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- Ram Mandir Trust crucial meet today
- LJP (Ram Vilas) ramping up UP push, eyeing assembly polls: Chirag Paswan
- Rajya Sabha MP Tai Tagak announces Lower Subansiri as Parliamentary Nodal District
- Tripura offers industry-friendly atmosphere, business leaders keen to invest: CM

Budget session of Assam Assembly from today ● ALA TV renamed as 'Assam Bidhan Sabha TV'

Hindi to make debut as official language in Assembly



GUWAHATI, July 5: Hindi will be introduced as an official language in the Assam Legislative Assembly, alongside Assamese, English and Bodo from the Budget Session starting Monday, speaker Ranjeet Kumar Dass said.

Addressing a press conference here on Sunday, Dass said the decision was taken at the general purpose committee meeting held a day ago.

"The meeting was held on Saturday. It was decided that along with Assamese, English and Bodo, Hindi will be introduced as an official language in the Assembly," he said.

"Since Hindi is a 'Rashtra Bhasa', as a sign of respect for it

we have decided to introduce it in the House," the speaker added.

Dass also said the committee had decided to rename ALA TV, which streams the proceedings of the Assembly, as 'Assam Bidhan Sabha TV'.

Meanwhile, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma dismissed speculation that Bodo would be withdrawn as an official language in the Assembly.

In a post on X, Sarma said he had been informed by the speaker that there was no proposal to discontinue the use of Bodo in the Assembly. He said Bodo language is an inseparable part of Assam's rich cultural heritage and identity,

adding, "It carries the history, traditions, and aspirations of the Bodo community and enriches the vibrant diversity that defines our state."

"The government of Assam is fully committed to preserving and promoting the Bodo language. We will continue to make every possible effort to support its growth and ensure that it continues to flourish for generations to come," the chief minister added.

Bodo is among the official languages included in Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. It was notified as an Associate Official Language of the Assembly through the Assam Official Language (Amendment) Act, 2020. (PTI)

India to host two-day BRICS anti-drug agencies meet in Guwahati from today



NEW DELHI, July 5: India will host a two-day BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies Meeting in Guwahati from June 6 to enhance intelligence sharing, and operational and institutional cooperation to combat narcotics trafficking, the government said on Sunday.

Hosted by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) under the Union Home Ministry, the meeting will bring together heads of anti-drug agencies and senior officials from BRICS countries, according to an official statement.

The meeting assumes significant changes in the global drug trafficking landscape, with the proliferation of synthetic drugs, new psychoactive substances (NPS), darknet-enabled trafficking and cryptocurrency-based financial flows posing complex transnational challenges, it said.

"At the same time, advances in interdiction technologies, data analytics, and financial intelligence present significant opportunities for enhanced international cooperation and coordinated enforcement action," the statement said.

India envisions the meeting as a pivotal step in transforming BRICS cooperation from dialogue-centric engagement to structured and action-oriented collaboration, with a focus on strengthening operational coordination, intelligence sharing, capacity building, and collective responses to emerging drug-related threats, it said. The meeting will focus on three key priority areas -- combating synthetic drugs and precursor diversion, strengthening intelligence sharing and operational coordination, and capacity building and institutional cooperation.

"The meeting will provide India with an opportunity to showcase its decisive efforts to combat the drug menace as the abuse of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances poses a serious threat to public safety and health and the future of the nation's youth," the statement said.

India will seek to strengthen cooperation through information sharing on clandestine laboratories and emerging synthetic drug trends, enhanced monitoring of precursor chemicals and pharmaceuticals, intelligence exchange, sharing of best practices, joint training programmes and expert exchanges through the meeting. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

US DOJ says decision to drop Adani charges not tied to planned US investments

NEW YORK, July 5: The US Department of Justice has denied that its decision to drop criminal charges against Indian billionaire Gautam Adani and seven others was linked to the Adani Group's plans to invest about USD 10 billion in the United States, saying the prosecution was legally unsustainable and should never have been brought.

In a filing, responding to a federal judge's demand for a fuller explanation, Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General R Trent McCotter rejected media reports suggesting the dismissal was influenced by the conglomerate's investment plans.

"The current or former Department attorneys... have suggested that I sought dismissal of the securities charges at least in part because of some promise by those defendants to invest money in the United States. That is false," McCotter wrote.

"I would have sought dismissal of the securities charges regardless of any mentions of investments," he added, saying he had already concluded that the case should be dropped before the issue was ever raised. "The mention of potential investments could

not have played any role."

Reports in US media had linked the DOJ decision to drop charges altogether to Adani hiring a new legal team led by Robert J Giuffra Jr, one of President Trump's personal lawyers and the co-chairman of the prominent firm Sullivan & Cromwell.

According to a May 14 report in the New York Times, Giuffra had made a presentation of about 100 slides in meetings at the Justice Department's headquarters in Washington in April this year, outlining why prosecutors lacked basic evidence, as well as the jurisdiction even to bring the case.

In one of the slides, he reportedly made an unusual offer: If prosecutors dropped the charges, Adani would be willing to invest USD 10 billion in the American economy and create 15,000 jobs, echoing a pledge he had made in the wake of Trump's election last year. McCotter said such stories were "unethically fed" by current or former Department attorneys.

DOJ had in 2024 under the previous Biden administration indicted Adani and others for allegedly being involved in a scheme (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

RPF recovers contraband, valuables worth ₹ 43.9 lakh across NFR zone

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, July 5: The Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) recovered contraband and valuables worth more than ₹ 43.92 lakh and arrested 17 offenders during a six-day special drive conducted across its jurisdiction from June 25 to 30, said an official statement on Sunday.

According to NFR, RPF personnel carried out 36 successful operations during the period which led to the seizure of 83,984 kg of ganja valued at around ₹ 41.99 lakh, 343 bottles and one can of illicit liquor and beer worth over ₹ 39,000, seven mobile phones valued at more than ₹ 1.12 lakh, two illegal railway tickets worth over ₹ 7,000 and cash exceeding ₹ 35,000.

The operations also resulted in the apprehension of 17 offenders allegedly involved in narcotics trafficking, ticket touting, theft, stone-pelting and other offences under the Railway Act and other applicable laws.

Besides enforcement action, the RPF rescued 17 persons, including 15 minors and two vulnerable adults, who were subsequently handed over to the respective Child Welfare Committees, Childline, One Stop Centres, NGOs or their guardians after due procedures. In a separate incident, RPF personnel provided immediate medical assistance to an injured passenger at Dalkhola railway station, ensuring timely treatment and transfer to a health-care facility. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

CM Himanta to attend Assamese Sikh Community's 204th anniversary



HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 5: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma has assured the Assamese Sikh community of the State Government's support and confirmed that he will attend the community's 204th Anniversary Celebration later this year.

The assurance came during a meeting at Janata Bhawan, where a delegation of the Assamese Sikh Association, led by its president Rajbir Singh, called on the chief minister and submitted a memorandum highlighting the community's educational, economic and developmental aspirations.

During the interaction, the delegation apprised the chief minister of issues concerning the indigenous Assamese (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Two held with Yaba tablets worth ₹ 8 crore in Assam

GUWAHATI, July 5: Two persons have been arrested and banned Yaba tablets worth around ₹ 8 crore seized from them by a joint team of security forces in Assam, chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Sunday.

The arrests and recovery were made in a joint operation by state police and Assam Rifles. "Roses are red, Violets are blue, 80,000 tablets seized, Zero sympathy for you," Sarma said in a post on X.

"Kudos to @cacharpolice, @HailakandiPolic & @official_dgar for seizing 80,000 Yaba tablets worth nearly ₹ 8 crore and apprehending 2 accused. Another day, another reminder: @as-sampolice doesn't miss," he added.

Yaba tablets are illegal in India as they contain methamphetamine, a Schedule II substance under the Controlled Substances Act. (PTI)

Growth inevitable with India-UK free trade agreement, says industry expert

LONDON, July 5: There is already "euphoria" within industry over the possibilities opened up by the India-UK free trade agreement, and economic growth for both countries is an inevitable outcome of the pact coming into force this month, according to an industry expert.

The UK-India bilateral Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) was signed last year and will enter into force on July 15.

Kishore Jayaraman, Group CEO of the UK India Business Council (UKIBC), said he remains "very bullish" about India and the UK being a "formative force into the future" as a result of the pact.

"India offers capacity and capability, so scalability for businesses that want to scale up in the Indian market just gets that much easier," Jayaraman told PTI in an interview. "I think this is a celebration for SMEs, startups, and for creative people to scale themselves through the capacities and capabilities that India offers and go to the next level of their businesses," the industry leader said.

"They should be stepping up, understanding what it means, developing a business plan that includes India in their roadmap, and eventually grow, because growth is but inevitable through this agreement," said Jayaraman, who is also a former president of Rolls-

Royce in India.

According to official estimates, the total bilateral trade between India and the UK hit 47.9 billion pounds in the four quarters ending in 2025, representing a 10 per cent increase from previous years. Analysts have projected that the CETA can double trade by 2030. "I think there is already euphoria in the industry of all the possibilities that exist... about the kind of expansion different sectors will witness, from food and beverage, education, digital technologies to energy and infrastructure; there's a lot of opportunity here for this agreement to enhance the trade between the two nations," said Jayaraman.

The veteran business leader acknowledged that some obstacles and challenges may yet come along the path of CETA implementation. "But how we get through those obstacles will come from a strategic intent; that's what the CETA is about -- a strategic intent for both nations to say we can be partners, allow the scalability across the multiple sectors, and make sure that there is market access, and there is appropriate tariffs," he said.

Asked to pinpoint the top sectors that he sees benefiting once the agreement comes into force, the UKIBC chief listed advanced manufacturing and engineering, energy and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Guwahati man arrested in extortion case; arms, ammunition seized

GUWAHATI, July 5: A 39-year-old man was arrested with a cache of arms and ammunition in Guwahati during an investigation into an extortion case, police said on Sunday.

The arrest was made by a team of the Pragjyotishpur police station after an FIR was lodged on July 2, Guwahati Police said in a series of social media posts.

The 39-year-old accused allegedly threatened, assaulted and wrongfully confined the victim before extorting Rs 3 lakh and detaining his car, police said.

During a raid at the accused's residence at Chapaingid in the Bonda area, police arrested him, recovered the victim's car and found an empty cartridge, corroborating the allegation that a warning shot had been fired during the

incident, they said.

The search also led to the seizure of a large cache of arms and ammunition, including a pistol, three rifles, over 360 live rounds of ammunition, 80 empty cartridges, three mobile phones and an arms licence.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the accused and the victim were former business associates, police said.

The victim was allegedly threatened, assaulted, forced to sign documents and coerced into transferring Rs 3 lakh online, they said.

Police said the accused is a history-sheeter with four criminal cases registered against him in Assam. The authenticity of the arms licence is being verified, while investigators are also probing possible links to illegal procurement of firearms, they said. (PTI)

Assam forest official suspended after audio of alleged bribe demand surfaces

GUWAHATI, July 5: A forest department official in Assam has been suspended after an audio clip of him purportedly demanding money from a dumper truck owner to operate illegally surfaced on social media, an official said.

According to an office order, Divisional Forest Officer of Jorhat, Montu Hazarika, has been suspended with immediate effect for allegedly indulging in corrupt practices.

He has been asked to report to Mariani Range headquarters.

The action was initiated after a telephonic conversation, purportedly of the officer seeking money from a dumper owner to allow unauthorised activities, went viral on social media. The authenticity of the clip was not verified by PTI.

"Sources said the audio clip came to the notice of Assam Forest Minister Jayanta Malla Baruah, who directed the department to take immediate action," a forest department spokesperson said. (PTI)

Day 16 of CJP protest: Wangchuk loses 6 kg as fast enters 8th day

NEW DELHI, July 5: The Cockroach Janta Party's (CJP) protest at the Jantar Mantar here, demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation and government accountability over alleged examination irregularities, entered its 16th day on Sunday, while it was the eighth day of an indefinite hunger strike announced by climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who has lost around six kg since beginning the fast.

According to a health bulletin issued by doctors, Wangchuk's blood pressure was recorded at 112/70 mm Hg in the lying-down position, heart rate at 72 beats per minute and blood sugar at 67 mg/dL. The bulletin said his hydration is fair, he is mentally alert and his weight has dropped to 60.95 kg, accounting for a loss of around six kg in seven days.

The CJP continued to press for Pradhan's resignation, alleging that repeated examination irregularities and paper leaks have devastated the lives of students and their families.

In a post on X, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke said the parents of NEET aspirant Riya Kumari Thapa, who the outfit claims died after the alleged paper leak shattered her dreams, visited the protest site on Sunday. Dipke said Thapa's father, an Army veteran, joined the protest with the appeal that no other family should have to endure the loss that his family has suffered and urged the Centre to ensure that such incidents are not repeated.

In another post, the CJP said it stands firmly with Thapa's parents in their grief and fight against what it described as a corrupt system that failed their daughter. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for admission to medical colleges, held on May 3, was cancelled amid allegations of paper leak. A re-test was held on June 21.

Meanwhile, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), which had earlier extended support to the CJP agitation, is now scheduled to send a delegation to the Jantar Mantar on July 7. The farmers' body had initially said in its letter to the CJP that its delegation would visit the protest site on Sunday.

The SKM has expressed solidarity with the students and youngsters participating in the agitation, saying every student has the right to a transparent, fair and credible examination system and that ensuring accountability is the government's responsibility. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'Her service and sacrifice will always remain a source of inspiration' Assam bids farewell to Kaziranga's legendary patrol elephant Joymala

GUWAHATI, July 5: Joymala, one of Kaziranga National Park's most iconic patrol elephants, has died after more than three decades of service in wildlife conservation, officials said on Sunday.

The 66-year-old elephant died on Saturday night in Naloni area within the park's Agorotoli Range following prolonged illness.

Born in 1960, Joymala was inducted into Kaziranga National Park (KNP) in 1992 and served for 34 years, participating in anti-poaching patrols, wildlife monitoring, rescue operations and routine forest protection duties.

Her courage drew international attention in 2004, when a stray tiger leapt over her during a patrol. The moment, captured in a widely circulated photograph, came to symbolise the bravery of Kaziranga's patrol elephants and their mahouts.

Assam Forest minister Jayanta Malla Baruah led tributes to Joymala, describing her as one of



Kaziranga's "finest jungle warriors" and a symbol of the silent sacrifices made by patrol elephants who work alongside frontline forest staff to protect the park's globally celebrated biodiversity.

"Joymala was far more than a patrol elephant. She was a trusted companion of generations of forest guards and mahouts who dedicated their lives to protecting Kaziranga.

Her service and sacrifice will always remain a source of inspiration for everyone associated with wildlife conservation," Baruah said.

For much of her career, Joymala was cared for by veteran mahout Satyaban Pegu, before her care was entrusted to Nilakhanta Koch, both of whom formed close bonds with the elephant. Koch continued

to look after her with great affection.

In recognition of her extraordinary service, KNP accorded Joymala a ceremonial guard of honour during her last rites.

Forest personnel gathered to bid a final farewell to the elephant that had spent decades protecting the park's wildlife.

The minister said Joymala's story reflects the invaluable role played by patrol elephants in Kaziranga's conservation success.

"Working through floods, dense forests and difficult terrain, these elephants remain indispensable partners in anti-poaching operations and wildlife protection," he added.

Joymala's legacy continues through her children and grandchildren, several of whom still serve as patrol elephants in the park, upholding the tradition of protecting one of the world's most celebrated wildlife reserves. "As Kaziranga (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Govt issues stern notice to Meta on child sexual abuse material in Instagram ads: Sources

NEW DELHI, July 5: The government has issued a stern notice to Meta on Child Sexual Exploitative and Abuse Material (CSEAM) in paid advertisements on Instagram, sources said on Sunday.

The government issued the notice on Saturday evening, they added.

"MeitY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) has ordered Instagram to disable all ads and content promoting and facilitating access to CSEAM," the sources said.

The development came a day after IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw directed MeitY officials to summon Meta over Instagram ads allegedly promoting child sexual abuse material.

The ministry has demanded an explanation and information on action taken in its notice to Meta over child sexual abuse material advertisement allegations, government sources said.

The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) has also demanded a detailed explanation within 7 days.

The Menlo Park, California-headquartered technology giant Meta owns popular social media platforms Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

The latest action from the ministry comes amid a BBC report that alleged Meta's recommendation algorithm had been promoting videos containing child sexual abuse material, exposing serious gaps in the safeguards.

The BBC investigation had also allegedly found advertisements of



this nature appearing on Facebook and Instagram, despite Meta's advertising policies explicitly prohibiting nudity and sexually explicit content.

Instagram is alleged to have shown paid advertisements with terms like 'rape video' and 'child video', which directed users to Telegram channels where such content was reportedly on sale.

