

Govt questioning Meta team

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: The government is questioning the visiting Meta team on whether the company is adhering to the law of the land, following summons to the social media giant over temporary restriction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Facebook post recently, sources said on Thursday.

The government and the Meta global team are currently engaged in discussions.

Meta will also be questioned on their algorithms, whether compliance mechanism has sufficient checks and balances, and guardrails to meet constitutional and legal re-

quirements, government sources said. IT Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw is meeting Meta global team on Thursday, sources said, adding that the ministry's discussions with technical teams will continue thereafter.

This is the second round of questioning of Meta's global team by the government, after the Prime Minister's July 23 Facebook post -- addressing students and youth and promising stringent action against examination paper leaks -- was restricted for about five hours on the platform, raising issues around intermediary accountability.

Meta's global affairs head Joel Kaplan, who served in the administration of George W Bush -- including as White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy -- before joining Meta (then Facebook) in 2011, was summoned by the government to explain why PM's Facebook post was temporarily restricted.

On Wednesday, Kaplan and his team met IT Secretary S Krishnan, and then the IT Minister.

After the executives of the US tech giant met Vaishnaw on

Wednesday, government sources said Meta has apologised for the temporary removal of Modi's post as well as for failures ranging from child sexual abuse content to deep-fakes and boosting certain content on being paid "a lot of money".

While Kaplan, who flew in for meetings with Indian officials, said in a written statement on Wednesday, that he "apologised to the minister on behalf of Meta for the error restricting PM Modi's post", government sources, who did not wish to be identified, said the apology came from company chief executive Mark Zuckerberg.

A Parliamentary Standing Committee, too, sought an apology from Zuckerberg over the removal of Modi's Facebook post, warning in a letter that protection and immunity available could be withdrawn if no apology was forthcoming within three days.

Modi had first posted the selfie video on Instagram. The video was later shared on Facebook, which was restricted by the social media platform. Meta later restored the post, attributing its removal to an

error by AI-powered automated content filters, and apologised.

According to government sources, Vaishnaw had asked Meta point-blank on Wednesday whether the company accepted payments to promote content that could trigger public disorder.

The government read out provisions of Section 79 of the Information Technology Act, making it clear that non-compliance in discharging intermediary obligations jeopardises the company's safe harbour protection (immunity as a platform). After the meeting, government sources said Meta executives admitted to failures involving child sexual abuse content and deepfakes and admitted that "a lot of money was paid for boosting a certain type of content". Vaishnaw, it is learnt, also asked Meta if it is doing enough to prevent illegal content on their platform.

"They admitted that their systems are not fully geared up for so much of the content which is illegal... They admitted that they are not able to control all of it," government sources said. (PTI)

Simply South records 135-fold growth in Zomato orders

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Simply South, a Guwahati-based restaurant specialising in authentic South Indian and Andhra cuisine, has recorded more than a 135-fold increase in yearly orders since joining the Zomato platform in 2021.

Founded by chartered accountants Sumanth Nagiseti and Manmadh Reddy, the restaurant saw its annual order volume rise from 195 orders in 2021 to 26,528 orders in 2025.

The founders said the venture was started after identifying a gap in Guwahati for authentic South Indian cuisine with a strong regional Andhra identity. In addition to popular South Indian dishes, the restau-

rant serves Andhra specialties such as Guntur Podi Idli, Punugulu, Upma Dosa, Pesarattu and Fried Piece Biryani, using spices sourced from Andhra Pradesh and signature chutneys to retain authenticity.

Sumanth Nagiseti said the response from customers had been encouraging and credited platforms like Zomato for helping the brand reach households across the city.

Zomato CEO Aditya Mangla said regional food brands such as Simply South play an important role in introducing local cuisines to a wider audience and that the platform was pleased to support their growth.

The restaurant has also expanded its operations by launching Telugu

Aromas, a cloud kitchen dedicated to Andhra cuisine, and plans to further expand within Guwahati.

According to the company, Simply South has strengthened its city-wide reach using platform insights and customer demand data, refined its menu based on consumer preferences, and improved packaging and procurement through Hyperpure while introducing biodegradable packaging designed to keep dosas crisp during delivery.

Zomato said it has introduced several initiatives to support small restaurants, including faster onboarding, access to verified service providers and promotional support for new restaurant partners.

Pfizer-TCCF partnership reaches one million beneficiaries through cancer screening drive

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Pfizer on Thursday marked a major milestone in its partnership with the Tata Cancer Care Foundation (TCCF), announcing that the initiative has reached more than one million beneficiaries across Assam, Jharkhand, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Odisha through cancer awareness, early detection and capacity-building programmes.

The partnership has facilitated over 993,000 screenings for oral, breast and cervical cancers, trained nearly 25,000 healthcare providers and strengthened community-based referral systems to support early diagnosis and timely treatment.

To commemorate the achievement, Pfizer and TCCF organised a stakeholder conference in Guwahati, attended by Commissioner and Secretary of Assam's Medical Education and Research Department Dr Siddharth Singh, senior officials from the Health and Family Welfare Department, National Health Mission, Atal Amrit Abhiyan Society, Pfizer and State Nodal Officers.

Addressing the event, Dr Siddharth Singh said Assam has made significant progress in strengthening its healthcare ecosystem through partnerships that complement the state's vision of accessible and equitable healthcare.

He noted that awareness, early detection and timely

intervention remain crucial in tackling the state's high cancer burden.

Pfizer India Country President Meenakshi Nevatia said the company's commitment extends beyond developing medicines to strengthening healthcare systems at the community level.

She said public-private collaboration integrating awareness, screening, capacity building and referral pathways could significantly improve cancer prevention and early detection.

Under the partnership in Assam, more than 350,000 people have been reached through community awareness programmes, nearly 280,000 screenings for oral, breast and cervical cancers have been conducted, resulting in over 1,700 referrals and the identification of around 350 confirmed cancer cases.

The initiative has also trained more than 5,700 frontline healthcare professionals, including Community Health Officers, Multi-Purpose Workers, ASHAs, AYUSH practitioners, general practitioners and dentists. Dr Kailash Sharma, Chief Advisor of Tata Cancer Care Foundation and Director of Assam Cancer Care Foundation, said the collaboration has demonstrated how community-led partnerships can expand access to cancer screening, strengthen local healthcare capacity and improve cancer outcomes through early detection and timely care.

Contd. from Page 1...

Police alerted against 'forced'

and our people are helping those affected," he said, avoiding a direct response when asked for his reaction of an Assamese actor-dancer performing live on London streets in a fund-raising endeavour.

"We do not need to ask for help in London or America. But if someone comes forward on their own, we don't have a problem. It should not be sought, but come voluntarily," the chief minister added.

He also urged people of the state to help the government in ensuring that those affected receive the due aid. (PTI)

Opposition not allowing

present in Parliament every day and is available to participate in discussions. "He is here, working. We see him coming every morning and remaining in Parliament till late in the evening," he said. Responding to a query on the opposition's claim that Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan has asked him to "echo the sentiments" of the opposition to the home minister, Rijiju said the opposition was claiming it but the Chair has not said so.

"That is what the opposition is claiming. The Chair has not given this advice," he said.

BJP MP Ravi Shankar Prasad also accused the Congress of spreading a "false narrative" about the home minister and disrupting Parliament to avoid a discussion.

"Rahul Gandhi and Kharge ji come up with a new story and poster every day and keep demanding that Amit Shah be called to the House. The Union home minister sits in his chamber from 10 am to 7 pm every day. "He is there even now. Let the House function first and let a debate take place. Once the debate begins, he will speak and give a strong reply," Prasad said. The former Union minister alleged that the opposition has been preventing Parliament from functioning while simultaneously accusing the government of avoiding discussion.

"But you do not allow the House to function; you do not allow any debate. You keep creating a ruckus while Amit Shah is sitting there and then demand that he be called. We also come and sit in the House, but there is continuous disruption and then proceedings are adjourned," he said.

"Kharge ji, Rahul Gandhi ji, just look ahead. He (Shah) is sitting in his chamber, ready to hear your arguments and respond," he added. (PTI)

Himanta terms highway project

which is accelerating development and opening new doors of development," the CM added, while also thanking Union Minister Nitin Gadkari for "being so considerate of our requirements". (PTI)

Jorhat Bar Association to file FIR

He held the contractor as well as the superintending engineer, chief engineer and executive engineer responsible for the alleged lapses.

Borah also questioned the installation of a central air-conditioning system, claiming that frequent voltage fluctuations caused the miniature circuit breakers (MCBs) to trip 15 to 20 times a day.

He further alleged that cement was flaking off pillars, the roof concrete had been laid over plastic sheets, and the walls were so poorly constructed that nails could not be driven into them to hang curtains.

According to Borah, the project was initially scheduled for completion within 18 months but was ultimately finished after about three years following an extension.

Assam STF arrests 3 from Kolkata

arrested persons are from Kolkata, while the third is from Assam's Baksa district and was hiding there.

The accused were brought to Guwahati on Wednesday night on transit remand after obtaining the necessary orders from the competent court, the statement said.

During the operations, mobile phones, SIM cards and various documents were recovered from their possession. With these three arrests, the total number of persons apprehended by STF, Assam in connection with the recently detected fake GST/ITC fraud cases has risen to 12.

"The investigation is in progress, and further legal action is being taken in accordance with law," the statement added. (PTI)

The air Delhi's TB patients

a fragile state. When air pollution spikes, they may struggle to breathe and sustain more lung damage, and it is reasonable to think this raises their risk of dying. Readers should treat this as a serious warning signal, not as final proof," he said.

He added that the findings nevertheless carry significant implications for a country that bears the world's highest tuberculosis burden.

"For India this is a serious finding. India carries the world's largest TB burden, and the country has invested enormous effort and resources into finding people with TB and getting them onto treatment. That work saves lives," Sinha said.

He further said that the study suggests polluted air can raise a patient's odds of dying by two-thirds even when they are on the right treatment. So a risk we have largely left out of the equation may be quietly undercutting one of the country's biggest public health achievements.

Asked whether tuberculosis patients should be advised to reduce exposure during periods of severe pollution, Sinha said more research is needed before firm recommendations can be made but some simple precautions appear reasonable.

He further said the findings could extend well beyond tuberculosis.

"Almost certainly. Air pollution is a risk factor we tend to take for granted and leave out of our analyses. Given how clearly it affects TB mortality, we can no longer afford to ignore it," he said.

The researchers said polluted air may affect tuberculosis patients in several ways. Fine particles such as PM2.5 can inflame and narrow the airways, making it harder to breathe. While inflammation is part of the body's natural defence against infection, excessive inflammation may damage the lungs instead of helping them fight the disease, potentially making recovery more difficult. (PTI)

Sri Lanka Navy rescues 11

and Sri Lanka, with Lankan Navy personnel even firing at Indian fishermen in the Palk Strait and seizing their boats in several alleged incidents of illegally entering Sri Lankan territorial waters.

The Palk Strait, a narrow strip of water separating Tamil Nadu from Sri Lanka, is a rich fishing ground for fishermen from both countries.

Fishermen from both countries are arrested frequently for inadvertently trespassing into each other's waters. (PTI)

INROAD, Rubber Board launch multilingual training videos for rubber growers

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Project INROAD and the Rubber Board have launched a multilingual educational video series to help rubber growers adopt scientific practices and improve the productivity and quality of natural rubber under the INROAD Skilling and Production Efficiency Enhancement Drive (iSPEED).

The ₹150-crore iSPEED programme focuses on skill development, quality enhancement and infrastructure creation in the natural rubber sector.

It aims to train nearly three lakh rubber growers while supporting the establishment of modern processing facilities, including rubber sheeting machines and scientific smokehouses.

The newly launched video series covers five key aspects of rubber production—rubber tapping, rain guarding, grading, rubber sheet making and scientific smokehouses. Produced in Assamese, Bengali, Hindi and Malayalam, the videos are intended to reach growers across the country's natural rubber-growing regions.

The videos were formally launched by Rubber Board Executive Director M. Vasanthganesan in the presence of Rubber Production Com-

missioner Dr Siju T Nair, senior Rubber Board officials and representatives of the Indian tyre industry.

INROAD Chairman Mohan Kurian said skill development and the adoption of scientific practices are essential to improving productivity and quality in the natural rubber sector.

He said the multilingual videos would complement the Rubber Board's extension activities and serve as practical training resources for growers.

The training modules, developed over the past year with technical support from the Rubber Board and the Rubber Research Institute of India (RRII), combine animation with field demonstrations to simplify scientific processing techniques.

ATMA Supply Chain and Resources Group Convenor Sanjiv Saxena said the initiative seeks to strengthen the natural rubber value chain by improving productivity and quality, thereby helping growers secure better returns.

Project coordinator Muraligopal said the videos were developed through close collaboration with the Rubber Board, RRII and field teams across the Northeast to ensure the content remains practical and farmer-friendly.

boltt to launch Evo, Ace 5G smartphones on Aug 25

HT Bureau
GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Homegrown smartphone brand boltt, from the house of Fire-Boltt, has announced that it will launch its new Evo and Ace 5G smartphones on August 25.

Ahead of the launch, the company has entered into a strategic partnership with Flipkart as the title sponsor of the Freedom Sale 2026 to build nationwide brand awareness and strengthen its market presence.

The Freedom Sale will run from August 7 for early-access members and from August 8 to August 15 for all customers, providing boltt with a platform to reach consumers across metro cities as well as Tier-II and Tier-III markets before the official launch of its smartphones.

According to the company, the Evo and Ace 5G smartphones have been designed for Indian consumers, combining reliable performance, sleek design and practical features to meet evolving digital lifestyle needs.

JN Digital Print inaugurated in Diphu

HT Bureau
DIPHU, Aug 6: A new digital printing enterprise, JN Digital Print, was inaugurated at the Sivromi Statue tri-junction in Matipung, Diphu, on Thursday with the aim of providing quality printing services at affordable prices.

The family-owned venture, established by Jiten Bey and his family, was inaugurated by Karbi Cultural Society (KCS) president Humsing Bey in the presence of KCS general secretary Sunil Tokbi, vice-president Kamsing Engti, Dhansing Kramsa, members of the society, and family members, friends and well-wishers of the proprietor.

A traditional Hindu puja was performed before the inauguration to seek blessings for the success of the business.

JN Digital Print will offer a range of services, including digital printing of posters, flex banners, hoardings and vinyl prints, offset printing for schools, government departments, businesses and organisations, as well as invitation cards for weddings and other occasions. The unit will also provide customised T-shirt and mug printing.

Addressing the gathering, Humsing Bey described the venture as an inspiring example of entrepreneurship and encouraged educated unemployed youths to explore self-employment opportunities instead of relying solely on government jobs. He expressed confidence that the enterprise would contribute to the local economy and emerge as a leading printing brand in Diphu and the wider Karbi Anglong region.

Proprietor Jiten Bey said the business had been established with a modest investment as a family venture to provide reliable digital and offset printing services at affordable rates. He added that the enterprise would ensure timely delivery of printed materials not only within Diphu but also to customers in other parts of the region through available transport networks.

AFFIDAVIT

Through an affidavit sworn before Notary Public, Diphu Court that my actual name is Ranju Saha Paul which is recorded in Aadhaar Card vide no. 648159230880 but by mistake in my AGVB saving bank pass book Account No.7419010017889 where my name has been recorded Ranju Paul in place of Ranju Saha Paul. The name of Ranju Saha Paul and Ranju Saha are the name of one and single person.

Ranju Saha Paul
D/O: Sukhendu Saha
Vill- Bakalia Atigaon
P.O- Bakalia
P.S- Bakalia
Dist- Karbi Anglong

AFFIDAVIT

Through a notary affidavit at Nagaon Court on 5-08-2026 I declare that the actual and correct name of my son is Angaraj Saikia which is recorded in all official and non official documents. But his name has been recorded in his birth certificate vide Regd. No B-2022;18-90250-004090 date of issue on 20-05-2022 as Anuraj Saikia instead of Angaraj Saikia. Hence Anuraj Saikia and Angaraj Saikia is the same and one person i.e. my son. Dhruba Jyoti Saikia S/O- Late Indra Mohan Saikia Vill. Senchowah Haldiat, PO - Senchowah, Nagaon (Assam)

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SIGNALLING WORKS IN LUMDING DIVISION

E-Tender No.: SNT-25-LMG-2026-27; Dated: 03-08-2026. E-Tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following work: **Name of work :** Associate signalling works in connection with provision of Track Machine Siding at Katakhal Jn., Jamira, Lalabazar, Sribar, Hilara, Bhairabi & Jiribam station of Lumding Division. **Tender Value:** ₹3,14,88,959.67/- **Bid Security:** ₹6,29,800/- **Date & time of closing of tender at 15:00 hours and opening at 15:30 hours on 25-08-2026.** Complete information alongwith the tender document of above e-tender are available in the website www.irops.gov.in **DSTE, Lumding**

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers With A Smile

INTERLOCKING OF LC GATES WITH ASSOCIATED WORKS

E-Tender Notice No. N-2026-27-TSK-NIT-06; Dated: 31-07-2026. E-tenders are invited by the undersigned for the following works: **SN. 1: E-Tender No.: N-2026-27-TSK-T-06. Brief Description of Work:** Interlocking of 05 nos. LC gates with associated works of Tinsukia Division in N.F. Railway. **Tender Value:** ₹5,63,84,692.57; **Earnest Money:** ₹11,27,700.00; **E-tender will be closed at 15:00 hrs. on 24-08-2026 and Opened after 15:00 hrs. on 24-08-2026.** The complete information with the tender document of above e-tender will be available in website www.irops.gov.in **DRM (S&T), Tinsukia**

NORTHEAST FRONTIER RAILWAY
Serving Customers with a smile

PUBLICATION

No. 4039 / 2026
OFFICE OF THE LABOUR COURT,
New Administrative Bldg. Gr. Floor,
Govt. Colony, Bandra (East),
Mumbai. 400 051.
Date : 05 / 08 / 2026

IN THE 4th LABOUR COURT AT MUMBAI
BEFORE SMT. M.R.YADAV, JUDGE
APPLICATION (ECA) No. 173/A-40/2026

Smt. Rebina Khatun w/o Mostafa Ali and ors.

