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THE HILLS TIMES

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM GUWAHATI & DIPHU

Voice of the hills people

Vol .No. XXVII

Issue No. 221

RNI-ASSENS/2000/12862

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PRICE ₹ 8

Fourth KSU leader arrested for August 19 violence

Conrad Sangma assures action against miscreants in state Assembly

SHILLONG, Aug 24: A fourth leader of the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) was arrested on Monday in connection with the violence during the union's black-flag bike rally on August 19, a senior police officer said.

Assistant Organizing Secretary Jeremiah Pohthmi was arrested in the morning and produced before the court. Police sources said he has been remanded to judicial custody.

According to police, Pohthmi is among five masked miscreants identified so far for their alleged involvement in arson and assault incidents, particularly attacks on Assam-registered vehicles.

Presenting a suo motu statement in the Assembly, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma said, "Five masked persons have so far been identified as being involved in the August 19 incident, particularly in the attacks on Assam-registered vehicles. One has already been arrested."



He said the government will leave no stone unturned to ensure miscreants are brought to justice.

On the progress of the probe, the Chief Minister said, "I don't have that information with me right now. I will review the situation later today. As I said, we have identified five

masked miscreants and action has been taken. Further steps will continue to ensure that all miscreants who led to the situation are brought to justice."

Earlier, police had arrested three senior KSU leaders – president Raymond Kharjana, vice president

Pynkmenlang Sanmiet and general secretary Reuben Najiar – in connection with the same case.

Government invites KSU for talks
The Chief Minister said the government has officially written to the Khasi Students Union (KSU) inviting them for talks on their five-point agenda.

"We have written officially to the Khasi Students Union (KSU) and asked them to come for discussion and for talks. We expect we will get some response maybe by today evening or maybe by tomorrow and we will discuss all five agendas and the points," Sangma told reporters.

On the allegation that the government has not acted on their demands, the CM said, "Let me assure you that is not the case and on most fronts, in fact, work has been happening. There has been some communication gap and whatever points that have come up, we will clarify in the joint meeting that we will have with the members of the KSU."

Permanent district-level panel comprising Ri Bhoi and Kamrup Metropolitan to be formed: Conrad

Vehicular movement on GS road resumes



associations was called off, allowing normal movement of essential commodities between the two states, Sangma said while informing the Assembly about steps taken to restore normalcy.

He said a permanent district-level

committee comprising the deputy commissioners of Ri Bhoi and Kamrup Metropolitan and police officers of corresponding rank would address day-to-day issues along the inter-state border.

(CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Hazarika stresses land rights for Karbi Anglong farmers



GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Minister for Agriculture and Irrigation Pijush Hazarika on Monday asserted that farmers in Karbi Anglong will remain deprived if land rights are not guaranteed.

Hazarika said this during a high-

level review meeting which was held at Janata Bhawan in Guwahati.

The minister expressed concern over the fact that despite having 2 lakh beneficiaries under the 'Orunodoi' scheme, the number of PM-KISAN beneficiaries in Karbi Anglong remains too low.

"Eligible farmers will continue to be deprived of government assistance unless land mutation and ownership complexities are resolved. Karbi Anglong farmers will remain deprived if land rights are not guaranteed," he added.

To address this, it was decided to increase the number of survey teams to complete the digitisation of land records and mapping process across both districts within the next 4-5 months.

Hazarika asked the Director of Land Records to support the KAAC with necessary human resources and software guidance so that farmers can register and claim benefits such as the Rs 6,000 annual benefit under PM-KISAN, urea subsidies and other government schemes.

During the meeting, the minister also held discussions with a PepsiCo delegation led by Director Sandip Samaddar. Initial talks focused on promoting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

36 cattle smugglers nabbed, over 100 livestock rescued: Assam CM



GUWAHATI, Aug 24: At least 36 suspected cattle smugglers were arrested and over 100 livestock were rescued during a major operation in Assam's Biswanath district while the animals were being transported, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Monday.

This action is a testament to the Assam government's resolve toward cow protection and safeguarding the interests of farmers, Sarma said.

"Strict action continues against cow smugglers. @BiswanathPol has conducted a major operation, safely rescuing 106 livestock from 10 vehi-

cles transporting them in inhumane conditions, and arresting 36 accused individuals," he said in a post on X.

When contacted, Biswanath district Senior Superintendent of Police Ashif Ahmed told PTI that the operation was carried out on Sunday evening after receiving information about the alleged smuggling of the cattle. "We found 10 pick-up vans and mini trucks at Soota Tiniali and Pavoi Ali. The cattle were found in very cruel conditions with no valid documents," he added.

Legal steps are being taken against the 36 alleged smugglers who were transporting the animals, the SSP said.

"The apprehended persons are being interrogated to find out the forward and backward linkages. Initially, it was known that the cattle were from various parts of Lakhimpur, Majuli, and the bordering region of Arunachal Pradesh and Biswanath district," he added. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rahul not champion of women's rights but Hindu baiter: Himanta

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday slammed Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, claiming that he is not a champion of women's rights but "simply a Hindu baiter".

During an interaction with girl students in Maharashtra on Saturday, Gandhi had criticised the "Manusmriti mindset", urged students to "smash patriarchy" and said women belonged to themselves, not to their fathers, husbands or sons.

Gandhi is simply using the cause of women's empowerment as a convenient smokescreen to target and discredit Hindu Dharma, Sarma alleged in a social media post.

"Consider this: how many times has he spoken with the same outrage against patriarchal and medieval practices that persist under Sharia? NEVER," Sarma said. "While Sharia is foundational to Islamic jurisprudence, Manusmriti has no comparable (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

India, Gulf bloc discuss next steps on free trade agreement

DUBAI, Aug 24: India has reviewed the negotiations on a free trade agreement with the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), as the country's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Vipul, held wide-ranging talks with the secretary general of the six-nation bloc, Jassem Mohamed Albudaiwi, in Riyadh.

The meeting took place on Sunday, where both sides discussed ways to strengthen India-GCC relations, exchanged views on regional and international developments, and reviewed preparations for a ministerial meeting scheduled next month, the GCC Secretariat said in a statement.

The meeting assumes significance as India and the GCC resumed negotiations in February for a comprehensive trade agreement aimed at boosting bilateral trade and investment, even though the talks were temporarily stalled in June because of the West Asia crisis.

The GCC comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and was established in 1981 as a political, economic and security grouping.

During Sunday's meeting, India and the GCC also affirmed the importance of continued coordination and consultations on issues of common interest to contribute to regional security and stability, the GCC statement said.

"Both discussed India-GCC cooperation, including FTA negotiations and strengthening high-level engagements. They also exchanged views on regional and global developments of mutual interest," the Indian Embassy in Riyadh said in a post on X.

The GCC is India's largest trading partner bloc, with bilateral trade reaching USD 178.56 billion in 2024-25, accounting for 15.42 per cent of India's global trade, according to official data. India's exports to the GCC stood at about USD 56.87 billion during the period, while imports were valued at USD 121.68 billion.

Key Indian exports include engineering goods, rice, textiles, machinery, gems and jewellery, while imports are dominated by crude oil, LNG, petrochemicals and gold.

The GCC countries are also a major source of investment for India, with cumulative investments exceeding USD 31.14 billion as of September 2025. The region, a major source of remittances, is home to nearly 10 million members of the Indian community. The latest negotiations mark a resumption of talks that were held in 2006 and 2008, before the GCC deferred discussions on free trade agreements with countries and economic groupings. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

SC restores election petition of Cong's LS poll candidate from Assam before HC

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The Supreme Court on Monday restored an election petition filed by Congress candidate Hafiz Rashid Ahmed Choudhury, challenging the election of the BJP's Kripanath Mallah, who won the 2024 Lok Sabha poll contest against him from Karimganj in Assam.

A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and K Vinod Chandran allowed Choudhury's plea, saying it finds absolutely no reason to sustain the April 4, 2025, order of the Gauhati High Court dismissing the petition.

"We restore the election petition to the files of the high court for consideration as required hereinabove," the bench said while allowing the appeal.

It said the allegations of corrupt practice, entailing civil consequences of disqualification for a maximum period of six years, apart from conviction, mandates strict compliance of the statutory requirement and a true copy supplied to the returned candidate containing the attestation by the prescribed authority and certified to be a true copy by the election petition in his or her own signature was held to be a sine qua non.

The bench said in an earlier decision of the court, it was held that no general principle of universal application can be (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Himanta apprises Shah of Assam flood responses



GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said he has called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah and apprised him of the measures being undertaken in the wake of the devastating flood in the state.

Shah affirmed unequivocal support for rehabilitation and restoration work in flood-hit areas, he said.

"Today in New Delhi, I had the privilege of meeting Hon'ble Union Home Minister Shri @AmitShah Ji and briefing him on the #AssamFloodResponse, along with several other important matters concerning Assam," Sarma said in a post on X late on Sunday night.

He said Shah has remained in constant touch with the state government in view of the flood. "In today's meeting too, he acknowledged the scale of damage caused by the floods. He assured the Government of India's unequivocal support for (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

UIDAI, Army launch Aadhaar biometric update camps

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: The UIDAI in collaboration with the Indian Army and Assam's Tamulpur district administration on Monday launched special Mandatory Biometric Update (MBU) camps for students.

The camps will cover students aged 5-17 years, who are yet to complete the mandatory biometric update in their Aadhaar, in the entire Tamulpur district, according to an

official release.

The first camp under the initiative was held at Naokata Milan H S School, Tamulpur. Similar camps will be conducted at different schools across the district to make the process accessible to students at their respective schools.

"A total of 17,480 students have been identified across Tamulpur district for Mandatory Biometric Up-

date. Special camps will be organised at schools to ensure that all eligible students are covered," the statement said.

As per Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) guidelines, MBU is required twice during a child's lifetime -- first upon attaining the age of 5 years and again upon attaining the age of 15 years. Timely updating (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

KAAC announces free APSC, ADRE 3.0 coaching for Karbi Anglong Youth

DIPHU, Aug 24: In a major push to empower local youth, the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang, on Monday announced a comprehensive, completely free coaching programme for candidates preparing for the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) and Assam Direct Recruitment Examination (ADRE) 3.0 examinations.

Scheduled to kick off on September 1, 2026, the initiative aims to

bridge educational gaps by providing top-tier guidance, study materials, and competitive examination resources to local aspirants.

The youth development drive is a joint initiative launched in collaboration with Deputy Speaker Dr. Habbey Teron, alongside MLAs Surjya Rongphar, Lunsing Teron, and Niso Terangpi.

The educational project is being executed in partnership with the Biplob Foundation and Deep Kumar Patra, under the overall direction and leadership (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The satellite will come up under the DBLOTT model'
Assam in final stage of partner selection to build satellite: Himanta



GUWAHATI, Aug 24: The Assam government is in an advanced stage of evaluation to select a partner from the private sector to launch its own satellite, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Claiming that Assam will be the first state in India to have its own earth observation system, he said the satellite will come up under the 'DBLOTT model' - Design, Build, Launch, Operate, Train and Transfer.

"Earlier this year, we invited Expressions of Interest to select an implementation partner under the DBLOTT model. Following strong interest from India's private space sector companies, we are now in the

final and critical stage of partner selection, with dedicated committees evaluating the proposals," Sarma said in a social media post on Sunday.

He said 'AssamSAT' marks a landmark shift -- from Assam being a user of satellite data to an active participant in the space-tech ecosystem, enabling faster and evidence-based governance.

While presenting the state budget for 2025-26, the then Finance Minister Ajanta Neog had announced that the state government would have its own satellite, which would help collect data for implementation of critical socio-economic projects,

besides keeping surveillance on its border.

"In collaboration with IN-SPACE (Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre) of the Department of Space, Government of India, we would like to set up our own satellite, ASSAMSAT, to ensure a continuous, reliable flow of data for the implementation of critical socio-economic projects," she had said in her budget speech.

Neog had said the satellite would also help in providing dedicated services for agriculture, disaster management, infrastructure development and border security management and police operations. (PTI)

Goyal seeks Japanese investment; says India eyeing more FTAs, aims to cover 75 pc global trade

TOKYO, Aug 24: India is in negotiations with at least 8-9 more groups of countries and individual nations that together account for another USD 15 trillion of GDP, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said here on Monday.

The country's free trade agreements would eventually cover about 75 per cent of global trade and help position India as a trusted partner in global value chains, Goyal said.

India has a large domestic market and it has opened its doors to the world with nine free trade agreements signed in the last four years, he said addressing business representatives from India and Japan.

These nine agreements cover economies with a combined GDP of USD 60 trillion and 38 developed countries.

The earlier trade pacts with countries, including Japan and Korea, and the ASEAN region have opened another USD 10 trillion of GDP.

"So today India opens up the doors to preferential market access to USD 70 trillion of economy. We are in negotiations with at least 8 or 9 other groups of countries or countries which will add another USD 15 trillion.

"Basically 75 per cent of global trade will be covered through our free trade agreements, opening India to become a part of the global value chain as a trusted partner," he said.

India has finalised trade pacts with EU, EFTA bloc, UAE, Mauritius, Australia, Oman, New Zealand, US and the UK.

It is also negotiating such pacts



with countries such as Israel and Canada. It has signed terms of references to negotiate trade agreements with South Africa-led SACU, and six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council.

Goyal is leading a large business delegation of over 200 representatives here to boost trade and investment ties between the two countries.

He said there are large opportunities for investments in India in areas like data centers, manufacturing and artificial intelligence.

The minister added that strengthening economic ties should lead to balanced trade between India and Japan.

The two-way commerce between the countries grew 9.18 per cent to USD 27.47 billion (exports worth USD 6.03 billion and imports of USD 21.43 billion) in 2025-26 from USD 25.16 billion in 2024-25.

The trade deficit between the two countries rose to USD 15.4 billion in the last fiscal year from USD

12.66 billion in 2024-25. It was USD 12.53 billion in 2023-24 and USD 11 billion in 2022-23.

Goyal also said there are huge opportunities in the space sector as India has opened it for private sector participation.

"India is also a compelling case to set up data centres," he said adding there are 1,580 Japanese firms operating in India.

"I am told that Suzuki India's market cap is higher than that of its parent company. We would like to see 1,580 Suzukis developed out of India," Goyal said.

Talking about the potential in research and development segment, he said the cost of doing innovation in India is very low compared to developed economies.

The minister invited Japanese firms to set up units in the 20 industrial smart cities being developed in India.

India is in the process of developing 100 plug and play industrial parks, he said inviting Japanese

companies to set up facilities there. Goyal also held bilateral meetings with several companies here and discussed ways to boost investments in India.

"Met with a delegation from @TokyoElectronJ, led by Mr. Takeshi Okubo, Corporate Officer and Executive Vice President (Global Sales Division and India Business). We discussed Tokyo Electron's investments in India's semiconductor ecosystem and opportunities to strengthen collaboration in advanced manufacturing," Goyal said in a social media post.

India's growing semiconductor and electronics ecosystem offers strong potential for Japanese companies to deepen their footprint and participate in India's growth story, he said.

Goyal also met Juro Baba, Representative Director, Mitsubishi Corporation.

"We discussed opportunities to build on Mitsubishi Corporation's long-standing presence in India, spanning over nine decades, and to expand collaboration across mobility, energy, and infrastructure," he added.

In his meeting with Toshiaki Nagasato, President and Representative Director of Meiji Seika Pharma Co., Ltd, Goyal said he discussed opportunities to strengthen India-Japan cooperation in the pharmaceutical sector and avenues to expand the company's manufacturing and R&D footprint in India.

India's pharmaceutical ecosystem offers significant opportunities for Japanese partners to scale and achieve long-term growth, he added. (PTI)

Govt lifts ban on wheat exports to protect farmers interest amid depressed local prices



NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The government on Monday lifted the export ban on wheat and its products with immediate effect and said the decision is aimed at boosting farmers' income amid depressed domestic prices.

Early this year, the government had allowed export of 50 lakh tonnes of wheat and 10 lakh tonnes of wheat products.

India, the world's second-largest wheat producer, banned wheat exports in May 2022 as part of measures to control rising domestic prices.

"The export policy of wheat...is revised from prohibited to free with immediate effect," according to notifications issued by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

The government has also removed the export ban on wheat flour and other products such as maida, semolina, and wholemeal atta, as per other notifications.

When asked about the decision, Food Secretary Sanjeev Chopra told PTI, "Export ban has been lifted in the interest of farmers. The domestic wheat prices are de-

pressed currently. Allowing exports will increase the domestic market prices and encourage good sowing in the coming rabi season, and farmers will get better prices."

On the impact of consumer prices, Chopra said there is adequate and bumper stock of wheat available in the country, sufficient to meet the demand and check prices.

The export of wheat, which was allowed earlier through issue of licence, has now been simplified, he added.

Out of 60 lakh tonnes allowed earlier, 2.5 lakh tonnes have been shipped so far, the secretary said.

India's wheat production stood at a record 120.65 million tonnes in the 2025-26 crop year (July-June) as against 117.94 million tonnes in the preceding year.

Food Corporation of India (FCI), the government's nodal agency for procurement and distribution of foodgrains, has nearly 49 million tonnes of wheat in buffer stock.