According to a person privy to the development, the government is expected to seek answers on how such advertisements were even approved, what corrective measures Meta has taken since the allegations surfaced, and what safeguards it plans to put in place to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Even as an intermediary, Meta can't hide behind the 'third-party content' argument or defence if allegations involve paid ads promoting child sexual abuse material, sources said.

Bureau of Investigation, India's national nodal agency for Interpol.

Authorities have repeatedly warned technology companies that any failure to crack down on CSAM and other harmful content could invite regulatory scrutiny and legal action.

Meta has come under regulatory glare for the second time this week.

On Wednesday, the Centre issued a notice to Meta questioning the planned username feature on WhatsApp, citing concerns that it could materially increase online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams, and impersonation attacks.

It directed the platform to pause the feature until consultations on the issue are completed "to the satisfaction of the Government".

Sources said that WhatsApp will defer the rollout of the username feature.

Meanwhile, a team from Meta met officials in the IT Ministry following the notice summoning them over the contentious feature on WhatsApp.

Given that the timeline for furnishing a detailed explanation on the 'usernames' feature is three days, Meta will submit its final reply as per the schedule, they added.

The Centre had asked Meta to explain why action shouldn't be initiated under the IT Act and rules over WhatsApp's new feature that may increase cybercrimes.

The government also reminded Meta that WhatsApp, as a significant social media intermediary, is bound by due diligence obligations under the IT Act and rules. (PTI)

Gold outlook hinges on geopolitics, interest rates and investor sentiment

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: Gold is expected to remain at the centre of global investor attention during the second half of 2026, with its performance likely to be shaped by geopolitical developments, interest rate expectations and investor sentiment, according to the World Gold Council's Gold Mid-Year Outlook 2026.

The report noted that after a volatile first half of the year, gold recorded more than 12 all-time highs, reaching a record US\$5,405 per ounce in late January before retreating to US\$4,002 per ounce in June.

The correction resulted in a 7 per cent decline in the metal's year-to-date price, while average volatility rose to 30 per cent.

Despite the pullback, gold remains among the best-performing asset classes over the past year.

According to the World Gold Council's Gold Return Attribution Model (GRAM), heightened geopolitical tensions, particularly the conflict involving the United States and Iran, were the principal drivers of gold's first-half performance.

Investor positioning and profit-taking also influenced price movements, while changing expectations surrounding interest rates and the US dollar produced mixed effects.

The report observed that most of gold's recent price movements occurred during Asian and US trading hours, highlighting the growing influence of Asian investors in global

price discovery.

Looking ahead, the World Gold Council's Gold Valuation Framework suggests that if current market expectations hold—including at least one US Federal Reserve rate hike by October, parallel policy tightening by the Bank of England, the Bank of Japan and the European Central Bank, and US inflation peaking at around 3.9 per cent in the second quarter—gold is likely to trade within approximately five per cent of US\$4,100 per ounce through the remainder of the year.

The report added that gold could resume an upward trajectory if geopolitical tensions intensify, economic conditions weaken or expectations regarding interest rates change significantly.

Conversely, a stronger US dollar, higher-than-expected interest rate increases and improved investor appetite for risk could weigh on prices.

Commenting on the outlook, Juan Carlos Artigas, Regional CEO (Americas) and Global Head of Research at the World Gold Council, said gold has demonstrated its role as a truly global asset whose price reflects worldwide macroeconomic and geopolitical developments rather than conditions in any single country.

He added that although interest rates would remain an important factor in the months ahead, the resilience of gold continues to be supported by sustained demand from central banks, institutional investors and consumers across multiple regions.

"If the allegations are found to be true, they will be held accountable for the advertisements, for which the platform receives revenue," one of the sources said.

While MeitY will review the technical and regulatory aspects of the matter, any agency, authority, or individual may file a complaint against the advertiser or platform if they believe offences under the law have been committed, sources pointed out.

The Indian government has maintained a zero-tolerance approach towards CSEAM, requiring online platforms to promptly detect, remove and report such content while strengthening safeguards to protect children in the digital ecosystem.

The government has, from time to time, also blocked websites containing child sexual abuse material (CSAM), based on lists from Interpol received through the Central

ICAI seminar highlights global opportunities for chartered accountants

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: The Global Trade & Services Committee of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India (ICAI), in association with the Guwahati Branch of the Eastern India Regional Council (EIRC), organised a seminar on "Global Opportunities – India to the World" at Hotel Ormate, Guwahati, to equip chartered accountants with insights into emerging international opportunities.

The inaugural session began with a welcome address by CA Anjali Kumar Mundhra, Chairman of the Guwahati Branch (EIRC), who highlighted the significance of the seminar and the expanding global opportunities available to chartered accountants. The programme concluded with a vote of thanks delivered by CA Piyush Bimrival, Secretary of the Guwahati Branch.

The seminar featured four technical presentations spread across three sessions, focusing on international accounting, global business services, taxation and digital transformation. In the first session, CA Hitesh Kapoor spoke on "International Accounting and the ERP Software Ecosystem", discussing the growing demand for international accounting services, evolving enterprise resource planning (ERP) platforms and the competencies required for Indian chartered accountants to succeed in the global marketplace.

The second session commenced with CA Sanjib Sanghi, Chairman of the Global Trade and Services Committee, delivering a presentation on "Global Capability Centers (GCCs) and Building a Global CA Practice – Strategy and Roadmap". He outlined opportunities emerging from Global Capability Centers and shared strategies for developing an international professional practice. This was followed by a session by CA Ravi Kumar Patwa, Programme Director, on "Changing Mindset to Attract International Clients," where he emphasised the need for Indian professionals to adopt a global outlook, strengthen client relationships and position themselves competitively in international markets.

The third session featured CA Mithilesh Reddy, who discussed opportunities in "Transfer Pricing and Cross-Border Tax Advisory," providing insights into international taxation and advisory services. The final presentation by CA Venugopal Gella focused on "Process Automation, Artificial Intelligence and Digital Transformation in Finance," highlighting how emerging technologies are reshaping the finance profession and creating new avenues for value-added services.

The seminar witnessed enthusiastic participation from chartered accountants and finance professionals. Organisers said the programme reaffirmed ICAI's commitment to equipping its members with the knowledge, skills and global perspective needed to thrive in an increasingly interconnected business environment.

The programme commenced with a welcome address by outgoing president Lion Deepak Bhajanka, who reflected on the club's achievements during the past year and thanked members for their support.

The annual secretarial report was presented by Lion Sumit Hissaria, while Lion Rakesh Agarwalla presented the financial report. Addressing the gathering, Lion Sujit Bakharedia appreciated the club's commitment to community service and emphasised the spirit of selfless service that defines Lionism.

In his address, Lion Kamlesh Kumar Kallani welcomed the newly inducted members and formally administered the oath of office to the newly elected board. He encouraged the new team to uphold the values of service, responsibility and leadership.

The newly installed office-bearers for the Lionistic Year 2026-27 include Lion Anupam Agarwalla as President, Lion Amit Poddar as Secretary and Lion Siddhartha Khetawat as Treasurer.

In his acceptance speech, President Anupam Agarwalla stressed the importance of collective leadership and teamwork, stating that the new term would be driven by the shared commitment of all members towards community service.

A major highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of awards recognising members for their outstanding contributions during the previous year.

Emma Luxe launches northeast india's largest premium furniture experience centre in Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: Setting a new benchmark in luxury furniture retail, Emma Luxe has officially launched Northeast India's largest premium furniture experience centre in Guwahati.

Spanning over 20,000 square feet, the state-of-the-art showroom promises to redefine the region's home and lifestyle segment by offering an unparalleled blend of design, comfort, craftsmanship, and innovation under one roof.

Strategically located on NH-37, near Puno Trampoline Park, Lokhra Lalung Gaon Road, Guwahati, the expansive experience centre has been thoughtfully designed to provide customers with an immersive and world-class furniture shopping experience unlike any other in Northeast India.

Emma Luxe is led by Amit Dhoot and Praveesh Kabra, entrepreneurs backed by a family legacy of more than 35 years in the furniture industry.

With decades of expertise, a strong commitment to quality, and the trust of thousands of customers, the duo has envisioned Emma Luxe as the culmination of their rich legacy—bringing together international designs, premium craftsmanship, and customer-focused solutions in one destination.

The experience centre showcases an exclusive range of premium furniture sourced and inspired by leading global designers, catering to a wide range of lifestyle preferences and contemporary living spaces.

Customers can explore an extensive collection that includes luxury sofas, designer beds, elegant dining sets, premium outdoor furniture, customised lifestyle furniture, and modern home furnishing solutions.

A key highlight of Emma Luxe is its emphasis on fully customised furniture solutions.

Customers can personalise their furniture by selecting dimensions, materials, finishes, colours, and designs, ensuring every piece perfectly complements their individual style and functional requirements.

Beyond its premium product offerings, Emma Luxe also provides several customer-centric services, including complimentary home delivery, convenient EMI and flexible payment options, expert consultation backed by over three decades of industry experience, and comprehensive after-sales support. The showroom also houses one of the widest selections of premium furniture available under a single roof in Northeast India.

Designed as more than just a retail outlet, Emma Luxe has been envisioned as a complete Furniture Experience Centre, where customers can explore beautifully curated living spaces, experience furniture firsthand, and receive personalised recommendations from experienced professionals to create homes that reflect their unique personalities.

Speaking on the occasion, the promoters said that Emma Luxe aims to elevate furniture shopping in the Northeast by combining global trends, superior quality, personalised solutions, and exceptional customer service.

They expressed confidence that the experience centre will emerge as the preferred destination for discerning customers seeking premium furniture and lifestyle solutions.

With its expansive collection, international designs, bespoke offerings, and customer-first philosophy, Emma Luxe is poised to become the definitive destination for premium furniture in Northeast India, delivering an experience that extends far beyond conventional furniture retail.

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US DOJ says decision

to bribe Indian government officials to the tune of USD 250 million and lie to investors to receive billions more in investments from other entities, during which alleged scheme Adani Green Energy Ltd raised at least USD 175 million from US investors.

The filing came after US District Judge Nicholas Garaufis described the department's earlier motion to dismiss the indictment as "terse, bland, and conclusory" and ordered prosecutors to explain why they wanted the case thrown out with prejudice.

The DOJ said the prosecution should be abandoned because it was fundamentally flawed. McCotter said the alleged conduct occurred almost entirely in India. Indian authorities had investigated the allegations and found no actionable misconduct, investors suffered no losses, key evidence and witnesses were outside the United States, and the defendants were unlikely to ever appear before a US court.

"The decision to seek dismissal was not a close call," he wrote. The department also argued the securities fraud charges should never have been brought because the alleged conduct fell largely outside US jurisdiction and the legal theory underpinning the case was weak.

It further said the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act charges no longer fit the Trump administration's enforcement policy, which prioritises cases affecting US national security, American companies or transnational criminal organisations.

"The FCPA charges should have been dismissed a year ago," McCotter wrote. The filing urged the court to promptly grant the government's motion, saying continued judicial scrutiny would improperly intrude on the executive branch's exclusive authority over prosecutorial decisions and leave defendants "in limbo on charges that should have been dropped a year ago - or never brought in the first place." (PTI)

RPF recovers contraband

As part of efforts to protect railway property, the RPF, in coordination with the civil administration, Railway Protection Special Force (RPSF), Government Railway Police (GRP) and local police, conducted an anti-encroachment drive at Safrai railway station.

During the operation, 61 unauthorised structures were removed, clearing around 5,600 square metres of railway land without any untoward incident.

"The Railway Protection Force of NFR remains committed to strengthening passenger safety and security through intelligence-based operations, close coordination with law enforcement agencies and prompt assistance to passengers," NFR said in a statement.

NFR also urged members of the public to report any suspicious activity through Rail Madad, the Railway Helpline 139 or the nearest RPF personnel to help maintain a safe and secure railway environment.

India to host two-day BRICS

"During the two-day meeting, the member nations will deliberate on the drug situation in their respective countries and participate in six thematic sessions based on pressing and emerging global challenges," it said.

The sessions will focus on leveraging digital technology for real-time drug interdiction, countering darknet-based drug trafficking, tackling emerging NPS, reinforcing global supply chains against precursor diversion and chemical leakage, drug demand reduction initiatives and strengthening institutional mechanisms.

The meeting will culminate with the adoption of a Joint Declaration, the statement said. BRICS brings together 11 major emerging markets – Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates. (PTI)

Growth inevitable with India-UK

infrastructure, financial services, and digital and artificial intelligence. "I separate that from tech because tech would be more of heavy engineering work as well. Last, but never the least would be healthcare and life sciences. But needless to say, there are about three, four more sectors like education, food and beverage and startups," he said.

Jayaraman, who joined Commerce and Industry minister Piyush Goyal in the launch of a new 'CETA Manual: A Business Utilisation Guide' in London recently, noted how the focus will now shift towards translating the complex trade agreement into a practical roadmap for businesses operating across both markets.

"I think the India-UK corridor has been working very well, but what happens is that when you really want to take it to the next curve, like with any growth curve, if you want to change the curve there's got to be very relevant change... and I think the CETA is that change," he said.

The Double Contribution Convention, which would come into effect alongside the CETA and prevents temporary cross-border workers from having to pay social security contributions in both countries, is also expected to impact the growth curve, he said.

"It's a win-win for both sides because at the end of the day, it allows the employee to feel that much better and to celebrate their experience in the United Kingdom and vice-versa... the takeaway from that will be greater productivity, greater efficiency, greater mobility, and greater mobility," said Jayaraman.

The India-UK CETA was signed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the UK in July 2025. After its UK parliamentary ratification process was completed, Modi and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer set July 15 as the date for its "entry into force" – a major milestone for a pact which opened for negotiations in January 2022.

"It's a relationship that's there for a lifetime and what this bilateral agreement does is formalises that, so that the industry understands that both nations are very serious about how we trade with each other," said Jayaraman. "It is just a testament... I think in marriage parlance it is like renewing of vows," Jayaraman added. (PTI)

CM Himanta to attend

Sikh community and sought government support for its long-term development. Sarma gave a patient hearing to the delegation and assured members that the State Government would examine their concerns and work towards addressing them.

The chief minister also suggested that the 204th Anniversary Celebration of the Assamese Sikh community be organised at Chapar Mukh, a place of historical significance for the community, in October this year. He accepted the association's invitation to attend the programme as the chief guest, describing the occasion as an opportunity to recognise the rich heritage and longstanding contribution of the Assamese Sikh community to the State.

The Assamese Sikh Association expressed gratitude to the Chief Minister for his positive response and said his participation in the anniversary celebrations would be a significant moment for the community and its socio-cultural identity in Assam.

Day 16 of CJP protest

Several members of the Left-affiliated All India Students' Association (AISA) also continued their indefinite hunger strike on a separate stage at the protest site. Jawaharlal Nehru University Students' Union (JNUSU) joint secretary Danish Ali was admitted to the Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital on Saturday after her blood sugar level dropped to 46 mg/dL on the seventh day of the hunger strike. Meanwhile, Neha, Manish, Hrishikesh, Deepak Kumar Verma and Aameen continued their indefinite fast at the protest site.

The CJP protest began on June 20 over alleged irregularities in the country's examination system and has since drawn support from several political leaders, activists and civil-society members. (PTI)

Assam bids farewell to Kaziranga's

bids farewell to one of its greatest guardians, Joymala's legacy of courage, loyalty and selfless service will forever remain etched in the history of the park," Baruah said.

KNP Field Director C Ramesh said Joymala's life is a reminder that the story of Kaziranga's conservation success is written not only by its dedicated forest staff but also by its patrol elephants.

"These gentle giants are the voiceless warriors of Kaziranga, standing steadfast beside the foot soldiers," he added. (PTI)

Café Akasa unveils limited edition monsoon special meal

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: Café Akasa, the onboard meal service of Akasa Air, has launched the fourth edition of its limited-time Monsoon Special Meal, offering passengers a seasonal menu inspired by traditional comfort foods associated with the rainy season.

Available from July 1 to July 31 across the airline's network, the specially curated meal comprises Potli and Chinese samosas served with tomato salsa, accompanied by malpa with rabri and a beverage of the passenger's choice.

According to the airline, the menu has been designed to capture the flavours of the monsoon by combining savoury snacks with a traditional Indian dessert, offering travellers a nostalgic and comforting dining experience during their journey.

The Monsoon Special Meal can be pre-booked through the airline's website and mobile application before travel.

Akasa Air said Café Akasa continues to intro-



duce limited-edition menus throughout the year to celebrate seasonal occasions and evolving customer preferences.

The initiative is aimed at enhancing the onboard experience by offering travellers new culinary options during different festivals and special occasions.

Since commencing operations in August 2022, the airline has introduced themed meal offerings for occasions such as Makar Sankranti, Valentine's Day, Holi, Eid, Easter, Mother's Day, International Yoga

Day, Navroz, Onam, Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra, Diwali, Children's Day and Christmas.