... Applicants

V/s

M/s. Contratista Venture LLP and Ins.

... Opponents

WHEREAS the M/s. Contratista Venture LLP had deposited the compensation amount of Rs. 9,68,939/- on 13/01/2026 in this Court payable in respect of death of employee Late Mostafa Samar Ali s/o Samar Sohor Ali, Form 'A'. The Employer has mentioned in Form 'A' that they desires to be made a party to the proceedings for distribution at the aforesaid compensation.

And whereas the legal heirs of the deceased made distribution application of compensation amount deposited.

Please take notice that the said matter is kept for distribution of deposited compensation amount on 20/08/2026. Therefore your presence is necessary on aforesaid date for submitting reply if any.

You are hereby directed to appear in this court on 20/08/2026 at 11.00 a.m. or at such time immediately as convenience to the court.

Take further notice that in default of your appearance on the date and time as mentioned above, the application will be heard and determined in your absence.



By Order
Sd/- P. Bhatnagar
V/c Secretary
25-08-26
Labour Court, Mumbai

To,
Smt. Ajufa Khatun d/o Late Tomuruddin
At: Village Batamari, P.O. Kallabhomora, Sub District Tezpur, Dist. Sonitpur,
Assam 784027

AMK 01-08/21



ASSAM POWER GENERATION CORPORATION LIMITED

Registered Office: Bijule Bhawan, Paltanbazar, Guwahati-781 001, Assam
CIN: U40101AS2003GC007239

Tel No.: 0361-2739502, Fax No.03612739546/22

SHORT TENDER NOTICE NO. APGCL/KLHEP/GM/Tech-10(E)/2026-27/24 Dated: 06/08/2026

"Servicing, Repairing, Repainting, Modification, Refilling and Hydraulic Pressure Testing of Outdoor Gas Bank Fire Extinguisher System for 06 Nos. of Generator Transformer, 1 Nos. of Station Reserve Transformer and 02 Nos. Station Auxiliary Transformer installed at 2X50 MW KLHEP Power House."

Financial Involvement: Rs. 13,87,031.00 (Rupees Thirteen Lakh Eighty-Seven Thousand Thirty-One)

Tender Paper Issue (Start Date) : From 10:00 hrs. of 06-08-2026
Tender Paper Issue (Closing Date) : Up to 13:00 hrs. of 26-08-2026
Tender receiving : Up to 17:00 hrs. of 27-08-2026
Tender Opening : At 11:00 hrs. on 28-08-2026

Details tender documents may be obtained from the O/O The General Manager, KLHEP, APGCL, Lengery, West Karbi Anglong, Assam during working hours. The tender inviting authority reserves the right to accept or reject any bid/tender and to cancel the bidding process and reject all bids at any time prior to contract award.

Sd/-
General Manager KLHEP, APGCL

Fresh floods hit Kaliabor; 210 rescued, three relief camps opened

Over 700 people affected as Nagaon administration launches rescue and relief operations

HT Correspondent

NAGAON, Aug 6: Fresh flooding triggered by incessant rainfall has affected 732 people from 206 families in Kalapani, Deju Valley Tea Garden and Lengpung Tea Garden under the Kaliabor Revenue Circle, prompting the Nagaon district administration to launch rescue and relief operations.

According to an official release issued by the District Information and Public Relations Office (DIPRO), the district administration, along with the Kaliabor sub-divisional administration and revenue officials, rushed to the affected areas to coordinate emergency response measures.

A joint operation by the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) and District Disaster Response Force (DDRF) teams from Sonaribali and Kaliabor rescued 210 people from vulnerable locations and shifted them to safer places on Wednesday.



To accommodate the affected families, three relief camps have been opened at Salna Bapuji Primary School, 23 No Deju Valley Primary School and Amguri Primary School.

The camps are currently sheltering all 732 affected people from the 206 families.

The administration has arranged hot cooked meals, safe drinking water, medical services, sanitation facilities, essential relief materials and veterinary care at the camps.

Child-Friendly Spaces and breastfeeding corners have also been established for children, lactating mothers and adolescent girls.

Officials said no deaths, injuries or missing persons have been reported so far.

However, the floods have affected 288 large animals, 436 small animals and 1,411 poultry.

The district administration, in coordination with revenue officials and other departments, is continuing to monitor the situation and provide assistance to affected families.

Meanwhile, officials of the Jakhlabandha Agriculture Circle inspected flood-hit villages at Kuthuri and Baghmari to assess damage to agricultural land and standing crops.

The Agriculture Development Officer, village headmen and field staff carried out preliminary surveys, while a comprehensive assessment has been initiated to determine the extent of crop losses and facilitate appropriate relief and rehabilitation measures for affected farmers.

Assures support to two villages; Akhil Gogoi criticises Centre's response

BTC chief Hagrama Mohilary visits flood-hit Sivasagar, distributes relief



HT Correspondent

SIVASAGAR, Aug 6: Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC) Chief Hagrama Mohilary on Thursday visited flood-affected areas of Sivasagar district, assessed the situation on the ground and distributed relief materials among the affected families.

Mohilary distributed 10,000 mosquito nets, 10,000 bedsheets, phenyl and other essential items to

flood victims.

Responding to media queries, the BTC chief said there was little point in blaming the people of Nagaland for the floods.

He said those concerned should instead urge the authorities in Nagaland to stop quarrying coal and stone.

Mohilary expressed hope that the issue would be addressed in the next Assembly, adding that the im-

mediate priority was to rehabilitate the affected people and rebuild damaged embankments and roads, around 60 per cent of which remain submerged.

Sivasagar MLA Akhil Gogoi, who accompanied Mohilary during the visit, said the BTC chief had assured him that he would adopt two flood-ravaged villages and assist in their rehabilitation.

While appreciating Mohilary for travelling from Kokrajhar to extend assistance to the flood-hit people of Sivasagar, Gogoi criticised the Central Government for what he described as an inadequate response to the disaster.

He alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah had not visited the affected areas and claimed that the Centre had sent only Union Health Minister JP Nadda.

Gogoi further said the ₹389-crore assistance announced by the Centre was insufficient, asserting that Assam required around ₹30,000 crore to effectively tackle the crisis and undertake rehabilitation.

Cachar launches mediation drive to settle pending court cases

HT Correspondent

SILCHAR, Aug 6: The District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), Cachar has launched the 'Mediation for Nation 3.0' campaign, a special mediation drive aimed at facilitating the amicable settlement of pending court cases through mediation.

The initiative is being implemented under the guidance of the Assam State Legal Services Authority (ASLSA) and the Gauhati High Court Mediation Centre as part of a nationwide campaign approved by the Mediation and Conciliation Project Committee (MCPC) of the Supreme Court of India.

Under the campaign, pending cases suitable for mediation will be identified, screened and referred to the Mediation Centre.

Awareness programmes will also be organised to encourage litigants to opt for mediation as a speedy, confidential, cost-effective and mutually acceptable mode of dispute resolution.

The drive covers a wide range of disputes, including matrimonial cases, motor accident claims, cheque dishonour matters, compoundable criminal offences, consumer disputes, debt recovery cases, arbitration and commercial disputes, service matters, partition and eviction suits, land acquisition cases, labour disputes and other suitable civil matters.

The DLSA has appealed to litigants, advocates and members of the public to support the campaign by participating in the mediation process.

Parties receiving mediation notices have been requested to appear before the concerned courts or the Mediation Centre as scheduled.

According to the Secretary of the District Legal Services Authority, Cachar, the initiative aims to strengthen the culture of consensual dispute resolution by encouraging parties to settle conflicts through dialogue, thereby reducing litigation and improving the efficiency of the justice delivery system.

NFR diverts, cancels trains as Simaluguri flood disruption continues

HT Correspondent

GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has announced fresh cancellations, diversions and operational changes for several trains due to the continuing disruption caused by flooding at Simaluguri and adjoining areas in Sivasagar district under the Tinsukia Division.

According to an NFR release issued on Thursday, the changes have been made in view of passenger safety and operational requirements as restoration work continues in the flood-affected section.

Several long-distance trains, including the Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express (12423), Dibrugarh-New Delhi Rajdhani Express (20503), Dibrugarh-Chandigarh Express (15903), Avadh Assam Express (15909/15910), Kamrup Express (15960/15959), Vivek Express (22504/22503), Amrit Bharat Express (15949), New Tinsukia-SMV Bengaluru Superfast Express (22502) and Lokmanya Tilak Terminus-Dibrugarh Express (15945) have been diverted on different dates through alternative routes via North

Lakhimpur, Rangapara North, Rangiya and New Bongaigaon.

Several passenger and regional services have also been diverted via Moranhat, including the Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express (15604), Guwahati-Ledo Intercity Express (15603), Lumding-Tinsukia DEMU (75601/75602), Ledo-Rangiya Intercity Express (15968/15967) and the Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger (55914) on specified dates.

NFR has also cancelled a number of trains, including the Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger (55914) on August 7, Jorhat Town-Tinsukia Passenger (55913) on August 7 and 8, Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU (75602) on August 7, and the Simaluguri-Dibrugarh Passenger (55909) on August 7. Meanwhile, the Guwahati-Dibrugarh Nagaland Express (15669) has resumed operations with effect from August 6.

NFR said engineering teams, under the supervision of senior railway officials, are working round the clock on a war footing to restore normal train operations in the flood-affected section at the earliest while ensuring passenger safety.

NFR restores Simaluguri rail link, diesel trains to operate initially



HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) has restored the flood-damaged railway tracks at Simaluguri and adjoining areas in Sivasagar district, paving the way for the gradual resumption of train services.

NFR General Manager Chetan Kumar Shrivastava inspected the restored section, including tracks, bridges and other railway infrastruc-

ture, following the completion of restoration work.

During the inspection, it was observed that many flood-affected residents, along with their belongings and livestock, were still taking shelter on or near the railway tracks.

Considering the humanitarian situation and prioritising public safety, NFR has decided to initially operate only diesel locomotive-hauled trains on the restored section to minimise

the risk of electrocution until normal conditions return.

Local train services, including Train No 15669 Guwahati-Dibrugarh Nagaland Express, Train Nos 15603/15604 Guwahati-Ledo-Guwahati Intercity Express, Train Nos 15967/15968 Rangiya-Ledo-Rangiya Intercity Express, Train Nos 75601/75602 Lumding-Tinsukia-Lumding DEMU and Train No 55914 Tinsukia-Jorhat Town Passenger, will continue to operate via Moranhat.

Long-distance trains will continue to run on the diverted route via North Lakhimpur, Rangapara North and Rangiya for the time being. NFR is also operating special trains during the disruption to maintain connectivity with Upper Assam.

The railway authorities said full restoration of services, including the operation of electric trains, will be considered once flood-affected residents are able to return to their homes.

NFR reiterated its commitment to ensuring the safety of both flood-affected people and railway passengers while restoration efforts continue.

Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury sworn in as Assam CIC

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 6: Bharat Bhushan Dev Choudhury was sworn in as the State Chief Information Commissioner of Assam at a ceremony held at Lok Bhavan on Thursday.

Governor Lakshman Prasad Acharya administered the oath of office to Choudhury at the conference hall of Lok Bhavan. Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam, Dr Ravi Kota, sought the Governor's permission to commence the proceedings of the swearing-in ceremony.

Among those present were State Information Commissioner Dr Reep Hazarika, State Information Commissioner Utpal Baruah, Commissioner and Secretary to the Governor SS Meenakshi Sundara, Commissioner and Secretary of the Administrative Reforms, Training, Pension and Public Grievances (ARTPPG) Department Dr Patibandla Ashok Babu, and other senior government officials.

KAAC distributes forms for Nijut Moina, Nijut Babu schemes in Diphu

CEM Tuliram Ronghang urges students to benefit from state education initiatives

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Aug 6: Application forms under the Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina Scheme and Nijut Babu Scheme were distributed to eligible students at a programme organised by the Assam Education Department at the Sarsing Teron Memorial Town Hall in Diphu on Thursday.

Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) Chief Executive Member and Rongkhang MLA Tuliram Ronghang attended the event as the chief guest.

Addressing the gathering, he highlighted the importance of the State Government's welfare initiatives in the education sector and urged students to make full use of the schemes to continue their studies.

The programme aimed to distribute application forms to eligible beneficiaries under the two schemes, which provide financial assistance to stu-

dents while encouraging higher enrolment, attendance and retention in schools and colleges.

Students from various educational institutions, parents, officials and staff of the Education Department, along with other dignitaries, attended the ceremony.

Application forms were formally handed over to eligible beneficiaries during the event.

The Mukhya Mantri Nijut Moina Scheme and Nijut Babu Scheme have been introduced to provide financial support to students and encourage them to pursue higher education without interruption.

The programme also coincided with the birthday of Tuliram Ronghang, during which Diphu Government College presented him with a birthday cake.

The event concluded with the singing of the National Anthem by students, teachers and other attendees.

Khilonjiya Axomiya Sikh Sanstha extends flood relief in Upper Assam

HT Bureau

DIPHU, Aug 6: The Khilonjiya Axomiya Sikh Sanstha, Assam on Thursday carried out a relief drive in flood-affected areas of Sivasagar, Nazira and Charaideo, distributing essential supplies to families affected by the recent floods.

Representatives of the organisation visited several severely inundated areas, including Nepalikhuti, where they distributed relief materials directly to stranded residents.

Keeping in view the increased risk of waterborne diseases following the floods, the organisation prioritised sanitation and health by providing water purification filters, phenyl for maintaining hygiene and new clothing to affected families.

Residents of Nepalikhuti and nearby localities expressed gratitude as relief materials reached them during the ongoing crisis.

The relief operation was led by Sardar Rajbir Singh, President of the Khilonjiya Axomiya Sikh Sanstha, Assam.

He was accompanied by Assistant Secretary Sardar



Parvinder Singh and volunteers Sardar Jaspal Singh, Sardar Kuldeep Singh, Sardar Harvinder Singh, Sardar Minku Singh, Sardar Nirmal Singh, Sardar Raja Singh and Sardar Vicky Singh, who participated in the distribution of relief materials.

The organisation reaffirmed its commitment to supporting flood-affected communities across Assam throughout the ongoing relief and recovery efforts.

Sonitpur DC, SSP complete self-enumeration for Census 2027



HT Correspondent

TEZPUR, Aug 6: Sonitpur District Commissioner and Principal Census Officer Ananda Kumar Das on Thursday completed his self-enumeration under the Housinglisting

Operation and Housing Census (HLO) of Census 2027 (Phase I) through the official portal, se.census.gov.in.

The self-enumeration process at the District Commissioner's official

residence was facilitated by a team led by Tezpur Municipal Board Executive Officer and Charge Officer Sharon Thomas.

Appealing to residents of Sonitpur, Das urged them to complete their self-enumeration within the notified period and encourage their family members, friends, neighbours and colleagues to do the same. He also requested citizens to extend full cooperation to enumerators during the Housinglisting Operation and Housing Census scheduled from August 17 to September 15, 2026.

The self-enumeration facility is available across Assam from August 2 to August 16, allowing residents to voluntarily submit their household details online before the commencement of the house-listing exercise.

Following the District Commissioner's self-enumeration, the Census team also visited the office of Sonitpur Senior Superintendent of Police Barun Purkayastha, where his self-enumeration was successfully completed.

Kokrajhar Nritya Kala Academy excels at Sanskriti Sangam 2026

HT Correspondent

KOKRAJHAR, Aug 6: Kokrajhar Nritya Kala Academy has earned accolades after its students delivered an impressive performance at the Sanskriti Sangam 2026 International Dance and Music Competition held at Jyoti Chitran Studio in Kahlipara, Guwahati.

The academy's young dancers won several honours in the dance category, impressing the judges with their talent, discipline and dedication.

To mark the achievement, the academy organised a felicitation programme where 32 award-winning students were honoured with traditional phulam gamosas.

In another major achievement, 20 students of the academy have been selected to represent the institution at the 4th International Mumbai Carnival Festival.

The selection will provide the young performers with an opportunity to showcase their talent on an international platform while promoting the cultural heritage of Assam and the Bodoland region.



Additional Deputy Commissioner Shubham Sinha congratulated the students, teachers and parents for the achievement and lauded the academy's efforts in nurturing young talent.

He expressed confidence that the selected participants would perform well at the international festival and bring further recognition to Kokrajhar.

Academy Principal Pralay Dutta said the institution has been consistently working to promote dance and cultural education among young learners. Thanking parents for their continued support, he urged the students to continue practising with dedication as they prepare for the upcoming international event.

The academy's success at Sanskriti Sangam 2026 has been widely appreciated and is being seen as another milestone in promoting young artistic talent from the region at the national and international levels.

Biswanath admin hands over ex gratia to families of drowning victims

HT Correspondent

BISWANATH CHARIALI, Aug 6: The Biswanath district administration on Thursday handed over ex gratia assistance to the families of two persons who drowned in floodwaters under the Nadarar Revenue Circle on Wednesday.

Cheques of ₹4 lakh each were presented to the next of kin of Khem Saikia (75) of Magurmara village and Dinesh Bhumij (40) of Bejorhola village, who lost their lives after entering a paddy field inundated by the floodwaters of the Dikarai River.

The financial assistance was provided in accordance with government norms to support the bereaved families.

Biswanath MLA Pallab Lochan Das, accompanied by District Commissioner Karabi Saikia Karan, visited Bejorhola village and inspected the waterlogged areas where floodwater had accumulated due to inadequate drainage and insufficient water discharge capacity.