According to government data, the all-India average retail prices of wheat stood at ₹ 31.46 per kg on Monday, while the rate of wheat flour at ₹ 37.3 per kg.

The rates of wheat and wheat flour (atta) are flat compared to the year-ago period. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Vehicular movement on

The government will also constitute a joint committee comprising commissioner- and secretary-level transport officials from both states and representatives of tourist taxi associations to facilitate and regulate tourist transport movement and protect the shared tourism interests of Assam and Meghalaya, he said.

Sangma further said a meeting chaired by Dhar, who is in charge of transport, was held with Meghalaya transport associations, following which they agreed to withdraw their agitation and restore normal movement of vehicles. The next meeting with the associations is expected to be held in the second week of September to discuss the remaining issues, he said. (PTI)

Hazarika stresses land

commercial potato cultivation, improving market linkages and doubling farmers' incomes in the district. To operationalise this initiative, a large-scale joint meeting has been scheduled for September 5, featuring PepsiCo executives and progressive potato farmers from various districts.

Minister Hazarika reaffirmed that the state government is working with utmost sincerity to ensure no eligible farmer in the hill district is left out of government welfare schemes or market opportunities.

The meeting was also attended by Chief Executive Member of the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Tuliram Ronghang, Director of Land Records Kailash Kartik and other senior officials.

36 cattle smugglers nabbed

Ahmed further said that the animals were loaded from different markets without valid papers and were being transported to Nagaon and Tezpur in Assam, and in neighbouring Meghalaya. (PTI)

Rahul not champion of women's

scriptural authority in Hindu Dharma. It is not even a universally binding code for Hindus," the chief minister said.

"How many times does Rahul Gandhi attack the Manusmriti, and how many times does he attack Sharia with the same fervour?" Sarma asked. He claimed that the enduring strength of Hinduism lies in its unique ability to "evolve, reform and adapt with time -- as it has for millennia, and as it will for eternity".

"Every Hindu must therefore ask: what is Rahul Gandhi's real intent- championing women's rights, or using them as a pretext to malign Hindu Dharma?" Sarma said. The chief minister alleged that Congress rhetoric on women's rights rights hollow when measured against its own record.

"They betrayed our mothers and sisters by reversing the effect of the Shah Bano judgment. It opposed the law against Triple Talac," he said.

Shah Bano Begum's case led the Supreme Court to grant divorced Muslim women the right to maintenance in 1985. Following protests by Muslim organisations, the then-Rajiv Gandhi government enacted a law in 1986 which nullified the apex court's decision in the Shah Bano case. Sarma further alleged that just to cling to power in Karnataka, Rahul Gandhi's party ensured that not a single woman found a place in the state Cabinet.

"So here is a simple challenge to Rahul Gandhi: If women's equality truly comes before politics, will he unequivocally support a Uniform Civil Code that guarantees equal rights irrespective of religion? Or will his idea of 'women's rights' continue to begin and end with attacking Hinduism?" (PTI)

India, Gulf bloc discuss

Meanwhile, India has already implemented a trade pact with the UAE and signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with Oman. (PTI)

SC restores election petition

laid down and it was categorically held that substantial compliance would not be sufficient either.

"Admittedly, in the present case, Form-25 was affirmed before a commissioner of affidavits, as available in the original before court. Suffice it to request the high court to verify and if due attestation of the affirmation on oath is available, proceed with the matter on merits, and if not available, not to permit the allegation of corrupt practices to be urged and proceed with the consideration on the merits of the other grounds, if any are pleaded," it added.

The bench said the apex court has held that corrupt practices are to be proved to the hilt and an element of vagueness would vitiate an election petition, which would lead to a dismissal in limine (at the threshold) when there is a true copy supplied with mistakes of vital and serious nature. The court said the absence of an affirmation of an allegation of corrupt practices by a commissioner of affidavits is not fatal since it neither amounts to a misrepresentation nor does it mislead the returned candidate.

Choudhary has challenged the Gauhati High Court's decision of April 4, last year, rejecting his plea at the threshold on the ground that the election petition was not served properly to the returned candidate, certain pages of it were not attested properly and some were missing.

In his plea before the high court, challenging the election of Mallah, Choudhury had alleged corrupt practices within the meaning of the Representation of the People Act.

Mallah had opposed the petition citing non-compliance with the provisions of the RP Act and sought its outright dismissal.

Choudhury lost the 2024 poll contest from Karimganj to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) candidate by more than 18,000 votes. (PTI)

Himanta apprises Shah of

rehabilitation and restoration," the chief minister added. "As always, I come away from every meeting with Shri Amit Shah Ji enriched by his meticulous attention to detail, and his unwavering commitment to a secure and stable Assam," Sarma said, expressing gratitude for the Union minister's "guidance and steadfast support".

At least 105 people have so far been killed in the deluge this year, with the floods particularly wreaking havoc in four eastern districts of the state. (PTI)

UIDAI, Army launch Aadhaar

of biometrics helps ensure continued Aadhaar authentication and prevents difficulties in accessing services where Aadhaar authentication is required.

Updated biometrics can facilitate access to services such as school admissions, registration for entrance examinations, scholarships and Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) schemes, wherever Aadhaar authentication is applicable, the release pointed out.

UIDAI Regional Office, Guwahati and the Indian Army have appealed to all government and private schools in the district to extend cooperation for maximum coverage of eligible students and timely completion of MBU. (PTI)

KAAC announces free

of Pranjali Pratim Hazarika. Speaking at the launch, leadership representatives emphasised that this initiative reflects KAAC's commitment to enhancing competitive capability among the region's youth, ensuring that financial constraints do not stand in the way of career advancement in state civil services and public sectors.

Eligible candidates across the region interested in enrolling in the free coaching classes can complete their registration or direct their enquiries to the Secretariat, Education Department, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Diphu.

LG Electronics steps up robotics collaboration with NVIDIA



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: LG Electronics has announced an acceleration of its robotics collaboration with NVIDIA, with senior officials of the two companies reviewing their partnership and exploring further areas of cooperation at LG's Data Factory in Seoul, South Korea.

The Data Factory, currently under construction at LG's Yangjae R&D Campus, is scheduled to become fully operational by the end of this year.

LG has deployed its self-developed CLOiD home robots at the facility to collect and learn from real-world data.

LG CEO Lyu Jae-cheol said the company would leverage its manufacturing expertise and partnerships to strengthen its competitiveness in physical AI and develop into a comprehensive robotics solutions provider.

The Data Factory includes dedicated training and validation spaces where robots perform tasks in simulated home and manufacturing environments.

CLOiD robots are being trained to perform cleaning tasks as well as move, stack and assemble components in a simulated washing machine manufacturing facility.

Data generated from LG's manufacturing, logistics and home environments will be integrated with NVIDIA's robotics technologies, including NVIDIA Omniverse, Cosmos and Isaac platforms, to create and enhance data for robot learning.

Spread across four floors with a total area of 10,000 square metres, the facility is expected to house several hundred robots by the end of the year.

LG said it plans to further expand its data-learning systems.

By the end of 2026, data collected directly at the facility and synthetically generated using NVIDIA Cosmos is expected to reach 100,000 hours, equivalent to around 12 years of data.

LG plans to use the data to advance its Robot Foundation Model (RFM), which supports the capabilities of humanoid robots.

NAME CHANGE

I have Changed my name from Shamal Das to Shaymal Das by swearing a Notarial Affidavit at Srimate Sankardevnagar, Hajo (Assam)

Shaymal Das
Vill-Ambari Forest Village,
PO-Ambari,
PS-Murajhar,
Dist-Hojai (Assam)

Stock markets end lower amid simmering geopolitical tensions, elevated crude oil prices

MUMBAI, Aug 24: Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday as persistent geopolitical tensions and elevated crude oil prices hampered risk appetite. Investors remained cautious ahead of fresh US sanctions on Iran, experts said.

Despite a positive beginning, the 30-share BSE Sensex failed to carry forward the momentum and declined 171.72 points, or 0.22 per cent, to settle at 77,369.11. During the day, it dropped 339.17 points, or 0.43 per cent, to 77,201.66. The 50-share NSE Nifty slipped 32.95 points, or 0.14 per cent, to end at 24,219.05.

Among the 30 Sensex firms, Adani Ports, Bharat Electronics, Bajaj Finance, Bajaj Finserv, Trent, Axis Bank, State Bank of India, and Tata Consultancy Services were among the laggards. Tata Steel, HCL Tech, Infosys, and Hindustan Unilever were among the major winners. Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, dropped 1.68 per cent to USD 92.80 per barrel.

"Indian equity markets ended lower on Monday, tracking weakness across Asian markets as renewed concerns over the Middle East and selling in banking and financial stocks weighed on investor sentiment," Ponnudi R, CEO of Enrich Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said.

"Markets remained cautious ahead of fresh US sanctions, with Washington promising an 'economic D-Day' against Iran and its trading partners, while Tehran threatened to halt Gulf oil exports in response, keeping investors

wary of further escalation," he added.

The BSE MidCap Select index dipped 0.11 per cent, while SmallCap Select index was flat and ended marginally higher by 0.06 per cent.

Among sectoral indices, Insurance declined 0.86 per cent, PSU Bank (0.82 per cent), Housing Finance (0.76 per cent), Financial Services (0.39 per cent) and Bankex (0.35 per cent).

Metal climbed 1.38 per cent, Telecommunication jumped 1.05 per cent, Commodities (0.55 per cent), Realty (0.43 per cent) and Oil & Gas (0.34 per cent).

"Indian equity benchmarks ended lower on Monday, surrendering their early gains as escalating US-Iran tensions kept investors firmly on the defensive ahead of Washington's announcement of what it has described as its toughest-ever sanctions package against Tehran," Harisvelan Radhakrishnan, Founder & CEO of HST Wealth, a Research Analyst firm, said.

In Asian markets, South Korea's Kospi, Japan's Nikkei 225, Shanghai's SSE Composite index, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower. The Kospi was down 3.12 per cent. "Caution dominated market sentiment as investors are awaiting fresh sanctions from the US on Iran later today. Brent crude eased on profit-taking but remained above the USD 90/bbl mark, supported by concerns over tighter Iranian oil supplies and ongoing tensions around the Strait of Hormuz," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Ltd, said. (PTI)

FM to leave for 8-day official trip to Canada, US; focus on deepening bilateral ties

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will embark on an official visit to Canada and the US from August 25 to September 2 to hold talks on bilateral economic and financial cooperation, investment opportunities and global economic priorities, besides participating in the G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) meeting.

During the first leg of her visit to Toronto, Sitharaman will participate in the inaugural Economic and Financial Dialogue with Canada's Finance and National Revenue Minister François-Philippe Champagne, the finance ministry said in a statement.

The dialogue is expected to cover macroeconomic developments, financial sector cooperation, bilateral investment opportunities and shared international priorities, while strengthening the economic and financial pillar of the renewed India-

Canada partnership, it said.

In recent months, the two sides have discussed cooperation in areas such as energy, critical minerals, technology, innovation and resilient supply chains, along with ongoing efforts towards a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).

Sitharaman will also participate in an investment roundtable with leading business representatives from sectors including energy, artificial intelligence and critical minerals to facilitate greater business-to-business linkages and identify investment opportunities, including in GIFT City-IFSC. She will also engage with senior Canadian business leaders at another roundtable, with senior managing directors and chief executive officers of Indian public sector banks participating in the discussions to explore greater financial-sector collaboration and investment linkages.

Sitharaman will hold one-to-one

meetings with Canadian company CEOs and senior executives on India's growth prospects, investment opportunities and avenues for expanding Canadian business presence in India. Besides, she will also interact with the Indian diaspora in Toronto. The US leg of the visit will cover Chicago, Asheville and New York from August 28 to September 2.

In Chicago, Sitharaman will participate in an investor roundtable and meet with CEOs and senior representatives of private-sector companies to discuss India's investment opportunities, economic outlook, and ways to strengthen business partnerships.

She will also visit the Polsky Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Chicago to exchange views on entrepreneurship, innovation, technology commercialisation and linkages with India's startup ecosystem, the finance ministry said. (PTI)

ICICI Prudential Life launches BSE 500 Momentum Value 50 Index Fund

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: ICICI Prudential Life Insurance has launched the ICICI Prudential Life BSE 500 Momentum Value 50 Index Fund, offering customers a value-plus-momentum investment strategy through select unit-linked insurance plans (ULIPs).

The fund provides exposure to a diversified basket of 50 companies selected from the BSE 500 universe and follows the ICICI Pru BSE 500 Momentum Value 50 Customized Index.

The strategy combines the investment factors of value and momentum, seeking companies that demonstrate attractive valuations as well as positive market trends.

Commenting on the launch, ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Chief Investment Officer Manish Kumar said the fund follows a disciplined and transparent approach, with the portfolio reviewed every quarter to reflect

changing market valuations and trends.

The rules-based strategy allows the portfolio to be periodically refreshed.

Where a stock cannot be selected due to regulatory guidelines, the subsequent eligible stock will be included to maintain a portfolio of 50 stocks.

The fund will be available through the company's ULIP offerings, including ICICI Pru SmartKid Assure, ICICI Pru Signature Assure, ICICI Pru Signature Online and ICICI Pru Smart Insurance Plan Plus, along with Life Cover.

The company said its claim settlement ratio stood at 99.3 per cent in Q1-FY2027, with an average turnaround time of one day for non-investigated individual claims.

As of June 30, 2026, its assets under management stood at ₹ 3.34 lakh crore, while the company reported zero non-performing assets since inception.

BJP spokesperson Ranjib Kumar Sarmah accuses Opposition leaders of politicising the flood situation and questions Akhil Gogoi's 'Dikhau Bachao' movement

Bihar floods leave Oppn in political quagmire: State BJP

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Assam BJP spokesperson Ranjib Kumar Sarmah on Monday accused Opposition leaders of attempting to politicise the devastating floods in Bihar by organising a citizens' meeting at a time when the government and local administration were engaged in rehabilitation and resettlement efforts.

Addressing a press conference at the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Bhawan here in the presence of party spokesperson Zafreen Mehjabin and media panelist Priyanka Tamuli, Sarmah said the State Government, along with the district administrations of Sivasagar and Charaideo and elected representatives, was working to restore normalcy in the flood-affected areas.

He said the unprecedented scale of destruction caused by the sudden deluge meant that rehabilitation and resettlement would naturally require time.

While acknowledging that organising public meetings was a legitimate democratic right, Sarmah alleged that the politics initiated by Akhil Gogoi, Debabrata Saikia and Lurinjyoti Gogoi in the name of a citizens' meeting was aimed at unsettling government departments and



agencies involved in the rehabilitation process.

Sarmah said the immediate priority should be to support the flood-affected people and become partners in the ongoing rehabilitation efforts rather than create pressure on stakeholders involved in the process.

Responding to questions about Akhil Gogoi's "Dikhau Bachao" movement, Sarmah alleged that the agitation had been called off within 48 hours after an understanding with a third party.

He said Gogoi should first explain

to the people the reasons behind the sudden withdrawal before organising another citizens' meeting and making statements on the issue.

Sarmah also recalled that preparations had been made in 2022 for the proposed "Dikhau Bachao" movement but alleged that it was abandoned after reports about the agitation appeared in the media. He called upon Gogoi to provide a clear explanation for the withdrawal.

Sarmah further alleged that during the tenure of the Congress govern-

ment led by Tarun Gogoi, licences had been granted to 90 establishments for setting up stone-crushing units in Bihubar.

He claimed that while a number of these units stopped operating during the COVID-19 pandemic, stone-crushing activities resumed after the "Dikhau Bachao" movement was withdrawn.

He also questioned allegations that the devastating floods were caused by the collapse of a secretly constructed dam on the Dikhau River in Nagaland, claiming that subsequent media reports had contradicted the allegation.

Referring to the controversy surrounding Manas Konwar, Sarmah alleged that attempts were being made to divert public attention through incidents at the Commissioner's Office, citizens' meetings and other political programmes.

Sarmah maintained that political controversies should not be allowed to overshadow the issues surrounding flood relief, environmental protection, rehabilitation and other issues.

The party also submitted a memorandum to the government through the District Commissioner.

Led by CPI general secretary Kanak Gogoi, along with Nayanmoni Gogoi, Ajay Bora and Pranob

CPI stages demonstration in Sivasagar over flood relief, other issues

Party submits 13-point charter of demands, seeks enhanced compensation for flood victims



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 24: The Communist Party of India (CPI) staged a demonstration in front of the District Commissioner's Office here on Monday, demanding fulfilment of its 13-point charter of demands concerning flood relief, environmental protection, rehabilitation and other issues.

The party also submitted a memorandum to the government through the District Commissioner.

Led by CPI general secretary Kanak Gogoi, along with Nayanmoni Gogoi, Ajay Bora and Pranob

Chetia, party workers raised a series of demands related to the recurring floods in Upper Assam and the difficulties faced by affected people.

The CPI demanded constitution of an expert committee to ascertain the actual causes of floods in Upper Assam, suggest measures to prevent their recurrence and declare the disaster a national disaster.