It also offers pre-bookable celebration cakes for passengers wishing to mark special occasions during flights.

Café Akasa currently offers more than 45 meal options, including gourmet dishes, fusion meals, regional snacks, desserts and beverages curated by chefs from different parts of the country to cater to a wide range of dietary and culinary preferences.

CRPC opposes citizenship laws, announces statewide campaign

Organisation plans Guwahati convention, memorandum to Centre and movement against what it calls discriminatory provisions

HT Correspondent

HOJAI, July 5: The Assam State Committee of the Citizen's Rights Protection Committee (CRPC) has announced plans to launch a statewide campaign against recently enacted citizenship and foreigners' laws, alleging that the measures adversely affect linguistic and religious minorities, particularly Bengali-speaking communities.

The decision was taken at the organisation's Executive Committee meeting held in Dibrugarh on Sunday under the chairmanship of State President Nripen Saha, according to a press release.

The meeting was attended by senior Gauhati High Court advocate Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury, CRPC General Secretary Sadhan Purkayastha, Kamal Dutta, Amar Chand Dey, Bijoy Chakraborty, former Lunding MLA Swapan Kar, Nibhas Ranjan Das, Chandan Majumdar and Debashish Roy, among others.

Addressing the meeting, Purkayastha alleged that linguistic and religious minorities in Assam were facing discriminatory treatment and urged members to discuss measures to counter what he



described as growing challenges.

Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury criticised the new citizenship and foreigners' laws, along with a related Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) issued by the Assam Government, alleging that they constituted a threat to Bengali-speaking people.

He claimed the measures could deprive Bengalis of their citizenship and civil rights and called for both legal intervention and a mass public movement.

He also alleged that Bengali

Hindus could be affected by the implementation of the laws.

During the meeting, Bijoy Chakraborty proposed submitting a memorandum on the laws and the related SOP to the Government of India through Deputy Commissioners in all districts, with copies to opposition Members of Parliament.

He also suggested that a delegation meet the Union Home Minister, if required, and seek the support of opposition MPs. The proposal was unanimously

adopted.

Other speakers, including Kamal Dutta and Swapan Kar, stressed the need to strengthen the organisation by enrolling socially conscious youth and revitalising its grassroots activities.

The Executive Committee adopted seven resolutions, including organising a state-level convention in Guwahati on September 20 to determine the next phase of the campaign, expanding the organisation across all districts, simplifying procedures under the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), officially notifying the National Register of Citizens (NRC) through a Gazette notification, issuing identity documents to eligible citizens and rejection slips to excluded applicants, resolving the issue of D-voters in accordance with the Assam Accord, ensuring allotment of land pattas under the Accord, and opposing what it termed discriminatory practices associated with the concept of "Khillonjia" or indigenous status.

The CRPC said the resolutions were intended to safeguard the civil and political rights of linguistic and religious minorities in Assam.

Baksa reviews monsoon preparedness, strengthens disaster response

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 5: The Baksa District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) recently reviewed the district's preparedness for the ongoing monsoon season, with officials directed to strengthen coordination and ensure prompt response to any flood-related emergencies.

The meeting, held at the District Commissioner's Office in Mushalpur, was chaired by District Commissioner and DDMA Chairperson Kinnei Changsan and attended by MLA Maneswar Brahma, ADC-cum-Chief Executive Officer of DDMA Mustafa Salim Ahmed, District Project Officer Tapan Koch, Circle Officers and officials of various line departments.

Reviewing the preparedness of all departments, the District Commissioner stressed the need for coordinated action, regular field inspections and close monitoring of flood-prone areas.

She instructed officials to ensure that relief camps remain equipped with safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, electricity, food, medicines, anti-venom, mosquito nets, veterinary support and other essential services.

Departments were also directed to maintain adequate stocks of emergency materials, submit the status of pending proposals before Circle Level Task Force Committees and ensure timely reporting of flood-related damage through the Disaster Reporting Information Management System (DRIMS) portal to facilitate quick assessment and relief.

Officials informed the meeting that inflatable rubber boats, porcupines, geobags and other emergency equipment have been kept ready.

A total of 180 Aapda Mitra volunteers, personnel from Fire and Emergency Services stations at Mushalpur, Jalah and Salbari, Civil Defence volunteers and the District Disaster Response Force (DDRF) have also been placed on standby for emergency operations.

The Water Resources Department briefed the meeting on embankment protection, desiltation and



repair works, while the Public Health Engineering Department reported that arrangements had been made to provide safe drinking water and deploy water tankers at relief camps.

The Health Department said sufficient stocks of essential medicines, including anti-venom, had been maintained, while the Food, Public Distribution and Consumer Affairs Department confirmed adequate availability of essential commodities.

The Veterinary Department informed that fodder and veterinary support for livestock had been arranged, and the Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL) said measures were in place for the restoration of electricity during emergencies.

Addressing the meeting, MLA Maneswar Brahma emphasised the need to provide adequate drinking water, mosquito nets and other basic facilities at relief camps.

He also called for regular field visits by departmental officials and continuous online updates on the flood situation.

The meeting was informed that the District Emergency Operation Centre (DEOC) at the District Commissioner's Office in Mushalpur is functioning round the clock to respond to emergencies.

Officials urged the public to contact the DEOC through its mobile number or the toll-free helpline 1077 in case of any emergency.

KKHSOU launches study centre-based pass certificate distribution

More than 1,200 learners receive certificates at Jorhat and Golaghat centres

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU) has launched a learner-centric initiative to distribute original pass certificates through its study centres, enabling students to collect their certificates closer to home without visiting the university headquarters.

As part of the initiative, certificate distribution ceremonies were organised in phases at study centres in Jorhat and Golaghat districts.

The first programme was held on July 3 at Kakojan College, Jorhat, where KKHSOU Vice-Chancellor Prof. Rajendra Prasad Das attended as the chief guest.

More than 500 learners from the Kakojan College and J.B. University study centres received their original pass certificates during the ceremony.

Another distribution programme was organised on July 4 at Cinnamara College, Jorhat, where over 400 learners from the Cinnamara College and Dr Nabin Bordoloi College study centres collected their certificates.

Addressing the gathering, Prof Das said the initiative reflected the university's commitment to making learner services more accessible and convenient.

On the same day, a similar programme was held at DKD College, Dergaon, where more than 300 learners from the DKD College Study Centre received their original pass certificates from university officials.

The programmes were attended by Dean (Study Centre) Dr Ridip Dev Choudhury, Deputy Registrar (Administration) Dr Ratul Kumar Patowary, Assistant Regional Director of the Jorhat Regional Centre Dr Sanjib Ghimire, Assistant Registrar (Study Centre) Birinchi Kumar Bora, coordinators of the respective study centres, faculty members, university officials, staff and learners.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof Das said the university had introduced the new system to provide faster and more convenient services to learners.

He noted that the initiative would save students the time, travel and expenses involved in visiting the university headquarters to collect their certificates.

KKHSOU authorities said similar certificate distribution ceremonies will be organised in phases at study centres across Assam so that more learners can conveniently collect their original pass certificates from their respective centres.

Forest department seizes illegal sand-laden tractor in Kokrajhar

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 5: The Forest Department under the Haltugaon Division intensified its crackdown on illegal forest-related activities recently, seizing a tractor transporting sand without valid documents and recovering illegally manufactured wooden furniture during separate enforcement operations in Kokrajhar town.

The drive was led by Deputy Ranger and In-charge Depot Officer Pintu Sarkar along with staff of the Kokrajhar Forest Depot Office, who conducted intensive patrolling to check the illegal transportation of forest produce and other unlawful activities.

During the morning operation, the patrolling team intercepted a tractor carrying a consignment of sand at Rangalikhata in Kokrajhar.

Officials said the driver failed to produce a valid challan or any other documents authorising the transportation of the sand.

The vehicle was subsequently seized and taken to the Kokrajhar Forest Depot Office for further legal proceedings.

In a separate operation later in the day, staff of the Kokrajhar Forest Depot joined the Protection Squad of the Bishmuri Range under the Hal-

tugaon Forest Division to conduct joint patrolling in different parts of the town.

During the drive, the team recovered illegally manufactured wooden furniture suspected to have been made from unauthorised timber.

The furniture was seized, and an investigation has been launched to identify those involved in the illegal trade.

Forest officials said surveillance and enforcement activities have been intensified to curb the illegal transportation of forest produce, unauthorised timber trade and other offences affecting forest resources. They added that regular patrolling, surprise inspections and joint operations would continue in vulnerable areas to ensure strict enforcement of forest laws.

Divisional Forest Officer, Haltugaon Division, PK Bhuyan, said the department was closely monitoring the ongoing enforcement drives and had instructed field staff to strengthen vigilance across the division to prevent illegal activities and protect forest resources.

He reiterated the department's commitment to the conservation and protection of forests and warned that strict legal action would be taken against anyone found violating forest laws.

New Morigaon DIPRO meets media representatives

HT Correspondent

MORIGAON, July 5: Newly appointed District Information and Public Relations Officer (DIPRO) of Morigaon, Ananya Gogoi, recently held an introductory meeting with members of the local media fraternity at the DIPRO office to strengthen coordination between the Information and Public Relations Department and journalists.

Welcoming the media representatives, Gogoi emphasised the importance of maintaining close cooperation between the department and the press to ensure the timely dissemination of authentic government information.

She expressed her commitment to facilitating effective communication and sought the continued support of journalists in promoting responsible and constructive journalism in the district.

During the interaction, members of the media fraternity shared their views and suggestions on improving communication and assured the new DIPRO of their cooperation in strengthening public information dissemination. The meeting concluded with an informal exchange of ideas over tea.

'Pobitora' released as experts discuss sustainable future of Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: Pragiyoti Communications marked its Pearl Jubilee celebrations with the release of the latest edition of Pobitora, a bilingual environmental anthology, and a discussion on the sustainable development of Guwahati, bringing together environmentalists, scientists, writers and academicians.

The programme, organised at the Public Works Department Convention and Training Centre, commemorated the organisation's 30-year journey in environmental awareness and journalism.

The event began with a violin performance by noted musician and retired Cotton College professor Dr Satyendra Kumar Choudhury, who paid tribute to the birth centenary of Dr Bhupen Hazarika by presenting two of his well-known songs with environmental themes.

Chairman of Pragiyoti Communications Dipanka Hazarika highlighted the organisation's three-decade journey, particularly its environmental initiatives, including the Pobitora Paribesh Jatra, which began in 2010.

Delivering the keynote address, Assam Pollution Control Board Chairman Dr Arup Kumar Mishra spoke on the need for environmentally sustainable development in Guwahati.

He outlined measures being undertaken to safeguard the city's environment and emphasised the role of civil society and voluntary organisations in protecting natural resources.

Environmental activist and documentary filmmaker Aneisha Sharma discussed the conservation of biodiversity-rich areas in and around Guwahati, while retired forest officer Mukul Tamuli, environmental activist Brajendra Dev Mohan Sharma, geologist Hemanta Borgohain and artist Shobha

Hazarika shared their perspectives on the city's environmental challenges.

Professor Dr Narayan Sharma of Cotton University's Department of Environmental Biology and Wildlife Sciences presented findings on environmental changes within the university campus and Guwahati, highlighting ongoing scientific documentation and the need for conservation.

A major attraction of the event was the address by retired forest officer Dharanidhar Boro, who spoke on Assam's biodiversity through a blend of songs, recitations and storytelling based on his decades of experience in wildlife conservation, particularly in Kaziranga.

The latest edition of Pobitora, edited by Dipanka Hazarika, contains nearly 130 articles on environment and nature contributed by writers from across Assam.

The anthology also includes special essays on the environmental writings of Dr Bhupen Hazarika and Keshab Mahanta in their birth centenary year, besides tributes to musician Zubeen Garg as a nature enthusiast.

The publication features contributions from Padma Shri awardees Jadav Payeng, popularly known as the "Forest Man of India", and silk conservationist Jogesh Deuri.

The programme was attended by several distinguished personalities from the fields of environment, science and education, including Dr Pratima Devi Sharma, Dr Buljit Buragohain, Dr Mrudul Kumar Borthakur, Dr Dev Kumar Dutta, Dr Arnab Jan Deka, Nabajyoti Bharali, Amardeep Gogoi, Ghanashyam Rajbanshi and Manoj Kumar Das, among others.

Musical renditions of Bhupen Hazarika's songs by Humayun Choudhury and interactions with contributors to Pobitora formed part of the jubilee celebrations.

APSC conducts Combined Competitive Preliminary Examination smoothly

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, July 5: The Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) successfully conducted the Combined Competitive (Preliminary) Examination, 2025 on Sunday across 74 examination centres in 35 districts of the State, with over 41,000 candidates appearing for recruitment to 78 posts in various state government services.

According to an official press release, a total of 41,695 candidates had applied for the examination, including 23,218 male, 18,473 female, four transgender candidates, and 278 Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD).

The examination was conducted for recruitment to 11 services, including 45 posts in the Assam Civil Service, six in the Assam Police Service, three District Transport Officer posts, one Superintendent of Excise post, two Assistant Registrar of Cooperative Societies posts, two Assam Urban Administrative Service posts, five Inspector of Labour posts, eight Assistant Employment Officer posts, four Sub-Registrar

posts, one Research Assistant post, and one Inspector of Excise post.

APSC Chairperson Prabhati Thaosan (Retd.) expressed appreciation to the district administrations, police, Health Department, Postal Department, Municipal Corporations, Assam Power Distribution Company Limited (APDCL), and the principals and teachers of educational institutions for their support in ensuring the smooth conduct of the examination.

The Commission highlighted several notable features of this year's examination. For the first time, question papers were provided in Assamese alongside English. The examination was conducted as per the annual examination calendar, candidates were provided OMR sheets with carbon copies, and the provisional answer key was uploaded on the same day immediately after the examination concluded.

The recruitment advertisement for the Combined Competitive Examination, 2025 was issued on April 10, while the last date for submission of applications was May 3, 2026.

Free Eye Camp benefits 86 patients in Karbi Anglong

HT Bureau

DIPHU, July 5: Team Tiger NGO, Diphu, in collaboration with Om Sai Pathibhara Eye Hospital, Bhabrapur, Nepal, organised a free eye check-up camp at Rong-Ali Sarmen Hanse Village under the Lumbajong MAC constituency recently, providing specialised eye care services to residents of rural areas.

The camp witnessed a positive response, with more than 86 patients from Rong-Ali Sarmen Hanse Village and neighbouring areas undergoing comprehensive eye examinations conducted by a team of ophthalmologists and healthcare professionals.

The screening covered refractive errors, cataracts, age-related vision problems and other common eye ailments.

During the examinations, 19 patients were diagnosed with cataracts and advised to undergo surgery, while several others were found to have refractive errors and were prescribed spectacles.

Organisers said the initiative was aimed

at preventing avoidable blindness and creating awareness about the importance of regular eye care in rural communities.

Team Tiger NGO expressed gratitude to social worker and businessman Rangina Hanse for his support in organising the programme. The organisation also thanked the doctors, optometrists and medical staff of Om Sai Pathibhara Eye Hospital for providing specialised medical services throughout the camp.

Appreciation was also extended to the School Managing Committee, the headmistress, local youth, volunteers, village leaders and residents for extending logistical support and ensuring the smooth conduct of the programme.

Team Tiger NGO reaffirmed its commitment to organising similar healthcare and social welfare initiatives in collaboration with medical institutions and community stakeholders to improve access to essential healthcare services in remote and underserved areas.

NTPC Bongaigaon launches fifth girl empowerment mission

Fifty rural girls selected for month-long residential programme focused on education, leadership and life skills

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, July 5: NTPC Bongaigaon recently launched the fifth edition of its flagship Girl Empowerment Mission (GEM) 2026, reaffirming its commitment to promoting education, leadership and holistic development among young girls from rural communities.

The inaugural programme at NTPC Bongaigaon, Salakati, was attended by NTPC Director (Finance) Jaikumar Srinivasan, Head of Project Arnab Maitra, President of Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club Kasturi Maitra, and General Manager (Operations and Maintenance) Anurag Gupta, along with senior officials, teachers, parents and representatives of various organisations.

This year's edition has enrolled 50 girls from 12 neighbouring schools, an increase of 10 participants over previous editions.

The month-long residential pro-



gramme is designed for girls aged between 10 and 12 years and aims to build self-confidence, leadership qualities, life skills and social responsibility. The inaugural ceremony began with the lighting of the ceremonial lamp and the rendition of the NTPC theme song.

The programme also featured a documentary on the Girl Empowerment Mission, cultural performances by members of the Bardwi Shikla Ladies Club and students of Notre Dame Academy, and motivational interactions with alumni of the 2023 GEM batch, who shared

their experiences after participating in the initiative.