The MLA assured that appropriate measures would be taken to improve the drainage system and mitigate waterlogging in the affected area.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak. - Epictetus

Trump's tariff challenged

A coalition of 25 Democratic-led US states sued the US administration on Monday, alleging that the US president Donald Trump exceeded his legal authority by imposing sweeping tariffs on 60 trading partners and asking the US Court of International Trade to block the measures and declare them unlawful. This is the most comprehensive legal challenge to Trump's tariff actions taken using section 301 of the U.S. trade Act. The lawsuit exposes both the fragile legal basis of the US administration's tariff policy and the country's deepening partisan divide. Trade experts in the US are baffled at the way the President is using trade, destabilizing the existing pattern and inviting wrath from friendly nations. The states' lawsuit follows challenges filed by a group of small US businesses, which sued to block the tariffs on the day they took effect in July. The complaint challenged the imposition of 10 per cent or 12 per cent on most of the goods imported from the affected economies, sixty in total which together account for 99.4 percent of U.S. imports. The states alleged that US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer rushed investigations into 60 economies, failed to conduct the country-specific consultations required under US trade law and did not adequately explain why nearly uniform tariff rates were appropriate for economies with widely different policies. Though the states are all run by the Democrats, the concerns are shared by the Republicans run states also many of whose businessmen supporters have expressed worry at the impact on the American business and the consumers. The states are asking the court to block the tariffs, declare them unlawful and order the administration to refund duties collected under the measures, according to the news agencies. The 25 states' lawsuit is the latest legal challenge to the US tariff agenda, following a series of setbacks in court. In February, the US Supreme Court ruled that the International Emergency Economic Powers Act did not give the president the authority to impose his earlier sweeping tariffs. Such a sweeping application of Section 301 amounts to an expansion and abuse of the provision, He added. On July 23, the USTR announced sweeping tariffs on goods from 60 economies, including a 12.5 percent levy on Chinese imports, following Section 301 investigations into their alleged failure to ban imports produced with "forced labour." The measures took effect the following day, replacing a previous 10 percent global tariff as it expired.

The US determination to preserve a broad tariff regime also points to the failure of its previous measures, which neither reduced the US trade deficit nor generated more manufacturing jobs. The US has nevertheless continued to pursue the policy, which shows that its primary objective is not the broader interests of the US economy, but the consolidation of the administration's domestic political base through an increasingly protectionist agenda.

RBI's status Quo on interest rate is aimed at pepping up growth rate

By: Anjan Roy

The Reserve Bank of India announced its new credit policy on August 5, keeping the policy interest rates unchanged. The policy interest rates are an extremely important tool used by a central bank for maintaining price stability and the pace of the economy.

On the face of it, it looks rather askance as current inflation rate is well above the target rate of inflation. The Reserve Bank has projected inflation to remain over around 5% in the coming months to opening days of the next financial year. Against this, RBI targeted level of inflation is 4%.

The reason RBI has chosen to retain the current level in interest rates, instead of raising it to rein in inflation to the targeted level, is that its analysis of the inflation dynamics convinces the policy maker that this was a limited kind of price rise and there is little fear of a general price increase. Going into the details of inflation figures the RBI has worked on, "CPI inflation for 2026-27 is projected to be 5.0 per cent with Q2 at 4.7 per cent; Q3 at 5.9 per cent; and Q4 at 5.5 per cent. Inflation for Q1-2027-28 is projected at 5.3 per cent with risks being evenly balanced."

But RBI pointed out that core inflation, that is, excluding fuel and food prices, the prints are in comfortable zone. That is, the current inflationary pressure is emanating mainly from two groups of articles, fuel and food. Of these, the fuel inflation is due mainly to volatility stemming from the Middle East war.

Once the war situation stabilises, it is reasonable to expect the fuel inflation should come down considerably. Hence raising the policy rates for the sake of containing some temporary spikes might hurt the overall growth prospects and the economy.

As for food prices, these have a seasonal behaviour and therefore the inflationary trends should also change. Generally speaking, the food prices spike in the summer months and till the harvest season in late October. Thereafter the food prices tend to soften after the arrival of food items in the markets. With such a background, the RBI has taken the gamble to encourage growth of the economy through a more accommodating stance in monetary policy. The bank analysis of the growth-inflation dynamics point towards a tilt towards supporting growth than a need for some emergency brakes to control inflation. It is more optimistic than a cautionary tale of control, based on Reserve Bank's trust on domestic demand as a trigger for continuing growth. The Reserve Bank approach is fundamentally data driven, that is, fine tuning its monetary policy in the context of emerging data. All central banks promise that and so also RBI. Nevertheless, in the end, it is the gut feelings—the judgment—which have been known to really prompt the actions.

Given the data cited by the RBI governor in his policy statement, it appears the current policy is crafted principally to aid the continuing growth of the Indian economy while maintaining price stability within that framework of an expanding economy. A good starting point for a policy stance of helping the domestic economy in the midst of a generally gloomy picture of the global situation.

Such a stance should also ring a sympathetic bell with the government. Administration generally expect a helping hand from the central banking authority by way of maintaining an accommodating stance in monetary policy. Look at what the RBI governor has observed in his policy statement.

"Amidst persistent global uncertainty, domestic economic activity has exhibited resilience as reflected by the high frequency indicators available for the first quarter", RBI cites. Now take a hard quick look at the data sets, quoted by the RBI governor, Sanjay Malhotra:

Private consumption continued to be driven by buoyant discretionary spending, while investment activity remained steady on the back of robust government spending on infrastructure and construction. Motor vehicle sales (retail) grew by 14.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27. Two-wheeler and tractor retail sales registered double digit growth of 15.1 per cent and 21.4 per cent in the same period, respectively. On the other hand, retail passenger vehicle sales and IIP consumer durables off take grew at a robust pace of 21.0 per cent and 7.2 per cent in the same period, respectively. Steel consumption grew by 8.3 per cent while cement production increased by 8.8 per cent in the first quarter of 2026-27. Port cargo witnessed a growth of 6.1 per cent in Q1-2026-27. (IPA Service)

Inside Assam's flood crisis: Humanity on the frontlines

Every year, as the monsoon clouds gather over the eastern Himalayas, the rivers that define the state of Assam begin their familiar transformation. The Brahmaputra, wide and majestic, along with its intricate network of tributaries such as the Barak, the Dihou, the Dhansiri, and the Subansiri, swelling far past their banks, spill across the floodplains. For centuries, the people who dwell along these fertile valley corridors have lived in an intimate relationship with water. The river gives life to their emerald rice fields, nourishes their fisheries, and shapes their rich cultural heritage. Still, when heavy seasonal rains turn violent and relentless, that same life giving water transforms into an overwhelming force that completely disrupts daily existence. Villages that were bustling with activity only hours earlier become submerged under muddy brown currents, while farmlands, roads, and courtyards vanish under a rising expanse of water. Across districts like Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat, Barpeta, Lakhimpur and the river island of Majuli, families wake to the sound of rushing currents near their thresholds, facing a rapid race against time to preserve their lives and whatever possessions they can carry.

Understanding the magnitude of Assam floods requires looking far past the physical boundaries of submerged land. The true story lies in the profound human experience that unfolds within every affected household. A flood is far more than a statistic reported on national news broadcasts or a temporary disruption of traffic along state highways. It represents the loss of months of patient agricultural labor, the destruction of carefully tended kitchens, and the sudden displacement of entire multi generational families. Schoolchildren watch their textbooks, notebooks, and cherished awards get swept away or ruined by thick silt. Artisans lose their handlooms and crafted wooden tools, while small shopkeepers see their lifelong investments washed out in a matter of hours. Farmers stand on elevated embankments, gazing out over submerged fields where green shoots of young paddy lie buried under feet of murky water. In every corner of the valley, the sudden intrusion of floodwaters strips away the physical markers of stability, leaving families to grapple with uncertainty, grief, and the daunting challenge of rebuilding their lives from scratch.

In the initial hours of high water, long before external relief agencies or official emergency teams can arrive with boats and supplies, the first helping hand always comes from within the community itself. The spirit of neighbor helping neighbor is deep seated in the rural fabric of Assam, where shared living creates bonds that withstand the strongest currents. When water levels rise silently through the night, residents wake one another with loud shouts and knocking on walls. Young men and women assemble quickly to build wooden rafts from banana plant trunks and hollow plastic containers. They wade through waist deep currents to assist elderly neighbors, carry small infants to safety, and help pregnant mothers reach higher ground. In places like Nepali Khuti in the Sivasagar district, local villagers recently demonstrated this extraordinary bravery when unexpected surges threatened multiple hamlets. Using six small wooden country boats, local residents worked continuously through darkness and pouring rain, rescuing over a thousand stranded neighbors from tree branches, rooftops, and raised wooden platforms without waiting for instruction or praise. These grassroots rescue missions highlight a deep cultural value known across Assam as the spirit of solidarity and collective action. When disaster strikes, formal social boundaries melt

away entirely. Families whose homes stand on slightly higher ground immediately open their doors, verandahs, and courtyards to dozens of displaced neighbors. Shared kitchens spring up spontaneously along elevated road embankments and school buildings that remain above the water level. A single large iron pot becomes the focal point of an entire temporary community, where families pool whatever rations they managed to salvage before fleeing their kitchens. Flattened rice, jaggery, salt, tea, and dry rice are shared equally among everyone present. Children are comforted by familiar faces, and adults find solace in sharing their worries with others who understand the exact weight of their loss. This instant community response serves as the first crucial shield protecting vulnerable people from total despair during the darkest hours of a disaster.

As word of the rising crisis spreads across urban centers like Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, and Tezpur, civil society organizations, student unions, local social clubs, and voluntary groups rally with remarkable speed. Citizens from all walks of life assemble at neighborhood donation counters, bringing sacks of food, clean drinking water bottles, clothing, and essential medicines. Small collections started by college students quickly turn into major relief drives capable of filling large supply trucks.

Volunteers work late into the night packing individual emergency kits containing dry food items, matches, candles, halogen water purification tablets, and basic first aid

items. Drivers offer their trucks for free, and boatmen navigate perilous water channels to deliver these packages directly into isolated pockets that remain cut off from main transportation routes. This spontaneous wave of public generosity demonstrates how deeply the people of Assam care for one another during moments of collective tragedy. A vital aspect of this community support centers on preserving dignity, particularly for women, teenage girls, and newborn infants who face acute challenges in relief shelters. In many historical disaster contexts, the specific hygiene and health needs of women were frequently overlooked in standard relief distributions. Recognizing this gap, modern social groups and female led non profit organizations in Assam have made dignified aid a top priority. Teams led by women volunteers venture directly into inundated areas carrying tailored packages containing clean sanitary towels, soap, undergarments, clean cotton clothes, and baby food. By taking time to speak individually with women in relief camps, these volunteers provide emotional reassurance alongside material aid, ensuring that privacy and personal dignity are maintained even under extremely challenging living conditions.

Healthcare delivery represents another critical pillar of the helping hand extended across the floodplains. When floodwaters submerge local health centers, contaminate drinking water wells, and disrupt road access, the risk of waterborne illnesses like gastroenteritis, dysentery, skin infections, and cholera rises sharply. Medical professionals, doctors, nurses, and paramedical workers step up to fill this dangerous void. Mobile medical units and floating clinics navigate inundated tributaries to reach isolated river islands and submerged villages. Volunteer doctors spend long days operating out of temporary tarpaulin tents set up on embankments, examining patients, distributing essential medicines, and administering vaccinations. They conduct continuous health awareness drives, teaching villagers how to use water purification drops and properly boil water fetched from emergency sources. Through these tireless medical interventions, countless outbreaks are prevented,

saving lives that might otherwise be lost to post flood health complications.

The cultural community in Assam has historically played a vibrant role in mobilizing support for flood affected populations. Musicians, actors, authors, and traditional folk artists have consistently used their public platforms to raise awareness, collect funds, and physically join relief operations. Inspired by legendary cultural figures who always dedicated their artistry to human welfare, contemporary artists travel into affected districts with supply materials, singing songs of hope, distributing rations, and encouraging local volunteers. Their active physical presence on the ground brings visibility to neglected interior villages, encouraging the broader national public to step forward with contributions. When artists stand knee deep in mud alongside local workers, it sends a powerful message that no community stands isolated in its struggle.

The relationship between humans and animals in Assam adds another touching dimension to these community efforts. Agriculture and dairy farming form the backbone of the rural economy, meaning that livestock represent both economic security and emotional family bonds. When floods strike, farmers go to extraordinary lengths to protect their cattle, goats, and poultry. People risk their personal safety to untie cows from flooded sheds, leading them through fast flowing water to high grounds, highway bridges, and elevated earthen platforms. In world renowned wildlife sanctuaries like Kaziranga National Park, where rising waters force iconic species like the one horned rhinoceros, elephants, swamp deer, and tigers to cross dangerous expressways toward the safety of the Karbi Anglong hills, local residents join hands with forest department guards. Villagers form human corridors, manage vehicle speeds along highways, and rescue distressed animal calves that get separated from their mothers, illustrating a deep reverence for all forms of life.

Institutional response structures, including state disaster response forces, national disaster management personnel, paramilitaries, and district administrative officers, work closely alongside these civilian volunteers. Emergency rescue personnel navigate heavy motorboats into hazardous waters to evacuate trapped individuals, deliver medical aid, and drop food packets in isolated locations. Government agencies set up structured relief camps in permanent educational buildings, offering shelter, clean water systems, and basic sanitation facilities. Recognizing that immediate monetary assistance is essential for families to recover basic stability, direct financial transfers are disbursed directly into bank accounts of affected households, helping them buy fresh rations, clothing, and temporary building supplies. This coordinated alignment between state resources and community initiatives strengthens the overall effectiveness of emergency response operations. When the immediate floodwaters finally begin to recede, a secondary, often more grueling phase of the disaster begins. The retreat of water exposes the harsh reality left behind. Homes that stood submerged for days are coated in thick layers of heavy black silt, mud, and decaying organic matter. Furniture is ruined, bamboo walls are warped or washed away entirely, and open drinking water wells are filled with contaminated sludge. Returning families face the physically exhausting task of shoveling out feet of mud before their living spaces can become habitable once again. It is during this difficult cleanup phase that long term humanitarian assistance becomes absolutely critical.

Voluntary youth groups and local community collectives step in to tackle this daunting cleanup work. Groups of young volunteers equip themselves with shovels, buckets, water pumps, and disinfectants to travel into hard hit villages. They launch free house cleaning

drives, working alongside exhausted homeowners to clear heavy silt out of rooms, scrub down mud covered floors, and disinfect living quarters with lime powder and bleaching agents. They assist in cleaning community prayer halls known as Namghars, which serve as the spiritual and social focal points of rural Assamese life. Restoring these sacred community spaces provides a huge psychological boost to villagers, offering them a clean, dignified place to gather, pray, and discuss their collective recovery plans.

Agricultural rehabilitation requires equally sustained effort, as lost crops threaten long term food security and rural livelihoods. To help farmers recover before the agricultural season slips away, government agricultural departments and non governmental organizations launch community paddy nurseries. High quality, flood tolerant paddy seedlings are cultivated in central communal land plots and distributed free of charge to farmers whose original crops were destroyed. Farmers come together in groups to clear sand deposits from farmlands, restore irrigation channels, and share draft animals and equipment. This collective agricultural effort ensures that rural families can put seeds back into the earth, securing their future food supply and preventing long term economic collapse.

The spirit of support extended to Assam reaches far across geographical borders.

Members of the Assamese diaspora living in distant Indian metro cities as well as overseas locations across North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia maintain strong emotional connections to their homeland. They organize international fundraising campaigns, leverage digital platforms to highlight ground conditions, and coordinate directly with trusted local non profit organizations back home. Financial contributions sent by people thousands of miles away fund long term recovery projects, such as rebuilding damaged primary schools, constructing elevated concrete community platforms, providing water filtration units, and gifting livestock to families who lost their main source of income. This global network proves that distance cannot weaken the bond of empathy and care. Rebuilding after a flood is a slow process that extends long after the waters disappear and media attention fades elsewhere. Reconstructing bamboo homes, replacing lost cattle, buying new household utensils, and repurchasing lost school supplies require months of steady work and financial expenditure. True relief must transform into long term resilience. Communities are increasingly focusing on building elevated wooden homes on high stilts, creating raised earthen platforms in flood prone areas to shelter livestock during emergencies, and adopting scientific river management strategies. Engaging technical institutions and environmental experts to study riverbank erosion and design sustainable structural solutions ensures that future generations are better protected against recurring water surges.

The recurring challenge of floods in Assam tests human endurance every year, yet it consistently brings out the finest qualities of humanity. In the face of overwhelming natural destruction, the courage of local rescuers, the generosity of strangers, the dedication of healthcare workers, and the tireless spirit of community volunteers shine with inspiring brightness. People who have lost their own possessions still find the strength to share their remaining meal with someone in greater need. This profound sense of togetherness shows that while rivers may overflow and destroy physical structures, they can never erode the enduring strength of human compassion. As Assam continues its journey toward building safer, more resilient communities along its majestic riverbanks, the warm helping hands extended across villages, cities, and borders remain the ultimate symbol of hope and renewal.

Democracy demands dialogue, not parliamentary paralysis

By: Lalit Garg

The greatest strength of Indian democracy lies in its Parliament. It is the supreme democratic institution where issues concerning the nation's present and future are debated with seriousness, where the government is held accountable, where the opposition gives voice to public aspirations, and where the country's developmental direction is determined through legislation. Unfortunately, Parliament today is increasingly turning into an arena of confrontation, accusations, sloganeering, and political obstinacy rather than a forum for dialogue and consensus. The continued deadlock during the ongoing Monsoon Session has not only disrupted parliamentary proceedings but has also undermined the very spirit of democracy.

The recent meeting between Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju and Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi, aimed at breaking the impasse, failed to produce any meaningful outcome. This reflects the reality that both sides remain so deeply entrenched in their respective political positions that national interest has been pushed into the background. The opposition insists that Parliament cannot function unless the government agrees to make statements and hold discussions on certain specific issues. The government, on the other hand, remains determined to proceed with its legislative agenda. The result is that valuable parliamentary time is being squandered in unproductive con-

frontation.

Differences of opinion are natural in a democracy, but allowing disagreement to degenerate into disorder is contrary to democratic values. The responsibility of the opposition extends beyond merely opposing the government; it must also offer constructive alternatives. While holding the government accountable is the opposition's constitutional right, paralysing Parliament cannot be justified under any democratic principle. Democratic dissent has its own dignity and discipline. When opposition turns into obstruction, it ceases to be a democratic right and becomes a neglect of democratic responsibility.

