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● Victims of Maoist violence lash out at Chidambaram over his 'proud to be dimaagi Naxal' remark

● Won't take decision that affects tourism interests: Sikkim CM



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Assam cabinet clears new hydrocarbon policy

New policy aims to encourage oil exploration in Assam ● Cabinet also approves dedicated youth depart to address employment



GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Aiming to woo the younger generation, the Assam government on Tuesday de-

clared to set up a new department dedicated to the youth of the state, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting here, he said that a new hydrocarbon policy was also approved in order to give incentives to exploration of minerals and crude even if there are no findings.

"The cabinet approved setting up of the Youth Empowerment and Welfare Department. With this, Assam will probably become the first state to have a dedicated youth department," Sarma said.

The proposed department, which will start functioning from September 17, will look after all issues related to the youth, including the Employment Exchange, he added.

"Most of our government's programmes revolve around the youth. Out of 10 programmes by us, nine

are dedicated to the youth. That is why the youth supported us every time. This is nothing new, but a continuous process for the youths," he said.

The CM also said that the cabinet has approved a new hydrocarbon policy to give incentives for exploration of oil reserves.

"The crude happening in Assam is all from old discoveries. In the last 20 years, we have not found any new minerals because we have not done any exploration. There is a risk in exploration as they may not result in findings and all investment will be useless then," he added.

In order to create a positive environment, the state government will give incentives like GST rebate or subsidised (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Assam expands protected area network by 403.62 sq km: Himanta

Staff Reporter

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said the state has expanded its Protected Area Network by 403.62 square kilometres since 2016, describing it as the biggest such addition anywhere in India.

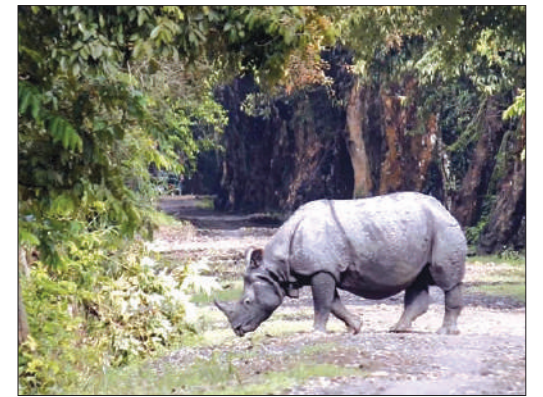
Taking to the micro-blogging site X, Sarma said the newly added area was almost equivalent to the size of Jaipur city.

"Assam is expanding the map of conservation in India! In an unprecedented effort, 403.62 sq. km of land, an area almost the size of Jaipur city, has been added to Assam's Protected Forest network. This is the biggest such green addition anywhere in India," he said.

According to information shared by the Chief Minister, 403.62 sq km has been added to Assam's Protected Area Network since 2016.

Sarma also highlighted the impact of the expansion on the Kaziranga landscape, saying the additions have helped create a more contiguous conservation landscape around the national park.

Kaziranga National Park is known for its population of the one-horned rhinoceros and is also home to ele-



phants, tigers, wild water buffaloes and several species of birds.

Assam has several national parks and wildlife sanctuaries that support a diverse range of flora and fauna. The state government has in recent years emphasised habitat protection, wildlife corridors and expanding conservation areas to improve connectivity (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Indian Army chief Gen Seth meets Nepal's PM, discusses issues of mutual interest

KATHMANDU, Aug 18: Indian Army chief General Dhiraj Seth on Tuesday called on Nepal's Prime Minister and Defence Minister Balendra Shah and discussed issues of mutual interest and ways to strengthen military ties.

Indian Ambassador to Nepal Naveen Srivastava was also present at the meeting held at the Office of the Prime Minister and Council of Ministers in Singha Durbar amid un-

ease in ties between the two neighbours.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed matters related to bilateral interest and strengthening bilateral military relations, according to sources at the Prime Minister's secretariat.

Earlier this month, Prime Minister Shah held his first one-on-one meeting with Indian Ambassador Srivastava and emphasised the need to deepen the country's "historic relationship" with India.

In recent weeks, Shah has moved away from his self-imposed rule of avoiding one-on-one engagements with foreign ambassadors and senior visiting officials.

General Seth, who is on a four-day official visit to Nepal from August 17 to 19 at the invitation of his



Nepalese Army counterpart General Ashok Raj Sigdel, was conferred the rank of Honorary General of the Nepali Army by President Ramchandra Paudel during a ceremony here on Monday.

Nepal and India have maintained a longstanding tradition since 1950 of conferring the honorary rank of General on each other's army chiefs.

The conferment of the honorary rank is part of a unique and time-honoured military tradition under which India and Nepal reciprocally confer the honorary rank of General on the

chiefs of each other's armies.

General Seth also held bilateral talks with General Sigdel at Army Headquarters on Monday, discussing matters of mutual interest.

Nepal's leaders have traditionally attached importance to early engagement with New Delhi, reflecting the close political, economic and people-to-people ties between the neighbours.

Prime Minister Shah, however, has not undertaken any visit to either the southern or the northern neighbour. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Convicted B'deshi national expelled from Assam

Case of illegal entry to India

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: A Bangladeshi national has been expelled from Assam under the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950 by the District Magistrate of South Salmara-Mankachar following his conviction in a case related to illegal entry into India, an official said on Tuesday.

An order issued by South Salmara-Mankachar District Magistrate Parikshit Thoudam states that the Bangladeshi national has been expelled under Section 2(b) of the Immigrants (Expulsion from Assam) Act, 1950, that empowers the government to give directions regarding the removal and physical expulsion of a person or a group from India or Assam after an initial removal order has been issued.

According to an order issued on August 14 by the District Magistrate of the district, the foreign national has been identified as 24-year-old Mohammad Masood alias Mista, a resident of Ratanpur village under Rowmari police station in Kurigram district of Bangladesh.

BSF personnel apprehended him in the Jordanga BOP area on January 13 this year for allegedly entering India illegally and was subsequently handed over to Mankachar Police Station, where a case was registered against him under various sections of the BNS, the Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025, and the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984.

The district's Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate had subsequently convicted Masood on July 21 and sentenced him to one month, seven months and three

months of simple imprisonment respectively under the provisions of the three Acts. The sentences would run concurrently, with set-off granted for the period already spent in detention.

The sentence term expired on August 12, after which he was shifted from District Jail, Dhubri, to the Matia Holding Centre in Goalpara for further action towards his deportation/repatriation to Bangladesh.

The district magistrate, in the order issued on August 14 and released to the media on Tuesday, observed that the offences involved unauthorised entry into India by damaging international border fencing and therefore had a direct bearing on border security and enforcement of immigration laws.

He also directed that the foreign national be removed from Assam's territory within 24 hours of receiving the order, through the South Salmara-Mankachar/Dhubri route for lawful deportation or repatriation to Bangladesh by competent authorities.

He also directed the district's Senior Superintendent of Police (Border) to capture the foreign national's biometrics and demographic details on the Foreigner Identification Portal and ensure his removal.

Concerned authorities were also directed to take action regarding any Aadhaar card, electoral roll entry and ration card of the foreign national, and to take necessary steps concerning any movable or immovable property held by him. (PTI)

Assam: Drugs worth over ₹ 10 crore seized, 7 traffickers arrested



GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Drugs worth more than ₹ 10 crore were seized and seven suspected drug traffickers arrested from different parts of Assam.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, in a social media post on Tuesday, said that 50,000 Yaba tablets worth ₹ 10 crore were seized from a truck's secret chamber at Old MVI checkpoint in Digharkhal area of Cachar district.

"Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. So did this drug haul. Good job @cacharpolice and @assampolice," he said.

During the operation, one suspected drug trafficker was also arrested, he added.

The chief minister's office, in a post on social media, said that 234.89 kg of ganja were seized from Bhairabkunda in Udalguri district and six people apprehended. "Legal action is underway against those apprehended in (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Parliamentary panel says excessive judicial interventions slow down arbitration decision

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Amid the government's push to make India an international arbitration hub, a parliamentary committee has lamented that "excessive or inconsistent" judicial intervention affects the efficiency of arbitration.

It said such interventions often slow down what is intended to be a quicker alternative to court litigation.

"While some level of court oversight is necessary to ensure fairness and legality, frequent or avoidable intervention can lead to inordinate delays and may also dilute the independence of the arbitral process," the committee said. In its latest report on institutional alternative dispute resolution submitted in Parliament last week, the department-related standing committee on law and personnel has also flagged "limited global visibility" as a challenge for the country's alternative dispute resolution ecosystem and has suggested consistent quality in arbitral proceedings as one of the solutions.

The panel noted that the evolving nature and increasing complexity of disputes today require regular as-

essment of the capacity of alternative dispute resolution institutions as demands continue to grow over time.

"In many instances, existing where-withal does not keep pace with this rising demand, which can affect both the quality and speed of dispute resolution," it pointed out.

There is a need, it said, for continuous evaluation and timely upgradation of resources, systems, and professional capabilities to ensure that these institutions remain efficient, responsive, and well-equipped to handle disputes effectively.

"The Committee, therefore, recommends that ADR institutions put in place regular review mechanisms to assess their functioning and identify the gaps in infrastructure, staffing, and expertise."

The panel said that greater focus should be on training and professional development in order to build a stronger pool of skilled practitioners, along with planned expansion of facilities and administrative support systems to meet the growing demand at present as well as in the times to come. (PTI)

New BJP office-bearers vow to strengthen organisation, realise 'Viksit Bharat' goal



NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Several newly appointed BJP office-bearers on Tuesday vowed to work with dedication to strengthen the organisation and realise the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat'.

The reactions came a day after BJP president Nitin Nabin announced a revamped national team of 65 office-bearers, with 51 new faces, and hours after the party assigned state-level responsibilities to some of its senior office-bearers.

Newly appointed BJP national general secretary Harish Dwivedi

expressed gratitude to Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his "affection, blessings and good wishes", saying the new responsibility is both a matter of pride and a significant responsibility towards the organisation.

"Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the party's national president Nitin Nabin, I will continue to work with complete dedication, devotion and commitment to further strengthen the organisation in the spirit of 'Nation First' and to realise the resolve

of 'Viksit Bharat'." Dwivedi said in a post on X.

Newly appointed national secretary Jai Prakash said being entrusted with the responsibility is an honour as well as a resolve to work with greater dedication towards the organisation.

"Heartfelt gratitude and thanks to the BJP's top leadership for entrusting me with the responsibility of national secretary and expressing their trust in me. I will discharge my responsibility with complete sincerity and dedication to strengthen the party's ideology and organisation," he said.

National secretary Swadesh Singh said the new responsibility provides an opportunity to move forward with "new energy and new resolve".

"Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the leadership of Nitin Nabin, I am committed to realising the resolve of 'Nation First' and 'Viksit Bharat' by taking the organisational strength of BJP to every individual," Singh said. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Close to 100 cr electors have voter cards in India: EC officials

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: After US President Donald Trump cited India's voter cards to make a case for the SAVE America Act, Election Commission officials on Tuesday said that nearly 100 crore electors have been issued 'special' Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC).

They underlined that polling in India is held based on a photo identity card.

The ECI has issued a special EPIC to "all" electors, which are close to a billion, they said.

Electors can also download their e-EPIC from a dedicated website.

The officials also noted that electoral rolls in India are prepared for each of the 1.2 million polling stations by the booth-level officers (BLOs), who are employees of the state government, and they are concurrently audited by the booth-level agents (BLAs) appointed by political parties.

Polling in booths is also concurrently audited by polling agents appointed by the candidates.

Similarly, counting of votes is also

concurrently audited by the counting agents appointed by the candidates, the officials said.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar recently asked the US administration how elections in America can be held without a valid photo identification card, President Trump said, making a case for mandatory photo IDs for every US voter to curb "electoral fraud".

In a post on Truth Social on Monday, Trump said less than 1 per cent of voters in India used postal ballots in the recent general elections, and every voter had a valid photo identification document.

The US president made the remarks to drum up support for the SAVE America Act, which would require Americans to show proof of citizenship to register to vote, impose a nationwide voter identification requirement and severely limit voting by mail.

"Earlier this month, India's Chief Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar, asked our Administration (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The docking experiment is a very interesting experiment which we have conducted'

ISRO official says docking technology key to future lunar, human space missions

LUCKNOW, Aug 18: Docking technology will be crucial for future lunar exploration and human space missions, including bringing lunar samples back to Earth and assembling India's proposed space station, a senior ISRO official said here on Tuesday.

M R Raghavendra, Director of ISRO Telemetry, Tracking and Command Network (ISTRAC), Bengaluru, was speaking at a National Space Day celebration organised by ISTRAC in collaboration with City Montessori School (CMS) in Lucknow.

The school is the alma mater of astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla, the first Indian to visit the International Space Station.

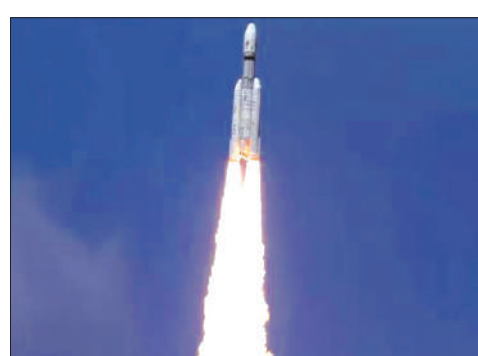
"The docking experiment is a very interesting experiment which we have conducted, as it can be very useful in future," Raghavendra said, referring to ISRO's successful space docking experiment.

"Now we have landed on the Moon. Now we want to bring some samples from the Moon, and to do that, we need this docking. There will be an orbiter which goes around the Moon, and there will be a lander which picks up the sample, comes to the orbiter, docks and then the sample is returned to Earth," he said.

"So ISRO has gained experience in docking as well," he added.

Raghavendra said docking would also be essential for the proposed Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), India's planned space station.

"You must have all heard of the ISS (International Space Station). Now we have BAS (Bharatiya Antariksh Station) also coming up, which will have a five-module approach and each of these modules will require docking. So docking is a way forward for



human missions and even for primary missions," he said. He also stressed the importance of planning and execution behind the success of the Chandrayaan-3

mission, under which India achieved a soft landing on the Moon.

"We were the fourth country to land on the Moon. Landing on the Moon was not just an event," he said, highlighting the technological and organisational effort involved in the mission.

Speaking to reporters separately, Raghavendra described National Space Day as an important occasion for India and its scientific community.

"This is a very important day for our nation, especially the scientific community, because on this day, we achieved a very technologically challenging mission by landing our ISRO lander on the southern side of the Moon on August 23, 2023," he said.

"This is not only a demonstration of technological prowess but also a huge inspiration to all young minds of our country," he added.

Chandrayaan-3 achieved a historic milestone in 2023, when its Vikram lander made a safe and soft landing on the lunar surface, making India the fourth country to successfully land on the Moon and the first to reach the lunar southern polar region. The Pragyan rover was subsequently deployed on the surface.

The landing site was named Shiv Shakti Point, and August 23 was declared National Space Day.

India will celebrate its third National Space Day on August 23 this year with the theme 'Towards Viksit Bharat: Innovating, Collaborating, and Aspiring to Global Space Leadership'.

As part of the 2026 celebrations, ISTRAC organised the one-day programme in collaboration with CMS at its Gomatnagar-1 campus in Lucknow on Tuesday. (PTI)

They'll have to comply with Indian law: Govt official on X's takedown visibility push

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Amid Elon Musk's recent announcement that X will make government content takedown requests more transparent and visible, a senior IT Ministry official on Tuesday asserted that the platform "will have to comply with the Indian laws".

X's new transparency push seeks to make government-directed content restrictions more visible to users, and bring more clarity on takedown requests. It intends to disclose which government was behind such a request, and why the content was flagged.

Asked about the IT Ministry's stance on the issue, a senior official made it clear that the platform "will have to comply with Indian law".

"...There is a process...there are two sets of processes. We don't talk about orders we issue specifically under 69 (A) because it is intended to be maintained as confidential," the official said.

In a post on X recently, Musk had announced that "any censorship required by governments is now clearly visible".

X and the Indian government have sparred in the past over content takedown orders and the limits of free speech on the platform.

Back in 2024, X complied with government directions to withhold certain accounts and posts linked to the farmers' protests in India, but publicly expressed its disagreement with the orders, saying it amounted to curtailing freedom of expression. X had argued in its 'Global Government Affairs' handle at that time that lack of disclosure can lead to a lack of accountability and arbitrary decision-making, and that greater transparency around such directives was essential.