The party also called for an immediate halt to open-pit coal mining in various parts of Assam and Nagaland and illegal quarrying in the Dikhau River.

It demanded exemplary punishment for those involved in illegal coal mining and stone quarrying.

On compensation, the party demanded ₹ 50 lakh each for families that lost one or more members, ₹ 10 lakh for severely affected families and ₹ 5 lakh for less-affected families.

It also sought immediate distribution of the proposed ₹ 15,000 one-time assistance to all flood-affected families and an increase in compensation for crop losses and livestock deaths.

The CPI further demanded free seeds and fertilisers, adequate water supply and irrigation facilities for flood-affected farmers to enable them to undertake Rabi cultivation.

It also urged the government to take urgent steps to prevent epidemics in flood-affected areas and ensure appropriate medical care for both affected people and livestock.

The memorandum additionally called for special funds to repair flood-damaged educational institutions and immediate provision of essential materials to affected students.

The party also demanded waiver of debts and loans of people severely affected by the floods.

NHM Assam holds joint meeting to strengthen TB elimination efforts

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: A high-level Joint Coordination Meeting was held at the National Health Mission (NHM), Assam State Headquarters here on Monday to strengthen inter-departmental collaboration under the Pradhan Mantri TB Mukht Bharat Abhiyan (PM-TBMBA) and accelerate efforts towards eliminating tuberculosis (TB) from the state.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Lakshmanan S, Mission Director, NHM Assam.

Dr Abhijit Sarma, Executive Director, NHM Assam, officials of the National Tuberculosis Elimination Programme (NTEP), representatives of the Panchayat and Rural Development Department and Social Justice and Empowerment Department, World Health Organization (WHO) consultants, senior NHM officials and development partners participated in the meeting.

The discussions focused on

strengthening convergence among government departments and other stakeholders for coordinated action towards achieving the goal of a TB Mukht Bharat.

Key areas discussed included community participation, awareness generation, TB screening, notification, treatment support and Nikshay Mitra initiatives.

The participants emphasised the need for a unified and coordinated approach to combat TB, with stronger linkages between health services, rural development networks and social welfare schemes.

Such convergence, officials said, would help ensure that TB prevention, diagnosis and treatment services reach vulnerable populations more effectively.

The meeting reaffirmed NHM Assam's focus on strengthening inter-departmental collaboration and community-based interventions as part of the state's efforts to achieve a TB-free Assam.

Noted tabla exponent Likhon Sarma passes away in Tezpur

HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Aug 24: Noted tabla exponent and Principal of Jyoti Kala Kendra Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Assam's first institution for music education, Likhon Sarma passed away in the early hours of Monday following a cardiac arrest. He was 71.

A retired museum assistant with the Cultural Affairs Department, Government of Assam, and recipient of the State's artist pension, Sarma complained of chest pain on Sunday night and was rushed to a private hospital in Tezpur, where doctors declared him dead at around 1 am.

His demise has cast a pall of mourning over Tezpur and the wider Sonitpur district.

Born on September 8, 1955, Sarma was a resident of Parbati Nagar near Prachya Vidyalaya in Tezpur and the grandson of freedom fighter Mahadev Sharma, one of the architects of the All Assam Moyna Parijat.

He studied at Gourimata Primary School and Tezpur Academy before graduating from Darrang College. He later obtained his B.Mus and M.Mus degrees in tabla from the Bhatkhande Music Institute, Lucknow.

Sarma joined the tabla department of Jyoti

Kala Kendra Sangeet Mahavidyalaya as a teacher in 1975 and served as its Principal from 2015.

He thus remained associated with the institution for more than five decades.

In 1985, he joined Jyoti Bharati, Tezpur, under the State Cultural Affairs Department as a museum assistant and retired from the post in 2015.

During the Assam Movement, Sarma was an active member of Sur-Bahini and the theatre group Sargam, alongside late reciter Pranab Bora and vocalist Dilip Chowdhury.

He participated in musical campaigns across the State, including programmes held during floods.

He also provided music direction for productions by Sargam, Jangam and Baan Theatre and composed background music for more than 150 cultural programmes.

Through his association with Bharat Vikas Parishad, Sarma performed at programmes across the country and frequently accompanied Dr Bhupen Hazarika on tabla.

His contributions to music and culture earned him several honours, including a one-time artist pension from the Government of

Assam, the title "Badya Ratna" from the Sarva Bharatiya Sangeet O Sanskriti Parishad, Kolkata, and the Raseshwar Saikia Bor Bayan Satriya Award from Sangeet Satra this year.

He also served as an examiner for HSLC examinations under the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, and for the Kolkata-based Parishad.

His mortal remains were kept at his residence on Monday morning, where several dignitaries and members of cultural and literary organisations paid their last respects.

The body was later taken in procession to Jyoti Kala Kendra Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, Baan Theatre and Jyoti Bharati, where colleagues, students and staff paid tribute before the last rites were performed at Hazarapur public crematorium in the afternoon.

Sarma is survived by his wife, two daughters, sons-in-law and three brothers.

A large number of political leaders, government officials, journalists, writers, artists, musicians, theatre personalities and cultural organisations expressed grief over his demise and conveyed condolences to the bereaved family.

2,050 kg ganja worth ₹2 crore seized in Srirampur; two arrested

HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Aug 24: In a major anti-narcotics operation, police seized around 2,050 kg of ganja, estimated to be worth nearly ₹ 2 crore, from a container at the Simultapu naka checkpoint along the Assam-West Bengal border in Srirampur and arrested two persons in connection with the seizure.

Acting on a tip-off, a police team led by Sanjib Sandikoi, Officer-in-Charge of Simultapu Police Outpost, intercepted and searched a container bearing registration number UP-54-BT/7674 at the naka checkpoint on Sunday night.

The container was carrying bamboo, beneath which the ganja had allegedly been concealed.

During the search, police recovered 203 large packets containing approximately 2,050 kg of the contraband.

The arrested persons have been identified as Ram-lakshman Rajbhar, the container driver and Manoj Chauhan, the co-driver. Both are residents of Mau district in Uttar Pradesh.

According to the preliminary investigation, the container was travelling from Tezpur in Assam to Muzafarpur in Bihar.

Police have registered a case in connection with the seizure and further investigation is underway to ascertain the source of the contraband and its intended destination.

National Lok Adalat to be held in Goalpara on Sept 12

HT Correspondent

GOALPARA, Aug 24: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Goalpara, will organise a National Lok Adalat at the Goalpara District Judicial Court Campus on September 12, 2026, from 10 am onwards.

The Lok Adalat will take up both pre-litigation and pending cases, including cheque dishonour cases under Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act, money recovery cases, motor accident claims, labour and employment disputes, electricity and water bill disputes, matrimonial matters excluding divorce, land acquisition cases, revenue matters and other civil cases.

The cases will be settled amicably through mutual consent before benches comprising Judicial Officers and conciliators.

Court fees paid in pending cases that are settled through the Lok Adalat will be refunded.

The DLSA has already issued notices to the concerned parties to attend the Lok Adalat.

For further information, the DLSA Goalpara may be contacted at dlsagoalpara@gmail.com.

Veteran Bodo folk dancer Aloka Narzary passes away

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 24: Veteran Bodo folk dancer Aloka Narzary passed away at her residence in Gosagaon subdivision recently. She was in her late 70s.

Associated with renowned Bodo folk dance pioneer Ostad Kamini Kr Narzary, Aloka was among the dancers who participated in the historic 1957 Bagurumba performance in New Delhi, where the dance won first prize at the Republic Day celebrations.

Her contribution to the preservation and promotion of Bodo folk traditions, particularly Bagurumba, earned her a lasting place in the community's cultural history.

Various social organisations, including Dularai Bodo Harimu Afad, expressed condolences over her demise.

NFR revises train services as restoration work continues in hill section

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced further changes in train services as restoration work continues near New Harangajao station in the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section following the settlement of railway tracks on Line-1 and Line-2.

Train operations in the affected section are currently being maintained through Line-3 with enhanced safety measures. In view of the ongoing restoration work, NFR has cancelled two trains, rescheduled two others and announced the regulation of another train.

Train No 15615 Guwahati-Silchar Express, scheduled to commence its journey on August 25, has been cancelled.

Consequently, Train No 15616

Silchar-Guwahati Express, scheduled to commence its journey on August 26, has also been cancelled.

Meanwhile, Train No 15650 Narangi-Agartala Express, commencing its journey on August 25, has been rescheduled to depart from Narangi at 6:30 pm.

Train No 15628 Silchar-Coimbatore Express, also scheduled to commence its journey on August 25, has been rescheduled to depart from Silchar at 10:10 pm.

Train No 15625 Deoghar-Agartala Express, commencing its journey on August 24, will be regulated suitably en route.

NFR said the changes have been made in view of the continuing restoration work and the need to maintain safe train operations through the hill section.

Poor road condition to Samaguri Market causes hardship to commuters

HT Correspondent

HOWRAGHAT, Aug 24: The dilapidated condition of the road leading to Samaguri Market under No 109 Howraghat Constituency in Karbi Anglong has been causing severe hardship to commuters and local residents for several years.

Residents of the greater Rajapathar area, including Kasamari, Samagaon and Kenduguri Das Gaon, depend heavily on the road to travel to Howraghat, Nagaon and Guwahati.

The poor condition of the road has particularly affected the weekly Wednesday market at Samaguri, where villagers face considerable difficulties while travelling to buy and sell essential commodities.

School and college students also face daily difficulties while commuting along the stretch.

The damaged road has further raised concerns over emergency medical transportation, with relatives of elderly patients and pregnant women reportedly facing difficulties in reaching hospitals.

During rainfall, the numerous deep potholes become filled with water, making the stretch even more hazardous.

The situation has reportedly been aggravated by the movement of heavily loaded sand trucks travelling towards neighbouring states, including Nagaland and Manipur.

The regular movement of such vehicles along the route has al-

legedly accelerated the deterioration of the road.

Notably, on October 16, 2023, Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Chief Executive Member Tuliram Ronghang formally laid the foundation stone for paving the road.

However, nearly three years after the foundation stone was laid, actual paving or construction work has reportedly not commenced.

Concerned citizens of the Howraghat constituency have now urged the authorities to initiate the long-pending blacktopping work on the stretch from Gorokhiya Pukhuri Chariali to Samaguri Market and fulfil the commitment made to the local people.

Two critically injured in road accident at Kheroni

HT Correspondent

KHERONI, Aug 24: Two persons sustained critical injuries in a road accident near the Kheroni Model Hospital in West Karbi Anglong late Sunday night.

Local residents rescued both injured persons from the accident site and rushed them to the hospital in critical condition.

They were identified as Buleswar Ingti, a resident of Kheroni Ampathar village and Robinson Terang (Tokbi) of Tsengbong village.

Buleswar Ingti is the father of Augustine Ingti, president of the West Karbi Anglong District Congress Committee.

According to local residents, the accident occurred when a speeding two-wheeler allegedly driven by Robinson Terang hit Buleswar Ingti while he was walking along the road.

Further details regarding the circumstances of the accident were not immediately available.

Missing girl from Demow found in Naharlagun

HT Correspondent

DEMOW, Aug 24: A girl employed at Kanchanjanga restaurant at Kachumari near Demow, who had been missing since August 17, was reportedly found safe in Naharlagun, Arunachal Pradesh.

The girl's father had lodged an FIR at Demow Police Station following her disappearance.

The family had alleged that Izaz Hussain, son of the restaurant owner, might have been involved in the incident.

According to sources, Papu Hills Police Station in Papum Pare district of Arunachal Pradesh apprehended Izaz Hussain on Sunday.

The missing girl was also safely recovered.

Further investigation into the circumstances surrounding the girl's disappearance is underway.



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 24: A Special Technology Intervention Campaign on "Scientific Protocols for Successful Sericulture" was organised under Mera Resham Mera Abhimaan (MRMA) 2.0 in Kokrajhar on Monday, with a focus on promoting scientific, sustainable and productivity-oriented practices among Eri and Muga farmers.

The programme was organised by Dr Suraksha Chanotra, Scientist-B, Central Silk Board (CSB), Muga Eri Silkworm Seed Organisation (MESSO), P-3 Unit, Kowabil, Kokrajhar, and her team in association with Kalpojita Basumatary, Extension Officer, Department of Sericulture, Adabari, and officials of the department.

The campaign covered the complete sericulture production chain, including scientific host plant management, pre-brushing care, systematic silkworm rearing and sustainable soil fertility management.

Farmers were provided practical guidance on improving crop estab-

lishment, larval survival, cocoon productivity and overall efficiency.

The technical team sensitised farmers on scientific rearing protocols for Eri and Muga silkworms, stressing hygiene and sanitation, suitable rearing conditions, careful handling, timely interventions and adoption of recommended prac-

tices at different stages of the crop.

Special emphasis was placed on pre-brushing care in Muga sericulture, including preparation and sanitation of the rearing environment, selection of healthy host shoots, careful handling of newly hatched larvae and maintenance of favourable conditions during

brushing.

Farmers were also advised on age-wise selection of host plant foliage, as the nutritional quality and physiological condition of leaves influence silkworm growth and development.

Improved host plant cultivation practices such as proper spacing, timely pruning, canopy management, weed control, moisture conservation and balanced nutrient management were also discussed.

The programme highlighted green manuring and vermicompost as sustainable practices for improving soil health and supporting vigorous host plant growth.

Green manuring was emphasised for enhancing soil organic matter, structure and nutrient availability, while vermicompost was promoted as an important organic nutrient source.

The campaign provided a platform for direct interaction between scientists and farmers, enabling participants to discuss field-level problems and understand practical technologies suited to local sericulture conditions.

ture conditions.

The technical team emphasised that sustainable improvement in sericulture productivity requires an integrated approach involving healthy host plants, scientific rearing, proper hygiene, timely technological interventions and efficient soil and nutrient management.

The intervention is expected to help improve crop establishment, reduce avoidable crop losses, enhance larval survival, increase cocoon productivity and improve economic returns for farmers.

The programme further strengthened the collaboration between Central Silk Board-MESSO and the Department of Sericulture, BTC, in taking scientific sericulture technologies from institutional platforms to the field.

The campaign reflected the broader objective of MRMA 2.0 of moving from awareness to technology adoption and measurable field-level impact, with the aim of making sericulture more scientific, productive, sustainable and remunerative for farming communities.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Art is the tree of life. Science is the tree of death - William Blake

Student agitation in Jharkhand

Jharkhand has just witnessed a multi group agitation of students, which ended on August 18 with an agreement reached between student leaders and the state government, and Devendra Nath Mahto ended his 16 days hunger strike. Jharkhand government, as per the agreement reached, notified cancellation of 22 recruitment examinations on August 19 and ordered investigation into 23 other alleged irregularities. However, on August 20, Jharkhand High Court stayed the government's cancellation of appointments connected with the 11th and 13th JPSC examinations and food safety officers' appointments. Agitating students are now feeling cheated, and have threatened the next phase of agitation, if the government does not act within the 60 days window agreed upon during negotiations. The students whose appointments have been cancelled are also preparing for a long battle to protect their appointments. They have already initiated legal battles in the High Court. Justice Deepak Roshan has stayed the decision of the government to cancel the recruitments and asked the government to file its reply and put the matter for further hearing on September 15, and the decision on that day may be a milestone.

During the hearing Justice Roshan had orally remarked that since the State government itself has ordered CID to investigate the entire matter, no one can be removed from a permanent job without adhering to the principle of natural justice. The opposition and student leaders think it to be a conspiracy of the Jharkhand government just to see the agitation ends. Leader of Opposition and BJP leader Babul Marandi said that the government intentionally did not follow the due process so that its order might not stand judicial scrutiny in the High Court. He called it political conspiracy hatched by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Chief Minister Shibu Soren, who are ally in the state, just to quell the student agitation. That is why they demanded a CBI inquiry. JPSC-JSSC Reform Mancher leader Kunal Pratap Singh has said that they were cheated. He said that when the matter was heard in the High Court, the Advocate General representing the state did not even appear. No senior advocate was present, and the lawyer representing the state did not utter a word. It shows that the government's decision and the negotiation was just a trap to end the protest.

Jharkhand Students agitation was peculiar in the sense that there were many agitating groups. JPSC-JSSC Reform Manch was one of them, the principal organisational banner under which agitation was launched on July 25 at Jaipal Singh Stadium in Ranchi. It even demanded cancellation of 14th JPSC PT exam among other allegedly compromised examinations. Their demand also included independent investigation by CBI or retired judges from outside Jharkhand.

Narcotics crisis threatens Jorhat's cultural heritage

The historic town of Jorhat, widely revered across Assam as a glowing epicenter of education, literature, and refined culture, finds itself trapped in a deep and unsettling social crisis. A space that once nurtured intellectual discourse and provided moral direction to the region is now struggling under the suffocating grip of an expanding illegal drug trade. Over the last five to six years, the situation across the urban landscape has deteriorated to an alarming degree. The younger generation appears increasingly held hostage by an invisible network of narcotics syndicates, whose pervasive reach into neighborhoods and alleys threatens to tear apart the delicate social framework of the entire district.