Over the past several years, a disturbing trend has emerged in which politically contentious issues are strategically amplified even before a parliamentary session begins, often with the apparent objective of disrupting the entire session. Consequently, many important bills are either passed without adequate debate or remain pending indefinitely. The nation pays the highest price for this dysfunction. Every minute of Parliament is funded by taxpayers' money and carries immense national value. If that precious time is consumed by slogans and disruptions rather than meaningful deliberation, it amounts to a betrayal of both public trust and democratic accountability. Dialogue remains the most effective instrument for resolving differences in any democracy. From Mahatma Gandhi to Atal Bihari Vajpayee, India's finest political traditions have been rooted in dialogue,

consensus, and mutual respect. Today, both the ruling party and the opposition must abandon their rigid positions and return to the negotiating table. The dignity of Parliament is not measured by how effectively one side corners the other, but by how seriously it deliberates upon issues of national importance.

The Congress Party and its leader Rahul Gandhi, in particular, must recognize that democracy is not sustained solely through protests and political agitation. The role of the opposition is not merely to challenge the government but to strengthen democratic institutions. If disrupting Parliament becomes the default strategy on every contentious issue, the public is likely to conclude that the opposition lacks a credible alternative vision and constructive policy agenda. Citizens expect not only criticism but also solutions. If the opposition distances itself from dialogue, the ideal of "Dialogue for Solutions" will remain nothing more than an empty slogan. The government's responsibilities are equally significant. In a democracy, a parliamentary majority does not authorize unilateralism. The government must also remain open to legitimate concerns raised by the opposition and seek consensus wherever possible. Parliament does not belong to any single political party; it belongs to the nation. Therefore, the government must demonstrate patience, sensitivity, and a broader statesmanlike outlook. However, if every attempt at dialogue becomes entangled in political preconditions and inflexible posturing, meaningful

solutions naturally become impossible.

What India urgently needs today is greater political maturity. Unfortunately, contemporary politics is increasingly shaped by rigid positions, prejudices, and partisan calculations. Every issue is viewed through the prism of electoral advantage rather than national welfare. Parliamentary debates are often overshadowed by political messaging. Such tendencies weaken democratic institutions. Parliament exists to deliberate on public policy and national development—not to serve as a platform for electioneering. India is currently navigating multiple critical challenges, including economic growth, technological advancement, employment generation, educational reforms, agricultural transformation, national security, global competitiveness, and social harmony. At such a crucial juncture, every day of Parliament is invaluable. If this precious time continues to be consumed by political confrontation, the nation's developmental momentum will inevitably suffer. Delays in legislation, policy decisions, and parliamentary functioning directly affect the lives of ordinary citizens.

The strength of Indian democracy should not be measured by the volume of noise inside Parliament but by the quality of ideas and deliberations it produces. In a healthy democracy, the government and the opposition are political rivals, not enemies. Their ultimate commitment must be to the nation. If political parties lose sight of this fundamental principle, democracy

risks being reduced to a mere contest of numbers. The time has come for all political parties to engage in sincere introspection. The opposition must make its criticism constructive, while the government must broaden the scope of dialogue. Together, they must restore the dignity and credibility of Parliament. The future of democracy lies not in confrontation but in communication. Parliament earns respect not through disruptions and slogans but through thoughtful debate and responsible lawmaking.

In a vast and vibrant democracy like India, if Parliament itself becomes a symbol of persistent deadlock, public faith in democratic institutions will inevitably weaken—a development that bodes ill for the nation's democratic future. The need of the hour is for politics to rise above electoral compulsions and dedicate itself to nation-building. Both the ruling party and the opposition must remember that before representing their respective political organizations, they represent India. Every moment of Parliament is a priceless national asset. To sacrifice it at the altar of ego, obstinacy, and partisan interests would be an injustice to future generations. If India truly aspires to strengthen its democracy, restore the dignity of Parliament, and realize its vision of becoming a developed nation, there is only one path forward—dialogue, consensus, and unwavering commitment to national interest. That alone embodies the true strength of Indian democracy and the highest ideal of parliamentary conduct.

Border management and Assam's internal security

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan

The state of Assam occupies a uniquely sensitive geopolitical position within India's northeastern frontier, serving as a critical land bridge connecting the mainland to the broader region while sharing direct international boundaries with Bangladesh spanning approximately 263 kilometers and Bhutan across 267 kilometers, alongside its close proximity to porous international corridors involving Myanmar and China. Historically, this geographic orientation has rendered the state vulnerable to a wide array of external security challenges, primarily driven by the artificial demarcation of borders following the Partition of 1947 and the geopolitical churn during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Unlike traditional land borders defined by clear natural markers or high mountain ranges, the Indo-Bangladesh border along Assam is characterized by an exceptionally complex, heterogeneous terrain that features dense riverine channels, low-lying floodplains, marshy char lands along the Brahmaputra River, and densely populated border habitats where agricultural land directly abuts the international zero line. The riverine sectors, particularly across districts like Dhubri, South Salmara-Mankachar, Cachar, and Sribhumi, present immense physical impediments to traditional physical fencing, as shifting river channels regularly erode border markers and inundate physical structures during the annual monsoon season. These ecological and geographical realities have historically created structural vulnerabilities that illicit networks, irregular migrants, and insurgent outfits have exploited for decades. The inability to establish an unbroken, impermeable barrier along these porous stretches transformed border management from a routine border-policing exercise into a complex internal security imperative. Over time, the uncontrolled movement of populations across these open borders directly impacted the socio-demographic composition of Assam, fostering deep-seated anxieties among indigenous communities regarding land ownership, political representation, and cultural identity. Consequently, the dynamics of border management in Assam cannot be viewed strictly through the narrow lens of territorial defense against foreign military aggression; rather, it represents an essential, foundational component of state governance that directly shapes local stability, law and order, ethnic harmony, and the broader internal security architecture of Northeast India as a whole.

The long-term socio-political impact of unchecked cross-border infiltration has historically constituted the primary driver of internal instability within Assam, giving rise to prolonged mass movements, ethnic friction, and socio-political polarization. The massive influx

of population across the porous border following the 1971 conflict triggered significant demographic changes, precipitating the historic Assam Movement from 1979 to 1985, which demanded the identification, disenfranchisement, and deportation of illegal foreign nationals. This political mobilization culminated in the signing of the Assam Accord in 1985, establishing a legal framework for border management and foreigner detection. Despite these institutional mechanisms, the persistence of illegal immigration over subsequent decades continued to fuel intense grievances regarding land encroachment in ecologically sensitive char areas, tribal belts, and forest reserves, while simultaneously threatening the political rights and cultural heritage of indigenous communities. To address these systemic vulnerabilities, state and central authorities initiated comprehensive policy interventions, including the updating of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the execution of the historic tripartite Memorandum of Settlement with the pro-talks faction of the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) in December 2023. This milestone peace agreement explicitly prioritized border security as a mandatory prerequisite for protecting indigenous rights, mandating enhanced technological surveillance, strict revision of electoral rolls to prevent the illegal inclusion of non-citizens, and rigorous eviction drives against unauthorized encroachments on government and forest lands. Concurrently, the Assam Police Border Organisation has been significantly strengthened to function as a resilient second line of defense behind the Border Security Force (BSF), deploying dedicated personnel for intelligence gathering, border monitoring, and the interception of illegal entrants. In recent years, strict zero-tolerance enforcement policies have led to the proactive detection and expulsion of organized infiltration attempts, demonstrating a clear strategic transition toward robust push-back mechanisms and coordinated inter-agency operations. Maintaining this strict posture along the border is vital not only for deterring unauthorized entry, but also for preserving social cohesion, preventing communal violence, and reassuring indigenous populations that state sovereignty and demographic integrity are being actively safeguarded. The porous nature of Assam's international boundaries has historically functioned as a force multiplier for armed insurgent groups, enabling underground organizations to establish cross-border operational networks, procurement lines, and safe sanctuaries outside Indian jurisdiction. Outfits such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and various factions of the National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) systematically exploited unfenced border stretches and difficult terrain to launch surprise attacks against state security forces before retreating into safe

havens located in neighboring countries, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Myanmar. These external bases provided insurgent outfits with logistics hubs, weapons training facilities, and access to international black markets for arms and finance, effectively sustaining violent conflicts for over four decades. The security paradigm underwent a fundamental shift following major counter-insurgency operations, most notably Bhutan's Operation All Clear in 2003 and subsequent sustained diplomatic cooperation with Bangladesh, which led to the dismantling of insurgent command structures and the arrest or extradition of top leadership figures. The gradual surrender of insurgent factions culminated in comprehensive peace agreements, including the 2020 Bodo Accord and the definitive 2023 ULFA Peace Accord, which saw thousands of cadres lay down their arms and integrate into the democratic process. However, internal security management cannot afford complacency, as residual insurgent elements, most notably the anti-talks faction known as ULFA-Independent (ULFA-I), continue to operate from remote bases in eastern Myanmar. These splinter groups leverage transnational illicit corridors to conduct sporadic extortion, recruit vulnerable youth, and maintain contacts with wider insurgent alliances in the region. Neutralizing these lingering threats requires sustained intelligence sharing, rigorous border control to prevent the infiltration of armed cadres, and active diplomatic engagement with regional neighbors to deny insurgent organizations any opportunity to re-establish sanctuary or transit routes along the borderlands.

To overcome the severe topographical limitations that make conventional physical barriers impossible along riverine and marshy sectors, India has pioneered an advanced technological paradigm in border management along the Assam-Bangladesh frontier. While physical fencing covers the vast majority of the land boundary, crucial unfenced gaps—particularly in the Dhubri sector where the Brahmaputra River enters Bangladesh—historically exposed the state to undetected crossings and smuggling. In response, the Ministry of Home Affairs implemented the Border Electronically Dominated QRT Interception Technique (BOLD-QIT) under the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) framework. This initiative converts difficult riverine stretches into technologically monitored zones using a network of high-tech sensors, thermal imaging devices, ground-based radar, micro-aerostat balloons, unmanned aerial vehicles, and day-night surveillance cameras integrated into a centralized command center. When these automated systems detect unauthorized movement or perimeter breaches, real-time alerts are instantly transmitted to specialized Quick Reaction Teams (QRTs) of the Border Security Force equipped with high-speed



river craft, enabling swift interception before intruders can melt into local populations. Modernization efforts have been further augmented by the deployment of body-worn cameras, night-vision devices, biometric verification systems, and smart perimeter alarms designed to operate under harsh weather conditions. Despite these remarkable technological advancements, operational border management continues to face serious physical challenges, including extreme monsoon flooding, riverbank erosion that damages physical infrastructure, dense seasonal fog that impairs visual optics, and land acquisition delays in inhabited border zones. Addressing these persistent vulnerabilities requires ongoing investments in climate-resilient engineering, modern radar technologies capable of penetrating heavy rainfall, and continuous structural upgrades to ensure that technical surveillance systems remain operational and effective throughout the year. Beyond population movement and political insurgency, border porosity presents a severe threat to Assam's internal law and order through the proliferation of organized transnational criminal networks engaged in smuggling and illicit trade. The strategic proximity of Northeast India to the Golden Triangle—one of the world's primary drug-producing regions encompassing parts of Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand—has turned Assam into both a major transit corridor and a direct market for illicit narcotics, including high-purity heroin, methamphetamine, and Yaba tablets. These dangerous substances cross vulnerable border points, fueling substance abuse among local youth, generating illicit revenue for criminal syndicates, and

funding residual insurgent activities across the state. Concurrently, cross-border networks actively engage in the smuggling of cattle, fake Indian currency notes (FICN), timber, wildlife products, and illegal arms, creating a shadow economy that undermines legitimate commercial activity and corrupts local governance structures. Managing these multi-faceted security threats requires border authorities to strike a delicate balance between rigorous security enforcement and the facilitation of lawful cross-border commerce. The establishment of modern border infrastructure, such as the Integrated Check Post (ICP) at Sutarkandi in Karimganj district, demonstrates how secure, digitized trade corridors can transform chaotic borderlands into regulated economic gateways. By centralizing customs processing, cargo verification, and passenger screening within secure, high-tech environments, ICPs significantly reduce opportunities for illicit contraband while facilitating legitimate trade volumes worth hundreds of crores annually. Securing the border against transnational criminal networks is therefore an essential economic and social priority, directly protecting local communities from the destructive effects of organized crime while encouraging formal regional trade and economic development.

Establishing a sustainable internal security framework for Assam ultimately demands a holistic, multi-layered strategic approach that seamlessly integrates physical infrastructure, smart surveillance technology, proactive law enforcement, civil-military synergy, and inclusive socio-economic development. While physical fencing and electronic surveillance systems form the first line of defense managed by the Border Security

Force, internal security cannot be maintained without robust secondary enforcement layers inside the state. Strengthening the capacity of the Assam Police Border Organisation, expanding intelligence networks, and utilizing advanced spatial technologies like satellite imagery to monitor encroachments in char areas are crucial steps in preventing illegal settlements and detecting illicit networks. Furthermore, effective border management relies heavily on the active participation and cooperation of local border communities. Implementing community-centric initiatives helps address socio-economic marginalization in remote border areas by improving road connectivity, healthcare, education, and livelihood opportunities, thereby converting border populations into proactive partners in national security rather than vulnerable targets for exploitation by criminal syndicates. At the international level, sustained diplomatic engagement with neighboring countries, particularly Bangladesh, remains vital for coordinating anti-smuggling operations, expediting joint border surveys, and resolving pending fencing disputes along sensitive zero-line sectors. In conclusion, border management in Assam is far more than an administrative or military task along the state's geographical perimeter; it is the cornerstone of the state's internal stability, cultural preservation, and long-term economic prosperity. By continuing to modernize border security infrastructure, enforcing strict rule of law, protecting indigenous land and political rights, and fostering regional economic integration, India can effectively safeguard Assam's borders and secure a peaceful, resilient future for the entire northeastern region.

Rising HIV cases on higher education campuses: No more silence, dialogue is essential

Seven years after Article 370: Kashmir's two faces, one unhealed wound

By: Dr Satyavan Saurabh

The future of a country is determined by its youth, and the greatest centers of youth power are our schools, colleges, and universities. Therefore, if news emerges from a state that a large number of students have tested positive for HIV, forcing the government to launch a comprehensive testing campaign in higher education institutions, this is no longer a matter solely for the health department. It is a serious warning for education, society, families, policymakers, and the entire nation. This is not the time to spread fear, but to confront this challenge with a scientific approach, sensitivity, and widespread awareness.

HIV, or Human Immunodeficiency Virus, attacks the body's immune system. If not diagnosed and treated promptly, it can lead to a serious condition called AIDS. However, advances in medical science have made it a manageable disease. With the help of antiretroviral therapy (ART), infected individuals can live a normal and long life. Therefore, early detection, regular treatment, and infection prevention are crucial.

The news of HIV infection among young people raises several serious questions. Is health and sex education adequate in our educational institutions? Are young people receiving scientific information about safe behavior, the causes of infection, and preventive measures? Are families and society willing to openly communicate on this topic? If the answer to these questions is 'no,' then we must acknowledge that the problem is not just about health, but also about our social mindset and education system.

Even today, Indian society doesn't consider it comfortable to discuss sexual health openly. Parents are hesitant, teachers often avoid the topic, and students often receive incomplete or misleading information from the internet or friends. This results in myths, misconceptions, and misperceptions. Scientific information, however, is the most effective means of preventing this disease.

It's also important to understand that HIV infection can spread not only through unprotected sex, but also through transfusions of infected blood, the use of contaminated needles, and from an infected mother to her child. However, HIV is not spread through shaking hands, sitting together, sharing food, hugging, sneezing, or mosquito bites. Unfortunately, even today, a large segment of society remains unaware of these facts. This ignorance leads to discrimination and social exclusion against infected individuals.

Young people attending higher education institutions are at a time of their lives marked by independence, curiosity, and a desire for new experiences. Guiding them in the right direction is not only the responsibility of families, but also of universities and the government. Every college and university should have a health counseling center, trained counselors, confidential testing facilities, and regular awareness programs. Students should be assured that their privacy and dignity will be fully protected if they come forward with a health concern.

If a state decides to launch an HIV testing campaign in higher education institutions, its objective should not be solely to identify infected individuals. Counseling, mental health support, treatment, and awareness must be given equal importance. Testing will be successful only if students perceive it as a normal health safety measure rather than a source of fear or shame.

The role of the media also becomes crucial here. Sensationalizing any data or event creates fear and confusion in society. Conversely, if the media promotes dialogue based on scientific facts, expert opinion, and awareness, society can become more responsible and sensitive. It is also essential to end the tendency to associate illness with crime or character.

The growing trend of drug addiction is also a matter of concern. Drug abuse, especially the sharing of infected needles, also increases the risk of HIV infection. Therefore, de-addiction campaigns and HIV awareness programs need to be integrated. Effective infection control is achieved not only through treatment but also by reducing risky behaviors.

India has achieved remarkable success over the years through its National AIDS Control Program. New infections have declined, and millions of infected individuals have been provided treatment. However, if the number of infections among young people is a cause for concern, it signals the need to review old awareness methods and make them more effective, modern, and youth-friendly.

The role of the family is crucial in this entire matter. Confidential communication, accurate information, and emotional support with children and adolescents can protect them from risky situations. If families themselves make this topic taboo, young people will be forced to seek information from inappropriate sources. Silence is never the answer; appropriate communication at the right time is the foundation of safety.

We must also remember that a person living with HIV is a normal citizen just like us. They need treatment, respect, and support, not scorn. The more sensitive society becomes, the more people will come forward without fear for testing and treatment. This is also the most effective way to prevent infection.

The need today is to transform higher education campuses not only into centers of knowledge, but also centers of health, awareness, and life skills. Scientific thinking, responsible behavior, regular health check-ups, and a sensitive social environment can only address this challenge.

Ultimately, the challenge of HIV teaches us that modern education cannot be limited to degrees. Life-saving knowledge is equally essential. If we break the silence today and embrace awareness, dialogue, and a scientific approach, not only will infection prevention be possible, but we will also build a society that sees people as human beings, not diseases. This is the need of the hour and the most important step towards a healthy, safe, and compassionate India. (Dr. Satyavan Saurabh, PhD (Political Science), is a poet and social thinker.)