Another confrontation had played out around the Centre's 'Sahyog portal', a platform facilitating content-blocking orders for social media and internet intermediaries, which X had equated to being a form of extra-legal censorship, while the government defended it as an efficient mechanism for regulation. (PTI)

Meta more cautious on CSAM after unequivocal govt message; action visible: IT Ministry sources



NEW DELHI, Aug 18: The government's hard talk with Meta has led to action on child sexual abuse material (CSAM), with the company now showing greater sensitivity and caution on such content, IT ministry sources said on Tuesday, asserting that the Centre has made it unequivocally clear that such content constitutes a violation and cannot be covered by safe-harbour protection.

Sources said the government's intent is not censorship or restricting coverage in any way, but ensuring Indian laws and norms are followed and that social media harms are mitigated.

Meta explained how its algorithms and systems work, the ministry sources said, noting that discussions are on and such matters involve "judgment calls" and "tweaks".

The IT Ministry official further said that Meta has shown increased sensitivity and caution on CSAM, with the government seeing some action by the company following its recent discussions. Sources described the response as "important and significant".

The government had unequivocally conveyed to Meta that CSAM violates Indian law and that no safe-harbour protection is available for content that violates the law in such a manner, sources said.

They added that the message appears to have "gone home", with such content not resurfacing so far and the company being more cautious on this front.

Sources clarified that safe harbour "removal" per se is not done by an act of government, but in the court of law. Violation of Section 67 of IT Act can lead to prosecution.

Asked about the issue of algorithmic bias, the official said: "We are discussing about their algorithms and how they work and what happens. They have been explaining how these things work and how the structure actually operates and functions."

WHATSAPP USERNAME ROW

On the WhatsApp username row, sources said the matter is under examination as it doesn't involve just that particular platform, but other messaging apps as well.

"So we are in the process of examining (the issue)", sources said.

It may be recalled that WhatsApp's proposed username feature, which would allow users to communicate without sharing phone numbers, had come under government scrutiny over concerns that it could increase risks of online fraud, phishing, digital arrest scams and impersonation. The IT ministry had asked Meta to explain why action should not be initiated under the IT Act and rules, and had directed WhatsApp not to launch the feature in India until consultations are completed to the Centre's satisfaction.

WhatsApp, which has about 50 crore users in India, subsequently submitted its response and assured the government that the feature would not be rolled out until discussions conclude. The IT ministry has also issued notices to Telegram and Signal over their existing username features, seeking details on safeguards against fraud and impersonation.

On the talks with Meta, the ministry sources said the US tech giant has indicated it is working to prevent content already taken down (as unlawful) from repeat-

edly resurfacing, including through improvements to its filters. On the government's call for greater sensitivity to Indian cultural and local context in content moderation, Meta has also indicated that it is taking action, the source said.

"We have to continue to watch, and these are things which overnight you can't say I'm fully satisfied with what they've done. We have to actually look at what really happens and what we see happening on social media," the source said.

The government's objective is to ensure Indian laws are followed and platforms do not create situations which are adverse to the country's social norms, while striking the right balance between the benefits platforms provide and risks, say, of addiction, gaming-related harms and CSAM.

"All of these have to be addressed and clearly they (platforms) have a responsibility," the source said.

These concerns are not unique to India and several democracies, including Australia, the UK and France are grappling with it, they said, adding that platforms have a responsibility to mitigate such harms while recognising differing cultural contexts.

Sources said the government has acted within India's constitutional and statutory framework, including through Section 69 A of the IT Act, which it has used sparingly where prescribed conditions are fulfilled.

AI LABELLING

On AI labelling, the ministry official said the law is clear that synthetically generated content must be labelled, and that responsibility lies at three levels, including with platforms. Platforms must comply accordingly, they added.

Meta's team led by its global affairs head Joel Kaplan had met IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and IT Secretary S Krishnan earlier this month, following the government's summons over the temporary restriction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Facebook post. In the rounds of discussions that followed, the Meta team apologised, and was asked by the government if it is adhering to Indian laws, grilled on algorithmic issues and guardrails meant to ensure that constitutional and legal requirements are being met.

Meta had assured that it is indeed serious and "working hard" to address concerns around deepfakes, child sexual abuse material, bots and synthetic content. (PTI)

Suspicious foreign remittances under I-T department scanner

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: The income tax department has launched a drive to verify "suspicious" foreign remittances by entities with little or no reported business activity, the persons behind them, and the chartered accountants who issued tax determination certificates.

Entities located in districts along India's land borders and remitting significant amounts of money abroad have also been covered in the exercise.

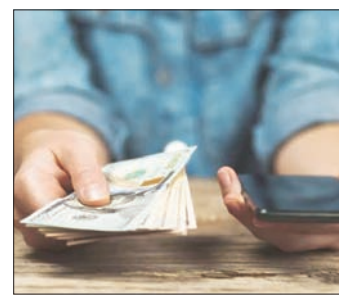
The exercise has covered approximately 394 entities (including 117 entities located in land-border states), and 36 professionals, the department said in a post on X.

"On August 18, the Department launched a nationwide detailed verification exercise to verify these (suspicious) foreign remittances, focusing on shell entities, the persons behind them, and the professionals who have issued Form 15CB certificates," the tax department said.

The verification of suspicious foreign remittances follows data analysis and ground intelligence indicating significant overseas remittances by entities with little or no reported business activity.

The Department cautioned CAs against issuing certificates in Form 15CB/Form 146 and said they should exercise due care, diligence and professional judgment.

"They should properly examine the underlying transactions and rel-



evant facts before certifying the remittances, as these certifications play an important role in maintaining trust in the system," the I-T department said in a statement.

Form 15CB or Form 146 is a tax determination certificate issued by CAs for foreign remittances from India. It is mandatory when making taxable payments exceeding ₹ 5 lakh in a financial year to a non-resident or foreign company, validating the tax deduction at source (TDS) and DTAA compliance.

Based on ground intelligence and analysis of data on outward foreign remittances, the Income Tax Department has identified several suspicious entities that remitted large amounts of foreign exchange over the last three years.

A nationwide network of entities engaged in remitting funds abroad was uncovered during a search operation conducted on a group of fictitious charitable trusts involved in providing accommodation entries against bogus donations/contribu-

tions, the tax department said.

Preliminary ground verification revealed that the entities making these remittances were either non-filers or were filing income-tax returns showing very small turnovers. The turnovers had no apparent correlation with the large amounts of money being remitted abroad.

They also did not appear to match the stated purpose of the remittances, such as payment for freight, import of software, or import of consulting services. Further investigations revealed that these entities were not actually operating from the addresses declared by them.

"Further analysis of the data also revealed that a large number of Form 15CB certificates were issued by a relatively small group of professionals. The remitted funds were also received by a clustered group of entities," the I-T department said.

"Form 15CB, read with Rule 37BB of the Income-tax Rules, 1962 (corresponding to Form 146 read with Rule 220 of the Income-tax Rules, 2026), requires the accountant certifying a foreign remittance to verify its taxability with reference to the books of account and other relevant documents. However, the findings raise concerns about whether adequate due diligence was carried out by the accountants before issuing these certificates," the I-T department said. (PTI)

L&T Finance plans major Bengal expansion, targets 26 more gold-loan locations by Mar'27

KOLKATA, Aug 18: L&T Finance Ltd plans to significantly expand its gold-loan business in West Bengal, with 26 more locations expected to be added by March 2027 as the company looks to strengthen its presence in one of the country's large gold-credit markets.

The company currently has 28 locations in West Bengal, including four in Kolkata, and plans to add another 26 locations in the state by March 2027, of which four are expected to be in Kolkata, Raju Dodi, Whole-time Director and Chief Operating Officer, L&T Finance said.

The lender launched new campaigns to promote its gold loan product.

The expansion is part of L&T Finance's broader strategy to scale up its gold-loan network, with the company targeting around 100 new branches across eastern India. It has set a target of adding about 500 branches during the current financial year, taking its total network to around 843 branches.

L&T Finance had no gold-loan branches or portfolio in West Bengal a year ago. Its gold-loan outstanding in the state has now risen to around ₹ 165 crore.

The gold-loan market in West Bengal is estimated at around ₹ 47,000 crore, while its market share in west bengal stands at 2.2 per cent, according to CRIF data, giving lenders significant headroom for expansion.

The average gold-loan ticket size at L&T Finance is around Rs 2.6 lakh per customer.

At the company level, its gold-loan book stood at ₹ 3,829 crore in the first quarter of FY27. L&T Finance had acquired and integrated the gold-loan business of

Paul Merchants Finance Ltd., in June 2025.

Commenting on the Reserve Bank of India's latest master direction on gold loans, the official said the consolidation of existing circulars into a single master direction would create a level playing field for lenders.

He said one of the key changes was the manner in which loan-to-value is calculated, with interest payable over the tenor of the loan being factored into the outstanding amount for the purpose of determining LTV.

According to Dodi, the change would bring greater transparency and certainty for borrowers while providing lenders with an additional buffer for recovery.

"Lenders are not interested in selling the gold. L&T Finance certainly is not interested. Whenever the gold has to be sold, that will be our last resort to recover," he said.

He added that the new framework would also allow the regulator to assess finance companies on the same parameters.

Dodi said the industry had witnessed a dip in gold-loan business in the last quarter as lenders took time to incorporate the regulatory changes into their technology platforms and branch-level processes.

"People took time to calibrate that into their technology platforms," he said, adding that lenders had to modify systems used for gold assessment, maximum loan calculations and amortisation schedules.

The company expects the regulatory clarity, coupled with its branch expansion, to support the next phase of growth in its gold-loan business. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

Assam expands protected area

between wildlife habitats. The latest addition is expected to strengthen protection of biodiversity-rich areas and support long-term conservation efforts in the state.

The expansion of the protected area network comes amid increased focus on wildlife habitat protection and the creation of larger, more connected landscapes for wildlife in Assam.

Indian Army chief Gen Seth

Instead, Foreign Minister Shisir Khanal made back-to-back visits to New Delhi and Beijing in June. Shah's predecessor K P Sharma Oli had visited China after taking over in 2024, in a major departure from past practices when Nepal PMs travelled to India on their first foreign visit.

In his maiden appearance in the parliament on May 31, PM Shah had said that he has learnt about his country "encroaching" territories in India.

Shah also said that apart from discussions with India on a long-standing border dispute, Kathmandu was in touch with China and the UK as well. Two days later, New Delhi categorically rejected any role for third parties to resolve its boundary dispute with Nepal.

Nepal and India have had an old boundary dispute over Lipulekh, Limpiadhura and Kalapani. India has consistently maintained that the territories are part of Uttarakhand.

Soon after Shah's remarks, Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) chairman Rabi Lamichhane visited India and met top Indian leaders.

The visit of the Indian Army chief to Nepal "reaffirms the unique and time-tested defence relations between India and Nepal, which are rooted in shared values, mutual trust, and enduring military-to-military ties", the Indian Embassy in Kathmandu said in a post on X.

General Seth also offered prayer at the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu on Tuesday, Nepal Army sources said. (PTI)

Assam: Drugs worth over

both operations," it added. Sarma applauded Assam Police for the decisive action and stressed that the state's fight against the drug menace will continue with full force. Yaba or 'crazy medicine' in Thai is a tablet form of a mixture of methamphetamine (a powerful and addictive stimulant) and caffeine. (PTI)

New BJP office-bearers vow

The party on Tuesday appointed national general secretary Satish Poonia as in-charge of Punjab, central office in-charge Tarun Chugh as in-charge of Gujarat and Rajya Sabha MP Vinod Tawde as in-charge of Uttar Pradesh. Newly appointed national secretary Jagdish Ishwarbhai Patel was made co-in-charge of Uttar Pradesh.

Poonia said strengthening the organisation in an important state like Punjab is a "significant responsibility".

"With the guidance of the esteemed national leadership and the cooperation of you and all the divine-like workers of the state, I will work with complete dedication to empower the organisation down to the booth level and to take the BJP's ideology to every individual," he said.

Chugh thanked Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Shah and Nabin for appointing him Gujarat in-charge and said he would strive to live up to the trust bestowed in him.

"I will strive to live up to the trust of all of you by serving the organisation with complete loyalty, dedication and commitment," Chugh said in a post on X.

The BJP on Monday overhauled its national team under Nabin, retaining some veterans while bringing in several new faces.

The new team has 13 vice-presidents, eight general secretaries and 16 national secretaries. (PTI)

Close to 100 cr electors

How can you have Elections in the US without a valid Photo ID," Trump wrote. "India's last Election had 646,000,000 Voters! Less than one per cent voted by mail, and every single Voter had to have a VALID Photo Identity Document," Trump said. (PTI)

Assam cabinet clears new

land lease agreements, Sarma said. "We have been producing around 4 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) of crude annually. If we don't have new reserves, this will start declining after 10 years," he added. (PTI)

ENGINEERING WORK UNDER TINSUKIA DIVISION

E-TENDER NOTICE NO. TSK/Engg/42 of 2026; dated 14-08-2026.

E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work:

Item No. 1: Brief Description of item: Replacement of old/dilapidated quarters by Constructing type-II Quarters (20 units) at Simlaguri Jn.-8 units, Lakwa - 4 units, Namrup-4 units and Sibsagar Town-4 units.

Tender Value: ₹4,22,06,606/-; Earnest Money: ₹8,44,100/- E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 07-09-2026 and opened at 16:00 hrs. on 07-09-2026. The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available upto 15:00 hrs. of 07-09-2026 in website <http://www.irops.gov.in>.

DRM (Work)/Tinsukia

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

"Serving Customers with a smile"

AFFIDAVIT

I, Mohammed Rubul Ahmed, S/O-Mohammed Abdul Hashim, Vill-Matikhola, P.O.-Joynagar, P.S.-Murajhar, Dist. Hojai, (Assam) That, my father's actual and correct name is Mohammed Abdul Hashim. That, in my some documents wherein my father's name has been recorded as Abdul Hashim instead of Mohammed Abdul Hashim. That, Mohammed Abdul Hashim and Abdul Hashim same and one person i.e. my father's names.

SITUATION VACANT

Applications are invited for filling up the following post lying vacant at Kolligan DAV English High School. Last date of document submission will be accepted on 30th August 2026.

Interview Post

Assistant Graduate Teacher Arts 3 Nos. Date of interview 9th September 2026 (Wednesday) Time: 11 AM onward.

Sd/ Headmaster Kolligan DAV Eng. High School, Dillai, Karbi Anglong

AFFIDAVIT

I, Imran Hussain, S/O Basiruddin, R/O Village No. 3 Baruahjar, Bechimari, P.S. Dalgaoon, District Darrang, Assam, do hereby solemnly affirm and declare that my correct name is Imran Hussain not Imran Ali and my father's correct name is Basiruddin not Badaruddin. That in the Jamabandi Copy of Land under Dag No. 418, Patta No. 158, Village No. 3 Baruahjar, Pachim Dalgaoon Mouza, my name is recorded as Imran Ali and my father's name is Badaruddin.

I hereby declare that Imran Ali and Imran Hussain are the one and the same person, and Badaruddin and Basiruddin are the one and the same person, being my father.

Sd/- Imran Hussain

AFFIDAVIT

I, Marzia Khatun, D/O-Azgar Ali, W/O Faiz Uddin, R/O-Vill-Merorhahi, P.O.-Gagalmari, P.S.-Mayong, Dist.-Morigaon (Assam), have corrected my name from Marziya Khatun to Marzia Khatun through an Executive Magistrate at Morigaon on 14/08/2026. Marzia Khatun and Marziya Khatun is the same and one person.

FABRICATION, SUPPLY & REPLACEMENT OF STEEL BRIDGE GIRDER

Tender Notice No.: DCBL/07/2026/MLG. **Date:** 11-08-2026. E-Tender are invited by the undersigned for the following work:

Tender No.: DCBL082026MLG.

Name of Work : Fabrication, supply & Replacement of steel bridge girder of span of Br No.126 DN (1x76.2m) at km 137/3-4 between Jamunamukh-Jugijan section and Br No.157 UP (1x30.5m) at km 175/1-2 between Habaipur-Lamsakhang section.

Approximate Tender Value: ₹11,70,94,583.43/-; **Bid Security:** ₹23,41,900/-; **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hrs. and opening of tender at 15:05 hrs. on 03-09-2026.** Complete information alongwith tender document of above e-tender are available in the website <http://www.irops.gov.in>

Dy. CE/Bridge-Line, Maligaon

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

"Serving Customers With A Smile"

ELECTRIFICATION OF ROB

Tender Notice No.: DY/CEE/CON/MLG/04/2026. **Dated:** 13-08-2026. E-Tender are invited by the following work. **Tender No.:** ELCON-DYCEE-RE-II-MLG-08;

Name of Work: Proposal for electrification of ROB adjacent to Railway station at Chaparmukh & Jamunamukh Under Digaru-Hojai DB Project.