Students also presented a performance inspired by the life of Malala Yousafzai, highlighting the importance of girls' education and its role in empowering future generations.

Addressing the gathering, Jaikumar Srinivasan emphasised that empowering girls contributes to stronger families and communities. He later interacted with the participants at the residential facility and distributed bicycles to all 50 girls to support their educational journey.

Head of Project Arnab Maitra described the Girl Empowerment Mission as one of NTPC's flagship social initiatives, aimed at nurturing confident, capable and socially responsible young women.

The programme, which will continue until July 31, includes aca-

demic learning, personality development, digital literacy, sports, creative arts, health and wellness sessions, educational exposure visits and activities designed to enhance the participants' overall development.

Since its launch in 2022, the initiative has benefited 210 girls, including this year's participants.

NTPC said that 10 per cent of the participants, selected through an independent evaluation process, are also provided free education at the township school to enable them to continue their studies in a supportive academic environment.

Officials said the Girl Empowerment Mission has so far reached more than 13,000 girls across NTPC projects nationwide and continues to reflect the organisation's commitment to gender equality, social responsibility and sustainable community development.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Start with what is right rather than what is acceptable.- Franz Kafka

Ram Temple scam and probe

Despite the best efforts of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Adityanath government in Uttar Pradesh (UP), a major scandal has exploded on the face of the Hindutva brigade. The biggest political project of the Sangh, which was like a blank cheque for encashment of electoral dividends by the BJP for the last two and a half decades, has ultimately turned out to be their biggest embarrassment. While the theft and embezzlement by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its ideological foot soldiers have been talked over in muffled voices in the corridors of power, it has now been established beyond any shred of doubt that donations in cash and valuables made to the presiding deity of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya were being stolen on a regular basis. That the repeated thefts were going unnoticed or glossed over has also been noted in some factual detail by the Special Investigation Team (SIT), which the state government was forced to appoint following the disclosure of wrongdoing. From media reports, it is clear that theft and some recovery of the stolen cash are prima facie established. However, it is not clear as to how such an outrageous criminal act could be perpetrated for a considerable period of time without anyone taking notice. Another question is whether this could have progressed without any knowledge of the higher ups of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust formed in 2020.

Of course, theft of cash and ornaments dedicated to the deity is a serious enough charge. But, the betrayal of the faith of millions of people is far more serious. The history of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement is now clearly unravelling. In a country like India nobody can deny the role of faith in shaping public perception, if not political opinion. In a way, the Ram Janmabhoomi Temple was the ideological lodestar of the BJP and the Hindutva brigade. The unprecedented exploitation of the religious sentiment of the people to the hilt for political and electoral gains has been the overwhelming feature in the days bygone. Apart from the RSS, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the union and state governments and even the highest judiciary cannot wash their hands off from these outrageous developments.

That the temple land was acquired after committing an act of vandalism is a fact that has been recognised by the then Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of India, D. Y. Chandrachud in his order. The dubious nature of and the brazen self-contradictions within the order had prompted many of us, particularly from the Left, to notice that though the long winding legal controversy was chosen to be put to rest, justice remained undelivered. Even Justice Chandrachud could not feel emboldened enough to defend his order on legal or constitutional grounds! Therefore, he had justified on grounds of divine intervention of the deity to settle the ownership of the title to the very same 'vandals'!

The issue of 'Dropout' in Assam's education system

The issue of students discontinuing their education midway in Assam's education system stands as a complex, multifaceted, and profound challenge, not only within the realm of education but also as a significant obstacle to the comprehensive social, economic, and human resource development of the state. This problem cripples the potential of future generations and its prevalence is deeply concerning. Education is the cornerstone of human life, serving as the primary driving force for a society's progress. When a student abandons schooling without completing their education, it is not merely a personal loss but an irreparable detriment to the entire society. Despite the introduction of the Right to Education Act, if a significant number of children remain deprived of the light of education, it reflects a failure of our social responsibility and system. Government statistics and various educational surveys highlight the gravity of this issue, indicating that the number of students dropping out from primary to secondary levels is alarmingly high, far exceeding the national average. The roots of this complex problem extend deep and are intricately linked to numerous social, economic, geographical, educational, and cultural factors.

The primary foundation of the 'dropout' issue in Assam is poverty and socio-economic disparities. For a large section of the population, particularly in tea garden areas, riverine char regions, tribal areas, and other backward rural regions, securing two meals a day remains a fundamental struggle. In such economically disadvantaged families, children are often compelled to engage in labor at a very young age to alleviate the family's financial burden, rather than attending school. Many of these children become child laborers, losing the opportunity to shape their futures. Numerous students feel embarrassed and frustrated due to their inability to afford essential school supplies such as books, uniforms, shoes, and other related expenses, leading them to withdraw from education. Although the government provides free textbooks, enrollment, and occasional financial assistance, many families remain unable to bear other hidden costs such as tuition fees, transportation expenses, and additional necessities, resulting in despair and the withdrawal of students from school. In impoverished families, immediate financial gains are prioritized over the long-term investment in higher education, as this addresses their im-

mediate survival needs. The lack of awareness among parents about the importance of education and insufficient understanding of its long-term benefits also plays a significant role, as they fail to recognize the future advantages of higher education and lack the motivation to keep their children in school for extended periods. This socio-economic issue exerts a severe and long-lasting negative impact on students' educational journeys, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and depriving them of opportunities to transform their lives.

Assam's geographical conditions also significantly contribute to the 'dropout' problem. In many rural areas, schools are located far from students' homes. Many students must walk several kilometers daily to reach school, creating significant challenges, particularly during the rainy season and floods, when the issue becomes even more complex. Annual floods damage numerous schools and cause prolonged disruptions in educational activities, forcing students to stay away from studies for months and leading to a loss of interest in education. In the char regions, particularly in districts like Dhubri, Goalpara, and other minority-dominated areas, the limited presence of schools deprives many students of educational opportunities, compelling them to seek livelihoods elsewhere. Additionally, the lack of adequate infrastructure in schools, such as proper classrooms, separate and clean toilets (especially for girls), drinking water facilities, electricity, and safe playgrounds, fosters disinterest among students toward attending school. The dilapidated condition of government schools discourages both students and parents, prompting them to either opt for private schools or abandon education altogether. The absence of modern and improved infrastructure hinders the creation of a healthy, safe, and conducive learning environment, which is essential for students' mental and physical development. The limited number of secondary and higher secondary schools forces many students, particularly from rural and poor backgrounds, to discontinue their education after primary schooling, as they are unable to travel to urban areas for further studies, effectively closing their educational pathways.

The shortage of teachers in many government schools in Assam is a pressing issue, particularly in critical subjects like science, mathematics, and languages, which creates barriers to students' learning. The lack of qualified and skilled teachers results in students failing to receive quality education and struggling to understand subjects. This leads to poor performance in examinations, diminishing their confidence and increasing the likelihood of dropping out. An inadequate teacher-student ratio makes it challenging for teachers to manage large numbers of students, resulting in a lack of individual attention. Uninspiring and exam-centric teaching methods, rooted in outdated practices, make students disinterested in school. The lack of innovation in teaching, limited emphasis on creativity, and insufficient focus on practical knowledge lead students to perceive education as irrelevant to their lives. A school environment characterized by fear, punishment, or frustration naturally discourages students from continuing their education. Teachers' focus on merely completing the curriculum often prevents them from understanding students' mental states and challenges. To improve educational standards, regular and high-quality teacher training, the use of modern teaching tools, and the adoption of student-centric teaching methods are essential.

Social and cultural influences, along with gender-based discrimination, are also significant factors contributing to the dropout problem. This issue is particularly pronounced among female students in rural and backward areas. Early marriage, dowry issues, the obligation to assist with household chores, and families' reluctance to pursue higher education for girls force many female students to abandon their studies midway. Prevailing conservative societal norms and discriminatory treatment between boys and girls create barriers to girls' education, as many families view girls as destined for "someone else's household" and are unwilling to invest in their education. In many cases, the distant location of secondary or higher secondary schools leads parents to hesitate in sending their daughters due to safety concerns. For boys, the pressure to financially support their families at a young age or other social influences often leads them to leave school in pursuit of work. In some communities, education is undervalued, resulting in higher dropout rates. Superstitions, regressive customs, and communal conflicts also disrupt students' school attendance. Parents' illiteracy or low educational levels prevent them from prioritizing their children's academic progress. Consequently, adolescents deprived of education lose the opportunity to lead healthy, secure, and self-reliant lives in the future. The consequences of the dropout problem are far-reaching and profound, posing a significant concern for the state's future. Students deprived of education face a narrowed life path, often forced into low-paying labor at a young age with limited opportunities to improve their quality of life. This perpetuates the cycle of poverty, with one generation after another facing the same economic hardships. The

lack of proper education renders most of these individuals unskilled laborers, limiting their earning potential and their ability to contribute positively to societal progress. The shortage of educated individuals negatively impacts all sectors of the state, particularly industries, healthcare, and technology, stunting economic growth. Students are also deprived of moral, social, and vocational knowledge, hindering their ability to establish themselves in society. Furthermore, adolescents without education are often drawn into criminal activities, substance abuse, and other antisocial behaviors, posing a significant threat to a healthy and secure societal environment. Therefore, addressing this issue is not only an educational necessity but also a matter of the state's stability, social harmony, and overall progress.

Addressing the 'dropout' problem in Assam's education system requires a coordinated, well-planned, and multi-faceted approach. Relying solely on government schemes or financial aid is insufficient; active participation from all sections of society is essential. Financial assistance and incentive programs should be implemented to support impoverished families, ensuring students receive regular and adequate financial aid to prevent them from being withdrawn from school for work. Special incentive programs, such as scholarships for female students and safe transportation arrangements, should be introduced to encourage regular attendance and academic excellence. To improve infrastructure and expand access, new secondary and higher secondary schools must be established in tea garden areas, char regions, and other backward regions, while existing schools' infrastructure, including separate toilets, drinking water, libraries, and laboratories, must be upgraded. To ensure quality education, teacher shortages must be addressed urgently by completing recruitment processes, particularly for science and mathematics teachers. Teachers should receive regular, high-quality training in modern teaching methods, psychology, and student problem-solving, with teaching approaches made more engaging, creative, and practical. Large-scale awareness campaigns are needed to educate parents and local communities about the importance of education, with school management committees and local panchayats empowered to monitor student attendance and educational quality. Finally, curricula should be designed to be life-oriented, incorporating vocational education and skill development from the primary level to equip students with relevant skills, fostering self-reliance and reducing dropout tendencies. Addressing this issue will enhance the state's human resource development, paving the way for a healthy, educated, and progressive Assam, requiring the concerted efforts of both the government and society.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan



Evasive Peace: How the US-Iran ceasefire is unravelling each day continuing conflict

By: Asad Mirza

The ink on the Islamabad Memorandum was barely dry when missiles and drones began flying again across the Persian Gulf. A week of tit-for-tat strikes between Washington and Tehran, compounded by Israel's relentless pounding of Lebanon, has exposed the US-Iran ceasefire of June 2026 as a fragile construct held together more by diplomatic exhaustion than by genuine strategic convergence.

When US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed the Islamabad Memorandum on June 17, 2026 - Trump at the Palace of Versailles following the G7 summit, Pezeshkian in Tehran - the world was offered a tantalising vision: the most dangerous military confrontation in the Middle East since the 2003 Iraq war, finally winding down. The deal, mediated over months by Pakistan and Qatar, established a 60-day ceasefire framework to negotiate a permanent end to the 2026 Iran war. Less than two weeks later, that vision lies in tatters, the victim of broken pledges, Iranian provocations, Israeli defiance, and the mercurial impulses of a US president who has threatened Iran with annihilation one day and dangled trade incentives the next.

To understand the current crisis, it is essential to grasp how fitfully the ceasefire has operated since its earliest iteration. The initial two-week truce brokered by Pakistan on April 7-8, 2026, was violated by both sides almost immediately. Low-intensity skirmishes never stopped. Trump extended the ceasefire "indefinitely" on April 21, yet US forces launched strikes on Iranian targets in May, targeting what CENTCOM described as "missile launch sites and Iranian boats attempting to emplace mines" in Bandar Abbas - framed publicly as self-defence. Iran retaliated against shipping. Each side accused the other of being the original aggressor; both were right. The June 17 memorandum was supposed to move beyond this cycle. Instead, it has accelerated it. On June 26, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps struck a Singapore-flagged cargo ship in the Strait of Hormuz with a drone. Trump called it a "foolish violation" of the ceasefire agreement and, true to his rhetorical style - "You'll find out" - ordered the US military to respond.

US Navy and Air Force jets struck ten Iranian military targets in and around the strait, hitting surveillance infrastructure, communication systems, air defence sites, drone storage facilities, and minelaying capabilities. Iran's foreign ministry declared these strikes a "clear violation" of the June 18 memorandum, stating that the conduct demonstrated that "the US regime places no value on its commitments." Iran then launched ballistic missiles and drones at US facilities - the Ali Al Salem Air Base in Kuwait and the US Fifth Fleet headquarters in Bahrain. Kuwait's air defences scrambled to intercept incoming fire; sirens blared across Bahrain. The US struck again, a second wave of attacks targeting Iranian coastal infrastructure. By June 28, both sides had agreed to halt strikes before renewed peace talks - but only after two days of the most intense exchanges since the April ceasefire. This is not a ceasefire. It is a managed escalation masquerading as diplomacy. No actor has done more to sabotage the fragile US-Iran diplomatic architecture than Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. From the moment peace talks gained traction, Israel

moved in the opposite direction in Lebanon, where its war against Hezbollah has continued with a ferocity that has killed more than 4,000 people, displaced over one million, and flattened dozens of southern villages.

Iran has consistently made one demand non-negotiable: a cessation of Israeli attacks in Lebanon must be part of any broader deal. Netanyahu has just as consistently refused, insisting that the ceasefire with Iran "does not include Lebanon" - a position that has infuriated Tehran and repeatedly brought negotiations to the brink of collapse. In early June, when Netanyahu threatened to bomb Hezbollah's strongholds in Beirut's Dahieh district, Iran suspended indirect negotiations with the US entirely, warning that "without fully restraining America's rabid dog in Lebanon, there will be no ceasefire." The bluntness of the language reflected genuine fury. This divergence goes deeper than tactics. Reports from late May suggested that Netanyahu and his inner circle privately view the emerging US-Iran agreement as "disastrous" - fearing it will rehabilitate Iran's regional standing, release frozen assets, and leave Tehran's nuclear programme ambiguous rather than dismantled.

The deeper structural problem is the incoherence at the top of the American strategy. Between March 23 and June 9 alone, Trump claimed at least 38 times that a deal with Iran was imminent. He threatened Iran with unconditional surrender, then offered to use frozen Iranian assets to buy American crops for the Iranian people. He declared that the US had "won" the war in late March even as Iranian missiles continued to rain down. He ordered strikes on the Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan nuclear facilities on June 21 - and three days later declared a ceasefire. This is not strategic ambiguity as a deliberate negotiating tool; it is the erratic output of a leader operating without a coherent endgame. Iran's threats to "militarily complete the job" if Iran continues to strike - warning that the Iranian regime could "cease to exist" - serve simultaneously as deterrence and as a provocation that hardens Iranian hardliners. His administration disputes claims that peace talks have stalled even as US warplanes conduct fresh strikes, a contradiction that undermines American credibility as a guarantor of any agreement.

What Trump wants from the deal is relatively clear: the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz to ease energy markets and claim a grand diplomatic victory. What he is less willing to confront is the harder architecture of a durable settlement: verifiable nuclear constraints, a framework for Iran's regional proxy network, and a mechanism to restrain Israel in Lebanon.

Whatever the ultimate fate of the memorandum, the 2026 war has already redrawn the strategic map of West Asia in ways that will outlast any single ceasefire. Iran, despite surviving the war, emerges militarily degraded, economically crippled, and diplomatically isolated. Its new supreme leader, Mojtaba Khamenei, is regarded as more hawkish than his father - a dangerous variable in a country whose politics were already fractured by massive popular protests in January 2026. The Gulf states - Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar - have borne severe costs from Iranian missile attacks and the Hormuz closure, and will push hard for permanent freedom of navigation guarantees. Israel's occupation of parts of southern Lebanon and its continued military presence raises the spectre of a protracted Lebanese quagmire echoing its disastrous 1982-2000 occupation. (IPA Service)

When earnings become more important than relationships

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

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

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

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

sonal savings, personal investment, or personal independence. This isn't the case in every family, but where it exists, it causes dissatisfaction. If the husband bears every major household expense, but the wife's income is kept separate from family responsibilities, the principle of equality remains incomplete. Similarly, if the husband expects the wife to work, manage the household, and yet lack independence in financial decisions, this is also unjust. The problem isn't one party's, but one of double standards. Equality doesn't just mean equal rights. It also means equal responsibility. If both earn, they should share responsibility for the family's needs, future plans, children's education, elderly care, and emergencies. Financial partnership means not only combining income, but also building trust.