By: T N Ashok

Seven years have lapsed after the BJP led NDA government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi abrogated article 370 of the constitution withdrawing special status conferred on the state of Jammu & Kashmir soon after independence when the Maharaja acceded to the Union of India under the then Premier Jawaharlal Nehru.

It had been a debate issue for 70 years when the Maharaja acceded to the Indian union seeking protection from marauding tribes in the hills aided and abetted by Pakistan's army when JLN agreed and a compromise was agreed to as article 370 made a precondition for the accession. The matter reached the UN for resolution and the world body ordered under a resolution for both countries to withdraw their forces to their original positions, India did but Pakistan did not -- stayed put -- creating the Pak Occupied Kashmir -- a thorn in Indo Pak relations and the territory now sees a massive uprising from residents both Muslims and Hindus against the barbaric and oppressive rule of Pakistan army with no respect for sovereignty, human rights, proper representation of 12 MPs from that region, and electricity tariffs. Against this background, on August 5, as Jammu and Kashmir marked the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370, the Valley once again wore its familiar split personality.

In Srinagar, the National Conference (NC) and the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) mounted protest marches in every district, only to be boxed in by police barricades around their party headquarters at Lal Chowk. Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, quoting Robert Frost on social media -- "miles to go before I sleep" -- declared that "we haven't forgotten, and we haven't reconciled."

Former PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti led a candlelight vigil the previous night. Meanwhile, the BJP and sections of civil society marked the day as one of integration and liberation from what they call decades of "Article 370 apartheid." Life, notably, went on as normal -- schools, banks and markets functioned -- under one of the tightest security blankets the city has seen in years.

Seven years on, Kashmir remains a place where mourning and celebration occupy the same street, on the same day.

The Provision That Was Always "Temporary". To understand why August 5, 2019 still divides opinion so sharply, one has to go back to October 1947. When the British left the subcontinent, princely states were given the choice to accede to India, Pakistan, or theoretically remain independent.

Maharaja Hari Singh, the Dogra ruler of Jammu and Kashmir, hesitated. His hand was forced when Pakistan, unable to secure acces-

sion through negotiation, backed an invasion by Pashtun tribal militias -- reinforced covertly by Pakistani army regulars -- in what was code-named Operation Gulmarg.

The raiders swept toward Srinagar, looting and killing as they advanced. A desperate Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession to India on October 26, 1947, in return for military assistance. Indian troops were airlifted to defend the Valley, and a war followed.

By the time a UN-brokered ceasefire took effect on January 1, 1949, Pakistan controlled roughly a third of the former princely state -- territory India calls Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), encompassing what Islamabad terms "Azad Kashmir" and the northern areas of Gilgit-Baltistan. The UN Security Council resolutions that followed called for a two-stage process: first, a full Pakistani withdrawal of its troops and irregulars from the territory it held; only then would a plebiscite be held to let Kashmiris decide their future.

Pakistan never withdrew. Without that precondition being met, the plebiscite envisaged under the UN framework could never legally proceed -- a fact New Delhi has consistently cited, even as Islamabad has spent 79 years demanding the vote regardless. That unresolved sequence -- ceasefire without withdrawal, promise without plebiscite -- has been the thorn at the heart of Indo-Pak relations since 1947, fuelling three further wars, the Kargil conflict, and decades of cross-border militancy.

It was against this backdrop of a contested, still-forming accession that Article 370 was inserted into the Indian Constitution in 1949, negotiated largely between Jawaharlal Nehru, Sheikh Abdullah and constitutional advisor N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar. It gave Jammu and Kashmir its own constitution, its own flag, and autonomy over all matters except defence, foreign affairs and communications -- explicitly framed in the Constitution's own text as a "temporary" provision pending final resolution of the state's status. Article 35A, added by presidential order in 1954, flowed from it: it empowered the state legislature to define "permanent residents" and reserved land ownership, government jobs and college admissions for them alone -- a provision that, among other things, meant Kashmiri women who married outsiders lost inheritance rights for their children.

It was very similar to Mexico giving up Texas to the Union of States called the United States of America. Texas enjoys special privileges to protect the huge Mexican population especially in San Antonio with Texas being the only state allowed to fly its own flag under the Star Spangled Banner national flag. Texas can secede from the United States and declare itself independent if its state assembly decided so and the people of the state voted for it. That has never happened and will never happen, Mexico is not

Pakistan, though controlled by Narco Kings.

Why Modi Moved, and Why Ladakh Was Split Off. The BJP had campaigned on scrapping Article 370 since the party's earliest avatar, the Jana Sangh, calling it an obstacle to J&K's full integration into India and a shield for separatism, dynastic politics and demographic exclusivity. On August 5, 2019, Home Minister Amit Shah moved a resolution in Parliament -- timed to a period of President's Rule in the state, which meant no elected state assembly needed to concur -- effectively hollowing out Article 370's substantive provisions.

Simultaneously, Parliament passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, downgrading the state into two Union Territories: Jammu and Kashmir, with a legislature, and Ladakh, without one, administered directly by a Lieutenant Governor.

The government's stated logic for the Ladakh split was that the Buddhist-majority, geographically distinct region had long felt neglected by Kashmir-centric politics and wanted direct central governance and Union Territory status of its own -- Leh's Buddhist leadership had petitioned for exactly this for years. Ladakh's own protest movement -- led by figures like the engineer-activist Sonam Wangchuk demanding Sixth Schedule tribal protections and statehood safeguards -- has since become a separate, occasionally volatile grievance, distinct from the Kashmir Valley's Article 370 politics.

The government's justification for the broader move rested on ending what it called a "temporary" anomaly that had outlived its purpose, integrating Kashmir fully into India's constitutional mainstream, opening the region to outside investment and land ownership, and -- its officials argue -- reducing terrorism and stone-pelting through economic development.

Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy has previously described the move as J&K's journey "from terrorist hotspot to tourist hotspot."

The Congress has run parallel "black day" campaigns demanding statehood under the banner "Hamari Riyasat, Hamara Haq."

A Wound That Won't Close. Seven years in, the anniversary itself has become a ritual of contested memory: black ambans and candlelight vigils in one part of the city, celebratory events in another, and a security grid heavy enough to ensure both happen without colliding. What remains unresolved is not just Kashmir's constitutional status but the older, deeper fracture from 1947 -- an accession under fire, a war that froze rather than settled, and a plebiscite promise suspended forever on Pakistan's unmet precondition.

Until that foundational dispute finds resolution, every August 5 in Srinagar will likely continue to be marked, as this one was, by two Kashmiris observing the same date for entirely opposite reasons. (IPA Service)

Bangladesh to hold presidential election on August 20: EC



DHAKA, Aug 6: Bangladesh's presidential election will be held on August 20, the Election Commission announced on Thursday, two weeks after President Mohammed Shahabuddin resigned on health grounds before completing his five-year term.

Shahabuddin, 76, was a long-time ally of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina.

"Chief Election Commissioner AMM Nasir Uddin has finalised the dates in consultation with (acting parliamentary) Speaker Kayser Kamal," the Election Commission's senior secretary Akhtar Ahmed told reporters.

In line with the Constitution, the parliament members elect the president, but the EC conducts the pro-

cedure to elect the head of state.

Announcing the election schedule, Election Commission Secretary Akhtar Ahmed said that voting will be held on August 20 from 2:00 pm to 5:00 pm at the Jatiya Sangsad (National Parliament) session hall.

Nomination papers will be accepted at the office of the Chief Election Commissioner on August 13. The scrutiny of nomination papers will be held on August 16. The last date for withdrawal of candidature is August 18.

The lawmakers would cast votes to elect the new president inside Parliament on August 20. However, no voting will be held in case of a consensus candidate.

According to the state-run BSS

news agency, Ahmed told journalists that the announcement for the presidential election schedule was made after discussions with Parliament Speaker Hafiz Uddin Ahmed, who is serving as Acting President for 90 days in accordance with the Constitution. A new President must be elected within a 90-day timeframe.

Ahmed said that the voter list for the election has been prepared and other remaining administrative procedures will be completed before the election.

Shahabuddin, a 1971 Liberation War veteran and former lower judiciary judge, had taken the oath in April 2023 for a five-year term.

He cited health complications as the reason for his resignation; however, it came amid speculations that Prime Minister Rahman's government was uncomfortable with the largely titular head of state.

Some reports had claimed that Shahabuddin contacted Hasina over the phone, disappointing the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party's top leadership. The former president had dismissed the reports as "baseless." (AP)

'We deplore and firmly reject this, and have lodged serious representations with Japan' China-Japan tensions escalate after Tokyo labels Beijing as its 'greatest strategic challenge'

BEIJING, Aug 6: China has lodged a "serious diplomatic" protest with Japan over its latest defence white paper, which portrayed Beijing as Tokyo's "greatest strategic challenge" and made "brazen comments" on Taiwan, further escalating tensions between the two countries.

"The white paper once again targeted China with groundless accusations, rehearsing the so-called 'China threat' and grossly interfering in China's internal affairs with brazen comments on China's Taiwan region," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jing said on Wednesday.

"We deplore and firmly reject this, and have lodged serious representations with Japan," he said while answering questions over Japan's new defence white paper.

Defending recurring military drills around Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory, Lin said, "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. The Taiwan question is entirely



China's internal affair. How to resolve it is a matter for the Chinese ourselves and Japan is in no place to interfere."

About disputed islands in the East China Sea, he said, "Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands have been China's territory since ancient times."

The islands, called Senkaku by Japan and Diaoyu Dao by China, are controlled by Tokyo. The Chinese coast guard periodically conducts patrols around them to assert Beijing's sovereignty.

The white paper approved by Japan's cabinet on Tuesday said

China's growing military actions are Japan's top security challenge and "must be addressed through overall national strength and co-operation with allies and like-minded nations."

The nearly 600-page white paper contained a detailed assessment of the increasingly volatile regional security environment.

Coinciding with the release of the white paper, Japan showcased its new anti-ship missile, with a range of about 1,000 km.

The missile test brings Tokyo a step closer to fielding an indigenous family of long-range stand-off missiles that could be deployed from the land, sea and air, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

In his preface to the whitepaper, Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi hoped that it would "deepen the public's understanding of Japan's defence and security, and serve as an opportunity for people to reflect on how security is linked to the future of every citizen." (AP)

Non-Territorial Tamil Community Council mooted for Sri Lanka's Indian-origin Tamils



COLOMBO, Aug 6: The Tamils of Indian origin would press for the creation of a Non-Territorial Tamil Community Council in Sri Lanka when the Constitutional reform process gets underway, TPA leader Mano Ganesan said Thursday.

Ganesan, the Tamil Progressives Alliance (TPA) leader met India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri along with other leaders of the newly formed group of Sri Lankan Tamil and Indian-Origin Tamil (IOT) community on Wednesday when he spoke about the role envisaged for the Non-Territorial Tamil Commu-

nity Council (NTTC).

The Constitutional reform must not only safeguard devolution but also recognise the democratic aspirations of the Indian-Origin Tamil community through the inclusion of the NTTC in the Constitution, Ganesan stressed.

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, Misri called upon the Sri Lankan leadership to implement their commitment to hold Provincial Council elections at the earliest and to fully implement the Constitutional provisions of Sri Lanka to meet the aspirations of

the Tamil people.

Ganesan told PTI, "There is understandable concern that a new Constitution could weaken the gains of the 13th Amendment, particularly (for) Provincial Councils. Given its historic role in the 1987 Indo-Lanka Accord, India has both the moral standing and legitimate interest to caution against any constitutional process that dilutes devolution."

Recalling that President Anura Kumara Dissanayake's National People's Power (NPP) had pledged to resume the Constitutional process that began in 2016 from where it was suspended, Ganesan said, "The 2016 Steering Committee's Interim Report did not propose weakening the 13th Amendment. Instead, it recommended strengthening the Provincial Councils and deepening devolution."

Ganesan said he served alongside President Dissanayake on the Constitutional Steering Committee and that it would be both politically and morally inconsistent to now weaken or abolish Provincial Councils. (AP)

North Korea launches short-range ballistic missile toward sea, South Korea says

SEOUL, Aug 6: North Korea launched a short-range ballistic missile toward the waters off its east coast on Thursday, South Korea's military said, the latest in a series of weapons tests by North Korea this year.

The military detected the launch from North Korea's eastern coastal Wonsan area around 5 pm, the South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement.

It said South Korea's military has bolstered its surveillance posture and is closely coordinating with the US and Japan.

Japan's Defence Ministry also said that North Korea fired a possible ballistic missile but there was no impact in or around Japan.

North Korea has been focusing on enlarging its nuclear and missile arsenals since leader Kim Jong Un's high-stakes diplomacy with US President Donald Trump collapsed in 2019.

Experts say the North Korean leader wants international recognition as a nuclear state so that he can demand the lifting of international economic sanctions on North Korea. (AP)

Israeli prosecutors charge settler in West Bank killing of Palestinian leader Awdah Hathaleen

JERUSALEM, Aug 6: Israeli prosecutors Thursday charged a settler for the killing of a Palestinian community leader last year in the occupied West Bank, according to an indictment filed in district court.

In the document, prosecutors accuse Yinon Levi, who lives in the south of the West Bank, of reckless manslaughter in the death of prominent Palestinian activist Awdah Hathaleen in July 2025. The charge holds a lesser punishment than murder under Israeli law. The indictment also charges Levi with armed trespassing and malicious property damage.

It is extremely rare for Israel to charge settlers with violence against Palestinians. Israeli rights group B'Tselem said that the charges against Levi mark the first time since October 7, 2023 that an Israeli has been indicted for the death of a Palestinian in the West Bank.

In that time, the group said, Israeli settlers and soldiers have killed at least 1,100 Palestinians in the territory.

A lawyer for Levi, Avichay Hajbi, did not confirm whether an indictment was handed down, but told The Associated

Press that the prosecution had made a "mistaken decision." He said the defence would respond to the accusations in court.

Levi was shown in video footage shooting at crowds of Palestinians in Hathaleen's village, Umm al-Khair, on the day the activist was killed. Witnesses said one of the shots Levi fired struck Hathaleen, who was standing metres away.

One video showed Levi firing two shots, while another, which family members say was taken by Hathaleen himself, showed Levi firing toward the person holding the camera. The footage cuts, but the person can still be heard moaning in pain. Hathaleen was a prominent voice advocating against settler violence and was involved in the 2025 Oscar-winning film "No Other Land," which chronicled the fight by Palestinian residents to protect their homes and villages.

A teacher and father of three, he often hosted international activists and dignitaries in his home. His public profile and the videos capturing the moment of the alleged shooting ignited global calls for Levi's prosecution. (AP)

Pak PM, Munir to visit Saudi Arabia amid continued tension in Gulf region

LAHORE, Aug 6: Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Asim Munir will undertake a three-day official visit to Saudi Arabia from Thursday as Islamabad seeks to reinforce its strategic partnership with Riyadh against the backdrop of escalating tensions in West Asia.

Pakistan last week said it is "doing its utmost" to bring the US and Iran back to the negotiating table under the Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding signed on June 18. Sharif, who last visited Saudi Arabia, is leading a high-level delegation for the August 6-8 visit. Apart from Munir, the high-level delegation includes Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar and other federal ministers, the Foreign Office (FO) said in a statement posted on X.

Dar, who is also the Foreign Minister, concluded a visit to Jordan after attending a ministerial meeting on Jerusalem and is already in Saudi Arabia. He will directly join the prime minister's delegation there, the FO said.

"During the visit, the prime min-

ister will meet Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia Mohammed bin Salman. Discussions would focus on consolidating the Pakistan-Saudi bilateral relationship and exchange views on areas of regional and international developments of mutual interests," the statement said.

The visit, it said, reflected Pakistan's long-standing partnership with Saudi Arabia, rooted in decades of mutual trust, cooperation and brotherhood.

"Although taking place amid heightened tensions in the Gulf, the visit carries significance beyond the immediate crisis and short-term considerations. It will further strengthen bilateral relations, deepen strategic cooperation, enhance coordination on regional and international issues of mutual interest and also reinforce multilateral cooperation," the FO said. The visit comes at a time when the West Asia conflict has widened across multiple fronts, prompting Gulf states to strengthen regional security coordination.

Earlier on July 30, Saudi Arabia proposed a Multinational Maritime

Defence Coalition (MMDC) aimed at safeguarding commercial shipping lanes and critical energy supply routes through the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb Strait.

Fourteen countries, including Pakistan, expressed support for the initiative, underscoring growing concerns over the security of one of the world's most vital maritime corridors, according to reports.

Islamabad simultaneously reiterated its commitment to Saudi Arabia's security and stressed the importance of ensuring the uninterrupted flow of lawful maritime commerce through the Red Sea and the Bab al-Mandeb. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia further deepened their defence ties last year by signing a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, which became operational earlier this year.

Its implementation coincided with Pakistan's diplomatic efforts to facilitate dialogue between Iran and the United States, reflecting Islamabad's attempt to balance its close strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia while maintaining channels of communication with Tehran. (AP)

Leader of Myanmar's military-backed government seeks political legitimacy in Thailand visit

BANGKOK, Aug 6: The head of Myanmar's military-backed government arrived in Thailand on Thursday for an official visit that could serve as a major stepping stone in his effort to win political legitimacy more than five years after seizing power from an elected civilian government.

President Min Aung Hlaing's two-day visit with members of his Cabinet included meetings with Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and other officials at Government House, where several memorandums of understanding were signed covering Myanmar migrant workers, water quality management in rivers shared by the two countries and space technology for Earth observation.

Following the meetings, the two leaders were scheduled to deliver speeches at a Thailand-Myanmar Business Forum.

At the meeting with Anutin, Min Aung Hlaing sought to reassure Thailand that his government was restoring stability and steering Myanmar toward democracy.

"Myanmar has now reestablished itself on the path to democracy and is moving toward a better future," Min Aung Hlaing said. "As the new government, we have now begun working

on national stability, peace, and national reconciliation."

The visit has drawn criticism from activist groups such as Justice For Myanmar, which stated that the trip lends "false legitimacy" to Min Aung Hlaing and the ruling generals.