Tender Value : ₹1,24,07,888.78/-; **Bid Security :** ₹2,48,200/-; **Date & time of submission of tender at 14:30 hrs. on 04-09-2026 and opening at 15:30 hrs. on 04-09-2026.** For complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-Tender will be available in website www.irops.gov.in

DEE/CON/HQ, Maligaon

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY

"Serving Customers With A Smile"

LG Electronics wins 10 honours at DIGIT India's Top Appliance Awards 2026



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: LG Electronics India Limited (LGEIL) secured 10 product awards at DIGIT India's Top Appliance Awards 2026, held in New Delhi, recognising its products across television, refrigerator, air conditioner, washing machine, microwave, dishwasher and air purifier categories.

The awards, an initiative of Times Network and presented by digit.in, are based on a lab-first evaluation process rather than consumer voting. Nominated products were tested at DIGIT's laboratories in Mumbai and Noida and assessed against more than 150 technical parameters, covering aspects ranging from thermal performance to customer support.

The technical evaluation was reviewed by an independent jury before the winners were selected. The jury included Tarun Pathak, Research Director, Counterpoint Research; Navkendar Singh, AVP, IDC; Manas Tiwari, Technology Editor, Times Network; and senior members of the DIGIT editorial team.

The awards covered more than 36 appliance categories. LG's recognised products included the DUALCOOL AI Convertible AC (AS-Q20JWZE), which won Best 5-Star Split Air Conditioner; the 610-litre LG GV-K25FFGFB, named Best French Door Refrigerator; and the LG GLD2156ZHS, which received the Value for Money (Single Door) award.

In the washing machine category, the LG FX1412A9K won Best Front

Load Washing Machine, while the LG WashTower (FWT1310BG) was named Best Stackable Washing Machine.

The LG OLED G6 Series (OLED65G6PLA) received the Best OLED TV award.

The LG DFB335HM was recognised as Best Dishwasher, while the LG 32L Charcoal Convection Microwave (MJEN32GUHWF) won Value for Money (Convection/Grill).

The LG MS3032BK 30L was named Best Solo Microwave.

Commenting on the recognition, LG Electronics India Managing Director Hong Ju Jeon said the awards reaffirmed the company's focus on bringing advanced, India-focused innovation to consumers.

He said the lab-driven evaluation and independent jury validation provided an endorsement of the reliability and performance of LG products.

The ceremony was attended by senior LG Electronics India leadership, including Co-Chief Sales & Marketing Officer Sanjay Chitkara, along with members of the DIGIT editorial and jury panels, technology opinion leaders, influencers and representatives of other appliance brands.

The recognised product range reflects LG Electronics India's focus on combining global technology with product features tailored to Indian household requirements, including convertible cooling, inverter-compatible refrigeration and washing technologies designed for local usage conditions.

Tribal organisations demand stringent punishment, compensation and enhanced safety for women and students

Protest held at Kajalgaon over Chirang gangrape

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 18: A protest demonstration was organised at Kajalgaon in Chirang district on Tuesday against the recent alleged gangrape of a minor tribal girl in the district.

The protest was organised by the Chirang District Committee of the All Assam Tribal Sangha and supported by several organisations, including the All Bodo Students' Union, ABWWF, ARSU, AASU, ABMSU, BSS and AATYL.

Students from various educational institutions and members of the participating organisations joined the dharna, holding placards and demanding justice for the victim.

The protesters demanded stringent punishment for those found guilty and sought capital punishment under the provisions of the POCSO Act, 2012.

They also demanded adequate compensation for the victim and her family, stronger measures to prevent atrocities against girl students and improved safety and security for students and the general public.

The organisations further called for strict enforcement of law and order to monitor and curb anti-social



and illegal activities in the region.

According to the police, three persons have been arrested in connection with the case. The accused have been identified as Nasirul Sheikh, 20, of Bartalowa in Chirang; Harunul Hasan, 29, of Barpathar in

Bongaigaon; and Pir Mohammad, 25, of Agomani in Dhubri district.

The protesters alleged that the victim, a Class X student, was befriended by one of the accused using a false identity before being taken to a room at Bartalowa, where the al-

leged crime took place.

The incident was also allegedly recorded and circulated on social media.

All three accused have been arrested, and further investigation is underway.

CPI opposes proposal to shrink Kaziranga ESZ

Party seeks withdrawal of proposal, calls for scientific assessment before any decision

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 18: The Communist Party of India (CPI) has expressed concern over the Assam government's proposal to reduce the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around Kaziranga National Park and Tiger Reserve from the default 10 km to 1-3 km in different areas.

In a statement, CPI general secretary Kanak Gogoi said any move to reduce the ESZ to facilitate the transfer of land to corporate groups was unacceptable.

He stressed that the areas surrounding Kaziranga are vital habitats for rhinos, elephants, tigers, wild buffalo and numerous other species.

The CPI said reducing the ESZ could increase human activity, construction, commercialisation, industrial activity, mining and road expansion, potentially leading to habitat fragmentation, restricted wildlife corridors and greater human-wildlife conflict.

The party also referred to information submitted before the

Gauhati High Court in March 2026, claiming that no final notification had been issued on the State government's draft proposal to the Centre and that the 10-km arrangement therefore remained in force.

It called for transparency, scientific assessment and public consultation before any decision.

The CPI demanded withdrawal of the proposal and called for a comprehensive scientific survey of the environmental sensitivity, wildlife corridors, forests and wetlands surrounding Kaziranga.

It also sought strict environmental assessments for large-scale construction, industrial and mining activities.

The party advocated a policy of coexistence between people and nature while protecting the rights and livelihoods of local communities.

It further called for strengthening wildlife corridors and adjoining forest areas and urged people to unite to protect Kaziranga's natural heritage.

Sanjay Singh says Centre must assess flood damage, provide compensation

HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 18: Rajya Sabha MP and Aam Aadmi Party leader Sanjay Singh on Tuesday urged the Centre to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the damage caused by the recent floods in Sivasagar and Charaideo districts and provide substantial compensation for rebuilding infrastructure in the worst-affected areas.

In an interview with The Hills Times at a city hotel, Singh criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, alleging that they visit Assam repeatedly during elections but are absent when the State faces a major disaster.

Singh said the Aam Aadmi Party would raise the issue of the floods as an election issue in the future and hold the government accountable for the loss of lives and property.

He also assured that he would raise Assam's flood problem during the next Winter Session of Parliament and demand appropriate action.

Referring to allegations of government involvement in coal and stone quarrying in neighbouring Nagaland, Singh said the Assam government should constitute a high-powered committee to investigate the matter and take appropriate action against those found responsible.

Minister Biswajit Daimary reviews sericulture schemes in BTC area



HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 18: Assam Minister for Handloom and Textiles, Sports and Youth Welfare, Sericulture, SEED and ITFC Biswajit Daimary visited the Bodoland Silk Park in Kokrajhar on Tuesday to review the implementation of various government schemes and departmental activities across the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) area.

During the visit, Daimary reviewed schemes and initiatives being implemented by the Sericulture Department, including the Vanya Cocoon Bank, Eri Spun Silk Mill and

Eri Pupae Processing Unit.

He also held discussions with departmental officials on operational challenges and measures required to ensure the smooth and uninterrupted functioning of departmental offices across the region.

The Minister distributed assistance in kind to beneficiaries under the Central flagship scheme Silk Samagra-2, aimed at strengthening sericulture activities in the region.

Emphasising the importance of traditional textile industries in strengthening rural livelihoods, Daimary stressed the need for streamlined administration and adequate technical support for sericultural farmers and weavers.

The programme was attended by BTC Executive Member for Sericulture Kameswar Ray, EM for Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs Lakhi Das, Padma Shri awardee Dr Jagesh Deuri, and senior officials of the Assam Government and BTC administration.

ONGC commissions gas evacuation facility at Khoraghat in Golaghat

New facility to facilitate evacuation of nearly 1 lakh SCM of gas per day through North East Gas Grid

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Aug 18: Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Limited (ONGC) has commissioned gas evacuation facilities at Khoraghat GGS-1 in Assam's Golaghat district, marking a significant step towards strengthening natural gas connectivity and energy access in the Northeast.

According to an ONGC press communique, the newly commissioned facility will enable surplus associated natural gas from the Upper Assam Shelf to be processed and evacuated through the North East Gas Grid (NEGG), developed by Indradhanush Gas Grid Limited (IGGL).

The new connectivity will facilitate the utilisation of nearly 1 lakh Standard Cubic Metres (SCM) of gas per day from ONGC's Jorhat Asset.

The development complements the commissioning of the Dergaon-Dimapur Pipeline, which has connected Nagaland with the North East Gas Grid as well as the National Gas Grid.

ONGC is also developing hook-up facilities at Jantapathar and Kasomarigaon to connect additional produc-

ing fields of its Jorhat Asset with the North East Gas Grid.

These projects are expected to further augment gas availability in the region, reduce flaring and strengthen the gas-based economy of Assam and the wider Northeast.

Improved availability of natural gas is expected to create greater opportunities for households, industries, transport and the power sector while supporting economic and infrastructure development across Assam and the Northeast.

The enhanced connectivity is also expected to contribute to the development of the Northeast as a key growth engine of India and support the region's transition towards a more integrated gas-based economy.

The commissioning of the Khoraghat facility is being viewed as an important addition to the region's energy infrastructure, enabling better utilisation of locally produced natural gas and strengthening its integration with the wider gas grid.

SSB Frontier Headquarters Guwahati celebrates 80th Independence Day

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Sashasthra Seema Bal (SSB), Frontier Headquarters Guwahati, celebrated the 80th Independence Day with patriotic fervour recently, with Inspector General Sudhir Verma unfurling the National Flag at the Frontier Headquarters.

Verma extended Independence Day greetings to SSB personnel and their families and paid homage to the martyrs who made the supreme sacrifice for the nation.

In his address, he highlighted the operational, administrative and sporting achievements of Frontier Guwahati.

He said SSB is entrusted with guarding 1,751 km of the India-Nepal border and 699 km of the India-Bhutan border, while also contributing to the development and welfare of people living in border areas with dedication and a spirit of fraternity.

As part of the celebrations, the Jazz, Pipe and Brass Bands of Fron-

tier Guwahati organised a two-day series of patriotic musical performances under the guidance of Verma and the supervision of DIG HKB Singh and Commandant, 1st Battalion, SSB, Sunil Kaushik.

A grand band show was held at City Centre Mall, Guwahati, on August 15, followed by another performance at Sati Radhika Shanti Udyan at the Brahmaputra Riverfront, Uzan Bazar, on August 16.

The performances received an enthusiastic response from the people of Guwahati.

The initiative sought to promote unity, patriotism and national pride through music while strengthening the bond between the SSB and the general public.

DIGs Rajneesh Lamba and Shri Neeraj Chand, Commandant (Administration) MKS Munda, other senior officers, representatives of the local administration, SSB personnel and media representatives were present during the celebrations.

Lions Club of Gauhati conducts 'Project Bag of Hope' across Guwahati

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Lions Club of Gauhati conducted its 'Project Bag of Hope' recently as a community service initiative aimed at providing food and nutritional support to people in need across Guwahati.

The project was flagged off by District Governor Lion Manoj Bhajanka at the Guwahati Lions Eye Hospital campus in the presence of Club President Lion Deepak Mittal, Past District Governors Lion MP Agarwal and Lion ML Agarwal, Cabinet Members of District 322G and members of the Lions Club of Gauhati.

Under the initiative, 202 'Bag of Hope' kits containing a total of 2,500 kg of dry ration were distributed across seven locations in Guwahati, including orphanages, an old age home and a child care centre.

The quantity of ration distributed was

equivalent to approximately 7,000 cooked meals, providing essential food support to the beneficiaries.

Special attention was given to the nutritional needs of children at the Child Care Centre, where Cerelac, Nestum, Lactogen milk powder, suji and dalia were distributed.

The project was initiated under the chairmanship of Lion Manish Khemani and carried out under the leadership of Club President Deepak Mittal, with active participation from members of the Lions Club of Gauhati.

The Club President said the initiative was intended to go beyond a one-time distribution drive and continue throughout the Lionistic Year and beyond, reaffirming the club's commitment to serving the community and bringing hope to those in need.

Assam Chamber of Commerce, Nagaon holds general meeting

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 18: The Assam Chamber of Commerce, Nagaon district, held its general meeting at Hotel Rishiraj, Nagaon recently, with discussions focusing on the welfare and interests of businessmen and members of various categories.

Rupam Goswami, Chairman of the Assam Chamber of Commerce Central Committee and Sisir Deb Kalita, Working President of the Central Committee, attended the meeting as special guests.

Nagaon district committee president Surendra Singh Sahni, Working President Dinesh Kalita, General Secretaries Jiban Banik and Debangshu Sharma, Treasurer Rajesh Gupta, executive members and general members were also present.

Several prominent businessmen of Na-

gaon attended the meeting as guests.

A key highlight was the felicitation of Rupak Sarma, newly appointed Chief Advisor and MLA of the Nagaon-Batadroba constituency, by the Nagaon district committee.

The felicitation was conducted by Nanu Das, General Secretary of the Assam Chamber of Commerce, Nagaon district.

During the meeting, office-bearers discussed issues concerning the business community, trade policies and measures to strengthen the Chamber's activities in the district.

They stressed the importance of unity among traders and collective efforts to promote business growth in Nagaon.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks.

NFR announces further train cancellations and rescheduling

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced further changes in train services amid ongoing restoration work near New Harangajao station following the settlement of railway tracks on Line-1 and Line-2.

Train operations through the Lumding-Badarpur Hill Section are being maintained via Line-3 with enhanced safety measures.

Train No 15617 (Guwahati-Dullabcherra) Express, scheduled to commence its journey on August 19 and Train No 15618 (Dullabcherra-Guwahati) Express, scheduled for August 20, have been cancelled.

Train No 15615 (Guwahati-Silchar) Express on August 19 and Train No 15616 (Silchar-Guwahati) Express on August 20 have also been cancelled.

Several services have been rescheduled.

Train No 15650 (Narangi-Agartala) Express will depart Narangi at 10.30 pm on August 19, while Train No 15649 (Agartala-Narangi) Express will depart Agartala at 11.30 pm.

Train No 15609 (Guwahati-Sairang) Express will depart Guwahati at 11.30 pm, while Train No 15610 (Sairang-Guwahati) Express will depart Sairang at 9.30 pm.

Train No 15611 (Rangia-Silchar) Express will depart Rangia at 11.30 pm on August 19.

Train No 15612 (Silchar-Rangia) Express will depart Silchar at 5 am on August 20, while Train No 15646 (Silchar-Charlapalli) Express will depart Silchar at 4.10 am on August 20.

Meanwhile, Train No 17031 (Charlapalli-Agartala) Express, commencing its journey on August 17, will be regulated suitably en route.

Swami Vivekanand University holds second Deeksharambh



HT Correspondent

GOSSAIGAON, Aug 18: Swami Vivekanand University, Kokrajhar, organised its second Deeksharambh (Student Orientation Programme) recently to welcome newly admitted students and introduce them to the university's academic and cultural environment.

The programme focused on the Indian Knowledge System (IKS), highlighting the importance of integrating India's traditional knowledge and values with modern education, research and innovation.

Dr Ajay Kumar Karn, Chancellor

of Swami Vivekanand University, attended as the Chief Guest, while Dr Pradeep Bhardwaj, CEO of Six Sigma, New Delhi, was the Guest of Honour.

Colonel Satish Hilli of the Indian Army attended as the Special Guest. Addressing the students, the dignitaries encouraged them to pursue academic excellence while developing discipline, leadership, innovation and a strong sense of responsibility towards society and the nation.

They also emphasised the role of the Indian Knowledge System in

fostering value-based and socially responsible individuals.

The campus wore a festive look as newly admitted students participated in the programme in the prescribed dress code, reflecting discipline, unity and a sense of belonging.

A cultural programme added to the occasion, with students showcasing their creativity and talents.

Members of the university fraternity, including Director Dr Amit Sharma, Registrar Dr Ranjan Prasad and Assistant Professor Dr Niranjana, along with faculty members, staff and students, attended the event.

The speakers stressed that quality education should extend beyond classroom learning and promote research, innovation, ethical values and holistic personality development.

The programme concluded with students taking a pledge to uphold the values of the university and contribute meaningfully to society.

The second Deeksharambh marked the beginning of a new academic journey for the students while reinforcing the university's emphasis on combining traditional Indian wisdom with contemporary education.