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

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

It's also true that millions of women today spend their entire income on their families. Along with their jobs, they also shoulder the responsibilities of home, children, and the elderly. There are many families where hus-

bands and wives share their earnings without any accounting and make decisions together. Therefore, blaming any one group is neither fair nor factual. The aim of social analysis should not be to make accusations, but to understand trends and find solutions.

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

The greatest irony of modern life is that conveniences have increased, but satisfaction has decreased. Incomes have risen, but communication has diminished. Independence has increased, but partnerships have weakened. In the past, families lived together even with limited resources because decisions were made collectively. Today, resources are plentiful, but a mindset of "mine" and "yours" often divides relationships.

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

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

What is the solution? The solution lies not in blaming one party, but in strengthening family communication. After mar-

riage, husband and wife should openly discuss financial expectations, savings, investments, family expenses, and personal needs. It should be agreed that both will contribute to the family according to their respective capacities. Whether someone's income is high or low should not be the criterion for respect.

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

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

Ultimately, we must remember that money can make life comfortable, but it cannot make life happy. A bank balance can provide security, but not closeness. Expensive houses can be built, but families cannot be bought. The ultimate currency of relationships, even today, is trust, sensitivity, sacrifice, and mutual respect. When income becomes more important than relationships, the family gradually transforms into a financial unit. Calculation replaces love, ownership replaces partnership, and dialogue replaces argument. Therefore, it's crucial to understand early on that earning money is a means to life, not its purpose. If money strengthens relationships, it's a blessing, but if it becomes a barrier between them, there's no greater irony.

A healthy society will be one where both men and women are financially capable, independent, respected, and fulfill their duties with equal devotion to their rights. This is true equality, true partnership, and the greatest strength of the Indian family system.

Adult Immunisation in India: What the latest data tell us

By: Oommen C. Kurian

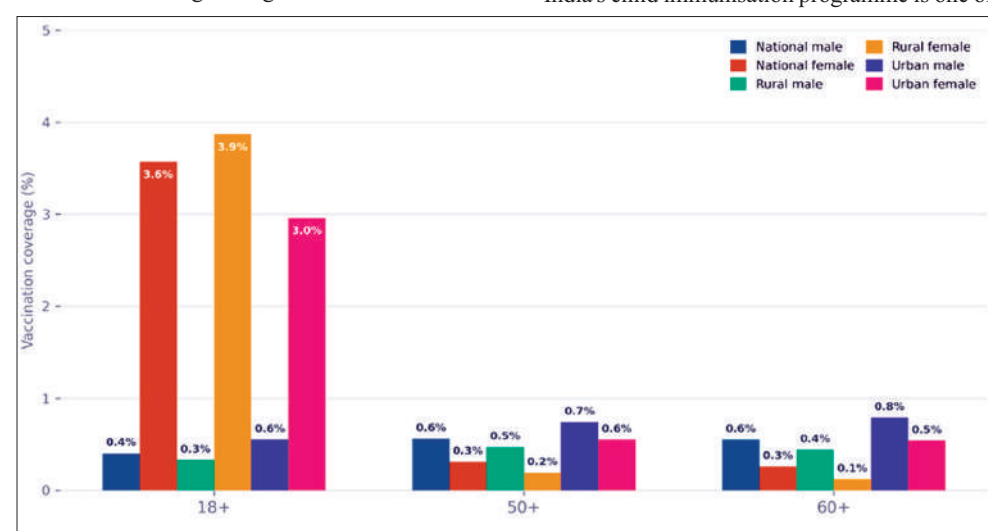
Until the National Sample Survey (NSS) 80th Round on health in 2025, the only nationally representative data source on adult vaccination in India was the Longitudinal Ageing Study in India (LASI) Wave 1, conducted in 2017–18. LASI covered adults aged 45 years and above across 35 states and union territories, and its health module asked respondents whether they had ever received any one of five vaccines: influenza, pneumococcal, hepatitis B, typhoid, and diphtheria-tetanus. The resulting coverage figures were stark, with influenza coverage at 1.5 percent and pneumococcal coverage at 0.6 percent among older adults. However, the data had significant structural limitations for policy purposes. The vaccination module recorded only a binary 'yes' or 'no' response for each vaccine, with no information on when the dose was received, where it was administered, its cost to the household, or how many doses had been administered.

The NSS 80th Round, fielded in 2025 under Schedule 25.0 on health, marks the first time that a large-scale national household survey in India has collected detailed, multidimensional data on adult vaccination across the full adult population. Unlike LASI, the round covers adults of all ages, establishing comparable coverage estimates from age 18 onwards and enabling age-disaggregated analysis at the 50- and 60-year thresholds that matter most for an ageing policy agenda. The result is a dataset that can, for the first time, situate adult vaccination within India's broader health financing architecture, whether vaccinations are delivered free through the government healthcare



The NSS 80th Round's headline figure of 8.14 percent vaccination coverage across all ages (Figure 1) is largely driven by childhood immunisation. However, examining adults separately reveals a very different picture.

Main Findings of the Survey
India's child immunisation programme is one of



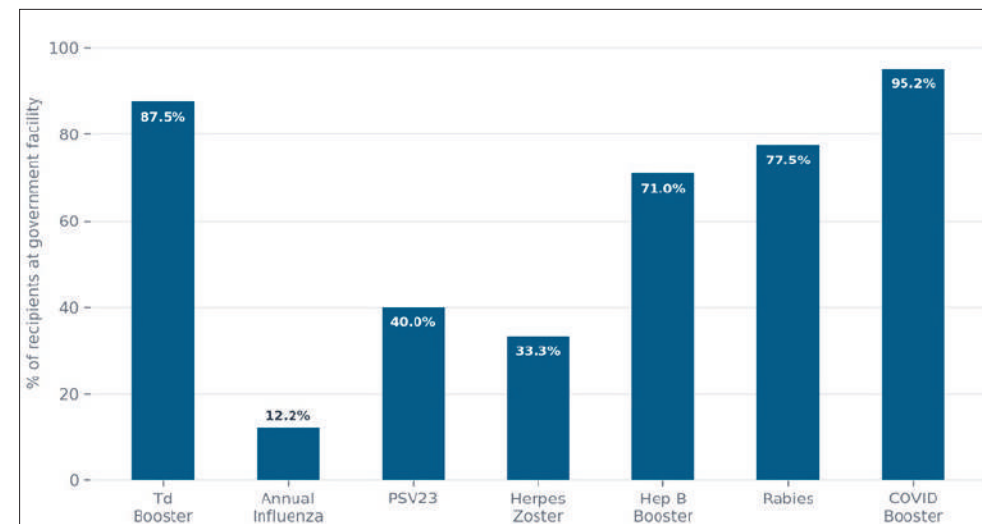
system or through the market. It is, in short, the baseline from which any serious adult immunisation programme in India will have to be built. As the immunisation findings were not a part of the initial report of the 80th Round published in April 2026, this article presents a country-level assessment of adult immunisation based on an analysis of the unit-level data.

the genuine public health achievements of the past three decades: NFHS-6 records full vaccination coverage among children aged 12–23 months at 87.1 percent. The NSS 80th Round's headline figure of 8.14 percent vaccination coverage across all ages (Figure 1) is largely driven by childhood immunisation. However, examining adults separately reveals a very different picture. Among adults

aged 18 and above, coverage is 1.98 percent. Among those aged 50 and above, it falls to 0.43 percent and among those aged 60 and above, to 0.40 percent. The same country that vaccinates nearly 9 in 10 children reaches fewer than one in 200 of its older citizens. These averages describe the sheer absence of a programme rather than low coverage.

The 1.98 percent adult coverage figure conceals more than it reveals. Roughly 95 percent of adult vaccination events in the sample are tetanus-diphtheria (Td) boosters, delivered almost entirely through government antenatal infrastructure to pregnant women. Many other vaccines on the list, including influenza, pneumococcal, and herpes zoster, were received at a government facility by fewer than half of their recipients (Figure 2). These are market-priced products accessed largely through private providers, which explains why their coverage is negligible at the population level. The COVID-19 booster is the only recent exception, with 95.2 percent being administered through government facilities—a product of an exceptional state-led campaign. Remove the handful of vaccines available as a part of government programmes, and adult vaccination in India is, structurally, a private enterprise.

Counterintuitively, at the 18+ population level, female coverage nationally is 3.57 percent, against male coverage of 0.40 percent, a gap that appears to reflect a women's health achievement (Figure 3). However, it is the result of Td booster vaccination among pregnant women through antenatal networks, not evidence of women's access to adult vaccination. A disaggregated analysis of the data makes this plain at older ages: coverage among women aged 50+ falls to 0.31 percent, and among



those aged 60+ to 0.26 percent, both below the male rate. Rural women aged 60 and above have a vaccination coverage rate of just 0.12 percent, the lowest in the dataset. Vaccination coverage among urban women at older ages do only marginally better, approaching the male rate because purchasing power provides some access to private-market vaccines. The public system, however, effectively stops reaching women once they are no longer pregnant.

Scheduled Tribe (ST) adults lead all social groups at 18+, with 2.33 percent coverage against 1.83 percent for the general category. This looks like an equity success until the older age bands are examined, mirroring the gender results. At 60+, ST coverage collapses to 0.10 percent, the lowest of any group, while the general category holds at 0.66 percent. The ST lead at 18+ is entirely a function of focused antenatal Td delivery in tribal geographies through government programmes fighting maternal and child mortality, which inflates female coverage among reproductive-age women. Once that cohort ages out, the public system has no equivalent mechanism to reach them. The general category's relative advantage at older ages seems to reflect access to private-market vaccines that are effectively out of reach for SC, ST, and OBC elderly adults by both price and geography.

Across consumption quintiles, adult coverage at 18+ barely varies, from 1.68 percent in the poorest quintile to 2.16 percent in the richest. At 50+ and 60+, a modest gradient appears, but with a clear anomaly: the fourth quintile (Q4) outperforms the fifth quintile (Q5). Urban Q4 coverage at 50+ reaches 1.03 percent, compared with 0.65 percent for urban Q5. The explanation remains unclear from these data, but the pattern is consistent across age groups and sexes. The more consequential finding is the rural-urban gap: urban coverage at 50+ is 0.65 percent, compared with rural coverage of 0.33 percent—a two-to-one disparity that may reflect limited vaccine availability and the relatively small number of private vaccine providers outside cities.

The religious disaggregation contains the

dataset's most striking finding. Christian coverage at 50+ is 2.12 percent and at 60+ is 1.92 percent, five to six times the rate for Hinduism and Islam at the same ages. This is not a wealth or urbanisation effect. Rural Christian coverage at 50+ is 2.32 percent, higher than the urban figure of 1.76 percent, reversing the urban premium seen everywhere else. Islam's 18+ lead of 2.67 percent dissolves on gender disaggregation: the female-to-male ratio is 9.3, identical to Hinduism's, suggesting it could be a fertility artefact, explained by the reach of the antenatal programmes. At the other end, Jainism, the most affluent religious community in the sample, records 0.05 percent coverage at 50+, the lowest of any group, a clear signal that vaccine hesitancy in India is not simply a problem of poverty.

The Way Forward

India has spent decades building the institutional muscle to count what it cares about, and governments do not design survey instruments for phenomena they have no intention of addressing. The NSS 80th Round has now told us, with unusual precision, that adult immunisation in India is not an agenda in need of improvement but one that does not yet exist. It has also told us where the fault lines run, who is being left behind, and what a serious programme would need to correct. From the findings of this preliminary analysis, it is clear that this fascinating dataset can offer actionable policy insights at sub-national levels.

The NSS 80th Round has now told us, with unusual precision, that adult immunisation in India is not an agenda in need of improvement but one that does not yet exist.

A country that is simultaneously the world's fastest-ageing large democracy and pharmacy of the world has both the epidemiological urgency and the manufacturing capacity to act. The silver dividend that an ageing India aspires to harvest will not materialise without a deliberate investment in keeping that population well. If the latest NSSO health round is any guide, the conversation has already begun. The programme should soon follow. (Courtesy: ORF)

Experts share 5 things to consider before you stop taking blood pressure meds

By: Amy McLean

Healthcare professionals may prescribe blood pressure medication to treat high blood pressure (hypertension). Some types of blood pressure medication can include trusted source beta-blockers, ACE inhibitors, diuretics, and calcium channel blockers.

A study presented in June 2026 at the 63rd European Renal Association Congress in Glasgow, United Kingdom, suggests that dihydropyridine calcium channel blockers (DCCBs) may increase the risk of major adverse kidney events by 33% in people with type 2 diabetes, compared with other medications for hypertension.

These findings have not yet been published in a peer-reviewed journal.

DCCBs are a common type of calcium channel blocker for the treatment of high blood pressure. Examples of DCCBs include:

- Amlodipine (Norvasc)
- Felodipine (Plendil)
- Isradipine (DynaCirc)
- Nifedipine (Adalat, Procardia)
- Nimodipine (Nimotop, Nymalize)
- Nisoldipine (Sular)

In a previous interview with Medical News Today, the Association of British Clinical Diabetologists (ABCD) explained that "this data suggests that DCCBs may be associated [with] a more rapid progression of kidney disease in such patients [with diabetic kidney disease]."

"This is, of course, important and concerning. There may, however, be many confounders, and the findings need to be replicated in larger cohorts, ideally prospectively, before guidelines should be significantly changed," they said.

In light of these findings, MNT spoke to two experts: Michelle Routhenstein, MS, RD, CDCES, CDN, preventive cardiology dietitian at EntirelyNourished and Rigved Tadwalkar, MD, FACC, consultative cardiologist and director of Digital Transformation Pacific Heart Institute in Santa Monica, CA.

We discussed whether it is ever safe to stop taking blood pressure medication if a person has hypertension, whether all blood pressure medications are the same, and whether any natural interventions may help manage high blood pressure.

FAQs about stopping blood pressure medication

The two experts answered 5 commonly asked questions on the topic of managing hypertension and blood pressure medications.



If a person has a diagnosis of hypertension, is there ever a point at which they can stop taking blood pressure medication, either gradually or cold turkey?

Tadwalkar said that "it's uncommon" that a person can stop taking blood pressure medication.

However, he said "there are situations where a person may be able to come off blood pressure medication. The patients who tend to have the best chance are those with relatively mild hypertension, a recent diagnosis, or those who have made substantial lifestyle changes that meaningfully lowered their blood pressure."

"Even then I generally recommend doing it gradually and with close monitoring rather than stopping medication abruptly. Some blood pressure medications can lead to rebound increases in blood pressure when stopped suddenly, and even when that's not the case, blood pressure can climb back up faster than many people expect," he said.

Talking about her practice, Routhenstein explained that she often sees "physicians gradually reduce and in many cases discontinue blood pressure medications when a person's blood pressure has been consistently maintained

within a healthy range through lifestyle and dietary changes."

"It's important to note that blood pressure medications should never be stopped abruptly without medical supervision, as this can cause blood pressure to rebound or worsen," she stressed.

"By addressing the underlying contributors to high blood pressure through targeted nutrition and lifestyle strategies, I see blood pressure medications being among the most common medications I see reduced or eliminated under a physician's guidance," she added.

Are all blood pressure medications the same? If not, when might doctors recommend changing blood pressure medication rather than stopping it completely?

"Blood pressure medications belong to several different classes, and each works through a different mechanism," explained Routhenstein.

"Depending on the underlying factors contributing to hypertension, such as fluid retention, increased vascular resistance, kidney function, heart conditions, or other health concerns, a physician may recommend switching to a different medication rather than stopping treatment altogether," she said.

"I also frequently work with individuals who have resistant hypertension, meaning their blood pressure remains elevated despite taking multiple classes of blood pressure medications. In many of these cases, targeted dietary and lifestyle interventions that help address the physiological cause can help lower blood pressure more effectively than medication alone," she explained.

Routhenstein added that physicians may decide to gradually reduce or discontinue the use of blood pressure medications while monitoring progress and overall health.

Meanwhile, Tadwalkar explained that some people may change blood pressure medication if they experience side effects.

"Changing medications is usually a much better option than stopping treatment altogether. In many cases, the fact that the medication is working is evidence that it is needed. Our goal is usually to find the right medication and dose that controls blood pressure while fitting comfortably into a person's life," he said.

Can you manage high blood pressure through natural interventions alone?

"Patients with mild elevations in blood pressure may sometimes achieve excellent control through lifestyle measures alone, particularly when changes are made early. At the same time, there are plenty of people who exercise regularly, maintain a healthy weight, and eat well who still require medication," he said.

Routhenstein spoke about natural interventions as an initial treatment for high blood pressure. "The first line of treatment with high blood pressure is through diet and lifestyle strategies. I see the strong impact diet has on blood pressure when we personalize the science into each person's lifestyle," she explained.