Min Aung Hlaing took a significant step toward would-be political rehabilitation in April when he was sworn in as president following an election held in phases in December and January. Critics dismissed the polls as a sham designed to consolidate the military's grip on power while ostensibly restoring civilian rule.

The diplomatic outreach is the latest in a series of moves to re-engage with countries in the region and the international community after relations became frayed or frosty following Min Aung Hlaing's ousting of Aung San Suu Kyi's government in February 2021 while serving as army chief.

Western governments have shunned and sanctioned Min Aung Hlaing and his associates for overthrowing Suu Kyi's government. Subsequent serious rights violations followed a deadly military crackdown on protests, which subsequently triggered a nationwide armed resistance movement and a bloody civil war. (AP)

Dozens of health workers at epicentre of Congo's Ebola outbreak protest lack of payment

BUNIA, Aug 6: Dozens of health workers working at the epicentre of Congo's Ebola outbreak staged protests on Thursday to demand payment for their wages, abandoning several health facilities even as aid workers warn that the world's fastest-growing outbreak of the disease is spreading at an alarming rate.

The health workers are protesting at the governor's office in Bunia, the capital of Ituri province, which accounts for nearly 90 per cent of the Ebola cases in the country. They are the latest group to walk off their jobs since protests over pay issues began weeks ago.

The health workers, including nurses providing critical care to Ebola patients, said they haven't received wages and bonuses for their work fighting Ebola since the outbreak was declared in mid-May.

"With this way of managing things, Ebola will not end in this province. We ask the authorities to get involved at all levels so that a solution is found quickly," said Edouige Makosi, one of the protesters. Officials have in the past blamed logistical issues for the payment delays. Congolese authorities did not immediately respond to an inquiry for comments on Thursday.

Poor welfare for frontline workers has been a key source of concern in the outbreak, the second-largest in history, unfolding in one of Congo's most remote and vulnerable areas. Apart from the payment issues, many health workers and facilities have been attacked by rebels and angry mobs.

During his visit to Congo on Wednesday, World Health Organisation Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus urged authorities to prioritise care and support for the responders.

The medical charity Doctors Without Borders said this week that the outbreak is still "spreading at an alarming and unprecedented rate" and that the response, which has been expanding with more steps, is still not reaching communities quickly enough to break transmission chains. (AP)

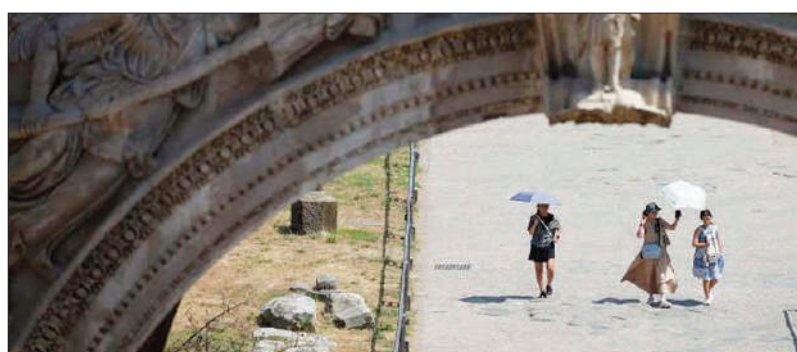
The extreme weather has pushed temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius Europe heat wave puts all major Italian cities on red alert as Austria sets heat record

ROME, Aug 6: Italy placed all of its major cities under the highest heat alert Thursday as a blistering heat wave gripped Europe, setting a national temperature record in Austria, fueling wildfires in France and disrupting energy and transport systems across the continent. The extreme weather has pushed temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in several countries, prompting health warnings for millions of people.

Across Europe, authorities are grappling with the consequences of extreme heat: health alerts for millions in Italy, record temperatures in Austria, drought-related disruptions to energy and shipping in Central Europe, and wildfires stretching from France to the Balkans.

Scientists and officials warn that such events are becoming more frequent and intense as the climate warms.

From the Mediterranean to Central Europe, prolonged heat, drought and wildfire conditions are increasingly be-



coming defining features of summer. The current heat wave has exposed vulnerabilities in public health systems, power generation, transportation networks and tourism infrastructure, forcing governments and businesses to adapt to more frequent periods of extreme weather. Italy's Health Ministry placed all 27 cities monitored under its national heat surveillance system on red alert Thursday — the first time this year the

entire network has been under the highest warning level simultaneously.

The alerts stretch from Trieste in the northeast to Palermo in Sicily and signal a health risk for the entire population, not only vulnerable groups such as older adults and people with chronic illnesses.

Authorities urged residents and tourists to avoid direct sunlight during the hottest hours of the day, remain indoors where possible and drink plenty

of water as temperatures in some areas approached 40 degrees Celsius.

The heat has also forced adjustments at major tourist attractions. The ministries of tourism and culture extended evening opening hours at landmarks, including Rome's Colosseum and Pantheon. Cooling mist fans have been installed at the Colosseum's entrances, and additional medical stations have been made available.

The most intense temperatures were recorded in Austria, where the mercury reached 41.2 degrees Celsius on Wednesday in the village of Bad Deutsch-Altenburg near the Slovak border, according to GeoSphere Austria. It was the highest temperature ever recorded in the country.

Austria is also facing severe drought. Rainfall from Jan. 1 through June 30 was 27 per cent below the long-term average nationwide, while some eastern regions received only half their normal precipitation. (AP)

Investigators look at why plane allowed to take off as President Trump's helicopter approached

WASHINGTON, Aug 6: It's not clear why a plane was allowed to take off as President Donald Trump's helicopter was approaching Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on Tuesday afternoon in an apparent violation of safety procedures put in place after last year's midair collision near the busy airport.

Both the National Transportation Safety Board and the Federal Aviation Administration said Wednesday they were investigating what happened when a commercial jet took off just as Marine One left the White House for Andrews Air Force Base with the president aboard for the first leg of a West Coast trip.

The FAA decided after 67 people died on January 29, 2025, when an airliner collided with an Army Black Hawk helicopter that all takeoffs and landings at the Washington, D.C., airport would be halted anytime a helicopter passes by on a conflicting route. The airspace near the White House and Reagan is heavily congested with military and commercial aircraft.

The airplane that took off Tuesday was climbing above Marine One as the helicopter approached, so the two aircraft were not

on a collision course.

The FAA said in a statement that a preliminary investigation showed "there was a momentary loss of separation after which the aircraft continued to move away from one another."

"The air traffic controller was in contact with both the commercial pilot and Marine One pilot during the loss of separation," the FAA said. The White House emphasised that Trump was never in danger.

"Marine One flights are piloted by some of the best aviators in the world, and at no point was the President in harm's way," White House spokesperson Kush Desai said in a statement. The Marine Corps defended the actions of their helicopter pilots. "There were no 'close calls' with the routine Marine One movement," Marine Corps spokesperson Capt. Jacob Sugg said in an email. "Washington National Tower did not delay the helicopter crew, ask them to hold, or otherwise alter their flight profile."

Audio recorded by Air Traffic Control shows the Marine One pilot calling the tower ahead of time: "Tower, just want to make sure you copy. Marine One, three minutes to lift." (AP)

Rajya Sabha clears bill to appropriate ₹54,067 cr excess expenditure in 2022-23

'This is the demand for excess grant for expenditures undertaken in the year 2023'

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: The Rajya Sabha on Thursday cleared the Appropriation (No.3) Bill, 2026, which authorises the withdrawal of funds from the Consolidated Fund of India to cover excess expenditure of around ₹54,067 crore incurred on certain services during the financial year ended on March 31, 2023.

The Bill was returned to the Lok Sabha after the members' approval through a voice vote. This completed the Parliamentary process for the Money Bill.

Replying to the debate on the Bill, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said, "This is the demand for excess grant for expenditures undertaken in the year 2023 on just two accounts. These two accounts were a part of what the Public Accounts Committee in its 39th report presented to the Lok Sabha this year in April".

Explaining further, she said one excess demand arises from a par-



ticular court order that was on the Railway Ministry for ₹196.44 crore. The second demand pertains to a larger amount of ₹53,871 crore for repayment of debt.

However, Sitharaman said the nature of debt receipts is against the issuance of securities and therefore has no fiscal impact.

Responding to the remarks made by a member representing Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), the Finance Minister said the Centre will ensure that the people of J&K

are supported and taken care of "because we are all part of one country".

"It was interesting when I heard the member from J&K speaking about how we have to take care of J & K and support them on some of the expenditures that they are overburdened with," the Finance Minister said.

Highlighting two things of "very big significance" that the government has done for J&K, she said it was because the government

strongly believes that Article 370 getting abrogated also proves that J & K is an integral part of India, inclusive of those which are occupied by Pakistan illegally.

The entire salary and pension of J & K police is being met by the Government of India on an annual basis, that means approximately ₹13,000 crore, Sitharaman said. She said the central government has also helped restructure the entire debt of the Union Territory of J & K.

"We paid back the entire debt of Ladakh and after having taken care of readjusting, restructured J & K's debt. Also, for the year 2024-25, and 2025-26, an additional amount of ₹5,000 crore each year has been given, over and above the revised estimates of their Budgets, just to make sure the urgent requirements of the J & K administration (are met) and it is not left without anybody supporting them," Sitharaman informed the House. (PTI)

UP to ensure representation of every community in development board: CM Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Aug 6: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Thursday said the government would ensure the representation of every community in the Denotified and Nomadic Communities Development Board and work to extend the benefits of all government welfare schemes to them.

Addressing members of denotified and nomadic communities who had gathered to thank the government for the board, which has been approved by the Cabinet recently, Adityanath said the initiative was part of the BJP-led government's policy of inclusive development under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" vision.

"The new link in this chain of inclusive development is the Nomadic Communities Development Board," the chief minister said. Adityanath said members of denotified communities had been unfairly branded as "criminal tribes" under the British-era Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 because many among them had actively participated in India's freedom struggle.



"The British declared them criminal tribes because they had made life difficult for the colonial rulers by participating directly and indirectly in the freedom movement," he said.

The chief minister credited B R Ambedkar with removing the stigma after Independence by abolishing the colonial law and declaring them as denotified communities in 1952. He alleged that despite this, adequate efforts for their welfare were not made for decades.

Claiming that the Narendra Modi government was the first after Independence to constitute a commission for denotified, no-

madic and semi-nomadic communities, Adityanath said he had announced the formation of a similar board in Uttar Pradesh during a convention of nomadic communities last year.

"The process of constituting the board has now moved forward," he said.

The chief minister said the board would identify members of these communities and ensure that they receive the benefits of government welfare schemes.

"We will ensure that every community gets representation in the board. Their voice should reach the government, and we will make every effort to provide them basic amenities," he said.

Highlighting the BJP government's welfare initiatives, Adityanath said communities such as the Van Tangiyas, Musahars, Tharus, Gonds, Cheros, Buxas, Kols and Sahariyas had been linked with government schemes, including housing, ration cards, land rights, Ayushman Bharat health insurance, electricity, LPG connections and social security pensions. (PTI)

Kejriwal alleges Centre plans ethanol blending in diesel, ATF; BJP claims 'fake news'

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal and BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya engaged in a war of words on X on Thursday, with the AAP leader alleging that the Centre plans to introduce ethanol blending in diesel and aviation turbine fuel (ATF).

Slamming Kejriwal, Malviya said spreading "fake news" and creating undue "panic" is his "old habit", and asserted that the Centre has clearly stated that there was no decision on ethanol mixing beyond E20.

E20 fuel, a blend of 80 per cent petrol and 20 per cent ethanol, is reshaping the country's retail fuel landscape.

Alleging that the government would soon blend ethanol in diesel as well, Kejriwal urged people to avoid purchasing new petrol and diesel vehicles for the time being.

In another post, he claimed, citing sources, that the Modi government was planning to blend ethanol in ATF. In a post on X in

Hindi, Kejriwal alleged the government planned to increase ethanol blending in petrol beyond 50 per cent after introducing E20 fuel.

"It seems they are going to adulterate petrol with more than 50 per cent. They are just waiting for the atmosphere to calm down. First, they forced E20 petrol into your E0 and E10 vehicles and wrecked them. Today, if you buy a new E20 vehicle, the government will force E50 petrol into it after a few days and damage it," Kejriwal said.

Former Delhi chief minister, replying to Malviya, alleged that the government is waiting for the situation to calm down before implementing further ethanol blending in fuel.

"Just like E20 was implemented without any scientific study, without listening to anyone, by silencing everyone through threats, you'll implement E50 in the same way," Kejriwal said, alleging this was the government's "style of functioning" without respecting

science, engineering and technology.

He challenged Malviya to publicly release any study conducted before implementing E20 petrol.

Malviya hit back in another post on X, saying Kejriwal's entire argument was based not on facts but "fear". "First, the government has clearly stated that no decision has been taken to increase ethanol blending beyond E20. Raising a debate on some imaginary E50 is nothing but politics of spreading fear," he replied to Kejriwal.

He refuted the AAP leader's charge, stating it is completely wrong to say that E20 was implemented "without any scientific study". In another post on X, Malviya claimed E20 is not a hasty decision and the country's ethanol blending programme has been progressing in a phased manner for over two decades.

He said before implementing E20, extensive testing and consultations with all relevant parties were conducted. (PTI)

Extend crop registration deadline until September 15: Surjewala to Haryana govt

CHANDIGARH, Aug 6: The BJP government turned the state's "Meri Fasal Mera Byora" portal into a tool that deprives farmers of their rights by closing crop registration before many cultivators could complete the process, alleged Congress Rajya Sabha member Ran-deep Singh Surjewala on Thursday.

He urged Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini to focus on farmers' issues instead of making "publicity-driven announcements". He demanded that the state government reopen the "Meri Fasal Mera Byora" portal and extend the crop registration deadline until September 15, as it did last year.

He claimed that registration on the "Meri Fasal Mera Byora" portal is mandatory for farmers to purchase certain agricultural inputs and to sell their produce at government procurement centres.

He alleged that while details of nearly 14.5 lakh acres of kharif cultivation are yet to be registered, the portal closed for registrations on July 31.

The Congress leader claimed that farmers visiting Common Service Centres (CSCs) for registration are being turned away because the portal is no longer accepting new entries. He said the government should have ensured a convenient registration process instead of closing the portal. Referring to the ongoing kharif season, Surjewala alleged that farmers are already facing several challenges, including weather uncertainties, concerns over compensation and procurement.

He claimed that kharif sowing in Haryana has declined by nearly 30 per cent compared with last year due to a weak monsoon. (PTI)

IYC protests outside Delhi hotel, demands Meta's apology for users' account takedowns

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Thursday staged a protest outside a luxury hotel in central Delhi where senior Meta executives were staying, demanding that the US tech giant apologise to users whose accounts were blocked, suspended or taken down.

Holding banners and placards reading, "You deleted the voice of citizens but found your voice to apologise to PM", the protesters raised slogans accusing Meta of suppressing student voices and critical content on its platforms.

The demonstration, held outside the hotel on Motilal Nehru Marg, came a day after Meta apologised to the Centre over the temporary removal of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Facebook post.

Addressing the protesters, IYC leaders alleged that Meta had acted selectively by apologising to the Prime Minister while failing to explain the suspension or removal of accounts and content belonging to ordinary users.

"If Meta could apologise within hours after action was taken against the Prime Minister's account, it must also explain why thousands of ordinary Indians continue to face arbitrary account suspensions and content takedowns without trans-

parency or accountability. Every citizen deserves the same respect, not just those in power," IYC member Karan Chourasia said. On Wednesday, Meta's Chief Global Affairs Officer Joel Kaplan apologised to Union Minister for Electronics and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw for the "error restricting" Prime Minister Modi's post during a meeting with senior government officials.

Kaplan, who served in the administration of George W Bush, including as White House Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy, before joining Meta (then Facebook) in 2011, was summoned by the Indian government to explain temporarily removing Modi's July 23 Facebook post, in which he addressed students and promised stringent action against examination paper leaks.

The temporary restriction of Modi's post had snowballed into a major political controversy in the country, with the government summoning global executives of the firm that owns Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, and a parliamentary committee seeking an apology from Zuckerberg within three days.

The IYC demanded that Meta ensure transparency and equal treatment for all users while taking action on accounts and content. (PTI)

Will personally submit special package proposal for flood-hit Rajouri-Poonch to PM: Omar

RAJOURI/JAMMU, Aug 6: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Thursday said he will personally approach Prime Minister Narendra Modi with a proposal seeking a special central package for the flood-affected districts of Rajouri and Poonch.

He also noted that the union territory does not have the financial capacity to meet the entire cost of restoration on its own.

"While there are some things we can manage on our own, the reality is that Jammu and Kashmir does not have the financial capacity to bear the entire cost of restoration."

"After last year's floods, the Central government approved a package of nearly ₹1,400 crore for Jammu and Kashmir. This time too, we will prepare a detailed package and seek Central assistance," the chief minister told reporters after chairing a review meeting on flood relief and rehabilitation in Rajouri.

He said floods, flash floods and cloudbursts are automatically treated as natural disasters and do not require any separate declaration before seeking Central assistance.

"As soon as the proposal is ready, I will personally submit it to the prime minister," Abdullah said.

Reviewing the aftermath of the July 19 flash floods that claimed four lives in Rajouri district, the chief minister said the government's response had been carried out in three phases -- rescue, recovery and rehabilitation.

"Our first priority was to minimise the loss of human lives. We regret the loss of four precious lives in this district. Had the district administration and police not acted promptly overnight, the death toll could have been much higher," he said.

He said the government has now entered the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, with priority being given to restoring damaged infrastructure and public services. Abdullah said electricity supply has been restored almost completely, while drinking water remains a major concern as several Jal Shakti Department water supply schemes were damaged in the floods.

He said suggestions made by local MLAs, including the deployment of water tankers and hand pumps in affected areas, would be implemented.

The chief minister assured compensation for damaged houses and said alternative plots would be provided to families whose land had been washed away so that they could rebuild their homes.

He also announced that farmers who lost their crops and agricultural land would be provided free ration for six months to one year.

Highlighting long-term mitigation measures, Abdullah said he has directed the flood control department to immediately construct a protection bund at Bela colony to prevent floodwaters from entering residential areas during future floods.