Rail connectivity to Jogighopa MMLP strengthens Northeast's global trade gateway

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 18: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has completed the track linking works connecting the Jogighopa (JPZ) Railway Station yard with the Multi Modal Logistics Park (MMLP) GCT siding in Assam, marking a significant milestone in strengthening freight logistics and multimodal connectivity in the Northeast.

The completion of the Non-Interlocking (NI) work has paved the way for freight trains operating to and from the MMLP to gain direct access to the national railway network.

The connectivity includes links from Line Nos. 1 and 2 of Jogighopa railway station towards the MMLP GCT siding, facilitating smoother and more efficient movement of freight.

Strategically located along the Brahmaputra River, Jogighopa MMLP is the first Multi Modal Logistics Park in Assam.

The facility is designed to integrate road, rail, air and waterways, providing a platform for seamless movement of goods and strengthening the region's connectivity with markets across India and abroad.

The newly completed rail connectivity is expected to significantly enhance the role of Jogighopa MMLP as a major logistics hub for the Northeast.

Direct access to the railway network will fa-



cilitate more efficient freight movement, strengthen supply chains and provide industries

and businesses in the region with improved access to markets across the country.

The strategic location of the logistics park also offers considerable potential for strengthening trade and commercial connectivity with neighbouring countries, particularly Bhutan.

By combining different modes of transport at a single logistics hub, the MMLP is positioned to support the movement of goods towards both domestic and international markets.

The MMLP is equipped with a range of modern logistics facilities, including warehouses, railway siding, cold storage facilities, a customs clearance house, yard facilities, workshops, petrol pumps and truck parking facilities.

These facilities are intended to support the integrated handling, storage and transportation of cargo.

The enhanced rail connectivity is expected to benefit the trade, industrial and logistics sectors by improving freight efficiency and reducing logistical constraints in the movement of goods.

It will also provide an important boost to the region's supply-chain infrastructure and create greater opportunities for commercial activity.

With the completion of the track linking works, Jogighopa MMLP is expected to play a greater role in integrating the Northeast with the national freight network and strengthening the region's position as a strategic gateway for international trade and regional connectivity.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less - Eldridge Cleaver

An extraordinary historian

Historian extraordinary, Sumit Sarkar, whose focus extended beyond nationalist icons, is no more. He felt it was more important to explore the limits of mainstream nationalism. He was only too aware that the shining promise of the dawn of independence began to fade by the late '60s and the early '70s. A new wave of popular struggles has begun in various forms and needs to be looked into closely. That is why he explored the textures of the lives of farmers, workers and class communities. He entered the arena of historical studies at a time when modern Indian history was largely framed through the binary of colonial oppression versus Indian resistance. His first major work was *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal*. In it he demonstrated how the ordinary people could be both hierarchical and democratic. Son of Sushovan Sarkar, an eminent historian and a stalwart of the Bengali intellectual Left, Sumit remained a Marxist throughout his life. A growing unpopularity of this school of thought in India and elsewhere did not sway him. Inarguably his commitment to history found its most eloquent expression in *Modern India* he penned. It helped make him one of the founding figures of subaltern studies. But he would eventually distance himself from this group. He found it increasingly turned towards cultural theory. He believed that a historian should take communalism head-on. Sumit Sarkar stood up to be counted.

He refused to submit to doctrine. His classes at the Delhi University brought about the possibilities of Marxist social history. But it would be wrong to assume that he bowed to a doctrine. Returning the Rabindra Puraskar to protest against the West Bengal Left Front government's treatment of Nandigram peasants is a case in point. He was never caught in an ideological dilemma when he knew in his head and heart that something was wrong. Talking to him on any subject whether history, politics or literature was always enlightening. For he had a vast store of knowledge on a variety of topics. And he was never boring. Unlike many other academics, Sarkar did not take himself too seriously. Even the most serious questions received a good dose of his brand of humour. He believed that some sort of "history from below" was a feasible project.

Sarkar was alarmed at the growth of Hindutva brand of Hindu nationalism. He felt that it posed a threat to Indian democracy and society. His apprehension found expression in a series of write-ups. They were polemical but lucid and did not become invectives. These pieces reveal the man Sumit Sarkar was. Here was an erudite man who could laugh at the absurdities of the world.

POST BAG

Kaziranga's ESZ-Development must not come at the cost of conservation

Sir,

The proposal to reduce the Eco-Sensitive Zone (ESZ) around Kaziranga National Park from 10 km to 1 km has understandably generated considerable debate. While the developmental aspirations of communities living around the park must be addressed, any alteration to the ESZ should be guided by science, ecological realities and long-term public interest.

An ESZ is not intended to stop development. It acts as a buffer or "shock absorber" around a protected area, regulating activities that could adversely affect its ecological integrity. In the case of Kaziranga, such protection is particularly important because the park is not an isolated ecosystem. Its wetlands, grasslands and forests are closely linked with the surrounding landscape, including the Karbi Anglong hills.

During the annual floods, wildlife from Kaziranga moves towards higher ground in Karbi Anglong through established animal corridors. These corridors are vital for the survival and movement of elephants, rhinos and other species. Any unplanned construction or infrastructure development along these routes could increase habitat fragmentation, human-wildlife conflict and wildlife mortality.

At the same time, the genuine developmental needs of local communities cannot be ignored. Better roads, livelihood opportunities, tourism infrastructure and essential services are necessary. But reducing the ESZ should not automatically be treated as the only route to development. Scientific zoning within the existing framework, coupled with participatory planning, could allow appropriate development in less-sensitive areas while keeping critical habitats and wildlife corridors protected.

Responsible eco-tourism, sustainable agriculture, organic farming and other nature-based livelihoods can provide employment without undermining the ecological foundation of Kaziranga. What is required is not development at any cost, but development that remains compatible with conservation.

Climate change makes this issue even more important. Increasingly erratic rainfall, floods, erosion and habitat pressures are already challenging Assam's ecosystems. Kaziranga's annual floods are an essential ecological process, but indiscriminate development in surrounding areas can interfere with natural drainage and wildlife movement.

Before making such a significant change, the government should therefore undertake a comprehensive scientific assessment, including wildlife movement, hydrology, habitat connectivity and cumulative impacts of existing and proposed projects. Experts, local communities, conservationists and other stakeholders should also have a meaningful role in the decision-making process.

Kaziranga is not merely a tourist destination or an economic resource. It is a globally recognised ecosystem and an important part of Assam's natural heritage. The objective should be to ensure that development and conservation reinforce each other rather than become competing interests.

The question, therefore, is not simply whether the ESZ should be 10 km or 1 km. The real question is: what level of protection does the Kaziranga landscape scientifically require to remain ecologically viable for generations to come?

Any decision on this matter should be based on that question—not on short-term commercial or political considerations.

Yours faithfully,
Mowsam Hazarika
Guwahati

Pointless targets, real victims

The extended deployment at sea of American aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln has exposed the logistical challenges of the United States war against Iran alongside the ugly realities of war itself. The Lincoln has been almost nine months at sea and is about to break the record for the longest trip away from home port for a US carrier since the Vietnam War. That record was set by another ship USS Gerald R Ford just months ago. Reports have surfaced of low crew morale and suicidal tendencies among crewmen on the Lincoln with family members of the deployed navy-men lambasting the military leadership.

The predicament of the Lincoln exemplifies the manner in which the United States has carried out this war without clarity and with constantly shifting goalposts. This approach has completely messed up logistics and left navy-men and their families in limbo. The psychological pressure is immense as an open-ended war combined with no port calls for months leads to serious mental health issues. Two sailors on the Lincoln jumped overboard in recent months as a direct consequence of this environment. Former President Donald Trump has batted away criticism because war is fundamentally a matter of old men talking and young men dying. This realization galvanized anti-war protests during the Vietnam War era and compelled Washington to leave that theater of conflict. Old people in power appear unable to learn from history.

Leaders like Trump with Iran or Vladimir Putin with Ukraine continue to send young men to die to satisfy



personal egos. In this hyperconnected world it is becoming difficult for authority figures to pull the wool over the eyes of the public. Approval ratings for Trump have plummeted following the Iran war. Putin recently banned the anti-war party Yabloko from upcoming parliamentary polls in Russia. Internal resentment will grow if young men continue to die in senseless wars and folks in authority must course correct or face severe trouble.

Military power relies heavily on human endurance and emotional stability. Long months spent on an isolated vessel in the middle of an ocean strip away the glory often associated with combat operations. Sailors on board the USS Abraham Lincoln face non-stop maintenance routines constant drills and an ever-present fear of sudden attacks. The lack of access to home life creates a disconnect from reality that breeds

extreme psychological strain. Navy families back home endure their own parallel struggle with endless waiting and insufficient updates from commanders. The absence of fixed return dates leaves households unable to plan their futures or offer meaningful comfort to loved ones at sea. When military strategies lack clear definitions of victory or exit conditions the burden falls entirely on the service members who must remain stationed in high-stress zones indefinitely.

The historical precedent set during the Vietnam War demonstrates what happens when public patience runs out. Millions of citizens took to the streets decades ago because they saw a disconnect between official government narratives and the human cost on the front lines. Today access to real-time information through digital networks accelerates this process. Families do not have to wait for traditional news outlets to learn about the poor conditions or mental health crises occurring on military ships. Direct communication channels and social

platforms allow personal stories to surface quickly. This transparency makes it hard for political architects to maintain domestic support for protracted foreign conflicts.

Geopolitical decisions driven by personal prestige or unchecked executive authority often overlook long-term consequences. In the case of the campaign involving Iran the strategy appears to shift with political convenience rather than clear operational logic. Extending carrier deployments beyond normal rotations strains the hardware of the ships themselves alongside the human crew. Essential maintenance gets delayed and equipment failure risks increase significantly. This mechanical strain mirrors the mental breakdown of the personnel creating an environment where operational readiness is compromised by sheer exhaustion.

International conflicts like the ones in Ukraine and the Middle East highlight a pattern of decision-making among senior leaders. Suppressing political opposition or ignoring public

discontent may offer short-term control over domestic policy. Banning opposition parties like Yabloko in Russia reflects a desire to eliminate alternate viewpoints and silence anti-war sentiments. Such measures signal an underlying vulnerability in the political leadership because reliance on force or suppression reveals an inability to maintain popular support through consensus.

The disconnect between political rhetoric and the lived experience of soldiers creates deep social divisions. Young men and women who enlist often do so with expectations of defending their country or fulfilling a duty. Finding themselves trapped in prolonged engagements with uncertain objectives leads to disillusionment. When sailors resort to jumping overboard or experiencing severe depression the military structure faces a fundamental crisis of purpose. Addressing these issues requires more than administrative adjustments or public relations efforts. It demands a fundamental reassessment of why and how nations choose to project military force across the globe.

Public awareness remains a powerful mechanism for holding political figures accountable. Decreasing approval ratings and growing domestic scrutiny show that populations retain the ability to question prolonged military actions. The burden of war ultimately rests on the families who send their children off to serve and the communities that absorb the consequences of returning veterans suffering from trauma. As long as leaders prioritize personal standing or abstract goals over human lives the friction between authority and the public will continue to build. Strategic course corrections are necessary to prevent further loss of life and maintain the stability of national institutions.

Flood aftermath and education

The recurring fury of nature has once again left a profound and devastating mark on the landscape of Upper Assam, unleashing a wave of destruction that has disrupted the lives of countless individuals. Over the recent weeks, torrential rains, coupled with sudden, heavy water flows from the neighbouring hills of Nagaland and the swelling of the Brahmaputra River, have triggered a severe flood situation that has deeply impacted the region. Among the worst-affected districts are Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Jorhat, where floodwaters have inundated villages, submerged agricultural lands, and displaced thousands of families. While the immediate focus during such natural disasters rightfully leans towards the preservation of human life, rescue operations, and the provision of basic necessities like food, clean drinking water, and emergency medical shelter, there is a silent, creeping crisis that unfolds in the aftermath—the catastrophic disruption of the education sector. Education, which serves as the fundamental cornerstone of community development and the primary vehicle for upward social mobility for the youth, has been brought to a grinding halt. The floodwaters have not only breached vital river embankments but have also washed away the immediate academic aspirations of thousands of students who find themselves suddenly disconnected from their learning environments. The severity of the recent floods highlights a recurring vulnerability in the region's infrastructure, particularly concerning the safety and continuity of educational institutions. As the state grapples with the immense challenge of rehabilitation and recovery, it becomes increasingly evident that restoring the educational ecosystem requires a multifaceted approach. The tragedy has laid bare the fragile nature of rural and semi-urban educational infrastructure, prompting a critical analysis of how natural disasters systematically dismantle the academic progress of a generation. Understanding the depth of this crisis is absolutely essential for formulating robust, long-term strategies that can safeguard the educational future of children living in one of the most flood-prone regions of the country.

The physical devastation inflicted upon educational infrastructure across these Upper Assam districts is both extensive and unprecedented in its recent scale, painting a grim picture of the logistical challenges that lie ahead for the state's education department. In Jorhat district alone, official assessments have revealed that a staggering number of educational institutions were directly affected by the deluge, with hundreds of schools suffering from severe structural damage. The situation in Sivasagar and Charaideo mirrors this destruction; at the peak of the crisis, numerous educational facilities were rendered entirely inaccessible, as they were either completely submerged or rapidly converted into temporary relief camps to house displaced families. The damage extends far beyond the mere structural integrity of the concrete or wooden buildings. Floodwaters, carrying thick mud, debris, and potentially toxic river silt, have breached classrooms, completely ruining the internal learning environments where students spend their formative years. Crucial academic assets, including carefully curated school libraries, modern computer laboratories, vital administrative records, and basic wooden furniture, have been destroyed or rendered entirely unusable by the prolonged exposure to contaminated water. The process of reclaiming these spaces is not as simple as waiting for the water to evaporate; the receding floods leave behind a hazardous layer of sludge that requires extensive, time-consuming sanitization and manual clearing before the campuses can be deemed safe. Furthermore, the dual use of schools as emergency relief camps complicates the timeline for academic resumption. While these institutions

serve a vital humanitarian purpose by sheltering those who have lost their homes, their continued occupation means that students remain displaced from their classrooms. This massive infrastructural blow necessitates a substantial financial injection for repairs and a dedicated workforce to oversee the physical restoration of hundreds of scattered, rural campuses.

Beyond the severe structural ruin of buildings and classrooms, the floods have exacted a heavy, deeply personal toll on the students themselves, fundamentally disrupting their daily access to learning materials and inflicting significant psychological trauma that is often overlooked in disaster assessments. As the floodwaters rapidly inundated homes across Sivasagar, Charaideo, and Jorhat, families were forced to flee with only their lives and the clothes on their backs, leaving behind personal belongings, which for young students included their most essential academic tools. Thousands of students lost their carefully maintained textbooks, handwritten notebooks, school uniforms, and irreplaceable educational documents to the rising, muddy waters. This sudden loss of basic learning materials creates an immediate, tangible barrier to education, as students find themselves entirely unequipped to resume their studies even if their schools were to miraculously reopen. However, the deprivation of physical materials is only one facet of this complex crisis; the emotional and psychological impact of the disaster is arguably far more debilitating and long-lasting. Many young learners have been subjected to the profound trauma of witnessing their homes destroyed, their tight-knit communities uprooted, and their familiar surroundings washed away. The sudden transition from the structured, predictable environment of a classroom to the chaotic, uncertain reality of a crowded relief camp breeds severe anxiety, stress, and a deep sense of insecurity among the youth. The disruption of their daily routines creates an environment where academic focus becomes nearly impossible to maintain. Recognising this fragile emotional state, educational authorities have adjusted their standard pedagogical approaches. Teachers have been directed to closely monitor the physical and mental well-being of their students, coordinating with local health workers. The focus has necessarily shifted from rigorous academic progression to providing vital emotional support and a desperately needed sense of stability, proving that recovery involves mental healing.