"There are many contributors to elevated blood pressure that can be addressed through targeted nutrition and lifestyle modifications, including excess fructose intake, reduced nitric oxide production, nutrient inadequacies, chronic inflammation, excess body weight, poor sleep, and physical inactivity."

— Michelle Routhenstein, MS, RD
"When these underlying drivers are ad-

ressed, blood pressure often improves significantly and in many cases normalizes," she added.

Which natural interventions may help manage blood pressure alongside medication?

Some dietary changes may help manage blood pressure alongside medication. Routhenstein listed the following lifestyle changes that may help lower blood pressure:

- Addressing gut health, and ensuring adequate intake of key nutrients such as potassium, magnesium, and calcium from food,
- Achieving and maintaining a heart-healthy weight,
- Engaging in regular physical activity, including resistance training,
- Limiting or avoiding alcohol,
- Managing stress,
- Prioritizing sleep quality, including evaluation and treatment of sleep apnea when present.

Tadwalkar said that the interventions with benefits that are "measurable and sustainable" are also "the least glamorous."

"Regular physical activity, reducing excess dietary sodium, maintaining a healthy weight, improving sleep quality, limiting excess alcohol, and managing stress can all have meaningful effects on blood pressure," he explained.

What diets may help manage blood pressure, and can any diets affect blood pressure medication?

Routhenstein explained that diet plays "a powerful role" when it comes to managing blood pressure levels.

"Reducing excess sodium while increasing potassium-rich foods such as fruits, vegetables, legumes, and potatoes can help support healthy blood pressure levels," she said.

Both Routhenstein and Tadwalkar reference the DASH (Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension) eating pattern, or "DASH diet," as an approach to lowering blood pressure.

"The DASH diet remains one of the most studied dietary approaches for blood pressure management. It emphasizes fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and lean protein sources while limiting excess sodium and highly processed foods. Many of these foods are naturally rich in potassium, which helps balance some of sodium's effects on blood pressure," Tadwalkar explained.

"The best results usually come from combining a thoughtful diet with appropriate medical therapy rather than viewing them as competing strategies," he added. (Courtesy:MNT)

Ram Mandir Trust crucial meet today

Champat Rai's fate, SIT probe likely among agenda

AYODHYA (UP), July 5: The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust will hold a crucial meeting on Monday amid ongoing investigations into the alleged embezzlement of donations, with the fate of the resignations submitted by the Trust's general secretary Champat Rai and trustee Anil Mishra expected to dominate the agenda, Trust sources told PTI.

The meeting will be held at Mani Ram Chhawani, the monastery of Trust president Nriyaya Gopal Das. Trust treasurer Govind Dev Giri has asked all regular and ex officio members to attend the deliberations.

Sources told PTI that Trust president Nriyaya Gopal Das, who is hospitalised in critical condition, and senior trustee K Parasaran, who cannot travel due to age-related health issues, may participate in the meeting via video conference. According to sources, the Trust is likely to discuss the resignations of Champat Rai and Anil Mishra, both of whom stepped down after being accused in the case.

If their resignations are accepted, the meeting is also likely to consider plans for a new admin-



istrative structure for the Trust's operations. The role of special invitee Gopal Rao is also expected to be discussed.

Additionally, the meeting is likely to include a briefing on the interim findings of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) looking into the alleged embezzlement and will address the future management framework for the Ram temple. Sources mention that an unaudited income and expenditure statement, balance sheet, and other financial details for the 2025-26

fiscal year will be presented for approval.

Furthermore, discussions regarding the appointment of a chief executive officer to oversee the management of the Ram temple are anticipated to take place during the meeting, sources told PTI.

Currently, the Trust comprises 11 regular members, including president Nriyaya Gopal Das, Vasudevanand Saraswati, Vishwaprakasmatirih, Parmanand Giri, treasurer Govind Dev Giri, Krishna Mohan, Dineendra Das, and K

Parasaran. With the resignations of Champat Rai and Anil Mishra, and the recent passing of trustee Bimlendra Mohan Pratap Mishra, the Trust currently lacks a vice president to preside over meetings in the president's absence, sources say.

The ex officio members include Union government secretary Prashant Lekhande, Uttar Pradesh government secretary Sanjay Prasad, Ayodhya District Magistrate Shashank Tripathi and former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister Nripendra Mishra.

The meeting comes as two parallel investigations into the alleged embezzlement are underway. While an SIT is conducting an administrative probe and its tenure has been extended till the end of July, the police are investigating the case after an FIR was lodged on the Trust's complaint.

According to sources, statements from Champat Rai, Anil Mishra, and special invitee Gopal Rao have been recorded by both the SIT and the police; however, no FIR has yet been filed against any of the three Trust functionaries. (PTI)

LJP (Ram Vilas) ramping up UP push, eyeing assembly polls: Chirag Paswan

LUCKNOW, July 5: Union Minister and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) president Chirag Paswan on Sunday said his party will celebrate the birth anniversary of its founder Ram Vilas Paswan in Lucknow this year as part of its efforts to strengthen the organisation in Uttar Pradesh ahead of the Assembly elections. Addressing reporters, Paswan said the party was working to expand its organisational base across the country while carrying forward the ideals of the late Ram Vilas Paswan.

"The party has decided to celebrate the birth anniversary of our founder, my leader and my father, the late Ram Vilas Paswan, in Lucknow this year. With this programme, we aim to infuse new energy into the organisation and strengthen the party in Uttar Pradesh," he said.

He said the LJP (Ram Vilas) had already established a strong presence in Bihar and had legislators in Jharkhand and Nagaland, while continuing to expand its footprint in several northeastern states.

"With the same vision, we have set a target of strengthening the organisation in Uttar Pradesh. In the



coming days, several programmes will be organised in different districts of the state under the leadership of the state unit," Paswan said.

On whether the party would contest the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections and its alliance strategy, Paswan said the party was keen to enter the electoral fray, but decisions on seat-sharing and the alliance would be taken by the state unit and approved by the central parliamentary board.

"I honestly admit that the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) intends to contest the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. The nature of

the alliance and the number of seats we will contest will be decided by the state unit, whose proposal will be sent to the central parliamentary board for final approval," he said.

"We are part of the NDA at the Centre and in Bihar, and certainly we want to strengthen the alliance in Uttar Pradesh as well. However, the final decision rests with the party's state unit and the central parliamentary board," he added.

Responding to a question about an alleged online threat to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Paswan said the matter should be treated with utmost seriousness. (PTI)

Govt should review its stand on keeping Ram Temple Trust outside purview of RTI: Brittas



NEW DELHI, July 5: CPI(M) Rajya Sabha MP John Brittas has urged the Centre to reconsider its stand that the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust is not a public authority under the RTI Act, saying such a move would be in the interest of transparency and public accountability.

In a letter to Union Home Minister Amit Shah dated July 4, Brittas said the Trust's origins are unique.

He noted that following the Supreme Court's November 2019 Ayodhya judgment, the Centre framed the scheme governing the Trust, constituted it through a gazette notification and vested in it the acquired land. He also pointed out that 12 of the Trust's 15 members were initially nominated by the government.

Referring to the Central Information Commission's (CIC) June 6, 2025 order holding that the Trust is not a "public authority" under the RTI Act, Brittas said the Commission had relied substantially on the Home Ministry's stand and urged the ministry to review its position in the interest of transparency and public accountability.

He argued that the Centre's contention that the Trust was not "established or constituted" by a government notification merely because the notification was issued pursuant to the Supreme Court's directions warranted reconsideration.

Section 2(h)(d) of the RTI Act, he said, makes no distinction between a notification issued independently by the government and one issued in compliance with a judicial direction. The CIC comes under the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension.

Citing Supreme Court judgments in D.A.V. College Trust and Management Society v. Director of Public Instructions (2019) and Thalappalam Service Cooperative Bank Ltd. v. State of Kerala (2013), besides the Delhi High Court's July 1 judgment declaring the National Stock Exchange a public authority under the RTI Act, Brittas argued that institutions deriving their legal existence and public character from governmental action should receive a purposive interpretation that advances transparency.

He said the Trust's governing framework includes continuing institutional representation from the Centre and the Uttar Pradesh government through serving IAS officers, reflecting the government's enduring association with its administration. "While these representatives may not enjoy voting rights, their statutory inclusion in the governing framework reflects the public character of the institution and the Government's continuing institutional association with its administration," he said.

The governmental presence cannot be ignored while determining whether the Trust ought to be subjected to standards of transparency under the Right to Information Act.

"The public character of the Trust also arises from the nature of the functions entrusted to it. It administers one of the country's most revered religious institutions, manages land acquired under a Parliamentary enactment and vested through government notification, and receives contributions from millions of devotees across India and abroad," he said. He added the "extraordinary confidence" reposed by the public in the Trust naturally carries with it an equally compelling expectation of transparency.

Brittas also cited the example of the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board, arguing that institutional autonomy and public accountability are not mutually exclusive. He said major religious institutions established under statutory or governmental frameworks continue to enjoy autonomy in religious matters while functioning within transparent administrative and financial systems. (PTI)

CIC says temple 'not a public authority' plea can't absolve Puducherry dept of disclosing records

NEW DELHI, July 5: The CIC has directed the Department of Hindu Religious Institutions and Wakf in Puducherry to revisit an RTI plea on Sri Vedhapureeswarar Sri Varadarajaperumal Devasthanam and furnish available records, saying the temple's status as "not a public authority" does not absolve the department of its statutory obligation to disclose information held by it about the temple. Information Commissioner P R Ramesh noted that the appellant had approached the Department, which is "admittedly a public authority" under the RTI Act, and not the temple.

The Central Information Commission (CIC) passed the order on an appeal seeking copies of the temple's annual budgets for 2021-22 to 2024-25, audited account statements for 2020-21 to 2023-24, audit reports and details of rectification of audit objections.

The applicant also sought details of complaints received against the temple's administrative officer and staff since 2021, disciplinary action taken, pending complaints, copies of complaints and re-



lated proceedings, besides inspection reports, registers maintained under the Puducherry Hindu Religious Institutions Act and orders relating to alienation of temple properties.

The Department had transferred the RTI application relating to budget and audit records to the temple administration under Section 6(3) of the RTI Act.

The temple administration, however, rejected the request, contending that the Devasthanam was not a "public authority" under Section 2(h) of the Act as it

was not substantially financed by the Government of Puducherry, and relied on an earlier CIC order passed in 2020.

Information Commissioner Ramesh noted that the appellant had approached the Department which is "admittedly a public authority" under the RTI Act.

"Merely because the temple itself may not qualify as a public authority does not ipso facto absolve the Department of its statutory obligation to furnish information that is available with it or is held by it under law," the CIC said.

"The Department cannot deny access to records in its custody by simply transferring the application to an entity which itself disputes its status as a public authority," it added. The Commission observed that the department had merely relied on the temple's response to queries relating to annual budgets, audited accounts and audit reports, without indicating whether copies of those records were available with it in discharge of its supervisory and statutory functions under the Puducherry Hindu Religious Institutions Act. (PTI)

VHP asks police to verify claims made by opposition leaders on donation 'theft' at Ram temple

NEW DELHI, July 5: The Vishva Hindu Parishad has written to Ayodhya police, urging it to examine the claims made by several Opposition leaders, including Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal, on the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple and summon them to substantiate the allegations.

The RSS affiliate demanded that action be taken against them if it is found that they have made "wild allegations" intended to create and promote feelings of "hatred, ill will and enmity".

In a letter dated July 4 to Ayodhya Deputy Superintendent of Police Ashutosh Tiwari, the investigating officer in the case, VHP international president Alok Kumar said the leaders have made specific allegations that have been widely circulated through television channels, social media platforms and other electronic media, and urged the investigating officer to call them to disclose the factual basis of their claims, the source of their information and any documents or material supporting them.

Kumar said the leaders have publicly made specific allegations and have even attributed definite figures, including allegations involving amounts exceeding Rs 20,000 crore.

"The allegations made by the above named and

other persons lead one to believe that they are acquainted with the facts and circumstances of the case," the letter said.

Referring to their public statements, Kumar said Priyanka Gandhi questioned whether junior employees alone could have switched off CCTV cameras and manipulated offerings worth thousands of crores, or whether influential people are involved.

Kumar said Kejriwal alleged that about Rs 200 crore in cash, besides Lord Ram's garland, charan padukas, diamonds, jewellery, silver bricks and lamps, have allegedly been stolen, and questioned the silence of the Uttar Pradesh Police, the ED and the CBI. The letter also referred to public statements allegedly made by Samajwadi Party leader Ram Gopal Yadav and AAP MP Sanjay Singh on the "theft" of cash and valuables donated at the temple.

In the letter, Kumar noted that Yadav alleged a Rs 20,000-crore scam, claiming that cash and valuables donated by devotees from India and abroad have allegedly gone missing and that not only junior employees and Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai, who has since tendered his resignation, but also several influential people are allegedly involved. (PTI)

Pandavani legend Teejan Bai dies at 70; PM Modi, Chhattisgarh CM Sai express grief

RAIPUR, July 5: Legendary Pandavani folk singer Teejan Bai, who took Chhattisgarh's traditional storytelling art to audiences across the world through her commanding voice and expressive style, died at AIIMS in Raipur on Sunday after a prolonged illness, doctors said. She was 70.

Teejan Bai breathed her last at 3.15 am at the hospital, where she had been undergoing treatment since May 27, a doctor at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Raipur, told PTI.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed grief over Teejan Bai's death, crediting her for giving Chhattisgarh's folk art a distinct global identity through her performances.

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said her unparalleled contribution to Indian folk art and culture will always be remembered. He went to AIIMS in the morning to pay tribute to the veteran artist.

Born in 1956 at Ganiyari village in Durg district in a humble family, Teejan Bai, a Padma Vibhushan awardee, developed a passion for listening to

and narrating stories from the Mahabharata at an early age.

Despite social opposition and financial hardship, she persevered and went on to become the country's most celebrated exponent of Pandavani, the traditional folk art form of Chhattisgarh that combines dramatic narration, singing and musical accompaniment to recount episodes from the epic.

Known for her powerful voice, commanding stage presence and expressive style, she transformed Pandavani from a regional folk tradition into an internationally acclaimed art form.

She performed extensively in India and abroad, including in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Japan, Russia, Australia and Germany, earning global recognition for Chhattisgarh's rich cultural heritage.

In recognition of her outstanding contribution to Indian folk arts, she was honoured with the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan, India's second-highest civilian award. (PTI)

No eligible voter should be left out during SIR exercise, says Jharkhand Congress

RANCHI, July 5: Jharkhand Congress in-charge K Raju on Sunday asked party workers to coordinate with booth-level officers (BLOs) and conduct door-to-door visits to ensure that voter revision forms are filled correctly under the ongoing SIR exercise. Raju issued the direction while addressing an organisational meeting attended by district Congress committee presidents, district and assembly in-charges, district vice-presidents, secretaries and the party's booth-level agents (BLAs).

"As the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) process in the state is underway, all party workers, including BLAs of all booths, should work in close coordination with the BLOs. Party workers should go door-to-door to ensure that the voter revision forms are filled correctly," he said. He said any errors detected during the exercise should be brought to the notice of the district authorities for prompt rectification.

"Today, I held a meeting with the party workers and functionaries from all parts of the state. We mainly discussed and reviewed the ongoing SIR process. In the last three days, I reviewed the SIR process at the gram panchayat, block and district levels across the state and gave directions to the workers so that no voter is left out," Raju told reporters. He said the tasks assigned by the party should be implemented properly, and reports submitted online for review. The reports would be assessed and incentive points awarded accordingly, he added.

State Congress co-in-charge Dr Sirivella Prasad said district in-charges, district chiefs, block presidents, ward presidents and mandal presidents should discharge their responsibilities effectively. (PTI)

Monsoon gains strength across India

Mumbai air traffic hit, alerts in Kerala, Odisha

NEW DELHI, July 5: Monsoon activity intensified across India on Sunday, with heavy rain disrupting flight operations in Mumbai, triggering weather alerts in Kerala, Odisha and Jharkhand, and bringing widespread downpour to Delhi.

Mumbai took the hardest hit as heavy overnight rain lashed the city, forcing the suspension of runway operations at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport for an hour.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Sunday retained a red alert, forecasting continued downpours and isolated extremely heavy showers.

Several inbound and outbound flights were affected due to the disruption, leaving passengers to grapple with an average departure delay of 75 minutes and arrivals by at least 28 minutes.

"At approximately 10.17 am, adverse weather conditions, including strong gusty winds of up to 42 knots and reduced visibility due to heavy rain, impacted runway operations," the

Mumbai International Airport Ltd said in a statement. Following an improvement in weather conditions, normal runway operations resumed after an hour, it said.

Several areas in Mumbai recorded over 200 mm of rainfall and a few others as much as 300 mm in the last 24 hours, according to official data.