He also announced plans to construct a new mini secretariat in Rajouri after the existing Deputy Commissioner's office building was found to be structurally unsafe.

"This is no longer a matter of choice but a necessity. The present building is no longer fit for use. A project report is being prepared, and we expect the new mini secretariat to cost around ₹50-60 crore. We hope to complete it within the next two to three years," he said.

Abdullah also acknowledged that compensation under the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF) for structural damage had become inadequate due to inflation.

"The SDRF compensation has not been revised for nearly seven to eight years. We have decided to enhance it," he said.

On the issue of vehicles damaged in the floods, the chief minister said he has directed the police to expedite registration of FIRs so that affected owners do not face difficulties in claiming insurance.

"Some people may attempt to misuse the process, but genuine victims should not suffer. The SSP has assured us that the cases will be processed expeditiously," he said.

He said MLA Ifthikhar Sahib raised two or three important issues concerning Rajouri town. (PTI)

Badal slams AAP over paper leaks, vows 100 pc govt job quota for Punjabis if SAD voted to power

PATIALA, Aug 6: Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Friday accused the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government of betraying Punjab's youth through repeated examination paper leaks and promised job reservations for locals if voted to power.

Badal was addressing a protest organised here by the Students' Organisation of India, the student wing of SAD, against the alleged examination paper leaks.

Citing the United States and China as examples, he said countries that invest in and protect their youth emerge as global leaders.

He alleged that Punjab's youth were being neglected and forced to take to the streets in protest, and claimed that the state government had shown complete indifference towards education and employment.

Badal said students spend substantial amounts on coaching and preparation only to see recruitment examinations marred by paper leaks, and alleged that around 10 examination papers had leaked during the AAP-led government and criticised Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann for remaining silent on the issue.

During the protest, Badal made a series



of poll promises.

He said that if the Akali Dal forms the next government in the state, it would enact a law mandating that 100 per cent of government jobs be reserved for Punjabis.

He also announced that 70 per cent of jobs in private industries would be reserved for Punjab's youth.

Badal further promised that if SAD government comes to power, it would establish medical and veterinary colleges in every district of the state and introduce large-scale vocational education programmes aimed at

making young people self-reliant.

Stepping up his attack on the ruling dispensation, the SAD chief alleged that their claims of having ushered in an "education revolution" were misleading and that law and order in the state had also deteriorated.

"They claimed to have brought a 'Sikhya Kranti' (education revolution) in Punjab, but in reality it's all a big failure," he alleged. He claimed that AAP leaders themselves admitted in the Vidhan Sabha that 1,200 of the state's 1,945 senior secondary schools did not have principals and that

3,200 of the 5,600 sanctioned posts in government colleges were lying vacant.

"Everyone comes to Punjab to rule. These are all 'Dilliwali' parties. Today, Punjab's CM is not Bhagwant Mann, it is Arvind Kejriwal."

"Today we are here to expose Kejriwal. He went to Delhi and did drama for students but when asked about 10-plus paper leaks in Punjab, he denied any wrongdoing. I have an entire list of AAP exam scams. AAP is so shameless that they have ignored the fact that they have ruined the lives of over 10 lakh Punjabi youth," he alleged.

The opposition has been targeting the AAP government over the alleged multiple examination paper leaks following the detection of a recent cheating racket in the pharmacy officer recruitment examination.

Punjab CM Mann, however, has maintained that not a single incident of paper leak has taken place in the state during the more than four years of his government.

Highlighting Punjab's development record, Badal said the state had witnessed around 22 years of Akali Dal rule and claimed that official indicators showed the maximum development had taken place during the party-led governments' tenure. (PTI)

The govt said the campaign aims to hoist the national flag at five crore households UP to hold Tiranga music concerts in all 75 districts under Har Ghar Tiranga campaign

LUCKNOW, Aug 6: The Uttar Pradesh government will organise "Tiranga Sangeet Samaroh" in all 75 districts as part of this year's "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign to promote patriotism and honour freedom fighters and war heroes, an official statement said on Thursday.

The government said the campaign aims to hoist the national flag at five crore households across the state and will be accompanied by a series of public programmes with people's participation.

The music concerts, to be held on the directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, will feature patriotic songs, dances and performances by school students, police bands and Army bands, it stated.

The government said leading performers as well as local artistes would participate in the events, while the families of soldiers martyred during the freedom struggle and various wars would also be honoured.

In Lucknow, the proposed venues in-



clude 1090 Crossing, Hazratganj, Ghan-taghar Chowk, Janeshwar Mishra Park, Emerald Mall, Lulu Mall and several other locations, according to the Culture Department.

The concerts will include collective renditions of "Vande Mataram", patriotic songs and other cultural performances centred on nationalism.

The events form part of the broader Har

Ghar Tiranga campaign, under which Tiranga fairs and musical programmes will also be organised across the state with participation from elected representatives and the public.

The statement also recalled the chief minister's recent directions making the playing of the national anthem and national song mandatory in cinema halls across Uttar Pradesh on August 14 and 15. (PTI)

BJP leaders pay tributes to Sushma Swaraj on her death anniversary

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: BJP leaders, including Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta and state president Harsh Malhotra, paid tributes to former external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj on her death anniversary on Thursday, recalling her contributions to the city and the country. The party leaders also planted saplings at the Delhi BJP office and Vasant Udyan in the memory of Sushma Swaraj, who was also the first woman chief minister of Delhi.

"Whatever I can do today for society and Delhi is the result of the inspiration and guidance I received from respected Sushma Swaraj," Chief Minister Gupta said, recalling her association with the former Union minister.

Sushma Swaraj's daughter and New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj said, "My mother was not just my mother; she was like a mother or elder sister to lakhs of BJP workers. Seeing so many people come in heavy rain today to pay their respects inspires me to continue serving the people with even greater dedication."

Swaraj passed away after a cardiac arrest on August 7, 2019, at the age of 67 years.

Delhi BJP president and Union minister Malhotra said Sushma Swaraj was not just a leader; she was the embodiment of an ideal in Indian politics, where compassion was combined with firmness, and authority with public service. (PTI)

House collapses, wall cave-ins kill nine in rain-related incidents across UP



PRATAPGARH/BARABANKI/SAHARANPUR (UP), Aug 6: Six members of a family, including two infants, were killed after a nearly century-old house collapsed during heavy rains in Uttar Pradesh's Pratapgarh district early Thursday, police said.

Three more people, including two children, died in separate wall and house collapse incidents in Barabanki and Saharanpur, taking the toll in rain-related incidents in the state to nine.

The incident in Pratapgarh occurred around 2 am in Mahuli Bazaar, about three km from the

Pratapgarh district headquarters. Circle Officer (City) Ashutosh Mishra said the incident took place when seven members of the family were sleeping in a single room of the old house. Only one family member, identified as Aman (28), managed to crawl out of the rubble and raised an alarm following which locals rushed to the spot and informed the police.

Those killed were identified as Pramod Srivastava (60), his wife Rita (55), their son Nitin (25), daughter-in-law Madhuri (24), wife of their elder son Aman, and Aman's two sons, Madhav (2) and

10-month-old Advik.

Police, assisted by the fire service personnel, launched a rescue operation and pulled out all those trapped under the debris. The injured were taken to the government medical college, where doctors declared six of them dead, Mishra said. Police have sent the bodies for postmortem and further investigation is on.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed grief over the loss of lives in the Pratapgarh incident and directed the district administration and the chief medical officer to ensure proper treatment for Aman.

In a post on X, the chief minister conveyed his condolences to the bereaved families and prayed for peace to the departed souls and the speedy recovery of the injured. He also reviewed the situation with administrative officials after the incident.

In Barabanki district, two siblings were killed and three other children injured after an old brick wall collapsed on them while they were playing in Aliyabad village this morning, police said. (PTI)

'We will be appealing against this order. We feel the order is wrong' Tarun Tejpal calls himself 'political victim' after HC imposes 10-year jail term in 2013 rape case

PANAJI, Aug 6: Former Tehelka editor Tarun Tejpal, sentenced to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment in a 2013 rape case, on Thursday claimed he was a "political victim" who had been targeted for the past 13 years because of his journalistic work, and alleged his career and printing of his books had been stopped.

Speaking to reporters after the verdict, Tejpal said he would challenge the Bombay High Court's judgment in the Supreme Court, and also expressed confidence that the truth will eventually come out.

"We will be appealing against this order. We feel the order is wrong. We will be moving the Supreme Court against the order," he said.

Alleging that he had been singled out because of his work with Tehelka, Tejpal said, "We will go to the Supreme Court definitely. We have no doubt that for the past 13 years they are after me because



of my work with Tehelka. We got acquitted after seven years fighting the case in the trial court, they are again after us."

He further claimed that people who had spoken or written against those in power were being targeted.

"The people who are with them, they are acquitted but the people who have done journalism against them or they have said something against them, they are after such people. Look at the number of

cases in the past 12 years where they have trapped people who were against them. Umar Khalid has been there in jail for the past six years, there are many people like us," he said.

Tejpal also alleged that the case had effectively ended his journalistic career.

"They have stopped my journalism, they have stopped Tehelka, they have stopped my books from being printed. I have full faith in the judiciary. In such a big-size judiciary, there must be judges who will see my truth. The truth will come out," he said.

In a major setback to Tejpal, the Bombay High Court's Goa bench on Thursday convicted him of raping a former junior colleague in 2013, setting aside his acquittal by a Goa sessions court in 2021. The high court later sentenced him to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment.

While Tejpal sought leniency, claiming he was a "political vic-

tim" and the father of two daughters, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Goa government, pressed for the maximum punishment to send a strong message that "no means no".

Tejpal was convicted under Sections 376(2)(f) (rape by a person in a position of trust or authority), 354A (sexual harassment) and 354B (assault or use of criminal force with intent to disrobe a woman) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

The case relates to allegations by a former junior colleague that the veteran journalist sexually assaulted her inside a hotel elevator during the ThinkFest event in Goa in November 2013.

Tejpal was acquitted by a Goa sessions court in 2021, but the Goa government challenged the verdict before the Bombay High Court, which allowed the appeal, convicted him and sentenced him to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment. (PTI)

Unidentified man electrocuted near Dehradun Expressway in northeast Delhi

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: An unidentified man, believed to be around 25 years old, died after allegedly coming in contact with high-voltage electrical wires near the Dehradun Expressway in northeast Delhi's Shastri Park on Thursday, police said.

Police received information around 10 am about a man lying unconscious on the divider near Pillar No. 52 of the Dehradun Expressway, they said.

A police team reached the spot and found the man lying motionless. The area was secured and a forensic team was called to examine the scene.

"Preliminary investigation suggested that the deceased had climbed over the nearly six-foot-high railing installed on the divider before stepping onto an electrical panel located adjacent to Pillar No 52," a senior police officer said. Police suspect the man came in contact with high-voltage electrical wires after stepping onto the electrical panel, resulting in electrocution.

He was rushed to Jag Praveesh Chandra Hospital, where doctors declared him dead. The body has been sent to the mortuary of Guru Tegh Bahadur Hospital for postmortem and identification.

No identity documents were found on the deceased and efforts are underway to establish his identity, police said. (PTI)

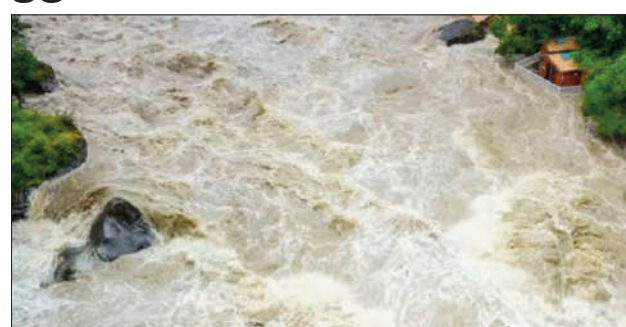
Rivers swell across Uttarakhand as heavy rain triggers alerts, road closures

DEHRADUN, Aug 6: Several rivers in Uttarakhand, including the Alaknanda, Mandakini and Bhagirathi, were flowing at or above warning and danger levels on Thursday following continuous rainfall, prompting authorities to issue alerts, suspend schools in three districts and ask officials to remain on high alert.

According to the Central Water Commission (CWC), the Alaknanda at Rudrapur was flowing at the danger level of 627 metres at 6 am and rising, while the Mandakini was recorded at 626.20 metres at 7 am, 0.20 metres above its danger level of 626 metres.

The Bhagirathi at Devprayag was flowing at the warning level of 462 metres and rising, while the Raisi (Banganga) river in Haridwar was recorded at 230.09 metres, 0.09 metres above the warning level.

In view of the rising water levels, Rudrapur District Disaster Management Officer Nandan Singh Rajwar directed



officials to maintain the highest level of preparedness and issue warnings through loudspeakers to people living along riverbanks, asking them to move to safer places.

Heavy rain also disrupted road connectivity in the state.

The Badrinath National Highway was blocked near Helang in Chamoli district due to debris, while the Gangotri National Highway was closed near Dharasu Nalupani in Uttarakashi district. The Yamunotri National Highway was also blocked at Silai Band, Durbil, Jangalchatti and

Sayanachatti due to continuous landslides and debris.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami reviewed the situation with Disaster Management Secretary Vinod Kumar Suman and directed all state agencies to remain on high alert to deal with any eventualities.

Suman said the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an 'orange alert' for heavy rain in Dehradun, Chamoli and Bageshwar districts on Thursday and a 'yellow alert' for the remaining districts of the state. (PTI)

Ladakh to launch India's first high-altitude wildlife safari, LG approves eco-tourism initiative

LEH/JAMMU, Aug 6: Ladakh is set to launch India's first high-altitude wildlife safari, with Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena approving guided jeep safaris on snow leopard and bird-watching trails to promote sustainable eco-tourism while making local communities equal partners in wildlife conservation and economic development.

The decision was taken at the first governing body meeting of the newly constituted snow leopard and high-altitude nature (SHAN) conservation society, chaired by the LG, officials said.

Under the initiative, the forest department has been directed to introduce guided jeep safaris, modelled on those operated in national parks such as Kaziranga and Ranthambore, using specially designed open-back vehicles driven by trained local drivers and guides, they said.

The move aims to curb illegal off-roading and minimise disturbance to wildlife while enhancing visitors' experience through regulated and eco-friendly tourism,

they added.

The forest department has also been asked to identify potential safari routes across Hemis national park, Changthang and Karakoram wildlife sanctuaries, besides wildlife-rich areas such as Nubra, Zaskar, Sham, Kargil and Drass, known for snow leopard sightings and rich birdlife.

As part of the initiative, 20 local youths will be selected and trained in birdwatching, bird identification and bird-spotting skills and equipped with binoculars. Ten birdwatching hides will also be established at major hotspots, they said.

Officials said Ladakh is home to India's largest snow leopard population, with 477 of the country's estimated 718 snow leopards.

The Union Territory also supports over 38 mammal species, around 340 bird species and nearly 1,800 vascular plant species, making it one of the country's most significant biodiversity hotspots.

The SHAN society, constituted on June 16, has been tasked with preparing a comprehensive

roadmap for community-led wildlife conservation, waste management, plastic-free tourism, sustainable livelihoods and responsible tourism across Ladakh.

The initiative envisages a governance model in which local communities become active stakeholders in protecting Ladakh's fragile ecosystem while benefiting economically from conservation-linked tourism.

"Ladakh's unique wildlife and fragile high-altitude ecosystem are its greatest natural assets. Conservation efforts can succeed only when local communities become equal partners in protecting nature and also benefit economically from it," Saxena said.

"Through SHAN, we are creating a model that integrates wildlife conservation, responsible eco-tourism, environmental education, community empowerment and sustainable livelihoods. Our vision is to establish Ladakh as a global example of community-led conservation and responsible high-altitude mountain tourism," he added. (PTI)

₹ 22.31 lakh assets of drug peddler seized in Gujarat's Kutch district



KUTCH, Aug 6: Police have seized assets worth more than ₹ 22 lakh, including a house, belonging to a jailed drug peddler in Kutch district of Gujarat, an official said on Thursday.

The drug peddler, Pintu Yadav, is originally a native of Bihar who later moved to Anjar town in the border district.

"The seized assets of drug peddler Pintu Yadav include one immovable property, a house located in Varshamed village in the district, and three movable properties comprising a car and a pair of two-wheelers, totalling ₹ 22.31 lakh," East Kutch Superintendent of Police Sagar Bagmar said.

Under sections 68B and 68U of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act (NDPS Act), if any drug peddler has acquired movable or immovable properties using income generated from illegal narcotics trade, police are empowered to take action against such assets, including their forfeiture.

These sections were invoked while confiscating the properties of Yadav, who faces four cases under the NDPS Act, said the SP.

"The first case dates back to 2019, and subsequently, in 2025, a case involving the seizure of 140 kilograms of ganja was registered against him," Bagmar said.

Yadav is currently lodged in Galpadar Jail in Gandhidham city in connection with those cases, he said.

Police have adopted an aggressive approach to dismantle the financial networks of drug traffickers by taking stringent legal action against them under laws like the NDPS Act and the SAFEMA (Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators Act, 1976), an official release stated.

"Under the instructions of state Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi and directives of Director General of Police G S Malik, the police have gone beyond merely seizing drugs and arresting offenders by launching a campaign to confiscate properties acquired through illicit earnings," it said.

As part of this campaign, under the guidance of Border Range Bhuj-Kutch IGP Chirag Koridiya and the supervision of East Kutch (Gandhidham) SP Bagmar, the SOG (Special Operations Group) prepared a strong legal case against Yadav, the release said. It was established that all assets belonging to Yadav had been acquired using money generated through illegal drug trade, the SP noted. (PTI)

Brij Bhushan gets grand welcome with slogans of 'Sher Aaya' after acquittal in sexual harassment case

GONDA/AYODHYA, Aug 6: Former Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh on Thursday received a grand welcome, with flower petals showered on his convoy using excavators, as he returned to his home district Gonda for the first time after being acquitted in the sexual harassment case filed by wrestlers.