The devastating impact of this crisis is most painfully felt in the repeated loss of young, promising lives. In 2021, the brutally violent killing of student leader Animesh Bhuyan in the heart of Jorhat town by an aggressive group of drug-addicted individuals sent shockwaves across Assam. That tragedy exposed the raw volatility lurking beneath the surface of the town. Regrettably, the systemic response failed to match the urgency of the moment. By 2025, another bright youth, Bedanga Bhushan Baruah, was beaten to death by drug-dependent assailants while returning home after attending Bihu celebrations. Entering 2026, the tragic and premature death of Anwesha Saikia has once again brought the shadowy menace of narcotics back to the center of public outrage. When innocent citizens are repeatedly targeted and killed on public streets, it signals a breakdown in safety that no civil society can afford to normalize. The grim realities unfolding on the ground bear a disturbing resemblance to the cinematic tragedy depicted in Uda Punjab, turning a cultural capital into a cautionary tale of systemic neglect.

This epidemic is not confined to Jorhat alone. In neighboring Golaghat district, the roots of the drug trade have struck equally deep, while Nagaon has emerged as a major operational base for regional traffickers. Illicit substances flowing through interstate corridors and international borders find their way into the interior pockets of Upper and Middle Assam with terrifying ease. The consequence of widespread addiction is a sharp rise in petty and violent crime. To sustain their daily dependency, many individuals turn to opportunistic theft, transforming into snatchers who target pedestrians on motorcycles to grab gold chains and personal belongings in broad daylight.

Public frustration is increasingly directed at the law enforcement machinery and administrative bodies responsible for maintaining order. While police drives against drugs are frequently announced with significant fanfare, operations often focus primarily on low-level peddlers and vulnerable consumers. The crucial question remains unaddressed: who is actually running these lucrative drug cartels across the state? The failure to dismantle the financial backbones and apprehend the high-level kingpins behind these syndicates allows the trade to regenerate rapidly after every minor crackdown. At the same time, the institutional framework designed to rehabilitate victims of addiction is suffering from serious operational flaws. Many private rehabilitation centers function as purely commercial enterprises, where systematic therapy and professional counseling are replaced by physical mistreatment and extortionate fees levied on desperate families.

Jorhat and its surrounding districts stand at a critical crossroads. Preserving the heritage and future of this cultural center requires immediate, decisive action that moves past superficial measures. Law enforcement agencies must demonstrate the political and operational will to target the masterminds of the drug trade, while the state government must establish strict regulatory oversight over rehabilitation facilities. Only a coordinated effort involving rigorous policing, genuine medical rehabilitation, and active community mobilization can break the hold of narcotics and restore lasting peace to the region.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrata Borah

Youth employment and Assam's economy

Assam's economic future depends heavily on how productively it can engage its young population. The state has a large pool of educated and working-age people, yet the transition from education to stable employment remains difficult for many young people. The latest Periodic Labour Force Survey data show the scale of the challenge. According to the PLFS 2025 annual report, Assam's unemployment rate among people aged 15-29 was 12.6 percent under the usual-status measure, with the rate at 11.0 percent for young men and 15.9 percent for young women. The rural youth unemployment rate stood at 11.7 percent, while the urban rate was substantially higher at 20.6 percent. These figures suggest that Assam's employment problem cannot be understood simply as a shortage of jobs. It also reflects a mismatch between education, skills, location and the kind of work that the economy generates. A young person may have a degree but still lack the technical, digital or practical skills demanded by employers. Another may possess useful traditional skills but lack access to markets, finance and modern production systems. Assam therefore needs to look beyond the number of government vacancies and examine the structure of its entire labour market. Government employment remains important, particularly in education, health, administration and public services, but it cannot absorb every young person entering the workforce. A sustainable employment strategy must create productive opportunities in agriculture, manufacturing, services, tourism, logistics, construction, information technology and emerging industries. The Assam Economic Survey 2025-26 provides some evidence of an economy that is expanding and diversifying. At current prices, services are estimated to contribute about 44 percent of Gross State Value Added in 2025-26, while industry accounts for 35.54 percent and agriculture and allied activities 20.46 percent. This changing economic structure creates opportunities, but Assam must ensure that growth translates into jobs that young people can actually access. Growth without adequate employment will not fully solve the state's economic problem.

The most important question, therefore, is whether Assam can convert investment into sustained employment rather than simply attracting large projects. The state has made a major effort to improve its investment environment through Advantage Assam 2.0 and related industrial policies. The government has highlighted sectors such as manufacturing, food processing, tourism, information technology, logistics, healthcare, agriculture, electronics and green energy as areas with potential for future investment. The proposed semiconductor and electronics ecosystem around Jajirao represents one of the most significant examples of this new industrial direction. The state government describes the Tata OSAT facility as a major semiconductor project with a planned capacity of 48 million chips per day, while associated plans include electronics manufacturing, logistics and ancillary industries. Such projects can create direct employment, but their larger economic value may come from the supplier networks, logistics companies, maintenance services, technical firms and small businesses that develop around them. Assam should therefore measure industrial success not only by investment announced or land allotted, but also by local employment, wages, skill transfer and the number of small enterprises connected to major projects. The state already has industrial infrastructure across several districts, including



industrial estates, growth centres, parks and specialised facilities. The Industries and Commerce Department reports developed industrial land and infrastructure spread across the state, creating a base for further private investment. Yet industrial expansion will not automatically benefit local youth. Companies need workers with specific skills, and young people need training that matches those requirements. This is where policy implementation becomes crucial. Training programmes should begin with actual labour-market demand instead of offering courses simply because training infrastructure exists. Assam's Recruit-Train-Deploy programme provides a useful model because industries identify their manpower requirements, candidates receive training according to those requirements and participating companies can absorb trained youth afterwards. If such demand-led training expands, Assam can reduce the gap between investment and employability.

Agriculture and rural enterprise also deserve much greater attention because a large part of Assam's young population still lives outside the major cities. The state cannot solve youth unemployment by concentrating every opportunity in Guwahati and a few industrial centres. Rural Assam needs an employment model that combines agriculture with food processing, storage, transport, tourism, handicrafts, fisheries, livestock, bamboo-based industries and digital services. The objective should be to increase the value generated from rural resources rather than encouraging every young person to leave the village in search of uncertain work elsewhere. Assam has strong agricultural and ecological advantages, including tea, rice, horticulture, fisheries, livestock and forest-based products, but many producers remain at the lower end of the value chain. A young entrepreneur can earn more from processing, packaging, branding and marketing a local product than from selling the raw product alone. The same principle applies to traditional crafts. Skill development should not mean abandoning traditional occupations; it should help artisans improve design, technology, productivity and market access. The state's Multi-Disciplinary Skill Development programme has already identified demand in areas such as industry and construction, private security, retail, hospitality and information technology, while its stated objective includes upgrading traditional skills. This approach deserves wider application. Assam should also make it easier for young people to establish micro and small enterprises by improving access to credit, business mentoring, digital payments, accounting support and market platforms. Entrepreneurship cannot survive on motivational speeches alone. A first-generation entrepreneur often needs working capital, reliable electricity, affordable transport, digital connectivity and predictable regulations more than a certificate from a training centre. The government can create a stronger ecosystem by linking skill programmes with banks, industries, colleges, self-help groups and local business associations. Rural youth also need better access to online markets because geographical isolation should no longer determine whether a small producer can reach customers. Tourism offers another major opportunity. Assam's wildlife, river systems, cultural traditions, tea landscapes and historical sites can support employment in hospitality, transport, guiding, food services, handicrafts and local entertainment. But tourism employment will become sustainable only when Assam develops year-round destinations, professional training and stronger local supply chains.

The gender dimension of youth employment demands equal attention. The PLFS 2025 figures show that young women in Assam face a higher unemployment rate than young men, particularly in urban areas, where the female youth unemployment rate reached 30.8 percent compared with 15.9 percent for urban young men. This gap reflects more than a shortage of vacancies. Social expectations, mobility restrictions, safety concerns, unpaid care work, limited access to workplaces and the concentration of employment in sectors that may not be equally accessible to women all influence labour-market participation. Assam cannot achieve broad-based economic growth while a large section of its educated young women remains outside productive employment. Skill programmes should therefore pay closer attention to women's actual employment conditions. Training centres should connect candidates with employers, while transport, workplace safety, childcare and flexible work arrangements can determine whether women remain in employment after recruitment. Digital work can create additional possibilities, but policymakers should avoid assuming that online employment automatically solves gender barriers. Young women also need access to devices, reliable internet,

financial services and professional networks. Education institutions can play a stronger role by connecting final-year students with apprenticeships, internships and industry projects before graduation. This would reduce the gap between academic qualifications and workplace expectations. Colleges should also provide career guidance based on current labour-market information rather than limiting students to traditional career paths. Assam's foreign-language training initiatives illustrate another possible direction. The state has announced plans under CM-FLIGHT to train 3,000 young people in Japanese for employment opportunities in Japan and with Japanese companies in Assam. Such programmes can widen the employment horizon of young people if they combine language training with technical skills and credible placement mechanisms. Migration should not automatically be treated as a failure of the local economy. Young Assamese workers can gain skills and income outside the state, but Assam should build systems that allow their experience, savings and entrepreneurship to contribute to the state economy later. A modern employment strategy should therefore support both local opportunities and safe, skilled mobility.

Ultimately, Assam needs to shift from a narrow job-seeking approach to a broader employment and productivity strategy. The state economy is already changing. The Economic Survey 2025-26 estimates industry and services to be growing strongly, with industry contributing 35.54 percent and services 44 percent of GVA at current prices in 2025-26. The challenge is to make this structural change employment-intensive. Large investments can raise output without creating enough jobs if production becomes highly automated or if companies import most specialised workers from outside the state. Assam must therefore prepare its youth before major projects become fully operational. Skill planning should begin several years ahead of industrial expansion, and every major investment proposal should include a clear assessment of local employment, apprenticeship and supplier-development opportunities. The state should also publish regular district-level employment data so that policymakers can identify where young people are unemployed, which sectors are hiring and which skills employers actually demand. Better data would allow colleges and training institutions to adjust their programmes accordingly. The private sector must also accept a larger role in training and recruitment because government programmes alone cannot create a dynamic labour market. Assam can use public funds to reduce the cost of training, but employers should help define curricula and provide apprenticeships. At the same time, small businesses deserve as much attention as large investors because they can create employment across districts and absorb workers with different levels of education. A young economy becomes stronger when people can move from informal work to formal enterprises, from low productivity to higher productivity, and from wage dependence to entrepreneurship where appropriate. Assam's employment challenge is therefore closely connected with its economic transformation. If the state can combine better education, demand-driven skills, industrial investment, rural enterprise, women's employment and stronger small businesses, youth can become a major source of economic productivity rather than a pressure on the labour market. The objective should not be to promise every young person a government job. It should be to build an economy in which young people can find decent work, develop useful skills, start businesses and participate confidently in new industries. That is the employment foundation Assam will need for sustained and inclusive economic growth.

Schooling or outside interference?

By: Dr Priyanka Saurabh

A school is not merely a collection of classrooms, buildings, and walls. It is a sensitive institution where the future of society is shaped. It is a place where children develop intellectually, emotionally, socially, and morally. Therefore, maintaining safety, discipline, and a peaceful educational environment is not merely an administrative duty, but an essential element of meaningful and quality education.

In this context, Deputy Commissioner Rahul Narwal's directives to government schools in Hansi district, prohibiting anyone entering without permission or unauthorized access to the premises, are noteworthy. These directives emphasize a point that is often forgotten: schools should be places of learning, not places prone to unnecessary disturbance, disruption and security problems.

Schools are community-based institutions. In rural and semi-urban areas, a government school can be an important public institution, especially as a community center. Public importance does not necessarily mean public access. In a broad sense, the community includes the school, but the school must be committed to the education and well-being of its students every day. Therefore, no one should be allowed to enter classrooms, disrupt teachers, or interfere with educational activities simply because the school is a public building.

Unauthorized intrusion can impact the learning process in many ways. Entering a classroom and engaging in unnecessary conversations with teachers, contacting students without permission, or bringing personal issues or problems into the school environment can disrupt learning. Students become distracted, teachers are distracted, and discipline is compromised. If this happens during

exams, school events, and other important academic activities, the consequences can be even more serious.

This isn't just a discipline issue. Today, the issue of school security is multifaceted. Improved access control involves protecting children, staff, protecting important files and digital hardware, and preventing untoward incidents. Unauthorized entry into school premises, whether by adults or children, can cause serious problems. Therefore, maintaining visitor records, understanding their intent, and obtaining appropriate permissions are crucial components of institutional security.

What's interesting about the Hansi administration's directives is that they aren't intended to isolate schools from society. Instead, they emphasize the need for proper permission and a legitimate purpose for entry. Parents, education officials, inspection teams, and other authorized individuals must have good reasons for visiting schools. Parents and schools should communicate constructively with each other to support children's progress. However, this communication should occur through a system that doesn't disrupt classroom teaching.

Appointments for parents can be scheduled, and schools can have a visitor register and a clear policy regarding meeting times with school officials or teachers. This will help ensure that any genuine concerns are addressed confidentially and respectfully, and that the academic routine is not disrupted. The aim is not to isolate the school from the community, but to establish a disciplined and accountable system for school/community interaction. Another problem is that influential people sometimes exert pressure on schools. The functioning of any educational institution should not be affected by political, social, or personal influence. Sometimes, people are brought into schools to resolve personal matters, intimidate



teachers, or interfere in administrative matters. These activities not only undermine discipline but also undermine the dignity and independence of educational institutions. Effective teaching is possible only when there is no intimidation or unnecessary pressure from outside the school. School should be a place where conflict or displays of influence are not permitted. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers and school administrators to protect themselves from such interference to ensure the quality and integrity of education.

But strict orders are not the solution to this problem. Schools must have clear and practical mechanisms to implement these guidelines. It is important for all institutions to maintain a visitor register and record the reason for their visit. Visitors may only be received by teachers or students with the knowledge of the relevant official, and entry should be monitored, especially when children are in school. In larger schools, if possible, security personnel, designated entrances and entry points, and appropriate surveillance systems may also be considered.

However, it's also important not to make schools overly restrictive and/or overly intimidating. Schools are institutions of openness, trust, and learning. A "one-size-fits-all" approach can create unnecessary hardship for parents and leave the community feeling alienated from the school. The real challenge lies in striking a balance between accessibility and safety.

Principals and headmasters are at the center of this process. They are not only administrative officials who carry out government directives, but also custodians of the educational environment. All teachers, non-teaching staff, students, and parents should know that the safety and sanctity of the school campus is everyone's responsibility.

The directives issued by the district administration also emphasize accountability in cases of violation or non-compliance with the Act. This is important, but requires adequate administrative support. However, many government schools have understaffed and small buildings, especially in smaller schools. Institutional support is essential for effective admission man-

agement, and this responsibility should rest squarely with the headmaster. The most important question concerns every child's right to a safe and peaceful school environment. Students have the right to a seamless learning environment. The learning environment must be free from threats and frequent disruptions to teachers. Parents must be assured that their children are attending a safe school.

The directives issued by Deputy Commissioner Rahul Narwal should be viewed in this context. Their aim is not to isolate schools from society, but to uphold the fundamental purpose of education. Child safety, school discipline, and the quality of education have become critical issues, and protecting the sanctity of schools is now a crucial responsibility. The school's doors should be wide open, but not locked. Parents, officials, and community members with valid reasons should be welcome into the educational institution, although clear boundaries should be established for "no trespassing." (Dr Priyanka Saurabh, PhD (Political Science) is a poet and social thinker.)

India's Space revolution: Private enterprise fuels a new scientific power

By: Lalit Garg

India's space journey is no longer confined to government institutions and scientific laboratories. Today, it has evolved into a powerful convergence of innovation, entrepreneurship, young talent, private capital and global ambition—giving India fresh momentum on its path to becoming a major space power. The decision to open the space sector to greater private participation under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a decisive milestone in this transformation. An arena once viewed largely through the lens of government control and institutional limitations is now witnessing the emergence of hundreds of young enterprises, boldly pursuing new possibilities with their ideas, technologies and entrepreneurial spirit. Prime Minister Modi's interaction with and encouragement of Indian private space entrepreneurs is not merely an event; it is a powerful articulation of the direction of India's future. His vision of making India a global magnet for space talent, investment and entrepreneurship reflects the country's rapidly expanding role on the world stage.

India's achievements in space have an extraordinary history. Despite limited resources, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) demonstrated remarkable scientific discipline, self-reliance and determination, earning global admiration. The journey that began with Aryabhata progressed to the Mars Orbiter Mission, while the Chandrayaan missions demonstrated India's growing capability to explore the Moon. Chandrayaan-3 created history by making India the first country to successfully land in the Moon's southern polar region. This was not merely a scientific triumph; it was a testament to Indian talent, technological confidence and the nation's ability to turn seemingly impossible challenges into achievable goals. The Mars Orbiter Mission, achieved at a remarkably low cost, showcased India's capability in interplanetary exploration. Aditya-L1 took India's ambitions in solar research to a new level, while the Gaganyaan programme, aimed at sending Indian astronauts into space, signals the country's next major leap. This entire journey has made one thing clear: India is no longer merely following global achievements in space science; it possesses the capability to establish new benchmarks of its own.

