19: Uncertainty might still be shrouding Rohit Sharma's future in ODIs, but his early mentor Lalchand Rajput believes that the former India captain is "good enough to play for couple of years", attributing the current struggles to natural "wear and tear" of two decades of cricket.

The debate over Rohit's place in India's plans intensified after reports suggested that chief selector Ajit Agarkar and head coach Gautam Gambhir had informed the veteran opener that he was not in the roadmap for the 2027 ODI World Cup. The speculation, however, was quickly dispelled by BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia.

"I don't believe in speculation. Unless it happens, then only we can talk about that. I still feel he is good enough to play for a couple of years," Rajput, who first watched Rohit as a youngster at the National Cricket Academy (now BCCI Centre of Excellence), told PTI.

"He is fit and has worked hard on his fitness. If you look at him now, he looks leaner. The way he batted in the last game, he showed glimpses of the Hitman." (PTI)

KASA celebrates 68th Foundation Day, honours sporting achievers

DIPHU, July 19: The Karbi Anglong Sports Association (KASA) has celebrated its 68th Foundation Day with a day-long programme at the Sarsing Teron (Langkung Haba) Multi-Purpose Sports Complex in Diphu.

The celebration which took place on Friday featured the felicitation of former presidents and general secretaries of the association, veteran sports organisers and athletes who have excelled at the state and national levels.

The programme began with the hoisting of the KASA flag by senior vice-president Jivan Chandra Pathak, followed by the National Anthem.

The main function was attended by the chief executive member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) and KASA president, Dr Tuliram Ronghang, who paid floral tributes by lighting a ceremonial lamp at the memorial dedicated to departed KASA members and distinguished sportspersons.

He also inaugurated the KASA Heritage Photo Gallery, showcasing the association's journey through rare photographs of former office-bearers, veteran athletes and major sporting events.

Welcoming the gathering, KASA general secretary Dr Pankaj Teron traced the history of the organisation, stating that it was established in 1958 as the Mikir Hills Sports Association before being renamed the Karbi Anglong Sports Association after the district was renamed Karbi Anglong. He also noted that KASA is affiliated with the Assam Olympic Association and the Assam Football Association.

Dr Teron said the association has made steady progress over the past 68 years through the dedication of sports administrators, coaches and volunteers. He also acknowledged the contributions of former office-bearers and sports enthusiasts, past and present, who have played a vital role in promoting sports in the district.

Former presidents, general secretaries and their family members were felicitated with traditional Karbi turbans and certificates of honour. Those honoured included former presidents B. Das Gupta, Sarat Daulaguphu, Chandrasing Teron, Jugen Goswami and Joysing Doloi, along with former general secretaries Padma Kanta Baruah, Bali Kalita, Sarat Deka, Roy Engthi, Lawrence Teron, Dhansing Teron and Dhansing Rongpi.

The association also honoured athletes and teams for their outstanding performances during 2025-26. Athletes Sangmir Teronpi, Larlyn Timungpi and Harmon Bey were recognised for their achievements in athletics, while footballers Sonia Marak, Meghasmita Kropi, Maanwi Mech and Elna Narzary were felicitated for representing Karbi Anglong in state-level women's football competitions.

KASA Girls FC and KASA FCC were honoured for

their participation in the AIFF Indian Women's League 2026 at Thiruvir and the AIFF Elite Youth League 2026, respectively.

National referees Baju Tisso and Dhannesh Shah, along with the district's first AFC 'B' Licence coach, Horen Engthi, were also felicitated.

In boxing, Soham Kro, Sarkangthir Rongphar and Mohima Bora were honoured for winning medals at the All Assam Inter-District Boxing Championships, while cricketers Roshmita Basumatary and Moksook Uddin were recognised for representing the region in national-level age-group tournaments.

A special recognition award was presented to Dhani Kalita, assistant general secretary of KASA, for his contribution to the association. A posthumous honour was also conferred on referee Rebel Singh, which was received by his wife, Monjit Kaur.

A special excellence award was presented to Kache Teronpi, wife of Dr Tuliram Ronghang, in recognition of her achievements in national and international Masters badminton competitions and her contribution to promoting Karbi culture through the Karbi Jutangkiri Thiptheng Aterang.