In Odisha, a well-marked low-pressure area over the Bay of Bengal intensified into a depression, prompting the state to place all its districts on high alert.

The IMD said the system is likely to cross the north Odisha coast between Chandbali and Digha over the next day and could bring heavy rainfall to Odisha and West Bengal.

Most parts of Kerala received widespread rain on Sunday, putting several areas across the state on orange and yellow alert.

The IMD issued orange alerts for Kannur and Kasaragod on July 6 and for Kozhikode, Kannur and Kasaragod on July 7, while yellow alerts remained in force for several northern



districts.

The Kerala State Disaster Management Authority urged people living in landslide, mudslide and flash flood-

prone areas to move to safer locations if advised by authorities.

In Delhi, moderate rainfall lashed several parts of the national capital on

Sunday, bringing much-needed relief from the sultry weather.

Chhatrapur recorded the highest rainfall at 49 mm till 2.30 pm, followed by Gurugram (35 mm), Mehrauli (18 mm), Greater Noida (17 mm), Najafgarh (8 mm) and Janakpuri (7 mm), according to IMD data.

The weather department has forecast a generally cloudy sky with moderate rain during the day, with the maximum temperature likely to settle around 36 degrees Celsius.

In Jharkhand, the IMD issued a yellow alert for thunderstorms, lightning and gusty winds across all 24 districts from July 6 to 9.

"Cloudy conditions are likely to prevail, with a possibility of light to moderate rainfall across the state, and heavy rain is expected at isolated places. The maximum temperature is likely to decrease by 3 to 4 degrees Celsius," it said.

Garhwa, Palamu, Chatra, Hazaribag, Latehar, Lohardaga, Gumla and Ranchi are likely to receive heavy rainfall on Monday. (PTI)

Rajya Sabha MP Tai Tagak announces Lower Subansiri as Parliamentary Nodal District

HT Correspondent

ZIRO/YAZALI, July 5: Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Tai Tagak concluded his maiden two-day tour of Keyi Panyor and Lower Subansiri districts by announcing Lower Subansiri as his Parliamentary Nodal District while unveiling a series of relief, development and cultural initiatives.

The tour began on July 4 with a visit to the flash flood-hit areas of Possa and the NEEPCO colony under Yazali Circle, where Tagak, accompanied by Nyapin MLA Tai Nikio and Raga MLA Rotom Tebin, reviewed the damage caused by the June 24 cloudburst and interacted with affected families at relief camps.

During the visit, the MP handed over ₹ 2.5 lakh each to Yachuli MLA Toko Tatung and Keyi Panyor Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta to provide ex gratia assistance of ₹ 50,000 to each of the families of the five people who lost their lives in the disaster.

The contribution follows an earlier emergency relief of ₹ 7 lakh extended to the district administra-



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tion on June 30.

He also assured residents and officials of his efforts to secure long-term rehabilitation support from the State and Central governments.

Later, Tagak participated in the Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam plantation drive at the ITI campus in Dilopolyang, Ziro, organised to mark the 125th birth anniversary of Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee.

Interacting with students and faculty members, he encouraged young people to pursue innovation, entrepreneurship and contribute towards building an

Atmanirbhar Bharat.

On July 5, the MP visited Achukuru (Mother's Home) in Old Ziro, an institution providing shelter, education and care to orphaned and destitute women and children.

Appreciating the efforts of its founder Taiyang Santhi, he donated mattresses, fruits and ₹ 1 lakh in financial assistance.

He also assured support for improving road connectivity to the institution.

The tour concluded with Tagak attending the 37th Dree Festival celebrations at Hanoko Ground in

Hong village as the chief guest.

During the programme, he paid tribute to the Dree Nyibus (traditional priests) for preserving Apatani cultural heritage and felicitated meritorious Class X and XII students from Hong village.

Addressing the gathering, Tagak announced that Lower Subansiri would serve as his Parliamentary Nodal District, saying he would work closely with local legislators and district authorities to promote coordinated development.

He also launched a digital directory prepared by the Ziro Tourism Organisation to support tourism and local businesses.

As part of his support for the festival, the MP presented a donation of ₹ 2.5 lakh to the organising committee through Niiti ZPM-cum-Organising Secretary Kago Kampo and announced the gift of a mithun for the next edition of the Dree Festival.

Tagak said his priority would be to combine humanitarian assistance, sustainable development, youth empowerment and the preservation of indigenous cultural heritage across the region.

Tripura offers industry-friendly atmosphere, business leaders keen to invest: CM

AGARTALA, July 5: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Sunday asserted that investors and entrepreneurs are keen to invest in the northeastern state, taking advantage of an industry-friendly atmosphere that ensures an improved law and order situation, availability of raw materials and simplified policies.

He also said DoNER Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will join the two-day business conclave, scheduled for July 9 and 10.

Around 500 business leaders, including foreign investors, are expected to participate in the 'Destination Tripura: Business Conclave -2026', aimed at attracting investments for industries in the northeastern state, Saha told reporters here.

The business summit will be held at Badharghat international fair ground in West Tripura.

"Development of North Eastern Region (DoNER) Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia will attend the mega business conclave along with other senior officials of the Union government," he said.

The state had attracted an investment of ₹ 8,000 crore, out of



₹ 30,000 crore of business proposals made in the last business summit.

"The investors and entrepreneurs are keen to join the business conclave and invest in the northeastern state, taking advantage of an industry-friendly atmosphere - be it law and order or availability of raw materials or simplified government policies," he said.

If investment continues to come, employment opportunities and gross state domestic product will increase automatically, which will pave the way for an all-round development process in the frontier

state, Saha said.

Earlier in the day, the chief minister held a meeting with the senior officials, including Chief Secretary JK Sinha and DGP Anurag Dhanekar, to review the preparedness for the mega event. Officials of several departments gave presentations on the investment prospects in their respective fields.

Over the past two months, the Industries and Commerce Department organised various business promotion-related events outside Tripura to make the conclave a grand success. (PTI)

Over 37,000 people left out as Sikkim publishes draft voter list after SIR enumeration phase



GANGTOK, July 5: More than 37,000 people have been left out of the draft electoral rolls published in Sikkim on Sunday following the completion of the enumeration phase under the Special Intensive Revision of the voters' list in the state.

The office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said that of the 4,71,018 registered electors in the state as on May 20, as many as 4,33,294 enumeration forms were collected and digitised.

The enumeration phase under the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls was held

between May 30 and June 28.

The house-to-house verification drive, carried out by booth-level officers (BLOs), found that 37,724 people had either died, permanently shifted, enrolled at multiple locations, or remained untraceable, the CEO's office said. The CEO clarified that the final status of such electors will be decided only after scrutiny by the electoral registration officers (EROs) and assistant EROs.

"The enumeration phase has been completed successfully with active public participation and coordinated efforts by election officials and political party

representatives.

"The revision process remains transparent, and no elector's name will be deleted without due process, including notice and a reasoned order. Citizens whose names have been omitted from the draft roll will have the opportunity to seek inclusion during the claims and objections period," the CEO said.

Following the publication of the draft electoral roll, the claims and objections window will remain open until August 4, allowing eligible voters to apply for inclusion or raise objections.

The CEO's office said booth-wise lists of electors reported as deceased, shifted, duplicated or untraceable have been shared with booth-level agents of political parties, and will be displayed at ERO offices and uploaded on official websites, alongside the draft electoral rolls to ensure transparency. (PTI)

19.34 lakh voters in Manipur's draft electoral roll: CEO

IMPHAL, July 5: Manipur Chief Electoral Officer Arun Kumar Sinha said the state has 19.34 lakh voters in the draft electoral roll, which was published on Sunday after the enumeration phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. Addressing a press conference, Sinha said till June 28, out of 20,93,076 electors, a total of 19,34,399 electors or 92.42 per cent have submitted their enumeration forms during the SIR.

The CEO said that, as per the draft electoral roll, Manipur has 19,34,399 voters comprising 9,40,466 males, 9,93,660 females, and 294 third genders.

Sinha attributed the "successful completion" of the enumeration phase to the coordinated efforts of District Election Officers (DEOs) of all 16 districts, 60 EROs, 84 AEROs, 317 BLO Supervisors and 2,956 BLOs deployed at 2,956 polling booths, supported by volunteers. He also said BLOs found 7,394



CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

electors enrolled at multiple places and 43,000 electors dead.

The CEO said 1,08,283 voters had either "shifted, were absent as the BLOs did not find these electors or did not get back their filled enumeration forms before June 28.

Genuine electors can still be added back in the electoral roll during the claims and objections period from July 5 to August 4 this year, he added.

Sinha said, "To ensure universal awareness and participation, during the enumeration period, CEOs, DEOs and EROs conducted extensive awareness campaigns and held multiple meetings with political parties to explain the process and shared updates on the progress of the enumeration phase of SIR at regular intervals."

"Enumeration forms were provided to the Internally Displaced Persons through the Nodal Officers of the District where they are presently residing, and their duly filled enumeration forms were collected and handed over to Electoral Registration Officers of respective Assembly Constituency through the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, Manipur for digitisation by the concerned BLO", he said. (PTI)

Four militants arrested for extortion

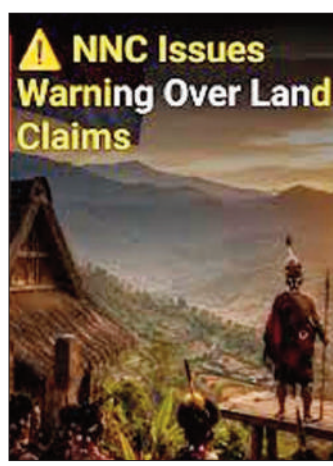
IMPHAL, July 5: Manipur Police have arrested four militants belonging to two different proscribed outfits from Imphal East and West districts for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, an official statement said on Sunday.

Three active cadres of the Kangleipak Communist Party (PWG) were nabbed from different locations in Imphal East and West districts on Friday.

Police also arrested an active cadre of UNLF(P) from Mantripukhri area in Imphal West district on Saturday. He has been identified as Chandam Geetchandra Singh.

UNLF(P) signed a peace pact with the Centre in 2023. However, many cadres of the outfit continue to be arrested for alleged involvement in extortion activities and illegal sale of firearms. (PTI)

NNC rebukes Kuki territorial claims, urges peaceful coexistence



KOHIMA, July 5: The Naga National Council (NNC) has issued a strongly worded statement rejecting what it described as Kuki territorial claims in Naga areas and urged the Kuki community to live peacefully while respecting Naga customary rights and traditions.

In the statement issued recently, the NNC alleged that Kuki settlers have been residing in Naga territories as tenants and claimed that earlier generations of Kukis had lived peacefully under Naga customary laws and traditions.

The organisation asserted that the Nagas have historically inhabited their ancestral lands bordering the

Meitei region, Assam and Myanmar, and maintained that there had never been a separate Kuki homeland within Naga territories.

It further stated that where Kukis had settled through mutual agreements, they should continue to coexist peacefully while respecting the rights of the indigenous landowners. The NNC also rejected what it described as "false narratives" regarding Naga history and urged the Kuki community to verify historical facts before making territorial claims.

Expressing concern over the continuing tensions, the organisation warned that the continuation of what it termed "false claims" and unlawful activities could create further difficulties for future generations.

The council said it expected Kukis residing in Naga areas to live peacefully and refrain from making statements or claims that, according to the organisation, misrepresent the history and rights of the indigenous Naga people. The statement comes amid continuing differences over territorial and ethnic issues in parts of the Northeast. (NNN)

First 3D printed dentures fabricated in Nagaland

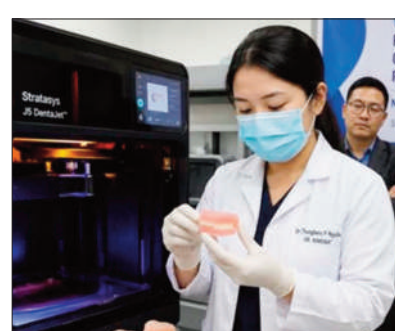
KOHIMA, July 5: Nagaland achieved a major milestone in dentistry with the fabrication of the state's first 3D printed monolithic complete dentures, with experts saying it would lower the risk of human error, reduce patient visits and enable quicker delivery of the prosthetics.

It was achieved during a workshop on 'Fabrication of monolithic complete denture using PolyJet 3D printer' at Naga Hospital Authority Kohima (NHAK) on Saturday. Around 30 dental professionals participated in the training programme.

The procedures were carried out by Dr Thungbeni P Ngullie, Senior Resident, Nagaland Institute of Medical Science and Research on five patients. She demonstrated the complete digital workflow and delivered the first five 3D printed monolithic dentures in Nagaland.

Explaining the technology, Dr Ngullie said a monolithic complete denture is a full denture printed as a single unit rather than being assembled from multiple components. She said the workshop showcased the complete digital workflow from conventional impression-taking and scanning to computer-aided design and final fabrication using a PolyJet 3D printer.

She explained that while certain conventional clinical procedures, such as border moulding and recording jaw relations, were retained for greater accuracy in edentulous patients, the remaining workflow was digitised.



The clinical data were scanned, converted into virtual models, digitally designed and then printed using PolyJet technology, she said.

According to Dr Ngullie, the PolyJet printer used can produce up to 32 dentures in about 14 hours, while the five dentures prepared were printed in approximately five to six hours.

Highlighting the advantages of digital dentures, she said the technology reduces the conventional fabrication process from around 15 manual steps to about six or seven, lowering the risk of human error, reducing patient visits and enabling quicker delivery.

She said digital records can be stored permanently, allowing damaged or lost dentures to be reproduced without repeating the entire clinical process.

Dr Ngullie also noted that unlike conventional printers, which require separate

printing of teeth and gum components, PolyJet technology enables the denture to be printed as a single multi-material unit, resulting in improved strength, aesthetics and efficiency.

She described the technology as a major advancement in modern prosthetic dentistry that will benefit both clinicians and patients. Dr Ngullie said this technology will revolutionise dental care, especially in older patients.

Addressing the workshop, Health and Family Welfare Commissioner and Secretary Anoop Khinchi said healthcare is being redefined by technology, and dentistry is no exception, while noting that digital tools, from digital impressions and CAD-CAM systems to 3D printing, have shifted dentistry towards greater precision, faster treatment and improved patient comfort. He said the government views digital dentistry as an important step in making healthcare more accessible and efficient across Nagaland.

Referring to PolyJet 3D-printed monolithic dentures, he said the technology significantly improves conventional methods by producing strong, biocompatible and accurately fitting dentures in a fraction of the time, directly benefiting patient care.

Khinchi reaffirmed the government's commitment to skill development so that healthcare professionals remain equipped with emerging technologies. (PTI)

Slow Loris rescued in Zunheboto, released in wild

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, July 5: An endangered Slow Loris was rescued by a resident of Sukhalu village in Zunheboto district on Saturday.

After its rescue, Nihoto K Yephthomi handed over the animal to the Zunheboto District Tourism Association for appropriate care and conservation.

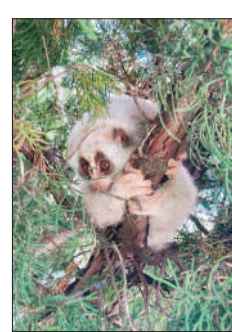
Following consultation with the authorities, the association released the rescued Slow Loris into its natural habitat at the Sukhalu biodiversity conservation area, ensuring the animal's welfare while contributing to ongoing wildlife conservation efforts in the district.

The association lauded Yephthomi and the people of Sukhalu village for their responsible action and commitment to protecting wildlife.

It also emphasised the importance of community participation in conserving the region's rich biodiversity.

The association also urged the public to report any sightings of injured, distressed, or displaced wildlife to the appropriate authorities or conservation organisations rather than attempting to keep wild animals as pets.

"Collective efforts by local communities play a vital role in safeguarding Nagaland's unique wildlife heritage for future generations," it stated.



Ziro Valley celebrates Dree festival with grandeur

Traditional rituals, cultural showcases and new attractions mark annual Apatani harvest festival

HT Correspondent

ZIRO, July 5: The Apatani community celebrated the annual Dree Festival with traditional fervour and large-scale public participation across Ziro Valley on Sunday, as thousands gathered to offer prayers for a bountiful harvest, prosperity and the preservation of indigenous culture.

This year's celebrations were organised simultaneously at three major venues, combining traditional rituals with cultural programmes and community events.

The central celebrations at the Biri Dree Ground in Ziro, organised by the Central Dree Festival Committee (CDFC), served as the principal venue for religious ceremonies, community prayers and the 59th Central Dree Football Tournament.

Lower Subansiri Deputy Commissioner Oli Pelme and Superintendent of Police Keni Bagra



attended the programme as chief guests.

At the Siilang Ditting Dree Ground in Hija village, the Siilang Ditting Dree Festival Celebration Committee organised its ninth edition of the local festival.