The natural next step in this journey is greater private-sector participation. Following reforms in the space sector, the emergence of around 440 space-tech startups in India reflects the depth of this transformation. Some are engaged in satellite manufacturing, others are developing launch-vehicle technologies, while several are working in cutting-edge areas such as space-based data analytics, artificial intelligence, Earth observation, communications, weather forecasting and space-debris management. Skyroot Aerospace has taken a historic step towards private-sector rocket launches, while Agnikul Cosmos has demonstrated through indigenous technology and modern manufacturing methods that Indian private enterprises can establish themselves even in the highly complex field of space launches. These efforts are changing the very perception of space as an exclusive domain of scientific institutions. It is increasingly becoming a new frontier for young entrepreneurs, employment, research, investment and global business.

The most significant aspect of this transformation is that space is no longer merely about achievements in the sky; it is increasingly becoming an instrument for improving life on Earth. Satellite-based services can enhance agricultural productivity, monitor crops, identify water resources, provide accurate weather information, support fisheries and forest conservation, and strengthen disaster management. During natural disasters

such as floods, cyclones, droughts and landslides, satellite-derived information can make rescue and relief operations faster and more effective. Space technology can also play a crucial role in expanding communication and digital services in villages and remote areas. India's space programme, therefore, is no longer merely a matter of scientific prestige; it is becoming a powerful engine of social transformation and economic development.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for the space sector appears to be rooted in precisely this broader perspective. His ambition is not merely to make India a country capable of reaching space, but to establish it as a leading force in the global space economy. He wants global talent to see India as a destination, Indian youth to enter the sector with innovative ideas, and India to emerge as a trusted hub for global space companies and investors. Such a vision can give a new direction to India's economic strength. In the coming years, the space economy will become increasingly intertwined with communications, weather forecasting, defence, agriculture, transportation, energy, disaster management and digital services. The countries that establish technological leadership in this domain will inevitably strengthen their economic as well as strategic influence.

Yet, while the opportunities before private space enterprises are immense, the challenges are equally formidable. Space



technology requires enormous investment in research and development. The risks associated with launch failures are far greater than in most conventional industries. Highly complex technology, stringent safety standards, specialised human resources and long-term investment requirements make the sector exceptionally demanding. Therefore, the government's role cannot be limited merely to framing regulations. It must create policies that encourage innovation, provide private enterprises with access to testing and research facilities, strengthen collaboration between research institutions and industry, and sustain investor confidence. Institutional mechanisms such as a single-window system for the space sector and the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre (IN-SPACe) are creating an important foundation for this transformation.

Another major opportunity for India lies in connecting its traditional strengths of cost-effectiveness and efficiency in space technology with the global market. India has already demonstrated that it can deliver high-quality space services at comparatively low cost. If this capability is combined with the speed, innovation and risk-taking capacity of the private sector, India can capture a significant share of the global market in small-satellite launches, satellite manufacturing, space-based data and other space services. This would not only generate foreign-exchange earnings but also create

large numbers of high-skilled employment opportunities.

Here, ISRO's experience represents invaluable capital for India's emerging space enterprises. The knowledge accumulated through decades of scientific endeavour, along with expertise in launch technology, satellite manufacturing and mission management, can serve as a powerful source of guidance for the country's young space companies. If government institutions and private enterprises develop a culture of collaboration alongside healthy competition, India's space capabilities can multiply manifold. The government's responsibility is to open the pathways; scientific institutions must share knowledge and experience; and the private sector must bring speed, innovation and market-oriented dynamism. The synergy of these three forces can propel India to unprecedented heights.

Prime Minister Modi's call for creating an environment in which young people from around the world aspire to build their future in India's space sector expresses a new Indian ambition in the global competition for talent. This is not simply a goal of increasing the number of rockets or satellites launched. It is a vision of transforming India into a global centre for space-based knowledge, technology and economic activity. In the years ahead, India's success in space will not be measured merely by how many satellites it launches or how many rockets

it sends into orbit. The real test will be how effectively space technology improves the lives of Indian farmers, students, entrepreneurs, soldiers, scientists and ordinary citizens. India's space journey has now reached a stage where the sky is no longer the limit—it is an expanding field of opportunity. From the lunar triumph of Chandrayaan-3 to Aditya-L1's journey towards the Sun, from the historic success of the Mars Orbiter Mission to preparations for human spaceflight, and from government institutions to private startups undertaking launches, India has travelled an extraordinary distance. The next chapter must be even more ambitious. Scientific curiosity must be connected with entrepreneurship, public policy with private-sector energy, and Indian talent with global opportunities. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for the space sector seeks to provide direction to precisely this convergence. India has already demonstrated its capabilities—from Earth to the Moon. The challenge now is to leave an equally enduring imprint in space through scientific excellence, economic strength, technological innovation and human leadership. This new space odyssey can become a vital link between the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) and the larger aspiration of a Viksit Bharat (developed India)—and can ultimately establish India as a space power whose achievements the world will remember for generations.



Jharkhand's Broken Trust

By: Satyabrata Borah

When people talk about the long climb up the economic ladder in a developing society, they often picture a broad staircase with room for everyone to move forward at their own speed. The reality for millions of young people living in places like Jharkhand is far harsher. The path to a stable life has narrowed down to a needle eye that passes almost entirely through public sector employment. When the only realistic gate to security becomes compromised by administrative failures, leaking question papers, and broken recruitment processes, the frustration that follows is never just a minor policy disagreement. It becomes a deep existential crisis that spills out onto the streets.

For several weeks now, the state capital of Ranchi has been witnessing this frustration firsthand. Thousands of young job seekers have gathered under different banners to protest against what they describe as a systematically flawed examination machinery. These students are largely grouped under two main platforms, namely the Jharkhand Public Service Commission and Jharkhand Staff Selection Commission Candidates Justice Front, along with the Reform Front. While these two student groups hold somewhat different internal political sympathies and attempt to speak with government representatives on separate tracks, their core grievances are practically identical. They are asking for a complete overhaul of an official recruitment process that they believe has robbed them of their youth, their family savings, and their dignity. The spark that ignited this current wave of unrest was the release of the preliminary examination results for the Fourteenth Combined Civil Services conducted by the state public service commission. About three hundred and fifty thousand hopeful applicants turned up to compete for just one hundred and three vacant positions. When the shortlist of roughly twenty two hundred candidates came out, it immediately raised serious eyebrows across the student community. Aspirants discovered that the official authorities had completely omitted the usual breakdown of cut off marks across different reservation categories. Mysterious patterns emerged in the merit rankings that made very little statistical sense.

To make matters infinitely worse, copies of an answer sheet began circulating on social media showing that a candidate who had attempted less than half of the required questions was somehow listed as successful.

Discovering that the private vendor hired to manage and process the examination data had already been blacklisted a year prior for unreliable work added fuel to the fire. The immediate reaction from the state government was familiar. Officials initially responded with police raids, targeted arrests of student leaders, and de-

fensive public statements. As the street pressure grew too large to ignore, high ranking members within the testing commission began resigning, and the state leadership scrambled to form a high level cabinet committee to address the crisis. In an effort to calm the rising anger, the government eventually announced a sweeping decision to cancel every single examination processed by that specific third party contractor going back several years. While cancelling those contaminated tests offers a sense of relief to the students currently protesting in Ranchi, it creates a new human tragedy in its wake. Thousands of honest candidates who worked hard, passed those very same examinations fair and square over the past decade, and subsequently built their lives around those government jobs now find their livelihoods hanging by a thread. They are caught in a crossfire between systemic corruption and panic driven administrative damage control.

This cycle of delay, disruption, and systemic decay is hardly a new phenomenon in the state. Ever since Jharkhand was carved out as an independent state at the turn of the millennium, its recruitment systems have been plagued by structural inefficiency. Examination cycles that are supposed to happen annually are routinely delayed for years at a time, forcing authorities to bunch multiple years of vacancies into single, chaotic recruitment drives. A young person who enters a coaching institute at twenty might find themselves writing their very first preliminary test well into their late twenties. This constant waiting game drains emotional resilience and financial resources from families who have very little to spare in the first place.

Trust in these institutions has broken down so completely that standard government assurances no longer carry any weight. When a state investigative team recently looked into suspected paper leaks in another major selection test, they concluded that no organized leak had occurred. That statement directly contradicted reports from police intelligence units describing large sums of cash changing hands in exchange for advance access to question papers. When the state's own investigative agencies cannot agree on basic facts, candidates naturally lose all faith in local inquiries. This total collapse of trust is why the protesting students are standing firm on their demand for an independent investigation by central authorities, even though everyone acknowledges that previous central probes into state recruitment drives from two decades ago are still dragging through the courts without final resolution.

To understand why a government job holds such an overwhelming, almost hypnotic pull over the youth here, one has to look at the broader economic landscape of the region. Jharkhand is extraordinarily rich in mineral wealth, holding a massive portion of the country's coal, iron ore, and

copper reserves. That underground richness has never translated into widespread, high quality employment opportunities for the local population. Industrial hubs exist, but they remain isolated pockets that do not absorb the vast stream of educated young people entering the workforce each year.

The average family outside the industrial belts relies heavily on small scale agriculture that is almost entirely dependent on seasonal monsoon rains. A single bad weather season can wipe out an entire household's annual income. In this environment of high risk and low reward, a position in the state bureaucracy represents far more than just a monthly paycheck. It signifies absolute security, social respect, medical coverage, and a guaranteed shelter against the volatile swings of the agrarian economy. A family that manages to get even one child into a government job often manages to pull its entire extended lineage out of poverty.

Driven by this incredible stake, young men and women leave their villages to crowd into tiny, rented rooms in cities like Ranchi. They spend twelve hours a day sitting in cramped libraries, memorizing thick textbooks, and attending budget coaching centers. They sacrifice their personal relationships, health, and best years in pursuit of a single goal. When the system that evaluates their sacrifice turns out to be compromised, the reaction is naturally explosive.

The state leadership finds itself in a tight corner, but choosing to hide behind bureaucratic delay or partial solutions will only make the situation worse. Admitting the need for a thorough, independent investigation into the testing process is politically painful, yet it is the only way to begin rebuilding a foundation of credibility. Alongside an honest investigation, the administration needs to implement a transparent, non negotiable calendar for all future recruitment drives. Cut off marks, answer keys, and candidate scorecards must be published automatically without requiring public protests or court orders to force them out into the open.

Fixing the examination system is only half the battle. A state cannot build a stable future when its entire young generation is competing for a few hundred government desks while the rest of the economy offers little hope. Local leadership must work aggressively to diversify the local economy, encouraging industries that generate real, sustainable private sector jobs and building modern skill programs that give young people viable alternatives. Until those broader opportunities exist, the government owes its youth an examination system that is fair, predictable, and completely clean. The young people sitting on the streets of Ranchi are not asking for favors or special treatment. They are simply asking that the rules of the game remain honest, so that their hard work actually means something.

Iraq tests a new security formula for Saudi-Iran rivalry

By: Arjavi Indraneesh

Iraq's proposal for a joint security council bringing Saudi Arabia and Iran into a formal mechanism is more than another attempt at regional mediation. It reflects Baghdad's growing conviction that diplomatic contact between the two powers, while valuable, is no longer sufficient to prevent security crises from spilling across borders.

National Security Adviser Qasim al-Araji has identified the central problem with unusual clarity: the relationship between Riyadh and Tehran remains burdened by a "crisis of trust". That diagnosis matters because the two governments have already restored diplomatic relations and maintained channels of communication. The difficulty is therefore no longer the absence of dialogue. It is the absence of confidence that either side can reliably control the forces, alliances and military networks operating around it.

That distinction explains why Iraq is proposing a security body rather than another political dialogue forum.

Saudi Arabia and Iran formally restored relations in 2023 after seven years of diplomatic rupture, under an agreement brokered by China following earlier rounds of Saudi-Iranian talks hosted by Iraq. Embassies reopened and senior officials resumed contacts. The reconciliation eased one of the Middle East's most consequential rivalries and created expectations that confrontation might gradually give way to managed competition.

Those expectations have proved harder to sustain at the security level.

The underlying architecture of rivalry remains largely intact. Iran retains relationships with armed movements and political-military networks across Iraq, Yemen and other parts of the region. Saudi Arabia continues to regard many of those actors as extensions, formal or otherwise, of Iranian strategic influence. Tehran, for its part, remains deeply suspicious of Saudi security partnerships with Western powers and emerging regional defence arrangements.

The result is a relationship capable of supporting diplomatic meetings while remaining vulnerable to military incidents that neither government may fully control.

Iraq sits directly inside this contradiction. Baghdad has strong political, economic and religious ties with Iran, but it has also spent years rebuilding relations with Saudi Arabia and the wider Gulf. Iraqi governments have therefore sought to avoid being forced into an exclusive alignment with either camp.

Mediation has become an instrument of Iraqi national security precisely because Saudi-Iranian confrontation frequently plays itself out on Iraqi territory. That makes al-Araji's proposal partly an exercise in Iraqi self-preservation.



The urgency became particularly evident after Saudi Arabia said drones launched from Iraqi territory had targeted oil infrastructure in the kingdom in July. Riyadh blamed Iran-backed armed groups and warned that it retained the right to respond. The episode produced an especially dangerous scenario for Baghdad: Iraqi territory becoming a launch platform for attacks on a neighbouring Arab state, followed by the possibility of retaliatory strikes inside Iraq.

Saudi and US forces subsequently attacked targets associated with Iran-aligned groups inside Iraq, demonstrating how quickly the Saudi-Iranian security contest can compromise Iraqi sovereignty. Al-Araji's simultaneous emphasis on restricting weapons to state control is therefore closely connected to his call for Saudi-Iranian security coordination. The two issues cannot easily be separated. Iraq cannot convincingly mediate between its neighbours while armed organisations operating within its borders retain an independent capacity to determine questions of war and peace.

A joint security council could, in theory, provide several mechanisms that are currently weak or absent. Saudi and Iranian officials could exchange intelligence concerning cross-border threats, establish direct channels for verifying responsibility for drone or missile attacks, develop procedures for preventing escalation after security incidents and communicate warnings before accusations harden into decisions for retaliation.

Such machinery could be particularly important because modern Gulf confrontation increasingly occurs in an ambiguous space between state and non-state action. Drones can cross borders without clear identification. Armed groups can claim independence from governments that possess influence over them. Cyber attacks, maritime incidents and strikes on energy infrastructure can produce enormous consequences before responsibility has been firmly established.

A standing security mechanism would not eliminate those threats, but it might create additional time for investigation before military responses are authorised. The greater challenge is whether Saudi Arabia and Iran are prepared to provide the transparency such a mechanism would require.

Riyadh's principal concern is unlikely to be whether Iranian diplomats are willing to

meet Saudi counterparts. It is whether Tehran can restrain armed organisations aligned with its regional strategy and whether commitments made by Iranian officials will translate into behaviour by those groups.

Iran faces a different trust problem. Tehran has traditionally regarded Gulf security structures backed by the United States as instruments designed partly to contain Iran. Saudi participation in new military partnerships and continuing Western deployments across the Gulf reinforce Iranian fears that security coordination could become another channel for pressure rather than a genuinely collective arrangement.

Iraq is attempting to construct a middle layer between those competing perceptions. Baghdad is well placed diplomatically because it maintains working relationships with both governments and previously hosted the negotiations that prepared the ground for the Saudi-Iranian diplomatic restoration. Yet Iraq is simultaneously weakened as a mediator by its own fragmented security environment. Saudi officials cannot overlook attacks attributed to Iraqi-based factions, while Iran will resist arrangements that appear designed to dismantle organisations it regards as part of its regional security network.

The proposal consequently places a significant burden on Baghdad itself. For the initiative to acquire credibility, Iraq would need to demonstrate that its government possesses effective authority over armed activity originating from its territory. Al-Araji's declaration that decisions of war and peace belong exclusively to the Iraqi state is therefore not merely a domestic political statement. It is effectively a condition for Iraq's larger regional diplomatic ambition.

There is also a broader strategic shift behind the proposal. Middle Eastern governments are increasingly seeking regional arrangements capable of operating alongside, and sometimes independently of, traditional external security guarantees. Years of conflict have encouraged Gulf states to diversify diplomatic and defence relationships rather than depend entirely on a single outside power. China's role in the 2023 Saudi-Iran agreement illustrated that change. Iraq's current initiative represents another version of the same trend, but with regional states themselves attempting to institutionalise crisis management.

The environment in which Baghdad is making its proposal is considerably more dangerous than the one that produced the 2023 reconciliation. Conflict involving Iran has increased pressure on Gulf shipping, energy infrastructure and neighbouring states. Disruption around the Strait of Hormuz has reminded Iraq and the Gulf monarchies how rapidly geopolitical confrontation can become an economic emergency. (IPA Service)

'Political disagreements and criticism are an integral part of democracy' BJP seeks FIR against Cong's Pawan Khera over 'derogatory remarks' against Amit Shah

SHIMLA, Aug 24: The BJP on Monday strongly objected to alleged derogatory and objectionable remarks by Congress leader Pawan Khera against Union Home Minister Amit Shah and demanded registration of an FIR against him in Shimla.