In direct response to the widespread devastation, the state government and the education department have actively mobilized a series of immediate interventions aimed at restoring a semblance of normalcy and mitigating the immense losses suffered by the educational sector in Upper Assam. Spearheading these crucial recovery efforts, the state's leadership initiated comprehensive review meetings to meticulously assess the institution-wise damage across the hardest-hit districts of Jorhat, Sivasagar, and Charaideo. Recognizing the acute financial paralysis of the affected schools, the government promptly sanctioned an interim relief fund for every flood-ravaged educational institution to kickstart the most urgent repairs, debris removal, and campus cleaning processes. Acknowledging that schools which lost expensive infrastructure like computer science labs and extensive libraries would require significantly more capital to function properly, officials committed to providing additional, need-based financial assistance following detailed damage assessments. To directly address the severe loss of personal academic property, the government undertook the massive logistical task of re-issuing essen-

tial school supplies, successfully coordinating the distribution of new textbooks and replacement uniforms to thousands of affected students, while also announcing streamlined provisions for the free replacement of destroyed academic certificates. The administration also rightly recognized that the timeline for physical restoration would vary greatly depending on the geographical severity of the damage, prompting the urgent exploration of alternative educational delivery methods. Authorities strongly emphasized the utilization of digital modes of learning to ensure that the academic gap does not widen uncontrollably while schools remain under intensive repair or continue to function as vital relief camps. Furthermore, there has been a strategic prioritization in the academic recovery process, placing a special, urgent focus on restoring classes for higher secondary students whose board examinations and future career prospects are highly sensitive to prolonged academic disruptions.

The delicate process of reopening schools and actually resuming formal academic instruction in the immediate aftermath of the floods has proven to be a phased, highly challenging endeavor, requiring immense localized coordination and flexible decision-making at the grassroots level. As the floodwaters slowly receded in the elevated parts of Upper Assam, the education department set tentative target dates for the resumption of classes, contingent entirely on the post-flood campus conditions and comprehensive safety audits. However, this recovery timeline has been heavily fragmented by the stark, uneven reality on the ground. In specific revenue circles of Sivasagar and Charaideo, where the inundation was particularly deep and devastating, higher officials had to authorize school headmasters to inde-

pendently assess the safety, structural integrity, and hygiene of their respective campuses before officially allowing any students back through the gates. The return to the classroom has been accompanied by a deliberate, cautious shift in academic strategy designed specifically to accommodate the continuing hardships faced by recovering families. Anticipating notably low initial attendance rates due to ongoing residential displacement,

ruined transportation networks, and prevailing health concerns, the district education departments issued empathetic directives regarding the daily curriculum. To ease the tough transition and ensure that no student is left permanently behind due to circumstances beyond their control, teachers were strictly instructed



DEGREE OF THOUGHT
By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan



Apprised Amit Shah of Manipur people's demand for NRC before census: Biren Singh

IMPHAL, Aug 18: Former Manipur chief minister N Biren Singh on Tuesday said he has held a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah and apprised him of the people's demand for NRC before the conduct of any census activity in the state.

Singh, who returned to Imphal this morning after a two-day visit to New Delhi, said he also raised the issues of economic blockades resulting in the disruption of supplies of essential commodities and an increase in prices.

"I went to Delhi to meet Home Minister Amit Shah and met him yesterday after getting an appointment. I apprised him of the issues related to economic blockades and counter-blockades, which shot up prices of essential commodities and affected supplies of commodities. Shah assured me of addressing the issues soon," the ex-chief minister said.

Singh said he informed Shah about the people's appeal for the "conduct of the National Register



of Citizens (NRC) that was taken up by my government in February 2023" before the ethnic strife broke out in the state.

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

"The Ministry of Home Affairs and the registrar general had then

informed that the demand sent by the then government was being considered. I also apprised Shah that people are not against the conduct of census but are demanding NRC first and then conduct of census," he said.

Students, demanding implementation of the NRC in Manipur before the census, staged a demonstration outside the Direc-

torate of Census Operations here on Sunday, prompting the police to fire tear gas shells to disperse them.

Hundreds of protesters in Imphal East and Imphal West districts also held a torch rally on August 16 evening, demanding implementation of the NRC before any census activity in the state to identify illegal immigrants.

Singh said that people are apprehensive that the "presence of illegal immigrants in the state has affected demographic imbalance".

"As per the government records, there are 926 unrecognised villages. There is a request to the government for recognition of these villages as well. Shah gave a patient hearing to our concerns. I genuinely believe and feel that there will be a positive response to the demands raised by the people," Singh said.

He also appealed to the people not to resort to bandhs and violence out of frustration. (PTI)

Won't take decision that affects tourism interests: Sikkim CM on proposed online permit system



GANGTOK, Aug 18: Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Tuesday assured tourism stakeholders that the government would not introduce any system that adversely affects their interests, amid concerns over the proposed online permit system.

Addressing a consultative meeting on the proposed system at Manan Kendra in Gangtok, Tamang said the digital platform was aimed at making the permit process faster, more transparent and accountable, and not at creat-

ing difficulties for those dependent on the existing mechanism.

"The government will not take any decision or undertake any initiative that adversely affects the interests, livelihoods or welfare of any stakeholder group," Tamang said.

Tourists, both Indians and foreigners, visiting border-adjacent regions in Sikkim, such as Tsomgo Lake, Nathula Pass, Yumthang Valley, and Gurudongmar Lake, require a Protected Area Permit. Additionally, foreign tourists also need a Restricted Area Permit to

enter Sikkim, officials said.

The documents are issued offline, often leading to uncertainties in travel plans. To streamline the process, the government plans to introduce an online system, they said.

The CM urged tour operators, hoteliers, taxi associations and other stakeholders not to be swayed by speculation.

"The objective is to bring greater efficiency, transparency and accountability into the permit process while ensuring that the transition does not create difficulties for those currently dependent on the existing system," Tamang said.

He stressed that the government remained open to dialogue and would consider genuine concerns, suggestions and feedback from tourism stakeholders before and during implementation.

Tamang said stakeholder consultation would remain central to the exercise to ensure that the technology-driven system works effectively on the ground without disrupting Sikkim's tourism ecosystem. (PTI)

Manipur MLA delegation to visit New Delhi to apprise central leaders on NRC: Govt spokesperson



IMPHAL, Aug 18: The Manipur government on Tuesday reiterated its stand that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) updation should be taken up in the state and that a delegation of MLAs will be visiting New Delhi to apprise the central leaders of the issue.

Manipur government spokesperson and MLA Dr Sapam Ranjan Singh told reporters that "The government has been very, very serious on the issues pertaining to NRC and the census and concerns related to demographic imbalances and changes. The concerns of the people are also ours."

Singh said, "Manipur Legisla-

tive Assembly had passed a resolution on August 5, 2022, urging that the NRC be taken up in the state. The resolution was subsequently reaffirmed by the Assembly on March 1, 2024. This has been a long-standing issue of utmost concern for our government. The government has been corresponding with the Union Home Ministry."

He also said that a team of MLAs would visit New Delhi to seek guidance and urge the Central government to take up the NRC updation.

Singh said, "We have been pushing for NRC right from before and have been continuing the re-

quest to central leadership. We had already planned that a team of MLAs will be going to Delhi to seek guidance and also to request them to make sure that NRC is taken up before the census. It's the responsibility of all of us. I am sure positive directions will come up."

He also stressed that the issue should be addressed collectively, irrespective of political party, community or other differences, as it concerns the future of the state and its people.

Singh also reiterated that the state government acknowledges the demand of civil society organisations and the people of Manipur that NRC should be conducted before the Census.

On the ongoing bandh and protests, Singh said that peaceful protest is a democratic right and appealed to the protesters to express their grievances peacefully and democratically without resorting to violence or causing inconvenience to the general public, students and people whose livelihoods may be affected by the disruptions. (PTI)

MP nominated as member of Petroleum Ministry consultative committee

ITANAGAR, Aug 18: Arunachal Pradesh Rajya Sabha MP Tai Tagak has been nominated as a member of the official Consultative Committee for the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, officials here said on Tuesday.

Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein welcomed Tagak's nomination and congratulated him on the new responsibility.

"Congratulations to Hon'ble Member of Rajya Sabha Shri @TaiTagak ji on his nomination as a member of the official Consultative Committee for the

Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas," Mein said in a post on X on Tuesday. The deputy chief minister said the nomination was a recognition of Tagak's experience and commitment to public service and an opportunity for him to contribute to important national discussions in the energy sector.

"Wishing him every success in this new responsibility," he added.

Tagak, a senior BJP leader, was elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Arunachal Pradesh earlier this year. (PTI)

46 militants of banned KCP (Taibanganba) surrender before police in Manipur

IMPHAL, Aug 18: Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Tuesday said 46 militants belonging to the proscribed Kangleipak Communist Party (Taibanganba) surrendered before the police, and assured them of providing assistance so that they can earn a livelihood.

The members of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (Taibanganba) laid down their arms at a "Homecoming Ceremony" organised by the state government at the 1st Manipur Rifles parade ground here.

Addressing the gathering, Singh said, "I think as a result of a conflict that broke out three years ago, many took up arms. I warmly welcome KCP (Taibanganba) and the group members, who laid down their arms. They understood that arms cannot bring progressive development."

The chief minister was referring to the ethnic violence that erupted in the state between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities on May 3, 2023. The clashes left at least 260 people dead and thousands of others homeless, forcing them to live in relief camps across the region.

The CM said the surrender of 46 members of the banned outfit was effected under the revised surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy of 2018.

The government will also provide assistance of skill development programmes to help them get a suitable livelihood.

"A state can develop only when there is peace and security



and with strengthening of police administration. A peaceful land can come when sections of people drop the desire to take up arms," Singh said.

Forty-six militants of the banned Kangleipak Communist Party (People's War Group) surrendered before security forces in Manipur last month.

In his address, Director General of Police Mukesh Singh said that by giving up armed activities, the cadres have chosen to return to their families, communities and duties as citizens.

He said that Manipur Police will continue to perform its constitutional duties with firmness.

At the same time, for those who truly give up violence and want to rejoin society, the police will support the legal process of surrender, verification and rehabilitation, the police officer said.

The DGP also asked the surrendered cadres to remain fully committed to their decision, as the "success of this homecoming will not be judged by today's event, but by how they behave in future". (PTI)

First Khasi woman M'laya chief secy dies



SHILLONG, Aug 18: Former Meghalaya chief secretary Rebecca V Suchiang, who was the first woman from the indigenous Khasi community to hold the post, died on Tuesday after prolonged illness, her family said. She was 64.

Her family members said that the 1989-batch IAS officer of the Assam-Meghalaya cadre had been in and out of hospital for some time. She served as the chief secretary of Meghalaya from September 30, 2021, till her retirement on July 31, 2022.

Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma expressed grief over her death and remembered her as a bold and dedicated administrator who continued to serve despite her health struggles.

"As the first indigenous woman chief secretary, Rebecca V Suchiang made bold decisions at tough times and was respected for her leadership, her guidance for her juniors and her inspiring work ethic," Sangma said in a social media post.

"Her service and dedication to the state will be remembered," he said. (PTI)

Khawzawl district authorities destroy drugs worth ₹ 4.13 cr

AIZAWL, Aug 18: District authorities of Mizoram's Khawzawl on Tuesday destroyed drugs worth more than ₹ 4.13 crore, officials said.

The drugs, seized between April and June this year, comprised 1.97 kg of methamphetamine valued at ₹ 1.57 crore and 1.28 kg of heroin worth ₹ 2.56 crore, they said.

The seizures were linked to 15 cases registered at Khawzawl police station, in which 17 people were arrested.

Speaking on the occasion, Khawzawl District Superintendent of Police F Lalbiakauva highlighted the cooperation between the police, Excise and Narcotics Department and civil society organisations, including the Young Mizo Association (YMA) and Mizo Hmeichhe In-suihkhawm Pawl (MHIP), in tackling the drug menace.

According to officials, Khawzawl Police have registered 26 cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act, and arrested 39 people in drug-related cases this year.

The total value of drugs seized in Khawzawl district so far this year stood at ₹ 18.53 crore, they said.

The figures showed a sharp increase over 2025, when Khawzawl Police registered 12 NDPS cases and seized drugs worth ₹ 2.36 crore. (PTI)

IMD forecast heavy rain in several parts of Arunachal from today



ITANAGAR, Aug 18: The IMD has forecast heavy rain and thunderstorms in several parts of Arunachal Pradesh from Wednesday.

The districts likely to witness heavy rain include Tawang, West Kameng, East Kameng, Papum Pare, Lower Subansiri, Upper Subansiri, East Siang, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit, Anjaw, Namsai, Changlang, Tirap and Longding, among others.

The weather is likely to remain unsettled on Thursday, with rain and thunderstorms forecast in parts of the state. Several districts in the western, central and eastern regions have been placed under watch, while isolated heavy rainfall is also likely in some areas, the IMD said.

On Friday, rain and thunderstorms are expected to continue in several districts, particularly over parts of western, southern and eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

The weather is likely to improve gradually over the weekend, with the warning map for

Saturday showing fewer areas under watch. However, rain and thunderstorms may continue in parts of the western and southern districts, as well as isolated areas in the eastern region.

Residents in affected areas have been advised to remain alert and take necessary precautions during the period of adverse weather.

They have been asked to avoid taking shelter under trees or weak structures, check road and traffic conditions before travelling, avoid unnecessary journeys and follow advisories issued by the concerned authorities.

Authorities have urged people to remain cautious as localised weather conditions may change rapidly.

The death toll in the ongoing spell of floods and landslides, triggered by rain, in the northeastern state has been estimated at 12, while the calamity has affected 1,55,858 people, spreading across 28 districts. (PTI)

Khandu submits report on devp during his 10-year tenure to Shah

ITANAGAR, Aug 18: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu said he has called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi and presented a comprehensive report on the state's development during his 10-year tenure.

In a social media post on Monday, Khandu said he briefed the home minister on several key development initiatives underway across the frontier state and sought his continued guidance and support.

Expressing gratitude on behalf of the people of Arunachal Pradesh, the chief minister acknowledged Shah's "unwavering support and keen interest in ensuring the region's long-term peace, progress, and prosperity".

On July 16, the chief minister completed 10 years in office. (PTI)

NO. KDB/BTC/15th FC(UT)/NT/2026-27/1122 Dated:17/08/2026

PRESS NOTICE

Tender No.KDB/BTC/2026

The BDO, Kokrajhar Development Block invites Bids from registered contractors with PWD (Roads/Building) or Registered contractor with BTC in the category of class II and above for the works against "Const. of 1 km village ICBP road at Mainaobil Village (Activity Code-128462919)" under the award of 15th FC (Untied Grant) for the financial year 2025-26 during 2026-27 for an amount of Rs. 50, 00,000.00(Rupees Fifty Lakh) only.

The detail may be seen at the website <http://assamtenders.gov.in> and also in the Office of the undersigned during Office hours.

N. B. The bill of the contractor will be paid only after receiving the fund from BTC.

Sd/-Block Development Officer
Kokrajhar Development Block, Titaguri

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1301

No.CHD/UDD/1/FC/NT/2026-27/882 Dated:the Kokrajhar 11th August/2026.

SHORT TENDER NOTICE

Sealed tenders affixing court fee of Rs. 8.25 (rupees eight and paise twenty five) are invited by the CHD, Urban Development Department, BTC, Kokrajhar from the reputed Government registered Contractor/Firm/Supplier for the works **under 15th FC (Untied Grant) 1st & 2nd installment for the year 2025-26.**

The detailed tender documents may be obtained from the office of the undersigned during office hours from 11th August to 30th August/2026 up to 2.00 pm on application in plain paper along with payment of prescribed Bid Cost (non-refundable) for each work in the form of demand draft in favour of the 'Principal Secretary, BTC, payable at 'Kokrajhar'.

The last date for submission of the completed tender is 31/08/2026 upto 2.00 pm and shall be opened on the same day at 3.00 pm in presence of contractor or his/her authorized representative.

Sd/-
Urban Development Department,
BTC:Kokrajhar

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1307

No. PMDB/ Tender/ Dated Pachim mangaldai, the 14th Aug/2026

SHORT NOTICE INVITING TENDER

Sealed tenders affixing a non-refundable court fee stamp of Rs. 8.25 (Rupees eight & paise twenty-five) only which a validity period of 180 days, which will subsequently be converted and drawn up in the printed P.W.D. F-2 form are invited from the registered eligible contractors of Class-II & Class-I (A,B,C) category registered under PWD (Bldge) Department, Assam and Bodoland Territorial Council for submitting tenders against 1(one)/nos. of Schemes under Direct Grant of 15th FC(Tied Grant) for the year 2025-26

Tenders will be received up to 2-00 p.m. on 05-09-2026 and will be opened on the same date & place at 3-00 p.m.

Name of work	Estimated Amount	Category of Contractor	Demand Draft/ Bank Draft Amount	Time of completion
Const. of Community toilet at Mahajihur Zame maszid(AC-128524886)	1785833.00	Class-I(A, B, & C) & Class-II	600.00	45 Days

Detail N.I.T. may be seen in all working days in the office of the undersigned. Tender paper will be issued to the contractor or their authorized agent from 28/08/2026 to 30/08/2026 in the office of the undersigned on payment.