Arunachal Pradesh Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Cooperation and Transport Minister Ojing Tasting attended as the chief guest, while Chief Engineer Toko Jyoti

was the guest of honour.

A major attraction at the Hija celebrations was the inaugural Apatani Fashion Week, which showcased traditional Apatani textiles alongside contemporary designs.

The venue also hosted the 2026 Academic Excellence Awards organised by the Hija Officers and Welfare Society to honour outstanding local students.

Meanwhile, celebrations at the

Hong Dree Ground in Hong village focused on preserving traditional Apatani heritage through community feasts, indigenous games and cultural performances, including the renowned Konchi Danyi folk songs.

Rajya Sabha MP Tai Tagak attended the programme as the chief guest.

The celebrations were also attended by elected representatives,

Apatani community celebrates Dree festival in Daporijo

HT Correspondent

DAPORIJO, July 5: The Apatani community of Daporijo in Upper Subansiri district celebrated the annual Dree Festival with traditional fervour and cultural splendour on Sunday, as community leaders, public representatives and government officials gathered to honour the community's rich heritage and agricultural traditions.

The programme, held at the Tagin Cultural Society (TCS) Secretariat, was organised under the leadership of Dree Celebration Committee Chairman Duyu Lampong and Secretary Pura Tagia, with Deputy Commissioner Tasso Gambo serving as the chief adviser.

Daporijo MLA Taniya Soki, who attended as the chief patron, commended the Apatani community for its discipline, progressive outlook and commitment to preserving its cultural identity.

Drawing a comparison with Japanese society, he said both communities had achieved remarkable progress while remaining deeply rooted in their traditions, and stressed that balancing development with cultural preservation was essential.

The chief guest, Dumperijo MLA Rode Bui, praised the Apatani community for its resilience and hard work, noting its significant contribution to the development of Arunachal Pradesh.

He highlighted the large number of distinguished civil servants and government officials from the community and urged younger generations to uphold the values of dedication, perseverance and cultural pride.

Superintendent of Police Pawan Kumar Yadav, who attended as the guest of honour, lauded the Apatani community for its rich cultural heritage, peaceful way of life and contribution to the socio-economic development of the State. He encouraged continued efforts to preserve traditional customs while promoting communal harmony.

Kylian Mbappé scores again

France reaches World Cup quarterfinals with 1-0 win over Paraguay

PHILADELPHIA, July 5: Kylian Mbappé laughed and smiled — and scored, of course — when Paraguay tried to bait him and his French teammates into fouls and provoke fights, as hot heads became a recurring theme during one of the steamiest World Cup games on record.

After the final whistle, Mbappé kept on walking and left Paraguayan goalkeeper Orlando Gill hanging as Gill extended his right hand in a show of sportsmanship.

In response, Gill threw the ball right at the No. 10 on Mbappé's jersey.

Mbappé got the last laugh as he scored his 19th career World Cup goal, and France survived stifling heat to beat Paraguay 1-0 on Saturday, sending Les Bleus into the quarterfinals for the fourth straight time.

"We knew what kind of match it was going to be," Mbappé said in French. "We can also get our hands dirty, we know how to do it. We know how to play ugly football. Guess they were thinking we were going to show up in tuxedos, but we were ready."

France advanced to play Morocco on Thursday in Foxborough, Massachusetts. France beat Morocco 2-0 in the semifinals of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar.

With an extreme heat warning



in effect throughout the match as temperatures hovered around 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius), Mbappé finally broke through against a physical, defensive-minded Paraguay side when he converted a penalty kick in the 70th minute.

That was enough for Les Bleus, whose red, white and blue-clad fans looked plenty patriotic on July Fourth in the city where the United States was founded exactly 250 years earlier.

Mbappé was awarded the penalty when Diego Gomez was called for tripping after a video review. Then he stutter-stepped on his way to his 19th goal in 19

World Cup appearances, one behind career record holder Lionel Messi of Argentina. Mbappé and Messi each have seven goals in this tournament to top the Golden Boot race.

Mbappé won that award four years ago, but Messi and Argentina beat France in the final.

Mbappé — who frequently trash-talked the Paraguayans in Spanish — is now the only player to score at least three goals in the knockout stage of three World Cups.

Mbappé botched a breakaway attempt in the second half, and Manu Koné had his top-corner shot knocked away by Gill after

he was wiped out in the netting by Ousmane Dembélé only moments earlier.

Gill also stopped two strong attempts by Mbappé in second-half stoppage time.

The 26-year-old Gill had bested German great Manuel Neuer in a penalty shootout in the previous round. He then lost his cool after the loss to France when he chucked the ball at Mbappé.

"I tried to shake his hand, but since he didn't pay me any attention, I lost my temper," Gill said. "But anyway, that was all I did; I calmed down afterward."

For the criticism that hydration breaks have watered down the pace of play at the World Cup, they were never more needed for the players than in the midst of a miserable heat wave. Sprinklers showered the Kentucky bluegrass field during the breaks and at half-time.

"Given our style of play, it was harder to give high intensity," France coach Didier Deschamps said.

More than in any of the five other World Cup games played before 68,000-plus fans at Lincoln Financial Field, spectators fled for the concourse at halftime, seeking shade and refuge from the sun.

Maybe they were looking for some action of any kind.

Les Bleus scored 13 goals in the first five games of the tournament but were stymied in the first half by a Paraguay team trying to turn the match into a rock fight. Tempers flared when Andrés Cubas took down Mbappé and the teams briefly pushed and shoved each other. Matias Galarza also threw his right elbow into Mbappé and sent him crashing to the grass.

Paraguay advanced by beating Germany in a penalty shootout on Monday, the biggest upset of this World Cup. But after a gritty effort by La Albirroja, it's France that's moving on.

After defeating Croatia to Argentina on penalty kicks in the 2022 final, Les Bleus are 5-0 in this year's tournament, outscoring opponents 14-2.

"As I said to the players, we've had easy games so far, so it is good to have a tough one," Deschamps said.

The city soaked in the moment as the 250th anniversary of American independence was celebrated. More fans honored America — draped in flags or wearing Uncle Sam hats as they tailgated in the parking lot — than at any of the other games in Philadelphia, and Idina Menzel, The Roots and DJ Jazzy Jeff all performed. (AP)

Morocco beats World Cup co-host Canada 3-0 and advances to the quarterfinals



HOUSTON, July 5: Morocco is heading back to the World Cup quarterfinals and coach Mohamed Ouahbi believes his team has established itself among soccer's elite.

Azzedine Ounahi scored twice to lead Morocco to a 3-0 win over Canada in the Round of 16 Saturday to make the country the first African nation to reach the quarterfinals more than once.

"We are no longer a surprise," Ouahbi said through an interpreter. "Now when people talk about Morocco we're a major contender and it's a great source of pride. I think it's only the beginning and I hope we continue to have runs like this."

And despite already making history in this World Cup, Morocco has much higher goals.

"We want to keep going," Ouahbi said. "We don't want to stop."

It's Morocco's second straight appearance in the final eight after becoming the first African team to reach the semifinals in 2022.

"We are so proud to represent Africa because it's a continent with a lot of talent and Africa deserves to be in the best level in football," goalkeeper Yassine Bounou said.

Neither team was able to break through until Ounahi took a free kick from Achraf Hakimi and made a right-footed shot through traffic from outside the box to the bottom right corner to put Morocco on top 1-0 in the 50th minute.

Ounahi made it 2-0 on a right-footed shot from the middle of the box off a pass from Brahim Diaz in the 82nd minute.

Soufiane Rahimi added a goal in the final minute of stoppage time.

Morocco will meet France, which beat Paraguay later Saturday, on Thursday in Foxborough, Massachusetts.

The loss ends a historic run for World Cup co-host Canada, which won its first-ever knockout round game, beating South Africa 1-0 to reach Saturday's match. The country was playing in the World Cup for just the

third time and the run enchanted a nation that is normally far more interested in hockey than the pitch.

Canada coach Jesse Marsch shared his postgame message to the team.

"I told them that I was proud of them and I challenged them to understand that we can play like this all the time against the best teams in the world," he said. "We can be better on the day. And then the challenge is, can we hold that standard for 90 minutes?"

Morocco, No. 7 in the FIFA rankings entering the tournament, dispatched the Netherlands in a penalty shootout to reach the Round of 16 and send the country to its earliest World Cup exit.

Marsch lauded how his team performed against a squad of Morocco's caliber and how Canada controlled the match for much of the day.

"The way we pushed, the way we were in the match, the quality we showed, the overall impact in the match, we were better," he said. "We were better than the No. 7 team in the world today."

Ouahbi had a strong response when told of those comments. "In terms of intensity they were good," he said. "They were good for 98 minutes. Were they better? It's hard to say. It takes some nerve to say that when you lose 3-nil."

Canada had a couple of chances to score late. Jonathan David had a free kick from outside the box in the 78th minute, but his shot sailed over the crossbar.

Just after that, Tajon Buchanan's shot from about 30 yards was stopped with a diving save from Bounou. Bounou, who was born in Canada to Moroccan parents, had three saves.

The victory set off a huge celebration for Morocco's fans back home.

Within minutes, thousands poured into the streets of Casablanca, Morocco's largest city. Horns echoed as supporters climbed onto car roofs, waving flags and chanting. (AP)

Grand Chess tour Croatia: Praggnandhaa goes behind in Blitz; Alireza breaks free

ZAGREB (CROATIA), July 5: Grandmaster R Praggnandhaa could not replicate his rapid form, managing just 3.5 points from the opening nine rounds of the blitz section, while France's Alireza Firouzja produced a brilliant display to emerge as the sole leader after the penultimate day of the Croatian leg of the Grand Chess Tour.

Alireza was simply brilliant in the faster version as he knocked down as many as eight points out of a possible nine and took a massive three points lead on 20 points over nearest rivals Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan and Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France.

Praggnandhaa slipped behind to a distanced fourth on 15.5 points, while world champion D Gukesh had another average day to reach on 14 points for his fifth spot.

In what can be termed one of the most dominant performances in Grand Chess Tour history, Firouzja has left half the field at least seven points adrift. Vincent Keymer of Germany is sixth on 13 points, Dutchman Anish Giri is another half a point behind, while Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania is on 11.5.

Another two points behinds is Jorden van Foreest of Holland and Croatian Ivan Saric at the bottom on just 5 points.

After a dramatic bounce back that saw him sharing the lead after the rapid section with Alireza, Praggnandhaa apparently missed the thread in the blitz section. Starting of the day with a win over Keymer, Praggnandhaa took a draw in the next game with Giri but then four straight losses were enough to dent his confidence. The Indian ended with a net score of 3.5 points out of a possible eight on the fourth day of the tournament.

Things were not so much different for Gukesh even though he got a half point more than Praggnandhaa. Four losses in patches for the youngest ever world champion did not help his cause much.

With 9 rounds in the blitz section still to be played, the top place is probably already decided. Praggnandhaa still has a chance for a podium finish if he regains his touch on the final day of this 2,00,000 USD prize money tournament.

Standings after round 9 rapid and 9 rounds of blitz: 1. Firouzja Alireza (Fr) 20; 2-3. Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (Fra) Nodirbek Abdusattorov (Uzb) 17 each; 4. R Praggnandhaa (Ind) 15.5; 5. D Gukesh (Ind) 13.5; Vincent Keymer (Ger) 13; 7. Anish Giri (Ned) 12.5; 8. Deac Bogdan-Daniel (Rou) 11.5; Jorden van Foreest (Ned) 9.5; 10. Ivan Saric (Cro) 5. (PTI)

Diksha, Aditi stay in title hunt at tied third in Belgium

HULENCOURT (BELGIUM), July 5: India's experienced Olympians Diksha Dagar and Aditi Ashok remained firmly in contention for a strong finish at the Hulencourt Women's Open after moving into a shared third place here.

Keeping India's hopes alive in the Ladies European Tour event, Diksha (71) and Aditi (70) closed the third round at five-under-par 211, five shots behind Australia's Kelsey Bennett.

Bennett seized control of the tournament with a composed three-under 69 to reach 10-under and open a two-shot advantage over Spain's Carolina Chacarra.

Hero-backed Diksha produced another steady display, carding a one-under 71 to stay in touch with the leaders despite difficult scoring conditions. Starting confidently, she picked up birdies on the second and ninth holes before dropping her lone shot of the day at the 10th.

A string of eight successive pars thereafter ensured the two-time LET winner remained within striking distance entering Sunday's decisive round.

Aditi, meanwhile, overcame a mixed day to post a two-under 70.

The five-time LET winner appeared to be slipping out of contention after three bogeys during the round, but she responded impres-

sively by birdieing three of her final four holes to join Diksha in tied third.

The finish underlined Aditi's ability to recover under pressure and kept alive her hopes of adding another LET title to her impressive resume.

Her maiden victory on the Tour had come at the Hero Women's Indian Open exactly a decade ago.

Among the other Indians, Pranavi Urs slipped to tied 42nd after returning a one-over 73.

Her round featured three birdies but was offset by four bogeys as she dropped down the leaderboard.

Youngster Avani Prashanth endured a disappointing day on a day of strong winds.

She mixed an eagle and a birdie with three bogeys on the front nine but unravelled on the inward half with four consecutive bogeys from the 11th, another dropped shot on the 16th and a double bogey on the closing hole. Her seven-over 79 pushed her down to tied 51st.

Speaking after the round, Aditi admitted she had not been at her best but was pleased with how she salvaged her score.

"I didn't feel like I had my good stuff today, but I managed to hole a couple of long putts towards the end and that made a big difference," she said.

For Indian squash players to win at world stage, entire ecosystem has to be in country: Tanvi Khanna

MUMBAI, July 5: Squash ace Tanvi Khanna believes that establishing the complete ecosystem of the sport within the country is essential for the skill expansion and global success of next generation players.

The world No. 74 Tanvi, who is in the Indian squad for the Asian Games to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, in September-October, says India must imbibe lessons from top nations that have consistently produced champions.

"I do believe we can learn from other nations that have a history of producing champions, but the idea is to learn and bring back the same skills to fellow Indians, so, it's more sustainable and long term," Tanvi, who won the Squash PSA Challenger Tour here, told PTI in an exclusive interview. "I strongly believe if we want the future generation to win medals for India, the entire ecosystem of coaches and players has to be in India."

"This is the only way to inspire the future generations (and) this is what countries like Egypt have, and India is currently lacking," she said.

Tanvi does not adhere to the belief that full-time foreign coaches can improve Indian players' performance, but underlined the need to put in place world-class infrastructure.

"Another struggle is infra-



structure. My academy has 6-7 kids who are India No.1 this year itself, a world junior medallist and multiple Asian junior medallists," she said.

"We desperately need a full glass court in Delhi. All the international events take place on glass courts, and they play very differently to traditional courts. When we go abroad for tournaments, we all find it hard to adjust to the glass court as we haven't practiced on it," she said.

The 29-year-old, who is not a part of the TOPS programme, said she would like to see more initiatives from the Squash Rackets Federation of India (SRFI) and the Squash Association of Delhi.

"Currently, I don't receive any funding towards my coaching expenses. My squash coach is an Indian (Dhruv Dhawan), and fitness trainer is an Egyptian (Ahmed Faragallah). Neither are my physio-

therapist and fitness expenses covered. I don't have sponsors... this is where it would really be beneficial if the federation and Delhi state association could take more initiatives," she said.

"Win in Mumbai reinstated belief"

Rallying from a two-set deficit, Tanvi beat Farida Walid (3-2), and it was sweet revenge as she had lost to the Egyptian earlier this year.

"Coming back from two love, 8-4 down, it's probably one of my biggest (and) best comebacks till now. It was a very tough match physically for both of us," Tanvi said.

"(The) last time I was two love up and towards the end of the match, I just started thinking too much of the finish line in the third game. So this time I was able to hold my nerve in the very end," she said.

Tanvi said the title win will hold her in good stead in the

upcoming Asian Games, where she will look to add a third continental medal after winning a team silver and bronze in Jakarta and Hangzhou respectively.

"It (the win) just gives you so much more confidence of your fitness, of your mental strength. Playing against good players, converting these matches, it means everything and especially in a final, it's a different type of pressure. I actually have had two knee surgeries and the second one happened just when I had reached top 60s (69th) in the ranking."

"Every time it happens, it sets you back at least two years. It's very hard. It just kind of destroys you for a bit because that's your life and then it's taken away from you in an instant," she said.

Tanvi said she has set her sights on winning a medal in singles.

"It's (the win) just going to build me up for the Asian Games. I haven't won a medal in the individuals. I've only won a medal in the team (event)," she said.

"This time, I'm definitely going to be aiming for that. I know I'm capable of it and this win is definitely going to boost me up in my preparation for the next few months. This win, the way it happened, the way I was able to come back, it was quite epic," Tanvi added. (PTI)



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