A BJP delegation comprising Chief Spokesperson and MLA Rakesh Jamwal, MLAs Satpal Singh Satti, D S Thakur and Dileep Thakur on Monday submitted a written complaint addressed to the superintendent of police, Shimla, through the additional SP, seeking legal action against Khera.

Jamwal claimed Khera had pub-



licly used words such as "dwarf", "fugitive" and "tadipaar", besides

making remarks about the "aukaat" (status/stature) of Shah.

"Political disagreements and criticism are an integral part of democracy, but the use of such language against the Union home minister crosses the limits of political decency and lowers the standard of public discourse," he said.

Jamwal said the BJP has submitted a written complaint requesting the police to examine the matter under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and any other applicable legal provisions. "The party will also provide the police with relevant videos, social media material and other electronic evidence pertain-

ing to the alleged remarks," he added.

Jamwal said the complaint specifically seeks preservation and examination of the original and unedited video/audio recordings and social media posts relating to Khera's statement.

"The BJP has requested that the entire context of the statement be investigated and all electronic and digital evidence be preserved in accordance with law. If the investigation establishes the ingredients of a cognisable offence, an FIR should be registered and appropriate legal action initiated," he said. (PTI)

Ex-diplomat raises concerns over SIR in Punjab over 'mismatch' notice

AMRITSAR, Aug 24: Former diplomat Navdeep Suri has raised concerns over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral roll underway in Punjab after he was served a notice saying his details do not match.

Suri, who served as India's Ambassador to the UAE and Egypt and high commissioner to Australia, on Sunday took to X to express his anguish.

"Dear @ECISVEEP, Sharing my experience with #SIR in Punjab. Went to BLO, submitted a Voter Card and Aadhaar Card, was assured that everything was in order. Got a message today from a volunteer saying some details don't match with SIR in 2003!" he wrote. He said he spoke with the booth-level officer (BLO), who told him to collect the notice.

"And then come again with unspecified documents that show I am an Indian citizen. Replied that

I was not in India in 2003, so they've asked for my passport as proof," he wrote.

"I happen to have documents other than voter ID and Aadhaar card. But I can't help asking: If I have trouble establishing my citizenship after representing India in three countries, what's the fate of the common citizen? Ease of Living, I presume!" Suri wrote.

When contacted, Punjab Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Anindita Mitra said Suri's name was never removed from the electoral roll as his name is part of the draft electoral roll published on August 13.

He was simply served notice and asked to submit certain documents, she said.

After getting all the mandatory documents, his name was published as part of the electoral roll, Mitra said, adding, his vote was earlier registered in Amritsar and continues to be registered there.



Suri has served in diplomatic missions in Cairo, Damascus, Washington, Dar es Salaam and London, and was India's Consul General in Johannesburg.

In recognition of his service, the president of the UAE conferred on him the Order of Zayed II, the country's second-highest civilian award. (PTI)

BJP leaders pay floral tributes to Arun Jaitley on his death anniversary

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Senior BJP leaders, RSS functionaries paid homage to former finance minister of the country Arun Jaitley on his death anniversary on Monday.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, RSS Sarkaryawah Dattatreya Hosbole, state president Harsh Malhotra, Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta, several BJP MLAs and other leaders attended the tribute ceremonies held at the Delhi BJP office and Siri Fort auditorium.

Arun Jaitley's wife Sangeeta, son Rohan and daughter Sonali also paid their respects. Delhi Lt Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu also paid floral tributes to the former BJP stalwart.

A formal tribute programme was held at the Delhi BJP office in the morning, followed by a commemorative programme at Arun Jaitley Park, Siri Fort. (PTI)

Adityanath hails changing Raebareli, targets Congress over development

RAEBARELI (UP), Aug 24: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Monday that Raebareli, a constituency long associated with the Congress, had transformed under the BJP-led governments.

He said this during a programme here to mark the 222nd birth anniversary of the local 1857 uprising hero Rana Beni Madhav Baksh Singh. While inaugurating development projects worth more than ₹ 800 crore, the chief minister also slammed the opposition Samajwadi Party.

Adityanath said the district was earlier described as a "VIP" constituency but remained marked by "anarchy, deprivation and lack of development".

"Raebareli has changed now," said the chief minister and added that the development underway would help fulfil the aspirations of youth, improve the condition of farmers and provide greater opportunities and dignity to artisans and workers.

Raebareli has for decades been a prominent Congress stronghold. Former Congress president Sonia Gandhi represented the constituency in the Lok Sabha for several terms, while Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is the sitting MP from Raebareli.

Taking a swipe at successive Congress governments, Adityanath referred to former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi's widely cited observation that only 15 paise of every rupee sent by the Centre reached the intended beneficiaries. "This was because the remaining money was siphoned off by people associated with the Congress and Samajwadi Party," Adityanath said, while claiming that the BJP governments had ensured greater delivery of welfare schemes to the poor.

The chief minister highlighted the modern coach factory in Raebareli as an example of the district's changing industrial profile. He said the factory, established in 2012 during the Congress-led UPA era, produced 2,106 coaches in 2025-26 under his government, describing it as a "record production" figure.

Adityanath said for the first time, a complete Vande Bharat train set was rolled out from the modern coach factory in May 2026, aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision.

"Raebareli's name is now being taken with pride not only in Uttar Pradesh but across the country," he said.

Adityanath said development was essential for creating jobs, increasing farmers' incomes and supporting workers and artisans. He credited the BJP governments for accelerating development in Raebareli and urged people to support the process.



"You cannot bring development. You have no interest in the development of Raebareli. As a responsible leader, you should conduct yourself in a manner that sets an example before the people."

"For the longest period, Congress and people supported by Congress have represented Raebareli and Amethi, but they never worked to honour the revolutionaries and heroes who fought for India's freedom. They believe honour should be reserved for only one family and it is only their family," Adityanath said.

He said Congress believes that only Congress should be honoured, while the Samajwadi Party believes that only its "family syndicate" (Yadav clan) should be respected.

"This 'family syndicate' is such that any goon in your town, area, district or state finds himself ideologically close to the Samajwadi Party. Their work was to occupy the land of the poor, extort money from traders and compromise the safety of daughters," he alleged.

He said the earlier governments deprived youth of jobs, restricted electricity and welfare benefits, occupied poor people's land and compromised women's safety. "But Uttar Pradesh has changed today. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, we are seeing a new Uttar Pradesh," he said.

Adityanath said his government followed a zero-tolerance policy towards crime, adding, "If anyone compromises the safety of daughters and traders, there will be only two places for them: Either jail or hell. There is no third place." (PTI)

Rajasthan poll panel pulls up officials over laxity in urban local body poll

JAIPUR, Aug 24: Rajasthan State Election Commissioner Rajeshwar Singh warned officials on Monday that any negligence by them in upcoming urban local body election-related work would not be tolerated.

Singh addressed a video-conference training programme for Returning Officers appointed for the Urban Local Body General Elections-2026, with officials from all districts participating.

While interacting with officials from different districts, the State Election Commissioner sought information about difficulties officials faced in carrying out election-related work and issued necessary directions to resolve them, according to an official statement.

Singh reviewed the status of revision and updating of electoral rolls and sought details of arrangements being made at polling stations to facilitate voting by persons with disabilities. He also took stock of preparations at sensitive and critical polling stations.

Expressing displeasure with districts and officials who had not shown the seriousness in election preparations, Singh said there would be no tolerance for negligence or laxity at any level of the election process.

He directed all officials to complete election-related tasks within the prescribed timelines and ensure strict compliance with the commission's instructions. (PTI)

Gehlot cites CAG to allege no spending under 21 welfare schemes

JAIPUR, Aug 24: Former Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot on Monday cited a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report to allege that no expenditure was incurred under 21 of 37 schemes meant for children, girls and women, despite a budgetary allocation of around ₹ 3,000 crore. Gehlot said the schemes were intended to benefit more than one crore children, girl students and women in the state.

"The CAG report has exposed another shameful reality of the BJP government before the Assembly. Not even a single rupee was spent on the ground in 21 of the 37 schemes being run for children, girls and women," the Congress leader said. Citing the report, Gehlot claimed that ₹ 21.61 crore allocated under the Kalibai Bheel Scooty Scheme, ₹ 6 crore for construction of Maa-Badi centres and ₹ 55.31 crore towards reimbursement of private school fees under the Right to Education remained unspent.

He further claimed that no expenditure was incurred under any of the nine schemes meant for college-going girls and women, including the Ladli Suraksha Yojana and the pension scheme for deserted women. (PTI)

*There are some people who work with a mindset of division in society
People of India will change mindset of those insulting Vande Mataram: Nabin*

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: BJP national president Nitin Nabin on Monday slammed the opposition parties for working with a "mindset of division" and insulting Vande Mataram, and asserted that the people of India will change their mindset.

Speaking at a Samrasta Sankalp Diwas event to mark the 650th birth anniversary of Sant Guru Ravidas at Talkatora Stadium here, Nabin said India's culture and heritage have faced challenges over the years, but their roots are strong enough to withstand them.

"People ruled this country for hundreds of years, but they failed to uproot the foundations of our culture. Even today, there are some people who work with a mindset of division in society."

"Vande Mataram, which laid the foundation of India's freedom struggle and became a patriotic anthem for our martyrs and freedom fighters, is still being insulted by some people in this country," the BJP president said.

"But I tell them: the soil of this country has such strength that if the minds of people like Lodi and Sikandar could be trans-

formed, then in the times to come, the strength of India's soil will also transform the minds of those who have insulted Vande Mataram. The people of India will change their mindset," Nabin said.

Hitting out at the previous Congress governments, Nabin said attempts were made to divide the country's resources along religious and social lines.

"But our leader said that the first right over the country's resources belongs to the poor, whose blessings brought this government to power," he said.

Nabin said government schemes are framed keeping the last person in society in mind and without discrimination based on caste, community or identity.

"The prime minister says that development schemes must reach the last person in society. When he enters Parliament by bowing before this sacred temple of democracy, he says in his very first speech that his government will be for the poor and dedicated to the poor," Nabin said.

He said the BJP has launched the Samrasta Sankalp Abhiyan based on Ravidas' ideas of social harmony.

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Trinamool Congress general secretary and Lok Sabha leader Abhishek Banerjee has approached the Supreme Court seeking an expeditious decision by Speaker Om Birla on petitions seeking disqualification of 20 rebel party MPs who have aligned themselves with the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI).

According to the apex court website, a bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joydalya Bagchi and V Mohana has listed the plea of Banerjee for hearing on August 25.

The top court is also seized of a similar plea filed by the Shiv Sena (UBT) challenging the speaker's approval to the merger of its six MPs with the Shiv Sena led by Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. A bench of Justices P S Narasimha and Alok Aradhe is hearing that petition.

Banerjee, in his plea, challenged the alleged delay in deciding the disqualification proceedings initiated against the MPs.

The TMC leader has sought directions for the speaker to decide the disqualification petitions in



accordance with the anti-defection provisions of the Constitution. He had earlier submitted separate petitions against the 20 MPs and subsequently urged the speaker to expedite their disposal.

According to reports, he also met Birla on August 12 over the issue after sending a written reminder on July 27.

The dispute follows a rebellion within the TMC parliamentary party after 20 of its Lok Sabha MPs announced that they had joined or merged with the NCPI, a Tripura-based political outfit, and sought separate recognition in

the House.

The rebel MPs have subsequently been treated as an NCPI group in Parliament and have participated in NDA parliamentary activities.

The TMC has maintained that the MPs were elected on its symbol and that their decision to align with another political formation amounts to voluntarily giving up membership of the party, attracting disqualification under the anti-defection law.

The rebel camp, however, has maintained that its move constitutes a valid merger. The petition names the Lok Sabha speaker and the secretary general as respondents, besides the 20 MPs against whom the disqualification proceedings have been sought.

The MPs named in the petition are Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Satadit Roy, Prasun Banerjee, Rachana Banerjee, Jagadish Chandra Barma Basunia, Partha Bhownick, Arup Chakraborty, Adhikari Deepak Dev, Sayani Ghosh, Bapi Haldar, Md Abu Taher Khan, Kalipada Saren Kherwal, Asit Kumar Mal, June Maliah, Mitali Bag, Khalilur Rahaman, Mala Roy, Sharmila Sarkar and Yusuf Pathan. (PTI)



"At a time when society was marked by deep social inequalities and several social evils, his thoughts and efforts struck a strong blow against these practices and laid the foundation of social harmony across the country," he said.

He also said Ravidas' ideas and struggle helped protect Indian society and Sanatan traditions during a period of foreign inva-

sions and attempts at religious conversion. "When foreign invasions took place, and large-scale attempts were being made to lead people towards religious conversion, Ravidas' ideas and his struggle also played a role in protecting the Indian society and its Sanatan traditions," he said.

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, who also attended the event, said the sacred soil brought from Varanasi will be taken to every district and settlement in the national capital so that Ravidas' teachings reach people.

"It is our endeavour that this sacred soil reaches every home and every settlement, and that through this soil, the teachings and blessings of Gurudev reach every person," she said.

Gupta said the year-long celebrations of Ravidas' 650th birth anniversary will be taken to every street and neighbourhood through various programmes.

At the event, urns containing sacred soil from Varanasi were distributed to representatives of Delhi's districts. The urns will be taken to different districts and settlements as part of the Samrasta Sankalp Abhiyan. (PTI)

FISH FEAST IN AYODHYA

BJP slams UP Cong chief Ajay Rai for 'eating fish' in Sawan, Rai says show proof

AYODHYA/RAEBARELI, Aug 24: A purported video of fish being cooked at a Nishad community event in Ayodhya was at the centre of a snowballing row on Monday with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath accusing state Congress chief Ajay Rai of partaking of the feast and the opposition leader challenging him to show evidence.

The attack against Rai was two-pronged. First, the feast was in Ayodhya, where non-vegetarian food is banned within a 15-km radius of the Ram temple. Second, it was during the Hindu holy month of Shravan (Sawan), when many devout Hindus avoid meat.

The event, attended by Rai along with other Congress leaders as part of the party's outreach to the Nishad community ahead of the 2027 assembly elections, was held on Saturday and the video surfaced on Sunday.

Rai had visited the Hanuman-garhi temple and recited the Hanuman Chalisa before offering prayers at the Ram temple and travelling to Tarun, around 30 km away, where the meeting was held.

Among those who spoke out was organiser and local leader Ram Nihaal Nishad.

"Hunting and selling fish is our traditional business and our livelihood depends on fish only... above all it is not mentioned anywhere in the Constitution of India that one cannot eat fish during the month of Sawan," he said.

Ram Nishad also cited an August 11 statement from Sanjay Nishad, a cabinet minister in the UP government: "He stated that if fish prepared without garlic and onion is vegetarian. The fish, along with the bow and arrow, features in the emblems of both the UP government and the Constitution of India. This is also the symbol of the Nishad community, and we take pride in it."

In Raebareli, Adityanath took up the issue in a big way.

Lashing out at Rai, he said in a speech, "You saw the conduct of the Congress state president yesterday. He goes to Hanuman-garhi for darshan and, after coming out, enjoys a fish feast and then shouts 'Ram-Ram'. There is a limit to shamelessness."

"Who asked you to go to the temple? You could have eaten whatever you wanted outside Ayodhya."

Hitting out at the Congress, he went on to say that even a chameleon would be embarrassed by this kind of behaviour.

"It too must be wondering what kind of species we have become in human form -- who shout 'Ram-Ram' in the temple, prostrate before Bajrang Bali, but then go outside and enjoy a fish feast," the CM said.

BJP Uttar Pradesh president Pankaj Chaudhary added in a post on X that "insulting Sanatan has now become Congress' identity". He termed the alleged fish feast during Sawan in Ayodhya "highly condemnable and unforgivable" and demanded that Congress publicly apologise.

Rai dared the chief minister to produce any photograph or video to prove he had consumed fish or was present where it was cooked and said he would apologise and resign as UP Congress president if this was proven.

"But if there is no evidence, then Adityanath ji you will have to resign as chief minister. You will not even remain worthy of sitting in the math (as the Goraksh-apeethadishwar). You will not have any respect there either, and you will have to go home," Rai told PTI Videos.

The UP Congress, in a post on X, accused the BJP government of "only lying and misleading the people" and said fishing, rearing and selling fish was part of the lifestyle and culture of the Nishad community. It said the community that ferried Lord Ram across the river was now being insulted.

Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera also defended the event, saying the hosts belonged to the Nishad community and had their own food traditions.

"Who were the hosts of this programme? They were people from the Nishad community, and they have their own traditions of eating and drinking. Who am I to comment on their traditions?" Khera told PTI Videos in Delhi.

He added, "Ajay Rai is a vegetarian person, and I do not want to comment on his eating habits."

Questioning the controversy over people's food choices, Khera alleged that it was a ploy to divert attention from the alleged theft of donations to the Ram temple in Ayodhya.