Sd/-Block Development Officer
Pachim Mangaldai Dev. Block, Mangaldai

IPR(BTC)/C/2026-27/1323

UK defiant amid Russian threat of ‘consequences’ over drone supply to Ukraine



LONDON, Aug 18: Prime Minister Andy Burnham on Tuesday hit back with a defiant commitment to continue supporting Ukraine after Russia threatened “consequences” over the use of British drones by Kyiv for strikes on Moscow.

The Russian Embassy in London said in a statement posted on its social media channels on Monday that the UK was acting as an “accomplice and co-perpetrator” in a conflict it has classified as “terrorist attacks” by Ukraine.

Burnham reiterated the UK’s “100 per cent” support for Ukraine to be able to defend itself in the face of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aggression.

“This is the UK doing what it has long said it would do, which is to support Ukraine 100 per cent against this illegal war led by Vladimir Putin,” said Burnham, when asked to respond to the Russian Embassy statement.

“We are providing support so that Ukraine can defend itself, and

that’s been the British position all the way through this conflict by previous prime ministers. It remains the case with me. We are not fair-weather friends. We will be there in Ukraine’s hour of need, and that won’t change,” he said.

“The Sunday Times” reported over the weekend that drones made by two UK companies have been supplied to Ukraine, where forces deployed them as part of a so-called “deep-strike campaign”.

“Reports that the Kiev [Kyiv] regime is using British drones to carry out strikes deep inside Russian territory confirm that London is deliberately opting for an escalation of the Ukraine crisis, while hypocritically professing a desire for peace,” the Russian Embassy to the UK said in a post on Telegram.

“In doing so, the United Kingdom is acting as an accomplice and co-perpetrator of the bloody crimes and terrorist attacks committed by Ukrainian neo-Nazis, seeking to contain Russia and inflict maximum damage on it by proxy. (PTI)

Ukraine aims a drone blitz at Moscow as Russian missiles kill 10 in a Ukrainian village

Putin continues to drag out the war instead of accepting Ukraine’s realistic ceasefire proposals

KYIV, Aug 18: Ukrainian forces staged one of their biggest drone attacks on Russia since Moscow’s invasion more than four years ago, firing almost 800 drones just two days after launching a similar salvo, officials said Tuesday.

Meanwhile, a Russian missile strike on a village in Ukraine’s northeastern Kharkiv region killed at least 10 people and wounded eight others as the barrage demolished homes, officials said Tuesday.

The warring countries are locked in an escalating duel of long-range aerial strikes. Fighting on the roughly 1,250-kilometre (780-mile) front line in eastern and southern Ukraine is restricted by large numbers of drones and ground robots threatening troop movements, and neither side is making significant battlefield progress, analysts say.

Over the past year Ukraine has



devised and deployed domestically produced long-range drones for strikes deep inside Russia. Its drone technology has impressed governments and defence manufacturers around the world.

Kyiv officials aim to make the Russian public feel the war’s consequences and pressure Russian President Vladimir Putin into negotiating a peace settlement. Putin has so far shown no sign he intends

to stop the invasion.

“Putin continues to drag out the war instead of accepting Ukraine’s realistic ceasefire proposals and ending the bloodshed,” Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said in a post on X.

Russian air defences overnight intercepted 791 Ukrainian drones over a number of Russian regions, as well as annexed Crimea and the Black and the Azov seas, the De-

fence Ministry in Moscow said, in what was the second-largest drone attack since January 2025, according to an Associated Press tally.

More than 600 Ukrainian drones flew toward the Moscow region, where 180 were shot down, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said. He didn’t provide further details.

Officials reported no deaths or major damage. Ukraine has increasingly launched swarms of hundreds of drones in an attempt to overwhelm Russian air defenses.

In the Moscow region that surrounds but doesn’t include the Russian capital, three people were wounded, Gov Andrei Vorobyov said.

Three people were also wounded in the Ryazan region adjacent to the Moscow region where three private houses were damaged by the attack, Gov. Pavel Malkov said. (AP)

Turkey’s Erdogan signs law offering conditional pardon for thousands of PKK militants

ANKARA (TURKEY), Aug 18: Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has signed into law a measure that would introduce a conditional pardon for thousands of Kurdish militants as part of a government peace effort with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK. The measure was published in the Official Gazette on Tuesday. It will only come into force after Turkey’s National Security Council confirms that the group has fully dissolved itself and disarmed.

Parliament approved the bill overwhelmingly last week. It would suspend certain prison sentences for convicted PKK members and postpone ongoing investigations and trials against others for five or 10 years, depending on the severity of the crime. Authorities would drop the cases against the individuals if they don’t re-offend during those periods. The legislation also establishes a committee to oversee the group’s disarmament, with its first meeting expected next week.

Last year, the PKK — considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and its Western allies — announced its decision to disband, following a call by its imprisoned leader, Abdullah Ocalan. Ocalan and other key PKK figures are excluded from the pardon. Soon after that, some fighters laid down their weapons in a symbolic ceremony in northern Iraq, where the group is based, and withdrew some fighters from key locations in Turkey to Iraq. (AP)

Russia summons Japanese envoy following Putin’s visit to disputed islands

MOSCOW, Aug 18: Russia’s Foreign Ministry on Tuesday summoned the Japanese ambassador to protest Tokyo’s condemnation of President Vladimir Putin’s trip to Kuril Islands, the Moscow-controlled Pacific archipelago that is claimed by both countries.

Last week, Putin visited Iturup, one of the four southernmost islands of the chain, which Japan calls the Northern Territories. The Soviet Union took them from Japan in the final days of World War II, and the dispute has kept the countries from signing a peace treaty formally ending their hostilities. Japan’s Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said Putin’s visit, his first to the islands, was “incompatible with the Japanese position on the Northern Territories” and is “absolutely unacceptable.” She said the visit was a further blow to already-strained ties between the two countries over Ukraine, and that Moscow should understand the consequences.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi said Tokyo “strongly protests” Putin’s visit to Iturup, which Japan calls Etorofu, noting that “the Northern Territories, including Etorofu Island, are Japan’s inherent territory both historically and from the perspective of international law.”

On Tuesday, Russia’s Deputy Foreign



Minister Mikhail Galuzin met with the Japanese Ambassador Akira Muto to lodge a formal protest over the “anti-Russia” statements by Takaichi and Motegi.

“Russia’s sovereignty and jurisdiction over the southern Kuril Islands are absolutely unshakable,” Galuzin told Muto, according to the Foreign Ministry.

“These territories passed to our country as a result of World War II that was enshrined in the relevant agreements of the Allied Powers and the UN Charter,” the ministry said. “Any attempts by the Japanese side to directly or indirectly call this obvious reality into question are absolutely unacceptable and unlawful.” (AP)

Sri Lankan govt presents bill to extend retirement age of judges



COLOMBO, Aug 18: Sri Lanka’s government on Tuesday presented a constitutional amendment bill to extend the retirement age of judges, despite strong opposition from various political parties and the country’s bar association.

Minister of Justice and National Integration Harshana Nanayakkara presented the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution Bill, that seeks to extend the retirement age of Supreme Court judges from 65 to 67 and the Court of Appeal judges from 63 to 65.

The minister also presented the

Judicature (Amendment) Bill, which includes amendments to extend the retirement age of judges in other courts.

The government argued that extending judges’ terms was a necessity to clear the current backlog of over 1.1 million cases.

Earlier, the cabinet approved the bills, paving the way for them to be presented to parliament.

The bills were presented despite opposition from the Bar Association of Sri Lanka, members of the Judicial Service Association and the Commonwealth Lawyers’ As-

sociation.

The opposition parties and the Buddhist clergy leaders also protested against the bills.

The opposition calls the bills a “direct assault on the independence of the country’s judiciary.”

It said the move will empower the executive president with the capacity to manipulate the judiciary’s functioning.

The opposition has two weeks from Tuesday to file objections in the Supreme Court against the amendment.

As per the process, the court’s determination on the petitions must be delivered to the Speaker of Parliament within 21 days.

The Supreme Court’s determination must be followed if the proposed amendment is to proceed.

According to sources, the amendment would be debated in parliament by late September and would be formally adopted with a two-thirds majority in the 225-member assembly.

The NPP government has a two-thirds parliamentary majority. (PTI)

Grenade attack near school in Afghan capital wounds numerous children, authorities say

KABUL, Aug 18: A hand grenade attack near a school in the Afghan capital Kabul on Monday afternoon wounded multiple children, authorities said.

Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadran said late Monday that “a number of children” had been wounded, and said an investigation was underway. He did not provide further details.

Richard Bennett, the United Nations’ special rapporteur for Afghanistan, on Tuesday condemned “the heinous attack harming numerous children near a school” the previous day.

Afghan media said around 50 children were hurt in the blast, which occurred in a part of the capital populated mainly by the Hazara ethnic minority.

Hazaras, who make up around nine per cent of the Afghan population, have long suffered attacks and persecution in Afghanistan. Most are Shiite Muslims, and they have been targeted repeatedly in the past by Sunni Muslim radicals like the Islamic State group, while



they have also faced discrimination in the Sunni majority country.

In May 2021, a few months before the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in the wake of a chaotic withdrawal of US-led troops, three bombings at a school in Kabul killed dozens of people, all of them from the Hazara community and most of them young girls leaving class.

That school, like the one where the explosion occurred Monday, was in Kabul’s Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood, the main Hazara district in the Afghan capital. (AP)

Pak SC orders shifting of jailed ex-PM Imran Khan to private hospital for medical check-up

ISLAMABAD, Aug 18: The Pakistan Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered that jailed former prime minister Imran Khan be shifted to a private hospital for medical assessment and treatment.

The court ordered that Khan be taken to Shifa International Hospital in Islamabad in the next few days and remain there until the next hearing on September 16.

It also ordered the constitution of a medical board to assess the health of the 73-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician and treat him.

Khan, who is the founder of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf political party, has been in Rawalpindi’s Adiala Jail since 2023, with several cases against him.

His supporters continue to protest against his incarceration. His relatives and party colleagues have repeatedly alleged human rights violations, and accused the authorities of restricting his access to adequate medical care, family visits and legal counsel.

The court directive came while hearing several identical petitions following Khan’s eye ailment that surfaced earlier this year. The petitioners had sought his transfer to a private hospital, saying they were not satisfied with the treatment he was receiving at government hospitals.

“Mindful of the fundamental rights, we are issuing this order to ensure the health and safety of the prisoner,” Justice Shahid Waheed, head of a three-member bench, said while passing the order, a day after prison authorities told the top court that Khan’s eye condition had improved significantly and his vision was “almost normal.”

As it ordered the constitution of a medical board to assess and treat Khan, the bench also directed a senior doctor and Khan’s personal physician to be present during his medical assessment and treatment. The cost of Khan’s treatment in the private hospital will be borne by his family.

The bench stressed that law and order outside the hospital must not be affected during Khan’s stay and directed his party and supporters not to use the medical report for political purposes.

The court warned that any violation of its directions could result in the withdrawal of facilities being provided to Khan.

In its report, the jail authorities included a summary of 39 medical check-ups conducted by different specialists between November 4, 2023 and August 10, 2026. It said several government doctors had examined Khan, with records of the consultations maintained by the jail authorities.

According to the report, Khan received treatment from leading ophthalmologists in Islamabad and Rawalpindi and his affected eye had “almost regained normal vision.”

Khan was taken to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences in Islamabad for eye treatment multiple times after his ailment — right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) — came to light in late January.

“Consequently, significant improvement of his eye has been noticed, and his vision returned to almost normal,” the jail authorities said in the report.

It added that the medical interventions and improvement in his vision showed that the jail administration had made all-out efforts to provide Khan with the best healthcare facilities.

Khan’s party colleagues have dismissed the claims.

The order comes at a time when voices accusing the Pakistani authorities of human rights violations against Khan have grown louder.

Earlier this month, Amnesty International accused Pakistani authorities of systematically denying him a fair trial and subjecting him to prolonged unlawful solitary confinement.

Last week, activists associated with Khan’s political party staged a demonstration outside the Supreme Court over his health condition and the alleged denial of meetings with him, a claim the government has dismissed.

They called off the protest after being assured that the matter would be heard the following week.

On Tuesday, the apex court summoned Adiala Jail officials to the next hearing on September 16 and directed them to submit Khan’s complete medical record. (PTI)

China rolls out new measures to boost consumption in counties, smaller cities

The government calls for upgrading consumption channels in counties

BEIJING, Aug 18: China on Tuesday rolled out a series of measures to boost consumption in its counties and smaller cities to revive sluggish domestic demand, which has become a major source of its economic slowdown.

The measures herald a policy shift to boost domestic demand from top cities and tap the potential of vast lower-tier markets as a new source of economic growth, an official announcement here said.

The government calls for upgrading consumption channels in counties, including renovating township commercial centres, rural markets and local fairs.

It includes encouraging domestic and international brands to open regional debut stores and promote the revitalisation of existing land resources to improve services, according to the guideline issued by the Ministry of Commerce.

The lower-tier markets, generally referring to third-tier and smaller cities, counties, townships and rural areas, account for about 70 per cent of China’s population and 60 per cent of total retail sales of consumer goods.



The guideline urges better services that cater to the elderly and children, more efficient urban-rural distribution networks, and stronger county-level employment. It also includes more channels for residents to increase their incomes, state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

The measures come as China seeks to give domestic consumption a bigger role in driving economic growth and to reduce over-reliance on exports as part of its efforts to rebalance the economy.

China’s GDP shrank to 4.3 per cent in the second quarter, the softest quarterly expansion since late 2022, down from five per cent in the first quarter.

Despite its economic heft, China’s household consumption remained around 40 per cent of its GDP in comparison to India’s 60 per cent, USA’s 68 per cent, the UK’s 62 per cent and Japan’s 55 per cent, according to International Monetary Fund data.

The ruling Communist Party is concerned over the slowdown as China’s economic performance becomes increasingly uneven, with growth supported by exports while domestic consumption is constrained by the real estate downturn and persistent labour market weakness.

The imbalances continued to deepen in July. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on Monday, retail sales a major gauge of consumer spending, grew by just 0.6 per cent due to sluggish retail sales and a fixed-asset investment slump, highlighting persistent weakness in domestic demand. (PTI)

Opening arguments set to begin in Meta’s federal trial over child safety

OAKLAND, Aug 18: Opening arguments are set to kick off Tuesday in a pivotal trial for Meta Platforms in a California federal court.

Attorneys general from California, Colorado, Kentucky and New Jersey are seeking extensive financial damages plus changes to how the company operates Facebook and Instagram.

Twenty-nine states sued the tech giant in 2023 over child safety and privacy — the other 25 will go to trial later. The company also faces lawsuits in state courts.

The lawsuit accuses the social media giant of contributing to the youth mental health crisis by knowingly and deliberately designing features that get children addicted to its platforms. It also argues that Meta routinely collects data on children under 13 without their parents’ consent, in violation of federal law.

“This week, we’re in court with



the largest consumer protection lawsuit in American history. We’ll show a jury that Meta concealed what it knew about the harm its products cause young people because looking away was more profitable,” said Kentucky Attorney General Russell Coleman in a statement.

Meta said it believes it has a strong case.

“We are proud of our record in protecting teens on our platforms and the amount of effort that we’ve

put into developing protections over the years, even before these cases were ever filed, and continuing to the present day. We look forward to showing the judge and the jury those facts in court,” the company said in a statement.

US District Judge Yvonne Gonzalez Rogers in Oakland will oversee the proceedings, which are expected to last six to eight weeks, with Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and other executives and former employees testifying. (AP)

‘All students and young people are distressed by paper leaks’

State may use excessive force: Tejashwi Yadav day ahead of RJD's Lok Bhavan march

PATNA, Aug 18: RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Tuesday expressed apprehension about “excessive use of force” by the administration during the party’s march to Lok Bhavan on August 19 over police action against students agitating against NEET question paper leaks in Bihar last month.

At a press conference, he claimed student leaders were being “rounded up” and “many youths may be prevented from boarding trains” to join the march. Earlier in the day, RJD supremo Lalu Prasad called for a march to the Lok Bhavan against the “dictatorial attitude” of the state government that “responds to democratic demands with bullets from an AK-47”.

Tejashwi Yadav, who is the leader of the opposition in the Bihar Assembly, said, “We have learnt that the police has picked up many student leaders in Patna and they might stop youths from boarding trains tomorrow when



they are likely to join us in large numbers.”

“Our spirits are not down, but we do suspect that tomorrow police may take recourse to excessive use of force like it had done against students in the recent past,” the RJD working president said.

He demanded an inquiry to ascertain “on whose orders” a police constable in Siwan district “opened fire from an AK-47” during the state-wide student protest on July 25.