Addressing the gathering, Dr Ronghang recalled the formation of the Mikir Hills Sports Association in 1958 at the Government Boys' Higher Secondary School playground, with B. Das Gupta as its president and Padma Kanta Baruah as its general secretary. He highlighted the transformation of KASA during his tenure as president, stating that strict discipline had been introduced by prohibiting the consumption of alcohol and gambling within the sports complex.

He said the once modest sports ground has been transformed into one of Assam's premier sports complexes, equipped with a modern football stadium, floodlights, an indoor badminton stadium, a swimming pool, boxing facilities, a gymnasium and accommodation for players.

Dr Ronghang said the district has witnessed significant sporting achievements in recent years, with several athletes excelling at the state and national levels. He added that Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC is currently competing in the second tier of Indian football and has received an invitation to participate in the 2026 Durand Cup.

Seeking continued support, Dr Ronghang said he would strive to further strengthen sports infrastructure and nurture young talent in the district.

Member of Parliament Amarsing Tisso also addressed the gathering and lauded Dr Ronghang's efforts in promoting sports in Karbi Anglong.

He said he had already discussed with the Union Sports Minister the possibility of securing additional Central schemes for sports development in the district and expressed hope for a positive outcome.

Vintage Sindhu stuns Yamaguchi to win maiden Japan Open title

TOKYO, July 19: Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu produced a vintage display of attacking badminton to outclass local favourite Akane Yamaguchi in straight games, clinching her maiden Super 750 title at the Japan Open here on Sunday.

The 31-year-old became the first Indian to win the Japan Open, combining relentless attack with tactical discipline and composure in the decisive moments to register a 21-17, 21-17 victory over the three-time world champion and end a title drought of almost two years.

"I'm very happy, I'm just out of words because it was 19 months since I had won," said Sindhu after the match. "I think this one was very important to me because playing in the finals, coming to the finals is one thing but I think to win and stand on the podium getting that gold is a different thing. 'I'm happy that I'm on the positive side and I think this gives me a lot of confidence. I think I'm very thankful to my coach, my parents, my support staff and of course my husband.'"

Sindhu's previous title came at the Syed Modi International in 2024. The triumph is her biggest title since winning the World Championships in 2019. She had won the Singapore Super 500 in 2022.

Yamaguchi was appearing in her



sixth Japan Open final, while Sindhu had not beaten the Japanese in a completed match in four years. Their meeting at the Malaysia Open earlier this year ended with Yamaguchi retiring after the opening game.

Sindhu's last full-match victory over her came at the Thailand Open in 2022. On Sunday, however, the Indian dictated terms from the outset. She controlled the forecourt superbly, attacked with purpose rather than sheer power and repeatedly found answers whenever Yamaguchi threatened a comeback.

Along with her powerful smashes, Sindhu's precise net play proved decisive. She repeatedly worked the shuttle tight to the net, forcing Yam-

aguchi to lift and creating opportunities to unleash her trademark cross-court and body smashes.

Sindhu raced to a 3-0 lead before a few unforced errors, coupled with some brilliant shot-making from Yamaguchi, allowed the Japanese to draw level at 3-3. Both players traded errors in the opening exchange before Yamaguchi's service error made it 5-5. Sindhu then began to seize control with superb net play, patiently constructing rallies before finishing them with a cross-court winner to move 8-6 ahead.

Another powerful smash extended her lead to 9-6, but two successive errors handed Yamaguchi a route back into the contest. A body smash

from the Japanese made it 9-9 before Sindhu misjudged a shuttle to trail by two points at the mid-game interval. The momentum swung again after the break as Sindhu won a gruelling 36-shot rally to restore parity at 11-11. A thunderous cross-court smash put her ahead at 13-12 before Yamaguchi sent one long and the Indian won a net exchange, followed by a deep push to open up a 16-12 advantage.

Yamaguchi responded with a clever push to Sindhu's forehand and a return that clipped the back line, but Sindhu wrong-footed her rival with a disguised follow-up shot to stay ahead. At 17-15, the pair produced a breathtaking 38-shot rally, with Yamaguchi's remarkable defence keeping her alive. Sindhu then allowed the Japanese to draw level.

The Indian, however, came up with her best badminton when it mattered most. A fierce cross-court smash and another Yamaguchi error gave her a 19-17 lead. The Japanese then found the net to hand Sindhu three game points. She wrapped up the opening game with a precise push into Yamaguchi's backhand corner. Sindhu carried the momentum into the second game, dominating the forecourt and taking the shuttle early to keep Yamaguchi under constant pressure. (PTI)