Adityanath kept up his attack against the Congress through the day. He used the Hindi expression "muh mein Ram, bagal mein chhuri" to accuse the party of double standards at a second speech in Raebareli. He also accused the Congress of having earlier questioned the existence of Lord Ram and said its leaders' conduct in Ayodhya had been witnessed by the country and the world. (PTI)

Enquiry into award of contracts in Arunachal

SC asks CBI to submit fresh status report

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The Supreme Court on Monday asked the CBI to submit a fresh status report on its preliminary enquiry into allegations of preferential allotment of contracts in Arunachal Pradesh to firms allegedly owned by or linked to family members of Chief Minister Pema Khandu.

The Arunachal Pradesh government told a bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta that it had complied with the apex court's direction to provide the CBI with the necessary records and documents.

In a status report submitted to the top court last month, the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) had alleged that the state was not cooperating in providing the records as directed by the court.

"I (state) would need a week to place the facts on record," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the state, told the bench on Monday.

He said that pursuant to the apex court's August 3 order, the chief secretary and principal secretary (Home) of Arunachal Pradesh were present in court.

"We will be able to satisfy the court that they (directions) are complied with in letter and spirit," Mehta said, adding that the state has given all the documents to the probe agency.

The bench said it would give the state two



weeks to place its stand on record.

When the bench was told that various documents have been handed over to the agency, it asked the CBI to confirm whether they have received them.

On April 6, the apex court had directed the CBI to register a preliminary enquiry within two weeks into allegations of preferential allotment of contracts in the state.

The top court had passed the order on a plea filed by NGOs Save Mon Region Federation and Voluntary Arunachal Sena seeking a CBI or SIT probe into the matter.

During Monday's hearing, advocate Prashant Bhushan, appearing for the petitioner NGOs, asked whether the materials collected and examined by the CBI during the preliminary inquiry so far were not sufficient to register a regular case.

The bench said the issue had to be examined by the CBI.

The top court also agreed to hear a separate plea related to the issue and asked Mehta to take instructions and file a counter affidavit, if necessary.

The bench noted that the chief secretary and the principal secretary (Home) of Arunachal Pradesh had also filed an affidavit. It allowed the petitioner to file a reply to the affidavit within two weeks.

At the end of the hearing, Bhushan requested the bench to direct the CBI to file a fresh status report by the next date of hearing.

"The CBI shall also submit a fresh status report," the bench said.

While hearing the matter on August 3, the top court had sought responses from the chief secretary and principal secretary (Home) of Arunachal Pradesh after the CBI claimed "non-cooperation" by the state.

In its April 6 order, the top court had directed the Arunachal Pradesh government

and all its concerned departments, authorities and instrumentalities to fully cooperate with the CBI.

It had observed that the state and its instrumentalities cannot confer benefits according to the "whims of any political or administrative functionary".

It had said the matter was a fit case for an "independent investigation".

"Accordingly, we deem it appropriate that CBI shall register a preliminary enquiry forthwith and shall conduct a time-bound investigation into the award and execution of the public works contracts and work orders which form the subject matter of this writ petition and the affidavits filed in these proceedings," it had said.

During an earlier hearing, the apex court was told that government contracts and work orders worth around ₹ 1,270 crore were awarded in the last 10 years in Arunachal Pradesh to four firms allegedly related to the family members of Khandu.

In its verdict, the top court had said the preliminary enquiry and consequential investigation, if any, shall cover the award and execution of public works contracts and work orders in Arunachal Pradesh from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2025, including the works and compilations placed on record in the proceedings before it. (PTI)

CRPF jawan injured in gunfight, houses torched in Manipur's Senapati district



IMPHAL/SENAPATI, Aug 24: A CRPF jawan was injured in a gunfight between two groups and several houses were burnt in Manipur's Senapati district on Monday, triggering road blockades by locals, police said.

Miscreants torched a house in Taphou Kuki village in Kangpokpi district around 2.30 am, a senior officer said.

"Following the incident of arson in Kangpokpi, several houses were burnt at Naga Taphou in Senapati district at 4 am. A CRPF personnel was injured in a gunfight between two groups in Taphou Naga area around 9.20 am. He has been admitted to the Senapati district hospital and is now out of danger," he said.

The incidents of arson in Senapati triggered protests as locals gathered at Senapati gate and burnt logs and tyres on National Highway 2, affecting movement of vehicles, the officer said.

"Security has been strengthened in the area to control the situation," he said.

The Taphou Kuki Village Authority, in a statement, has strongly condemned the loss of property and demanded the

culprits be identified within 24 hours.

In a separate search operation, security forces seized a cache of arms and ammunition in Kangpokpi district on Monday, a police statement said.

"During a cordon and search operation at J Songnung Village by a combined team of Manipur Police, CRPF, RAF and CoBRA, at least two country-made 12-bore guns and 14 guns were recovered," it said.

Ammunition along with six wireless sets, 18 bullet-proof vests and one telescope were also recovered, it said.

Locals, mainly women, blocked a road and demanded the return of the unverified firearms and ammunition, the police said, adding that the protesters were dispersed.

Security forces have been conducting search operations and area domination exercises in the fringe and vulnerable localities across all districts of Manipur since ethnic violence broke out in the state three years ago.

More than 260 people have been killed and thousands rendered homeless in ethnic strife between Meiteis and Kuki-Zo groups since May 2023. (PTI)

Biren Singh leaves for New Delhi

IMPHAL, Aug 24: Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh left for New Delhi on Monday morning to meet central leaders and hold discussions on the prevailing situation in the state, officials said.

Singh's visit comes amid rising demand for NRC updation in the state before the conduct of Census exercise.

Campaign for Just and Fair Delimitation (JFD), which has been spearheading the protests, has claimed that a proper National Register of Citizens (NRC) with 1951 as the base year will help identify illegal immigrants in the state.

Singh recently met Union Home Minister Amit Shah and apprised him of the demand for NRC updation before the Census exercise.

A BJP functionary said, "Singh has been called by central leaders to discuss the prevailing issues in the state." (PTI)

NSCN(IM) member held in Arunachal

ITANAGAR, Aug 24: A member of the NSCN (IM) was arrested in Arunachal Pradesh's Tirap district after a firearm and ammunition were seized from his possession, police said on Monday.

Acting on a tip-off, a joint team of the Assam Rifles and the state police held the accused from the New Paniduria area on Sunday, a police statement said.

"Security forces seized a pistol, a magazine, five live rounds, ₹ 5,450 in cash and incriminating documents from his possession, it said.

The operation reflects the strong coordination between the Assam Rifles and the police in maintaining peace, security, and stability across the district. (PTI)

Lower Subansiri reviews healthcare progress

District records zero malaria cases since 2020 and celebrates Siiro facility's NQAS award

HT Correspondent

ZIRO, Aug 24: The first-quarter District Health Society (DHS) Review Meeting-cum-District Task Force for Immunisation (DTFI) was held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hall of the District Secretariat here on Monday, bringing together senior administrative, health and allied department officials to review healthcare programmes and identify key priorities for the district.

Deputy Commissioner Oli Perme, Superintendent of Police Keni Bagra, District Medical Officer Dr Millo Kunya and Deputy Director (ICDS) Kago Maya were among those present.

The meeting was moderated by District Reproductive and Child Health Officer Dr S. Rigia.

A major highlight of the review was Lower Subansiri's achievement of maintaining zero malaria cases since 2020. District Programme Officer (NVBDCP) Dr Kuru Tama highlighted the achievement and acknowledged the contribution of Health and Wellness Officers and other frontline health personnel in sustaining malaria control efforts.

The district also celebrated the Siiro health facility receiving the National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) award.

Officials reviewed progress across several health programmes.

Dr Subu Habung, DSO-cum-DPO (NCD),



presented updates on the Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme and non-communicable diseases, while District TB Officer Dr Kime Homing reviewed progress under the National TB Elimination Programme.

Dr Hage Yubey, Medical Officer, Blood Centre, presented updates on the Blood Centre and Ayush initiatives.

The meeting also discussed public health concerns, including an increase in HIV cases reportedly linked to shared syringes and unsafe sexual practices.

Officials noted that free anti-retroviral treatment is now available at the ART Centre in Ziro, reducing the need for patients to travel outside the district for treatment.

Climate-related health risks and an HPV awareness campaign targeting girls aged 14-15

were also discussed.

The campaign is being supported by NGO partners, including the Voluntary Health Association of India, with initiatives focusing on male engagement and the involvement of "Buddy Mothers".

Highlighting gaps in the district's healthcare infrastructure, DMO Dr Millo Kunya identified several urgent requirements, including renovation of a defunct school compound to accommodate the administrative block of the Old Ziro Hospital, establishment of a full-fledged Data Centre, provision of night-shift security guards at hospitals and dedicated parking barricades for ambulances.

He also highlighted the need for recruitment of specialist doctors and additional budgetary support under the National Health Mission.

Concluding the meeting, Deputy Commissioner Oli Perme praised the healthcare personnel for their efforts and directed officials to ensure strict monitoring of dog-bite cases and uninterrupted availability of anti-rabies vaccines.

Deputy Director (ICDS) Kago Maya called for stronger coordination among departments and directed that monthly health and nutrition data concerning women and children be shared regularly to facilitate coordinated interventions.

The proceedings concluded with a summary of the meeting, closing ceremony and a vote of thanks by DRCHO Dr S Rigia.

SC asks Mizo woman challenging amendments in customary laws to move HC

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: The Supreme Court on Monday asked a Mizo woman challenging amendments to the Mizo marriage and property inheritance law to approach the Gauhati High Court.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and Justices Joyymalya Bagchi and V Mohana told the counsel appearing for petitioner Mieriam L Hrangchal that she is not required to come to Delhi when there is already a high court available in the region.

"Why don't you approach the high court? That is exactly why the high courts were established. Do not burden this woman so that she has to travel to Delhi to pursue this case. File a petition before the high court on this issue," the bench said. The plea has challenged the constitutional validity of the amendments introduced through The Mizo Marriage and Inheritance of Property (Amendment) Act, 2026.

It alleged that the law discriminates against Mizo women who marry non-Mizo men and adversely affects the rights of their children.

The new legislation further codifies customary law and strengthens the principal Act of 2014, introducing changes relating to polygamy, inter-community marriage and women's property rights.

While the Act introduces a landmark ban on polygamy and grants women rights to 50 per cent of matrimonial property, it has sparked intense debate over an interpretation of a clause that potentially strips Mizo women of their Mizo identity and Scheduled Tribe (ST) status if they marry non-Mizo men. (PTI)

NFR GM inspects key sections of Jiribam-Imphal rail project

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 24: Northeast Frontier Railway (Construction) General Manager Ashish Bansal recently inspected key sections of the Jiribam-Imphal New Line Railway Project, reviewing ongoing construction works and the preparedness of the Khongsang-Awangkhul section for the proposed Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) inspection in October 2026.

During the inspection, Bansal visited the Jiribam-Khongsang, Khongsang-Awangkhul and Awangkhul-Imphal sections and reviewed the progress of major infrastructure works.

He also inspected the Khongsang-Awangkhul yards and Tunnel Nos 28 and 12, with particular focus on tunnelling progress, safety and construction quality.

The 110.625-km Jiribam-Imphal New Line Project is among the most challenging railway infrastructure projects in the Northeast, traversing difficult and hilly terrain.

The project includes 54 tunnels with a cumulative length of about 66.47 km, along with 15



major and 116 minor bridges.

One of its major engineering features is Bridge No. 164 at Noney, which has a pier height of 141 metres.

The project will have 11 stations—Jiribam, Vangaichungpao, Rani Gaidinliu, Kambiron Halt, Thingou, Khongsang, Awangkhul, Noney, Tupul, Haichong Road Halt and Imphal—providing improved passenger and goods connectivity to Manipur.

The Jiribam-Vangaichungpao section was commissioned in February 2017, while the Vangaichungpao-Khongsang section was commissioned in September 2022. Work on the remaining sections is progressing in phases.

During the inspection, Bansal directed officials and field personnel to maintain stringent safety and quality standards, closely monitor construction activities and resolve issues promptly to ensure timely execution.

Once completed, the railway line is expected to provide faster and more reliable connectivity between Imphal and the rest of the country, facilitate the movement of essential commodities and goods, and contribute significantly to the economic and social development of Manipur and the wider Northeast.

SIT formed to probe into Shillong violence: CM tells Meghalaya assembly

SHILLONG, Aug 24: The Meghalaya government has constituted a special investigation team to identify and prosecute those involved in the recent violence during a students' organisation rally here, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma told the assembly on Monday.

Outside the House, Sangma said the government has also invited the Khasi Students' Union for a discussion on their demands.

Making a statement on the first day of the assembly's autumn session, the chief minister said the SIT, headed by the inspector general of police (law and order), has been tasked with "identifying and investigating all those involved in the violence, particularly those responsible for attacks on Assam-registered vehicles, and ensuring their prosecution in accordance with law".

The KSU bike rally on August 19 had turned violent, with stone-pelting, vandalism and assaults reported from several parts of Shillong. At least 31 vehicles were damaged, 18 people injured and two vehicles set ablaze, according to East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police Vivek Syiem.

Three senior KSU leaders - president Raymond Kharjana, vice president Pynkmenlang Sanmiet and general secretary Reuben Najjar - were arrested and subsequently remanded to 14 days' judicial custody.

Sangma said no stone will be left unturned to bring the perpetrators to justice. The CM said the rally had been permitted by the East Khasi Hills deputy commissioner after the KSU gave an undertaking that it would remain peaceful.

"However, during the rally, some miscreants indulged in violent acts, including the hurling of stones at 31 vehicles and attacking innocent bystanders," he said, adding that eight of the damaged vehicles were registered in Assam.

All the injured were taken to Shillong Civil Hospital for medical treatment, the chief minister said.

"Fifteen FIRs have been filed so far in connection with the incident on August 19. Five masked people have so far been identified as being involved in the incident, particularly in the attacks on Assam-registered vehicles. One has already been arrested," he said. (PTI)

Sports has potential to make one an instant icon: Nagaland CM

DIMAPUR, Aug 24: Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio on Monday said sports offer immense opportunities for young people, with the potential to bring recognition, employment and even overnight fame.

Rio was speaking at a send-off ceremony for athletes from Nagaland who have been selected to represent India at the 20th Asian Games, to be held in Aichi-Nagoya, Japan, from September 19 to October 4.

The athletes include Sepaktakraw player Menenu Tsukru and Seyiekhrieno Tapa, and two coaches, Puleno Neikha and Pungotolu Puro. Besides para-athlete from Nagaland and a Junior Commissioned Officer in the Indian Army, Hokato Hotozhe Sema is also going to the Asian Games and is presently training in the Army Sports Training Facility in Pune.

The send-off ceremony was held at the Conference Room of the Nagaland Cricket Association, Sovima, Chumoukedima.

Congratulating the athletes and coaches, Rio, who is also president of the Nagaland Olympic Association,



said their selection reflected the talent, hard work and dedication they had demonstrated.

He noted that they would now represent not only Nagaland but India on an international stage.

"Dedication, discipline and determination" must remain the guiding principles for sportspersons, Rio said, stressing that consistency was equally important.

He urged the representatives to give their best, make the state and

the country proud, and inspire the younger generation.

Rio said Nagaland had considerable potential across various sporting disciplines but that talent needed to be identified and nurtured from the grassroots. He said the state government was upgrading sports infrastructure and working to create a stronger ecosystem for developing athletes.

He recalled that Nagaland attained statehood in 1963 but was

affiliated with the Olympic movement only about four decades later, after which its athletes began participating in the National Games. Despite the infrastructural challenges of the past, he noted, the state had produced three Olympians.

The chief minister also highlighted the growing opportunities in sports, including employment and career prospects. He assured continued government support and encouraged young people to pursue sports with commitment and the ambition of competing at the highest levels.

Referring particularly to Sepaktakraw, Metha said the discipline had consistently brought medals to Nagaland at national and international competitions. (PTI)

Nagaland to join National Sports Day celebrations on August 29

KOHIMA, Aug 24: Nagaland will join the nationwide celebration of National Sports Day on August 27, with programmes to be organised across educational institutions in 12 districts of the state under the Khelo India Samwad 2026 and Yuva Connect initiatives, officials said on Monday. The state-level programme will bring together students, youth volunteers, sports enthusiasts and local stakeholders to promote greater youth participation in sports, leadership and nation-building, said Ruokuovikho Chale, State APS MyBharat Nagaland and Pradeep J, District Youth Officer, MyBharat Kohima, at a press meet here.

National Sports Day is observed every year on August 29 to commemorate the birth anniversary of legendary Indian hockey player Major Dhyan Chand. This year, the special nationwide programme is being organised on August 27, connecting young participants across the country through a common platform. On the occasion, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is scheduled to virtually address more than 8 lakh young participants at around 1,600 locations nationwide, while Nagaland's participation will extend the national initiative to youth across the state's districts and educational institutions, said Pradeep. (PTI)

Jurel's hundred gives India command over SL in 2nd Test

COLOMBO, Aug 24: An unflappable Dhruv Jurel allayed concerns surrounding his form with a remarkably composed unbeaten 115 before bowlers struck early blows to give India command of the second Test against Sri Lanka on a rain-hit second day here on Monday.