A police constable was sus-

able to carry an AK-47 rifle must be known, and those higher officials too must also be taken to task.”

Upping the ante against the BJP-led government in the state, RJD supremo Lalu Prasad took to X to say, “All students and young people are distressed by paper leaks, the deteriorating education system, a biased recruitment process and unemployment.”

“Instead of listening to their democratic demands, the arrogant government, built on a system of corruption and exploitation, responds by firing bullets from AK-47s. This is unjust. Everyone should unite in Patna on August 19 against this dictatorship and dictatorial attitude of the state government.”

Incidentally, the Bihar government on Tuesday made a major reshuffle in the police administration, transferring 18 IPS officers, including Siwan Superintendent of Police Pooran Kumar Jha. (PTI)

Victims of Maoist violence lash out at Chidambaram over his ‘proud to be dimaagi Naxal’ remark

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Several victims of Maoist violence decried senior Congress leader P Chidambaram on Tuesday for his “proud to be a dimaagi Naxal” remark, saying such statements should not be made only to “increase followers” or push “some kind of an agenda”.

“Hundreds of people have lost their lives in Naxal violence over the years. A large number of people, who have lost their body parts in various incidents of Naxal violence, are somehow living their life. This is not a joke,” Rudresh Singh, a victim of Maoist violence, told a press conference held here under the aegis of the Bastar Shanti Committee.

Singh, a Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) jawan, was one of the security personnel injured in an improvised explosive device (IED) blast and firing by Maoists during an anti-Naxalite operation in Chhattisgarh’s Bijapur district.

“And because of that, one of my legs ultimately had to be amputated below the knee,” he said.

“Sitting in an air-conditioned room in Delhi and saying ‘I am proud to be a dimaagi Naxal’ is



completely worthless talk. Such remarks should not be made just to increase followers or push some kind of an agenda,” he added.

Several other victims of Naxal violence, who came from Chhattisgarh’s Bastar region to hold the press conference at the Constitution Club of India here, also criticised Chidambaram, saying, “We are deeply hurt with his comment.”

Chidambaram took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday over his “dimaagi Naxal” remark and said, “I am proud to be a dimaagi Naxal.”

The Congress leader’s dig at the

prime minister came a day after Modi warned the country about the “dimaagi Naxals” who have allegedly entrenched themselves in the system and continue to pose a threat to society by manipulating policies. Modi urged citizens to “identify and isolate” them.

Speaking from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the occasion of the 80th Independence Day, the prime minister said the country has succeeded in removing armed Naxalism from the forests but warned that its ideological supporters are seeking opportunities to promote violence and anarchy. (PTI)

Govt delaying quashing of FIRs against protesters, alleges CJP

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Tuesday accused the Centre of delaying action on its assurance to withdraw FIRs against students and protesters and demanded that the outfit’s members be included in the high-powered committee announced by the Supreme Court to examine allegations of police excesses and violence against police personnel.

Speaking to the media outside the Supreme Court, CJP’s chief spokesperson Saurav Das said the apex court during the day’s hearing on the alleged violence against protesters on July 20 in and around Jantar Mantar had asked the government three times to provide a list of FIRs registered against protesters. He demanded that the government submit to the Supreme Court the list of cases that can be quashed.

The court was hearing a batch of pleas alleging police excesses against student protesters during the agitation spearheaded by the CJP and allegations of violence against police personnel.

Das said the petitioners, through their lawyer Vrinda Grover, urged the Supreme Court to invoke Article 142 to quash the FIRs against protesters across the country.

According to Das, Grover told the court that the Centre should have no objection to such a move as its representatives, including Union ministers J P Nadda and Jitendra Singh, had agreed to the demands of the protesters when the agitation was called off on July 25.

“The government has not given a commitment to the Supreme Court today that they are going to give it (the list of FIRs). The Supreme Court said three times to the government today that you should give us this list, only then will we quash it,” Das said. He claimed the government had also not honoured its assurances on compensation and had failed to hold subsequent meetings with representatives of the CJP.

“If you have given a commitment, then you will have to honour it. You are not honouring all the commitments you have made about compensation, about FIRs. So, you have betrayed the entire country,” Das said. He said that if the government fails to take steps to meet its commitments, the CJP’s National Working Committee would meet and decide its next course of action.

“If the youth of the country are forced to take to the streets again, then this time it will not be right for the government,” he said. CJP legal affairs head Ratna Singh said the last meeting between the organisation and the government delegation was on August 2 and a draft, vetted by lawyers, had subsequently been shared.

She alleged that there had been no response from the government to requests for another meeting.

“They even agreed that they will take a stand in the court with respect to invoking Article 142. They have not taken any such stand today,” Singh said, adding that the draft prepared with the government should be brought before the court.

Das said the government had identified around 2,800 “hardened criminals” and argued that those facing serious criminal charges should be dealt with separately from peaceful protesters. “If you want to take action against them, that is a different issue altogether. But the issue of the students, the issue of the protestors, is related to the FIR,” he said. On the proposed high-powered committee, Singh said the CJP would want its representatives to be included and insisted that the panel should comprise independent members. “We are sure that the High-Powered Committee will find a solution as long as it is independent. But we would also like the members of the CJP team to be a part of it.”

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it would constitute a high-powered committee comprising retired apex court and high court judges, a former DGP, and an ex-CBI director to examine allegations of police excesses against student protesters and violence against police personnel.

A bench of Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana said an order for constituting the committee would be released on Wednesday after it receives suggestions from parties on other members to be included in the panel.

Speaking to the media, Das also questioned the use of facial recognition technology during the Jantar Mantar protest, saying protesters were photographed, videographed and monitored through CCTV cameras. (PTI)

‘Modi ji, where is our MLA’: Kejriwal as AAP claims Delhi Police took MLA to undisclosed location

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday alleged that Delhi Police took its East Delhi Kondli MLA Kuldeep Kumar from his residence early in the morning and took him to an “undisclosed location”.

Kejriwal questioned the MLA’s whereabouts and sought an explanation from the Delhi Police, while AAP leaders alleged that Kumar was taken away around 4 am.

“Prime Minister Modi Ji, where is our MLA Kuldeep Kumar? At 4 am this morning, your Delhi Police picked up Kuldeep Kumar from his home, broke the CCTV cameras, and took the DVR along with them. Your police is not telling us anything,” Kejriwal said in a post on X.

The AAP leader asserted that if the police can pick up an MLA from his home without any information or any reason, then where can the common man go for help?

“This country will not tolerate such thuggery from you,” his post read further. There was no immediate response from the Delhi Police to the allegations.

AAP Delhi unit president Saurabh Bharadwaj said around 20 policemen in plain clothes came to Kumar’s residence and took him away.



He also alleged that the police were pressuring the family of a deceased sanitation worker to carry out the cremation.

The party leaders linked Kumar’s detention to his support for sanitation workers protesting over the killing of Anil, an on-duty sanitation worker in Kalyanpuri.

The protesters have been demanding ₹ 1 crore compensation for the family and a permanent government job for one of his family members. AAP leaders Atishi, Sanjay Singh and Sanjeev Jha also ques-

tioned the police action and sought information about Kumar’s whereabouts.

Atishi said the party would file a habeas corpus petition in the Delhi High Court at 2 pm, alleging that the police had not disclosed where the MLA had been taken.

Hundreds of sanitation workers and auto-tipper drivers had protested at Lal Bahadur Shastri Hospital on Monday over the killing of Anil and refused to allow his body to be taken from the mortuary for the last rites. (PTI)

Ensure peaceful functioning of House: Rajasthan Assembly Speaker Devnani at all-party meeting

JAIPUR, Aug 18: An all-party meeting chaired by Rajasthan Assembly Speaker Vasudev Devnani on Tuesday agreed to ensure the peaceful functioning of the House and maintain its dignity during the upcoming session beginning August 20.

Devnani urged the opposition to raise issues of public interest in accordance with the rules of the House and asked the state government to make all efforts to address them. Members of the ruling and opposition parties agreed to adopt a positive approach towards the proceedings, maintain the dignity of the House and the Chair, and refrain from using inappropriate language, according to an Assembly statement.

Both sides assured the speaker that members would put forward their views in a dignified manner and hold meaningful discussions on issues concerning the public.

Devnani assured the members that adequate time would be provided to all sides during discussions. (PTI)

CPI(M) MP Brittas writes to Jaishankar; seeks stronger diplomatic for seafarers

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: CPI(M) MP John Brittas on Tuesday wrote to External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar seeking stronger diplomatic and consular mechanisms for the safety, welfare and compensation rights of Indian seafarers working in conflict-affected maritime regions.

In his letter, Brittas said Indian seafarers face grave risks while operating in high-risk areas, particularly the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden, and the Black Sea. Citing the government’s response to his question in Rajya Sabha on July 30, Brittas said 16 Indian nationals, including 10 seafarers, lost their lives and 75 Indians had been injured since the outbreak of the conflict in the Middle East this year. He said the deaths included eight in Oman, four in the UAE, two in Kuwait and one each in Saudi Arabia and Iraq, while injuries were reported from the UAE, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

“Ten of the 16 Indian nationals killed in the Middle East conflict were seafarers -- a stark reminder of the risks they bear,” Brittas said in a post on X. Brittas, who is the leader of the CPI(M) group in Rajya Sabha, sought a “single, clearly identifiable 24x7 contact mechanism” through which a distressed Indian seafarer, family member or authorised representative could immediately reach the government or the Indian mission concerned. He also called for a common and readily accessible contact point for Indian seafarers sailing in the Red Sea, Persian Gulf and Black Sea, besides stronger mission-level intervention in cases involving disappearance, abandonment, detention, accidents, injury, death, non-payment of wages, evacuation and repatriation.

The CPI(M) MP also raised the case of Shinton Benny, a young man from Kochi and a deck officer trainee aboard the Japan-flagged Vicious Ace, operated by Mitsui O.S.K. Lines.

He said Benny has reportedly been missing since August 12

while the vessel was sailing from South Africa towards Singapore.

“I have also sought urgent diplomatic action to trace Shinton Benny, a young seafarer from Kochi, missing since 12 August while serving aboard ‘Victorious Ace’,” he said in his X post.

Brittas urged the government to expedite diplomatic and consular measures to trace Benny and ascertain his safety and whereabouts.

He also sought stronger assistance in securing death and injury compensation and other contractual dues of Indian seafarers, saying families often face difficulties in pursuing claims against overseas ship owners, employers, managers and insurers.

Referring to the recently strengthened Seafarers’ Welfare Fund Scheme, including the one-time assistance of ₹ 10 lakh for death or permanent disability in specified warlike or high-risk areas, Brittas said the assistance could not substitute for compensation contractually or legally payable by an employer, ship owner or insurer. (PTI)

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Congress calls omission of OBC from caste census ‘deep conspiracy’ by Modi govt

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: The Congress has accused the Modi government of deliberately omitting the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category from the caste census as part of a deep conspiracy.

The party’s OBC department head Anil Jaihind on Monday said the failure to include a separate column for OBCs in the census questionnaire violates the principles of social justice and prevents the true population figures of the OBC community from being recorded. Jaihind said that instead of conducting the caste census scientifically and transparently, the government is adopting a process that paves the way for excluding OBCs from official statistics.

A ‘Manuvadi’ (caste-hierarchical) system is operating in reality, he told reporters. Citing the notification issued on August 14, Jaihind pointed out the absence of a column to list the OBC category in the 10th question of the questionnaire. Congress leader Subhashini Sharad Yadav said the census must accurately identify castes, as the nature and manifestation of castes vary across different regions of the country. (PTI)

Prashant Kishor meets families of Lakhisarai stampede victims



LAKHISARAI, Aug 18: Jan Suraj party founder Prashant Kishor on Tuesday met the families of Lakhisarai temple stampede victims and those injured and alleged that the administration had “failed” to demonstrate the seriousness required to handle the tragedy.

Seven women devotees died and 25 people were injured in the stampede near the Ashok Dham temple in Lakhisarai district on Monday. The incident occurred due to a heavy rush of devotees at Ashok Dham Halt railway station, which is a short walk from the temple, and a rumour that electric current was spreading from a fallen pole.

“After speaking to people, it prima facie

appears that the administration did not show the seriousness it should have in handling the incident and making the necessary arrangements,” Kishor said.

The Bankipur MLA alleged that whenever an accident occurs in Bihar, the authorities tend to “settle the matter” by announcing a small compensation without fixing responsibility.

“Seven people have lost their lives, yet no administrative officer has faced any action so far,” he said.

Kishor questioned why no action had been taken against the district magistrate, superintendent of police, sub-divisional magistrate, deputy superintendent of police or the station house officer concerned.

“Not even a head constable or constable has been suspended,” he said.

Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary had announced ₹ 4 lakh ex gratia to the next of kin of each deceased on Monday. The district administration has also ordered an investigation into the incident.

The pilgrims had gathered there to offer water to Lord Shiva at the temple on Mondays during Shravan, a month considered sacred to Lord Shiva. (PTI)

Maharashtra Cabinet clears rehabilitation policy for Pandharpur

‘The 2032 championship is expected to bring economic activity of around ₹ 330 crore’

MUMBAI, Aug 18: The Maharashtra Cabinet on Tuesday cleared a rehabilitation policy for Pandharpur, paving the way for development works in the temple town, and approved a ₹ 6,477.88 crore allocation for Phase-II of the Jayakwadi irrigation project in Marathwada.

The Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis, also backed Pune’s bid to host the 2032 UCI Road World Championships, updated minor mineral mining rules under the ‘Mahakhanij 2.0’ portal, and restructured the Finance and Planning departments.

As per an official release, a rehabilitation policy for project-affected people in Pandharpur has been framed considering the town’s religious importance, local conditions, and the urgency of development works worth ₹ 3,993.90 crore undertaken there.

The Cabinet also approved the use of a ‘Trades Platform’ system in the Public Works Department to facilitate timely payment of pending dues to micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and contractors.

It approved grants for various sports



facilities under Phase-II of the district sports complex in Gadchiroli, with works estimated at ₹ 80.12 crore.

In another decision, the Cabinet granted 3,910 square metres of government land reserved for educational purposes in Sadar Bazar area of Solapur North to Shri Jambunani Mochi Samaj Seva Mandal for educational activities.

The government also allotted 15 hectares of land in Moshi, Pune district, to the Krantiveer Chapekar Committee, Krantitirth Chapekar Brothers National Museum in Chinchwad Gaon, and

Punarnathan Samarasata Gurukulam’s aided tribal residential school in Chinchwad. A comprehensive development centre for backward and deprived tribal communities will be established on the land, the release stated.

The Cabinet has approved the government support to Pune’s bid to host the UCI Road World Championships, a cycling event, in 2032.

The government will provide a letter of support, financial guarantees and assistance for infrastructure and other operational requirements for hosting the

event. The decision follows the successful organisation of the Pune Grand Tour 2026 by the Pune district administration and the Cycling Federation of India.

The 2032 championship is expected to bring economic activity of around ₹ 330 crore, the release said.

The Cabinet approved a financial provision of ₹ 6,477.88 crore for Phase-II of the Jayakwadi project, which will boost the Majalgaon dam project on the Sindphana River in the Godavari basin.

According to the release, the project is expected to provide irrigation to around 1,31,652 hectares in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, Ahilyanagar, Beed, Parbhani and Nanded districts. It will also boost industrial water supply, fisheries and power generation.

The Cabinet also cleared amendments to the Maharashtra Minor Mineral Extraction (Development and Regulation) Rules, 2013.

Under the ‘Mahakhanij 2.0’ portal, updated information on mining areas, storage areas and transportation of minor minerals will be made available transparently. (PTI)

Pant, Padikkal help India raise 372-run target in front of SL

GALLE, Aug 18: Rishabh Pant's quintessential 66 and Devdutt Padikkal's smooth 44 led India to 193 all out in their second innings, raising an improbable target of 372 in front of Sri Lanka at tea on the fourth day of the first Test here on Tuesday.

The lead has already gone past the highest ever successful chase in Test cricket at the Galle stadium—344 by Pakistan in 2022.

Sri Lankan bowlers were suitably rewarded for using the pitch and conditions to good effect with regular wickets.

But Padikkal first and Pant later ensured that there will not be too many jitters in the Indian camp.

Pant twisted, turned, twirled and fell down while executing his shots in typical Pant-style to reach a 53-ball fifty.

The left-hander reached the little landmark with a six off pacer Lahiru Kumara, and he added 54 runs for the sixth wicket Ravindra Jadeja.

Pant's adventures ended with a snick to stumper Niroshan Dickwella off Kumara.

Earlier, Padikkal, who made a 167 in the first innings, looked in perfect touch again.