Jurel's second Test hundred powered India to a hefty 503 for nine declared in their first innings, and Sri Lanka were reduced to 8 for two at close after pacer Prasidh Krishna and Manav Suthar gave marching orders to Lahiru Udara and Prabath Jayasuriya respectively.

Kamil Mishara was batting on five when the stumps were drawn at 5.51 pm of an extended session. The hosts are trailing by 495 runs.

But the main storyline of the day was given by Jurel, fresh from his 51 in the first innings of the opening Test last week.

If the fifty at Galle broke a barren run of eight innings, Jurel underscored his growing confidence and touch with a near flawless knock at the SSC ground.

India gained immensely from his innings, and the right-hander was also involved in two vital stands — a 112 for the seventh wicket with Rishabh Pant that lifted India from 307 for six to 419.

For the subsequent wicket, Jurel and Manav Suthar added 39 runs that helped the tourists to further break away from their opponents and close in on the 500-run mark.

However, Jurel's consistency was the key ingredient in both those partnerships. The 25-year-old's 177-ball innings was a prime example of risk-free runs accumu-



lation and situational awareness.

At the beginning of the day, Jurel gave full support to Pant, who came out to bat after the early dismissal of debutant Saransh Jain.

At that time, the focus was on Pant because he had to retire on 3 after copping a blow on his forearm by Lahiru Kumara on Sunday. Jurel understood the circumstances, and gave more strike to Pant, who played a typical innings of 63, full of chutpah.

Pant fought gallantly against Lankan pacers during his near two-hour stay at the crease, batting with confidence and little discomfort.

The eventual runs against his name might have looked good, but Pant had to dig deep to reach that mark.

Pacers Fernando and Kumara targeted his body with a bouncer barrage, and the former even managed to ping on his shoulder once.

However, Pant was equal to the task, either moving away from the

line or nudging the ball around.

There was an explosive moment too, when the left-hander got inside the line to hook Kumara over fine leg for a six.

Pant, who made a 66 in the second innings at Galle, reached his fifty in 81 balls with a pulled four off off-spinner Keshara Nuwantha.

The wicketkeeper batter celebrated the moment with a thundering maximum off left-arm spinner Jayasuriya.

On the other hand, Jurel reached his fifty in 97 balls, pulling Jayasuriya for a four.

But the partnership of contrast ended immediately upon the resumption after lunch, as Pant lofted Nuwantha straight to Udara on the edge of the circle.

It left the burden right on the shoulders of Jurel, a 12-Test-old batter. But he showed the knowhow of a veteran batter to tame a delicate situation — for him and the team.

The inclusion of Sarfaraz Khan as an injury replacement for Sai Sudharsan might have also contained a little clue for Jurel to buckle up and score runs, and ace that challenge in flying colours.

True to his strengths, Jurel stayed on the back foot, negating spinners and pacers alike, and there was hardly a moment when he looked out of place while playing a shot.

The only moment of uncertainty came when Jayasuriya appealed vociferously for a leg-before decision when the batter was in 80s, but it was promptly turned down.

The skies opened up nearly 30 minutes before the scheduled tea break, leaving Jurel stranded on 95.

After a lengthy rain break of nearly two hours, Jurel duly completed his hundred with a scampered single off Fernando, and he consumed 171 balls.

Off came the helmet and Jurel proudly flashed a tattoo on his biceps to his teammates at the dressing room. The tattoo read 'Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan' — the iconic lines spoken by former PM late Lal Bahadur Shastri.

Once he went past the three-figure mark, Jurel shifted the gears, smashing Fernando for a couple of sixes — one over long-off and another hook over square leg.

Skipper Shubman Gill declared the innings once India went past the 500-run mark, hoping to have a crack at the Lankans in the last hour of the day.

But elements ensured only a limited time for India to solidify the gains they accumulated through hundreds by Jurel and Devdutt Padikkal. (PTI)

Gauff beats Pegula for 2nd Cincinnati Open title

France's Fils beats American Tiafoe in men's final

MASON (US), Aug 24: Coco Gauff defeated fellow American Jessica Pegula, 6-2, 6-4, to capture her second women's Cincinnati Open title, and Arthur Fils of France defeated American Frances Tiafoe 6-3, 1-6, 6-0, in the men's final for his first Masters 1000 title.

In Saturday's semifinals, Pegula beat defending champion Iga Swiatek and Gauff defeated Sara Bejlek to set up the first all-American women's final at the Cincinnati Open in 56 years.

The last time two American women played in the Cincinnati final was in 1970, when Rosie Casals beat Nancy Richey.

Pegula's best finish in Cincinnati came in 2024, when she lost to Aryna Sabalenka in the final.

Gauff, who won the 2023 title beating Karolina Muchova, stormed out to a 5-0 lead in the first set on Sunday before winning 6-2. Pegula battled back to within 5-4 in the second before Gauff closed out the win. Gauff won five of six break points.

"I think it was a long journey, but I'm happy," Gauff said. "I think it's night and day, the player I was last year to now. I don't think that this is an indicator that I'm going to do well in New York. Just knowing the quality ones that I had this week, hopefully I can use that experience."

Gauff had five wins in straight sets in Cincinnati. "I thought she just played at a really high level and didn't really have many dips," Pegula said. "I didn't really think I played bad. The more you construct the point (against her), the worse it is because she almost likes to run. It was tough today. A dangerous, confident Coco is going to New York."

The head-to-head series between Gauff and Pegula is now tied at five apiece. Sunday was their second meeting in a final, with Gauff winning at Wuhan last year.

The Fils-Tiafoe match was the first time two Black players have met in an ATP Masters 1000 final.

Fils is the third Black man to win a Masters 1000 title, joining Ben Shelton, who won twice in Canada, and Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, who won in Paris in 2008 and Canada in 2014.

At 22 years old, Fils is the youngest French champion in Masters 1000 history. He became the second



French player to win a Cincinnati final, joining Guy Forget in 1991.

"Very happy with that," Fils said. "It's been a tough last year. I didn't play the French Open (due to a hip injury). I lost early in Washington. People think that I'm done. But here we are. I got the title."

It was the second time Tiafoe has appeared in the Cincinnati Open final, losing to Jannik Sinner in 2024. He was looking to become the first American male to win in Cincinnati since Andy Roddick in 2006.

"I'm going to have two Cincinnati finals trophies at the crib," Tiafoe said. "I wish they were both champion ones. Losing on Sunday sucks. I've had a tough summer. I was able to play five great matches and beat quality players."

Fils overpowered Tiafoe early in the first set on Sunday, winning 12 of 13 points to take a 3-0 lead. Tiafoe was dominant in the second, rolling to a 3-0 lead.

Tiafoe used the time break before the third set to stretch and receive massage treatment on his upper left leg and lower back.

"My hip bothered me a little bit, but that's neither here nor there," Tiafoe said. "It's not about how I feel. I'll be alright in a week (for the US Open)."

Tiafoe saved three championship points in the final game before Fils closed out the victory.

The Frenchman had 11 aces and won 71% of his points on first serve. He improved to 10-0 in deciding sets this year and 8-0 against American opponents. (AP)

Tears, heartbreak as India's World Cup medal dream ends agonisingly



AMSTELVEEN, Aug 24: Tears flowed freely in the Indian camp after the women's hockey team's hopes of making the World Cup semifinals ended in heartbreak, following a goalless draw against Australia here on Sunday.

As the final hooter sounded, veteran goalkeeper Savita Punia and Bichoo Devi, sitting in the dugout, broke down.

Ishika Chaudhary, playing her maiden World Cup, sat behind them, staring blankly as the enormity of the missed opportunity sank in.

For a team that had dared to dream and looked capable of turning that dream into India's first medal in women Hockey WC, the campaign ended with tears and heartbreak.

India finished level on points with Australia but were eliminated from semifinal contention on goal difference.

The disappointment was visible on the faces of the players as they walked off the field, many of them red-eyed and struggling to hold back tears before boarding the team bus.

For a side featuring 11 players at their first World Cup, the exit was particularly difficult to

digest.

Head coach Sjoerd Marijne, who spoke to the media after the match, too could not hide his disappointment, while scientific advisor and head of athlete performance Wayne Lombard and senior players tried to lift the spirits of the younger members of the squad.

One player, sitting on the stairs and speaking to her mother over the phone, summed up the mood in the camp.

"This was the best opportunity. We came so close, and now I don't know when I'll get this chance again," she said.

Savita, playing in her third World Cup, was equally heartbroken.

"This was the best opportunity," the player with 318 caps said quietly.

Experienced midfielder Neha Goyal was inconsolable. When reminded of next mission of winning gold at the Asian Games, she could only nod silently. India have never won a medal at the women's World Cup, with their best finish being fourth in the inaugural edition in France in 1974.

Their fifth-sixth place match on August 27 will now give them a chance to have best ever finish after that.

But statistics were not enough to console the players.

When one player was told that a fifth-place finish would still be India's second best result at the World Cup, she replied: "A medal is a medal, isn't it?" (PTI)

Nerves cost us against Australia, but I'm proud of the team: Marijne



AMSTELVEEN (NETHERLANDS), Aug 24: India women's hockey team coach Sjoerd Marijne admitted nerves got the better of his side in its goalless draw against Australia, adding that reaching the fifth-sixth place playoff at the World Cup is still a significant achievement.

India succumbed to the pressure of a must-win match and were knocked out of semifinal contention after being held to a goalless draw by Australia on Sunday.

"It looked like there were nerves. We didn't play the game we wanted to play. It was not fluent, there was no rhythm in the passing and re-

ceiving and there were a lot of unforced errors," Marijne told PTI after the draw.

"It's not that we can't do it, but I don't know why we couldn't do it. We know we can do much better than this. Everyone is very disappointed." India will now play the fifth-sixth place classification match, a position Marijne believes the team can take pride in reaching after making significant progress in recent months.

"But if you had said five or six months ago that we were going to play the fifth-sixth position match, nobody would believe us. I also told the girls that we really need to learn from this," he said.

The Dutchman said India's inability to convert their opportunities proved costly in a game where only a win would have kept their semifinal hopes alive.

"This was our first setback. We didn't lose and holding Australia to a draw is also a positive, although we needed to win this. In these kinds of matches you have to be there and avail the chances you get." (PTI)

PGTI launches 'Race to DP World India Championship' to be held in October

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: India's premier men's professional golf tour, the DP World PGTI, on Monday announced the launch of the 'Race to DP World India Championship', a season-long competition that will be a key feature of the 2026 season. The competition will determine the season's top performers and their route to the USD 4 million DP World India Championship, scheduled to be played at the Delhi Golf Course from October 15 to 18.

The Race will also help restructure the Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) calendar to

align with the DP World Tour calendar, giving the PGTI members more playing opportunities.

Under the new format, the 2026 DP World PGTI Order of Merit champion will be decided after the DP World India Championship, with the season finale playing a key role in determining the year's champion.

The nine tournaments in the Race will offer a combined prize purse of ₹ 10 crore, taking the season's total prize purse to ₹ 41 crore.

The first three events — J&K Open, Coal India Open and Kolar Open — have already been held

in the first three weeks of August.

The Race will conclude with the inaugural Kapil Dev Invitational Tour Championship at Jaypee Greens, Greater Noida, from September 30 to October 3.

At the end of the Kapil Dev Invitational Tour Championship, the top 24 players in the Race standings will qualify for the DP World India Championship 2026.

Besides, the top 60 players in the DP World PGTI Order of Merit will retain their playing rights for the 2027 DP World PGTI season. (PTI)



LONDON, Aug 24: UEFA President Aleksander Ceferin said he won't run against FIFA President Gianni Infantino but warned the beleaguered head of world soccer that he must either quit or face a leadership challenge in March.

Infantino has come under increasing pressure to step down over his plan, now aborted, to sell stakes in soccer's biggest tournament, the World Cup, to private equity investors. Three of the sport's continental confederations accused him of "deception" and European soccer body UEFA threatened a boycott of FIFA competitions.

"One option is that he realizes that he doesn't have the support,

and that's not only a political support of the ones who vote, but the political support of football community, the political support of fans, the political support of the players, former players, coaches," Ceferin said in an interview with "The Rest is Politics: Leading" British podcast which is set to be broadcast Monday.

"And the second option is that he goes to the elections in March, but in that case, I think he will have a candidate against him. I don't know yet who."

Ceferin's comments were in excerpts from the podcast that were published Sunday in the British media.

November deadline

Infantino has been FIFA president since 2016 and, until the backlash over his proposals, seemed sure to be reelected unopposed next year in Morocco. FIFA has set a Nov. 18 deadline for challengers to nominate.

Despite being widely seen as a potential challenger to Infantino, the 58-year-old Ceferin expressed his commitment to UEFA. (AP)

Nibir Saikia called for FIFA U-15 World Cup selection camp

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 24: Nibir Saikia, a young footballer from Geleki Nandanga Gaon in Sivasagar district, has been called up for the national selection camp for the upcoming FIFA Under-15 World Cup.

The son of Achyut Saikia and Lakhimoni Saikia, Nibir has already joined the selection camp in Bengaluru.

The upcoming Under-15 World Cup is scheduled to be held in Azerbaijan and will be played under a new format.

Nibir is a product of the Sivasagar Sishu Football Academy run by Anil Acharyya. He currently represents Reliance in the Under-15 category and is based in Mumbai.

His selection call has brought considerable pride to the local sporting community, particularly as he hails from Geleki, an interior area that was recently affected by devastating floods.

The Sivasagar Sports Association welcomed the development, describing Nibir's selection call as an encouraging recognition of football talent emerging from the district's rural areas.

His journey from flood-affected Geleki to the national selection camp in Bengaluru has also emerged as an inspiring example for young footballers in the region.

PM Modi to address country's youth on Thursday ahead of National Sports Day

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will address the youth of the country, including sportspersons, across more than 1500 locations on Thursday to mark the occasion of the National Sports Day which falls on August 29.

Modi's virtual address will be part of the nationwide programme 'Khelo India Samvaad - Khel Ki Baat, PM Ke Saath', a major initiative of the sports ministry to be held two days ahead of the National Sports Day.

Hockey legend Dhyan Chand's birth anniversary, which falls on August 29, is celebrated as the National Sports Day in the country.

"Key excerpts from the Hon'ble Prime Minister's Independence Day message on Sports and Youth Power will also be showcased. This will be followed by the virtual address of the Hon'ble Prime Minister to the youth across the country," Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said during a media briefing.

"Through this initiative, youth, athletes and educational institutions are

being brought together at 1,500+ locations across the country.

"IITs, IIMs, NITs, AIIMS, premier medical colleges and universities, along with other leading educational institutions, are participating in this nationwide campaign."

He said the programme is a major effort to create a direct dialogue between sports-loving youth and India's policymakers, providing young people with an opportunity to share their ideas, experiences and suggestions.

The programme will begin with a welcome by MY Bharat volunteers, followed by a special video presentation highlighting the transformational changes in India's sporting ecosystem over the past 12 years.

Following the Prime Minister's address, physical programmes will commence at 1,500+ locations across the country.

At the national capital, the celebration will be held in four-five locations, including one at the IIT, Delhi, where Mandaviya will grace the occasion.

"I will be present at the IIT Delhi for



the celebrations (on August 27)," the minister said.

Leading former and current Indian athletes and international medal winners, including Indian Olympic Association President PT Usha will also

interact with the youth of the country.

Other prominent sportspersons who will interact with the youth include Manika Batra, Deepa Karmakar, Saina Nehwal, Gagan Narang, Sreejesh, Mary Kom, Baichung Bhatia, Pulella Gopichand, Anju Bobby George, Karnam Malleswari, Mirabai Chanu, and some cricketers.

"They (the youth) will share their journeys, challenges, failures, successes and sporting experiences with young participants," Mandaviya said.

"The objective of the event is to inspire young people with the belief that a champion's journey does not begin in a grand stadium, but with a small field and a first attempt."

Members of Parliament, Members of Legislative Assemblies, Union Ministers, Ministers of State and State Sports Ministers will participate in the programme.

"These elected representatives and dignitaries will engage with youth and seek their ideas and suggestions on the four key themes," he said.

Key objectives of the programme

Mandaviya said key objectives include the sharing by the youth of their ideas, suggestions and innovative thoughts on four key themes related to sports and youth.

"First, strengthening the sports

ecosystem by ensuring better facilities, coaching and opportunities reach the grassroots. Second, nurturing talent for the 2036 Olympics, with a focus on scientific talent identification and athlete development.

"Third, strengthening youth leadership and increasing youth participation in governance. Fourth, Youth Empowerment for Viksit Bharat, including future-ready skills, volunteering and opportunities for nation-building," he said.

The suggestions gathered through the programme will be taken directly to policymakers and the wider sports ecosystem, helping connect ground-level experiences and youth aspirations with policy making.

As part of youth engagement activities, a Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue (VBLYD) Quiz will be organised. Youth will also be encouraged to register on the MY Bharat Portal.

The objective is to connect young people beyond a one-day event and make them part of a long-term national youth engagement ecosystem. (PTI)