The left-hander swept and cut spinners at will, giving India some valuable runs to break away from the home side.

A straight punch off off-spinner Keshara Nuwantha was the stand-out shot of his innings, as Padikkal showed the penchant to put away even good balls.

But the Karnataka man eventually fell to a zipping ball from off-spinner Keshara Nuwantha that pinned him to the back foot.

Padikkal did resort to DRS but to no avail.

However, India's second innings had a shaky start as a laden-footed Yashasvi Jaiswal edged pacer

Asitha Fernando to Dickwella in the first over itself.

Jaiswal, now largely a one-format player, will have to find a way to register some serious runs under his belt before the patience of big-wigs wears thin.

He has just one fifty in the last eight Test innings, and that is too lean for an opener assigned to give his team a solid start.

KL Rahul looked solid as ever and even added a dash of aggression in his innings, clobbering Prabath Jayasuriya for two sixes — one over long off and another to the sight screen.

But Rahul, who escaped from a leg-before decision through DRS on 25, perished to Jayasuriya after adding 65 runs for the second wicket with Padikkal.

Captain Shubman Gill too did not last long, falling leg before to Jayasuriya.

However, Sri Lanka lost Dinesh Chandimal's presence due to a shoulder injury which he suffered while fielding at boundary. He has been taken to hospital for a precautionary scan. Later, he was cleared of any major injury and should be available to bat in the fourth innings. (PTI)

India vs Pak: Knockout dream and survival on the line in WC blockbuster clash

AMSTELVEEN (NETHERLANDS), Aug 18: India will look to extend its decade-long unbeaten run against Pakistan and seal a place in the second round of the FIH Men's Hockey World Cup when the arch-rivals clash in a high-stakes Pool D match here on Wednesday.

India, with three points from two matches, needs at least a draw to progress, while Pakistan, with one point, must win to keep their campaign alive. England have already qualified for the next round after winning both their matches.

India opened their campaign with a 3-1 win over Wales but suffered a 2-4 defeat against world No. 3 England after conceding three goals in the second half.

Defensive lapses and an ineffective penalty-corner conversion rate will be the areas of concern for India coach Craig Fulton.

Pakistan, meanwhile, drew 3-3 with Wales after losing 1-4 to England and will need a vastly improved performance to overcome their neighbours. Their penalty-corner execution and defence have been inconsistent so far.

India have enjoyed the upper hand in recent meetings and defeated Pakistan 7-1 and 4-3 in the European leg of the Pro League



earlier this year. Pakistan's last win over India came in the 2016 Champions Trophy.

The gulf in recent performances is also reflected in their recent international record. India have won medals at the last two Olympics, while four-time World Cup champions Pakistan are making their return to the tournament after eight years, having failed to qualify for the 2014 and 2023 editions.

The rivalry, however, has historically produced matches where form and rankings count for little. With a place in the next round at stake, both teams will also have to keep their emotions under control.

India's most experienced player Manpreet Singh, with 419 caps,

said his side would not underestimate Pakistan.

"The match against Pakistan will be good, but we are not underestimating them. They also have good drag-flickers, so we will have to avoid giving them penalty corners. We must also create opportunities and capitalise on them. We must focus on our natural game," Manpreet said.

India will also hope to improve their penalty-corner conversion after scoring only once from four opportunities against England.

Pakistan captain Abu Bakar Mahmood, meanwhile, insisted that past records and rankings would have little bearing on the contest. (PTI)

Tero Entertainment launches 3x3 Quest India 2026



NEW DELHI, Aug 18: Tero Entertainment Public Co. Ltd. officially launched Quest India 2026 3x3 basketball, as a first step in bringing the world's fastest-growing urban sport to India.

It is backed by the Basketball Federation of India (BFI) and endorsed by FIBA.

Unlike traditional five-on-five basketball, 3x3 is played on a half-court with a relentless 12-second shot clock. Games last just 10 minutes, or end the moment a team hits 21 points.

It's a fast-paced, action-packed, constantly moving high-energy game designed around skill and technique. With DJs spinning throughout FIBA 3x3 events and fans sitting right on the baseline, the sport naturally blends elite athleticism with street culture.

Since its Olympic debut at Tokyo 2020, 3x3 has rapidly evolved. It captivated audiences at Paris 2024, is set to expand from eight to 12 teams at the Los Angeles 2028 Games, and remains a staple of the Commonwealth Games.

Kicking off with the Quest event on September 12-13, 2026, at DLF Promenade - Emporio, the inaugural event will fuse elite, intense 3x3 competition with music, interactive fan zones, and the distinctive urban energy that has made the format a global phenomenon and an Olympic sport. (PTI)

After cancer battle, Gustav Björklér grateful to be back on badminton's biggest stage

NEW DELHI, Aug 18: At 17 kilos lighter and with virtually no muscle left on his body, Gustav Björklér had to rediscover what it meant to be a badminton player.

Cancer had taken away his physical strength. Rebuilding it took time. But the Swedish shuttler never lost the belief that he would one day return to the court.

Björklér was diagnosed with myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS), a form of blood cancer, in 2018. After undergoing chemotherapy and a stem-cell transplant, he was declared healthy in 2019.

"I didn't have any muscle on my body at all. I was the same height, but almost 15 to 17 kilos less. So I didn't have any physicality at all," Björklér told PTI Videos after his match.

"It took some time to get these things back."

The experience changed more than just his body. Having once fought something far more important than a badminton match.

"Of course, it affects you mostly mentally. I think, and it gives you another perspective on life as a whole," he said.

"You think of life in another way and you're quite happy just to be healthy and to be able to live a normal life."

That perspective has stayed with Björklér even as he returned to the demands of professional badminton. He said he never lost belief that he would overcome the illness and make his way back to the highest level.

"That was something that helped me quite a lot when I went through the sickness. It really helped me to really push and just make the best out of it," he said.

Today, he does not want the illness to define him.

Asked what he would like people to know about him beyond his cancer story, Björklér kept the an-



swer refreshingly simple.

"I'm just a guy that likes to play badminton and enjoying badminton life at the moment," he said. "I'm really, really blessed that I'm healthy now."

His comeback is taking place against another challenge while trying to develop as an elite badminton player in Sweden, where the sport does not enjoy the kind of popularity like in some of Europe's leading badminton nations.

Björklér has moved to Copenhagen to find better training and sparring, a decision that he believes can help him take the next step.

"Badminton is of course not that big in Sweden so I made a move to Denmark. I live in Copenhagen, I practice there," he said.

"Not so many youngsters play badminton. They play football, ice hockey... these kinds of things. We have to find solutions to get the right sparring and the right train-

ing."

He has already showed glimpses of the level he wants to reach, representing Sweden at the Thomas Cup and facing players such as Chou Tien Chen and Anders Antonsen.

His World Championships campaign may have ended in the opening round, but Björklér's focus is already on the next step.

"My target is to go back to the top 100 and just develop myself and be a better player and play the bigger tournaments," he said.

For Björklér, the ambition is no longer simply about proving that he could return after cancer. It is about seeing how far he can go now that he is healthy again.

And perhaps that is the most important part of his story as he doesn't want to be remembered primarily as the player who survived cancer. He wants to be remembered as the player who simply loves badminton. (PTI)

Serena and Venus Williams return to doubles in Cincinnati

MASON (USA), Aug 18: Serena and Venus Williams played their first doubles match together since the 2022 U.S. Open and lost a thriller, 2-6, 6-1 (10-8) to Marta Kostyuk and Peyton Stearns on Monday night at the Cincinnati Open.

The sisters nearly recovered from a 6-0 deficit in the match tiebreaker before a double-fault by Venus Williams ended their first doubles appearance in a non-Grand Slam event since the Italian Open in 2016.

"I thought it was fun," Serena said. "I thought it was special. We kicked off a little rust in the middle of the match and just, you know (were) starting to feel it. I didn't come out here to win this tournament. Winning is obviously great. But in this position just, you know, having fun. It was really cool to be able to do this again."

Serena had been off the tour since 2022 before returning this summer at age 44. The sisters planned to play together at Wimbledon but had to withdraw after Serena injured her knee while losing her singles match. They entered Cincinnati as a wild card.

"Eventually we would find our way to each other," the 46-year-old Venus said about the decision to play doubles again. "It's our first time playing together in forever. It was great for us to get out there and do it."

Kostyuk and Stearns, both 24, are playing in their first tournament together. Kostyuk is from Ukraine. Stearns grew up in the Cincinnati suburb of Mason, where the tournament is played every year.

"I kind of expected it but it stung a little bit that this is my hometown," Stearns said about the pro-Williams sisters crowd. "I won't hold it against anyone. The crowd was going for them but we used it



to our advantage and flipped the script."

After dropping the first set, the Williams sisters rolled in the second to force a match tiebreaker.

Kostyuk and Stearns went ahead 6-0, but consecutive double-faults by Kostyuk helped the Williamses get within 8-7. It was 9-8 after Serena powerfully put away an overhead before Venus double-faulted.

"The crowd got the show," Kostyuk said. "They probably couldn't ask for anything better. At the end of a tiebreak is a lottery. You never know which way it's going to go."

Venus and Serena have won 14 Grand Slam doubles titles and 22 total. Serena won one with Alexandra Stevenson in 2002 at Leipzig. All of Venus' doubles titles have been with her sister. They also have won three Olympic gold medals together.

Serena has won 23 singles Grand Slam titles. Venus has won seven.

Swiatek rallies for 3-set win and other results

In other results Monday, defending Cincinnati champion Iga Swiatek rallied from a set down to win her eighth consecutive match, beating Maria Sakkari, 4-6, 6-1, 6-1.

No. 2 seed Elena Rybakina beat Magdalena Frech, 6-4, 7-6. Third-ranked Jessica Pegula beat fellow American Emma Navarro, 7-5, 6-2. (AP)

Keep India away from early PCs: Pakistan legend Samiullah's tips to team

AMSTELVEEN, Aug 18: Pakistan hockey legend Samiullah Khan has sounded a clarion call to his team, urging them to forge an impenetrable defensive wall and ensure they do not surrender penalty corners in the crucial opening quarter of their high-stakes FIH World Cup pool clash against arch-rivals India on Wednesday. Pakistan need a win to keep their campaign alive, while India can progress to the next round with a draw.

"I would advise Pakistan captain to keep a compact defence and not concede any penalty corners to India in the first quarter," Samiullah, the current chief selector of Pakistan, told PTI.

"My suggestion to the midfielders is to advance towards the goal instead of passing backwards. The forwards will have to score through diagonal and interchange passes," he said.

The two-time Olympic gold medalist, popularly known as the "Flying Horse" for his speed on the ground, feels Pakistan's largely young side can handle the pressure.

"They recently played India in the Pro League and gave a tough fight. Each of these players has played more than 50 matches. They know how important this match is," said one of the key members of the golden generation of Pakistan Hockey. Samiullah also praised India's transformation since 2016, saying Pakistan needs a similar long-term vision.

"India improved its system, expanded its player pool, improved penalty corners and deep defence, and its players are now earning well. In Pakistan, our federations lack long-term vision and set small goals," he said. (PTI)

When Manjrekar criticised me, I found something to learn from it: Ashwin



MUMBAI, Aug 18: The natural reaction to any criticism is anger, but Ravichandran Ashwin found Sanjay Manjrekar's harsh observations about his bowling to be constructive and worked harder in the following years to change his perception.

The former India and Mumbai batter-turned-pundit, known for his brusque takes on all things cricket, had criticised Ashwin's performance in his column after the off-spinner took only nine wickets in three Tests Down Under at a very poor average of 62 runs per scalp during the 2011-12 series. India lost that series 0-4.

"After my first Australia tour, Sanjay Manjrekar wrote a long article. When I was returning, I read the whole thing, and after reading it, I got really angry. I actually felt bad. Anger was just a reaction, but I felt really bad. But after that, I slept on the flight and let it go. Back then, I didn't talk to Sanjay much," Ashwin said on "Jio Hotstar". (PTI)

No Khel Ratna for 2025; Tejaswin, Divya and Gayatri Gopichand among Arjuna awardees



NEW DELHI, Aug 18: The Sports Ministry on Tuesday decided against bestowing the coveted Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna award on any athlete for the year 2025, while unveiling a significantly pruned list of 17 Arjuna awardees after an unprecedented re-evaluation of the selection panel's recommendations made more than six months ago.

Hockey star Hardik Singh was considered for the country's highest sporting honour by the selection panel headed by former Supreme Court Judge Arun Kumar Mishra but eventually fell out of contention. The last time that the country did not have a Khel Ratna was the year 2014.

World Cup winning chess player Divya Deshmukh, decathlete and high jumper Tejaswin Shankar and shuttler Gayatri Gopichand were among the 17 sportspersons named for the Arjuna Award on Tuesday.

Also on the Arjuna Award list were Grandmaster Vidit Gujrathi, Gayatri Gopichand's women's doubles partner Treasa Jolly, Glasgow Commonwealth Games silver-medallist boxer Narender Berwal (+92kg), and young deaf rifle shooter Dhanush Srikanth.

The selection committee this year had recommended 24 names for the Arjuna Award but the ministry approved only 17.

The awards were announced following massive delay with the ministry announcing a re-evaluation process to ensure only worthy names were honoured to "preserve the integrity of the awards."

The 19-year-old Deshmukh is the first Indian woman to win the World Cup. Vidit Gujrathi was part of the gold-winning In-

dian team at the 2024 Chess Olympiad.

Tejaswin Shankar, who won a historic decathlon silver medal in the Asian Games in 2023 and followed it up with a second-place finish in the Asian Championships last year, recently won a pathbreaking bronze in the Commonwealth Games despite battling a knee problem.

He was among the athletes who criticised the delay in the announcement of the awards calling it disrespectful towards athletes.

In 2024, a record 32 athletes were conferred the Arjuna award, which included 17 from para-sports. This time, only two names from para-sports made the final cut.

Para club thrower Ekta Bhyani, who won a gold in the 2024 para world championships, and shooter Rudransh Khandelwal, who is a 2024 Para World Cup gold-medallist.

Ekta also won a silver in the world championships held last year in Delhi.

The list, however, does not feature any cricketer, which has been the case since pacer Mohammed Shami received the honour in 2023.

I Arumainayagam, who was a member of the 1962 Asian Games gold-winning football team was sole winner of the Arjuna Award for 'Lifetime Achievement'. The ministry has named three

Dronacharya awardees.

Boxing coach Chhote Lal Yadav, who was a part of the women's national camp as well as the support staff of the legendary M C Mary Kom, is the most prominent name in the short list.

For the 'Lifetime Achievement' honour in coaching, Dharmendra Yadav, who coaches the men's national squad, and wrestling coach Virender Kumar have been named.

The Khel Ratna, which is the country's highest sporting honour, comes with a medallion, a citation and a cash prize of Rs 25 lakh, while the Arjuna award makes the winner richer by Rs 15 lakh.

Last year, the Khel Ratna was bestowed on four athletes -- world champion chess player D Gukesh, men's hockey captain Harmanpreet Singh, para-athlete Praveen Kumar and shooter Manu Bhaker.

The awards were traditionally presented on August 29 every year to commemorate the National Sports Day, which is also the birth anniversary of one of India's greatest sportspersons -- hockey wizard Major Dhyan Chand.

However, after the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when the ceremony was conducted virtually due to health protocols, the date has not remained consistent. More than once, the ceremony has been

pushed a couple of months after August 29 to accommodate multi-sport events' performances. The latest that it was held was last year on January 17.

But the announcement of the 2025 awardees after more than half of 2026 has passed marks the biggest delay since the inception of the awards in 1991.

This year, the award selection featured, among others, Indian Olympic Association (IOA) Vice President Gagan Narang, former badminton player Aparna Popat and former hockey player M M Somaya.

Arjuna Awards: Tejaswin Shankar (Athletics), Priyanka Goswami (Athletics), Divya Deshmukh (Chess), Dhanush Srikanth (Deaf Shooting), Rajkumar Pal (Hockey), Surjeet (Kabaddi), Rudransh Khandelwal (Para-Shooting), Ekta Bhyani (Para-athletics), Arvind Singh (Rowing), Akhil Sheoran (Shooting), Treasa Jolly (Badminton), Gayatri Gopichand (Badminton), Lalremisiami (Hockey), Muhammed Ajmal (Athletics), Pooja (Kabaddi).

Arjuna Awards (Lifetime): Shri I Arumainayagam (Football)

Dronacharya Award: Parveer Singh, Chhote Lal Yadav, Neha Chavan

Dronacharya Award (Lifetime): Dharmendra Yadav, Virender Kumar. (PTI)