Singh arrived at the international airport in Ayodhya by a chartered aircraft, where supporters welcomed him with drums, music and slogans. Thousands of supporters lined the route from the airport, while flower petals were showered on his convoy using excavators. Slogans of "Sher Aaya" (the lion has arrived) were raised and fireworks were set off as hundreds of vehicles accompanied his convoy.

The BJP leader is a former Lok Sabha MP from Gonda's Kaisarganj seat.

In adjoining Ayodhya, Singh travelled in an open jeep to the Hanumangarhi temple, where he offered prayers from outside and sought blessings from the seers.

During the procession, his elder son and Gonda Sadar MLA Prateek Bhushan Singh waved a mace from the sunroof of the vehicle and said "truth has prevailed".

After visiting Hanumangarhi, Singh proceeded to the Nandini Nagar Sports Stadium, where a massive rally titled "Satyamev Jayate" has been organised. Before reaching the venue, he also offered special prayers at the Nandini Gaumata temple. (PTI)

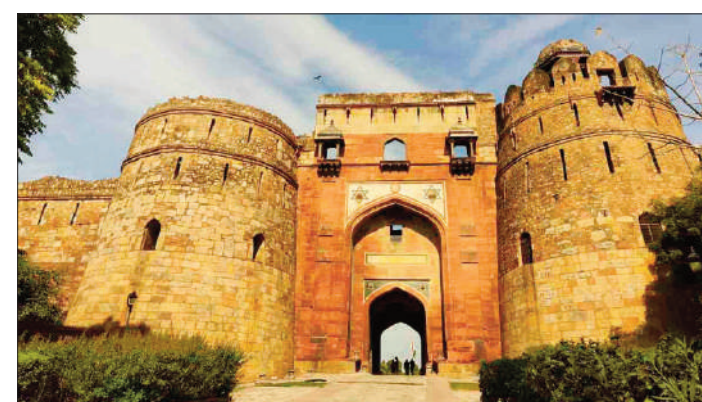
Crack-ridden bastion at Delhi's Purana Qila 'unsafe'; ASI clears restoration plan

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: A northern bastion of the 16th-century Purana Qila here has developed deep structural cracks, its condition ever-deteriorating owing to monsoon spells, with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) declaring the part 'critical and unsafe', and initiating restoration works.

The affected structure, identified as North-West Bastion No. 3, overlooks the fort's artificial lake. Long cracks have become visible along its stone walls and floor, while fresh debris can be seen scattered inside and outside, indicating continuous structural deterioration, the ASI said.

The agency shared with PTI that the damaged bastion has been covered with tarpaulin to prevent rainwater seepage. Temporary scaffolding has been erected near the structure, with access to the affected portion now restricted.

All approaches leading to the damaged bastion have been barricaded as a precaution. Sabhyata Foundation -- the NGO entrusted with the management of Purana Qila -- has been instructed to ensure visitors do not enter the re-



stricted area and all safety measures remain in place.

According to the ASI, the emergency conservation and restoration of the bastion was approved by the competent authority on August 3. The tender process and other formalities are currently underway before restoration begins.

"The situation is being closely monitored, and all necessary precautionary measures have been taken to safeguard both the monument and the visiting public until the conservation work is taken up," the ASI shared.

The agency said the bastion has been assessed as "critical and unsafe" because of continuous heavy rainfall and progressive deterioration of masonry. It said the entire exposed surface has been covered with tarpaulin to minimise further water damage during the monsoon.

The ASI said geologists, structural engineers and other experts are assisting in assessing the causes behind the recurring structural distress. Their findings will help determine appropriate scientific conservation measures before restoration work is undertaken. (PTI)

Over 1 lakh taxi drivers complete Marathi proficiency course in Maharashtra

'The said the campaign received encouraging response across the state'



MUMBAI, Aug 6: Transport Minister Pratap Sarnaik on Thursday said more than one lakh non-Marathi drivers have completed a course in functional Marathi since the state government made it compulsory for all taxi and auto rickshaw drivers to have basic proficiency in Maharashtra's official language from May 1, 2026.

Speaking to reporters after conducting a review meeting at Mantralaya, Sarnaik urged the remaining drivers, including those driving app-based taxis, to complete their Marathi training by Au-

gust 15.

The Maharashtra government announced in April that auto rickshaw and taxi drivers in the state must be able to communicate in Marathi with passengers, and their knowledge of the language will be tested. It also launched the 'Hinduhridaysamrat Balasaheb Thackeray Marathi Shikvani Abhiyan' on Maharashtra Day (May 1), introducing a course in Marathi for migrant drivers.

The campaign is being jointly implemented by the state Marathi Language Department and the lit-

erary bodies Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh and Konkani Marathi Sahitya Parishad.

Sarnaik said the campaign received encouraging response across the state, and drivers enrolled for Marathi classes voluntarily.

"Those who wish to earn a livelihood in Maharashtra should develop a connection with Marathi. This is not about compulsion but about belonging. Every driver who speaks a few words in Marathi with passengers becomes an ambassador of Maharashtra's culture," Sarnaik said.

The transport minister said Marathi was not merely a language of communication but the soul of Maharashtra's identity and culture, adding that the use of Marathi while interacting with passengers would strengthen emotional bonds besides making communication easier. (PTI)

Haryana makes disaster risk reduction mandatory in projects across departments

CHANDIGARH, Aug 6: In a bid to prioritise preparedness over a post-disaster response, all administrative secretaries have been directed to integrate disaster risk reduction into every stage of planning, execution and budgeting of government projects in Haryana, officials said on Thursday.

Issuing directions in line with the Government of India's vision of a "Whole of Government" approach, Financial Commissioner (Revenue and Disaster Management) Sumita Misra said all departments must mainstream disaster prevention and mitigation measures in accordance with the Disaster Management Act, 2005, and the guidelines of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

The move is aimed at ensuring that disaster preparedness becomes an integral part of governance rather than a post-disaster response, an official statement Thursday said.

Misra directed departments to ensure that every new and ongoing development project factors in disaster resilience from the planning stage itself. She also instructed that adequate budgetary provisions be made for disaster management activities, recognising that preparedness and prevention are key to safeguarding lives, infrastructure and public assets. (PTI)

Gujarat to form task force to enforce ban on analogue paneer, cheese and butter: Dy CM Sanghavi

AHMEDABAD, Aug 6: Gujarat Deputy Chief Minister Harsh Sanghavi on Thursday said the state government will soon constitute a task force to enforce the ban on analogue paneer, cheese and butter, warning that violators could also face closure of their establishments.

Addressing reporters in Gandhinagar, Sanghavi said the decision follows Wednesday's notification issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006, prohibiting "unstandardised" analogue dairy products across the state.

Analogue paneer is a non-dairy substitute made using vegetable oils, starches, emulsifiers and other additives instead of milk fat. It is cheaper to produce than conventional paneer and generally contains lower protein levels.

He said Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel has directed all departments to ensure effective implementation of the ban across Gujarat.

"The chief minister has made it clear that there will be zero tolerance towards food adulteration, including analogue paneer," Sanghavi said.

He said a dedicated task force comprising officials from multiple departments will be announced shortly to ensure strict implementation of the notification.

"Meetings are underway at the highest level re-

garding the formation of this task force. It will be officially announced soon and will seriously enforce these measures," he said.

Sanghavi said merely imposing monetary penalties on those selling adulterated food products would no longer be enough.

"Our task force will take strict measures, including the sealing of shops. We see such people as serious offenders and they will pay the price for playing with the health of people," he told reporters. On Wednesday, the Gujarat government imposed a state-wide ban on the production, storage, transportation, distribution and sale of "unstandardised" analogue paneer, cheese and butter, citing public health concerns and the need to protect consumers as well as the state's dairy sector.

Health Minister Praful Pansheriya had said the Food and Drugs Control Administration conducted raids over analogue paneer and similar products in the last four months and found that such products were "not fit for consumption" and lacked nutritional value.

The government said inspections and laboratory testing had detected products resembling paneer but prepared using vegetable oils and other non-dairy ingredients instead of milk, misleading consumers and affecting genuine dairy producers. (PTI)

Richa Chadha Launches Culture-Based Non-Fiction Series Musafiri Celebrating India's Heritage



Actor-producer Richa Chadha has started a new project. She has announced Musafiri, a non-fiction series exploring Indian culture. The show's eight-episode first season focuses entirely on Mumbai, which Chadha calls her 'residence of choice'.

This project rejects standard travel vlog formats. Instead, Chadha designed the series as a personal tribute to Mumbai, the city that built her career, changed her life and still inspires her creative work.

The series will highlight lesser-known traditions, living histories and various commu-

nities. Richa wants to scratch a "nerdy itch". She seeks to understand the roots of modern society by examining the country's diverse heritage and its historical contributions to the global stage. This drive pushes Chadha to investigate the origins of contemporary Indian identity.

She views the show as a slow-paced observation of the metropolis. "Musafiri is my humble love letter to this incredible city. This series is about slowing down, observing, and I promise you with each episode you will learn something new," Chadha added.

"Mumbai has been my karmabhoomi and I feel exceptional love for it, because it is still relatively safe for women. Over the years, I've discovered that every street, neighbourhood, market, heritage structure, and every community in this city has a story waiting to be told," Chadha said.

"Mumbai is where our journey begins, but it certainly doesn't end here. India is home to countless untold stories, forgotten traditions, remarkable people, and extraordinary places that deserve to be documented and celebrated," she added.

She hopes the show "inspires people to look at familiar places with fresh eyes and encourages them to travel with curiosity, empathy, and a deeper appreciation for the heritage that surrounds us." (Agencies)

Destin Daniel Cretton says he doesn't understand why Marvel axed 'Wonder Man'

Filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton says he is "heartbroken" over Marvel Studios' decision to cancel Disney series "Wonder Man", admitting he still doesn't understand why the project was shelved despite being renewed for a second season.

Cretton, whose latest Marvel film "Spider-Man: Brand New Day" recently crossed the USD 1 billion mark at the global box office, said both he and Marvel Studios president Kevin Feige were keen to continue the series.

"I love that show to death. If it were up to me, we would be making that show. And I do believe that if — and I know this sounds weird — but if it were up to Kevin, we would be doing that show," Cretton told TheWrap.

"And I'm just talking, I don't fully understand the business of streaming, but if the business was right, we would be making that show because I know loves that show as much as I do. It's a bummer. I'm heartbroken



about it. But I need to fully understand the why," he added.

Based on the Marvel Comics character Simon Williams, "Wonder Man" follows an aspiring actor played by Yahya Abdul-Mateen II, who gets an opportunity to star in a superhero film while navigating the entertainment industry alongside Trevor Slattery, portrayed by Ben Kingsley.

The series premiered in Janu-

ary and earned Abdul-Mateen an Emmy nomination. Marvel initially renewed "Wonder Man" for a second season in March before reversing the decision and cancelling the series last week.

The filmmaker said he could not determine whether the show's viewership justified a continuation because Disney does not publicly disclose streaming numbers.

As speculation mounted online that the cancellation could pave the way for a feature film, Cretton said the possibility was an "interesting question" but added he had no clarity on the matter.

Andrew Guest, who co-created the series with Cretton and served as showrunner, dismissed reports that the cancellation was part of a larger strategy.

"There is no movie in the works," Guest said, adding that the cancellation "is not a marketing stunt".

He said Disney and Marvel took an internal decision that the series "didn't make sense for them".

"And Destin's schedule — no one's schedule was an issue. Yahya, Destin, Sir Ben and I all loved making this show, all felt passionately about continuing to do it, and were eager to."

"Contracts were signed, schedules were cleared, writers room was supposed to start this month, production was supposed to begin early next year," Guest added. (PTI)



'STHAL', 'SAMNA' AMONG HIGHLIGHTS OF INAUGURAL DELHI MARATHI FILM FESTIVAL

Acclaimed drama "Sthal" and Marathi classic "Samna" will be among the attractions at the inaugural Delhi Marathi Film Festival, which will be held in the national capital from August 7 to 9.

Organised by the Delhi Marathi Pratishthan with support from the Maharashtra government's Department of Cultural Affairs, Maharashtra Film, Theatre and Cultural Development Corporation, the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) and the National Film Development Corporation (NFDC), the three-day festival aims to celebrate the rich legacy and contemporary landscape of Marathi cinema, a press release said.

Directed by Jayant Digambar Somalkar, "Sthal" has travelled to several international film festivals and received critical acclaim for its portrayal of arranged marriage through the perspective of a young woman from rural Maharashtra. The festival will also

screen Jabbar Patel's landmark 1975 political drama "Samna", regarded as one of Marathi cinema's defining works.

Written by Vijay Tendulkar, the film stars Dr Shriram Lagoo and Nilu Phule in a powerful ideological confrontation that remains relevant decades after its release.

Besides "Sthal" and "Samna", the festival's lineup includes "Deulband 2", "Mamachya Govyala Jau Ya", "Phulwanti", "Ghabadkund", "Bhutam Bhayam", "Uttar", "Satyashodhak", "Tumbadchi Manjula", "Asha" and "Gandhi Tax". A total of 16 telefilms will also be screened across three dedicated sections.

The inaugural ceremony on August 7 will be attended by Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta, Maharashtra Minister for Cultural Affairs Ashish Shelar, Delhi Minister for Art, Culture and Languages Kapil Mishra, Rajya Sabha MP Vinod Tawde and Maharashtra Chief Secretary

Rajesh Agrawal.

The festival will also feature interactions with noted Marathi film personalities, including filmmakers Pravin Tarde, Jayant Somalkar, Ramdas Phutane and Kishore Belekar, as well as actors Sandeep Pathak, Abhijeet Chavan, Usha Narkari and Priyadarshini Indalkar following screenings of their films.

A three-day masterclass by FTII for aspiring filmmakers and a special exhibition tracing the evolution of Marathi cinema will be organised alongside the screenings.

The organisers said the festival is intended not only for Marathi-speaking audiences in Delhi-NCR but also for cinema lovers interested in socially relevant and artistically significant filmmaking.

The screenings, to be held at the Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar International Centre, are free of cost, although prior registration is mandatory. (PTI)

Reality TV gives fame and money: actor Rithvik Dhanjani

Popular TV star Rithvik Dhanjani says reality shows offer immediate validation, fame and money to actors. He has participated as a contestant in shows like "Nach Baliye 6" and "Khatron Ke Khiladi 8", and hosted "Super Dancer", "India's Best Dramebaaz", and "Jhalak Dikhhla Jaa 11".

Dhanjani is now a contestant on "Khatron Ke Khiladi 15", which marks his third appearance on the action-adventure show after season six and ten.

"Reality TV gives a lot of validation, money, and fame. But then you've shows like 'Khatron Ke Khiladi' that gives you adrenaline rush, that push, thrill, and excitement."

It is like a kid in a candy store, or a kid going to theme park, that's the excitement that I get when I do this show. That's probably the only reason why I've said yes to the show for the third time," the 37-year-old actor told PTI in an interview.

Dhanjani said the latest season of filmmaker Rohit Shetty-hosted show has reignited the competitive spirit in him.

"There is a renewed sense of hunger and passion and madness that came along with this season when I saw co-contestants like Avinash, Farrhana, who have done phenomenal jobs. So, there was this renewed sense of passion that no matter where you are in life, just keep at it and just keep

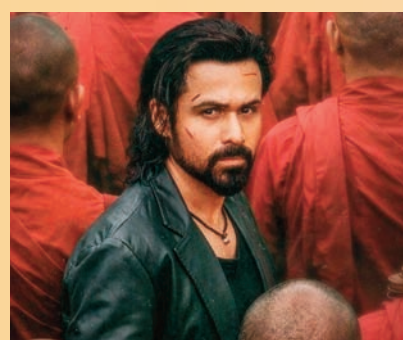


going, don't give up. That's what I've done this season," the actor added.

Asked if he would consider participating again, Dhanjani said he is open to the idea, even as he hopes to win the current season.

"I hope I win the show, so I don't have to do it all over again. But if it is offered to me again, I'll do it because it is a great platform to be on." (PTI)

Emraan Hashmi returns as Shivam Pandit in 'Awarapan 2' trailer



Nineteen years after "Awarapan", Emraan Hashmi is back as the brooding Shivam Pandit in "Awarapan 2" with the sequel's trailer promising a high-stakes tale of vengeance, redemption and unfinished business.

The trailer, unveiled by Vishesh Films on Wednesday, sees Shivam returning older and scarred as he embarks on a mission driven by revenge while confronting the consequences of his past.

Hashmi returns in the lead role along-

side Disha Patani, who joins the franchise as Zara. Veteran actor Shabana Azmi also features in the film as Nafisa.

The cast also includes Purni Gabbi as Zorawar, Anirudh Rawal as Sikandar, Surendar Vicky as Jaideep, Vijayant Kohli as Mehmood and Atul Kumar as Samarth.

The sequel's music has been composed by Mithoon, Jeet Gangguli, Amaal Malik, Ankit Sachdev and Wasif Ahmad, with lyrics by Sayeed Quadri, Rashmi Virag, Akhil Sachdeva and Sachin Singh

Chandel.

Songs such as "Ve Junoon", "Yeh Awarapan" and "Toh Phir Aao" have already been released ahead of the film, while "Tera Mera Rishta", composed by Mithoon and sung by Saaj Bhatt and Subodh Sharma, features prominently in the trailer.

Presented by Mukesh Bhatt and Vishesh Films, "Awarapan 2" is produced by Vishesh Bhatt, directed by Nitin Kakkar and written by Bilal Siddiqui. (PTI)

Birla Studios, Neelam Studios announce new action drama 'Makkal Kaavalan' with actor Manikandan

Birla Studios and Pa Ranjith's Neelam Studios have reunited for Tamil action drama "Makkal Kaavalan", starring K Manikandan in the lead role.

The film marks the second collaboration between the two banners following the success of "Bison Kaalamadaan", Mari Selvaraj's sports drama that emerged as one of the biggest Tamil hits of 2025.

Written and directed by debutant Santhosh Kumar, "Makkal Kaavalan" follows an ordinary man whose fight against a corrupt system transforms him into an unlikely leader. The film is billed as an action drama rooted in themes of dignity, resistance and social justice.

The project marks Manikandan's first full-fledged action film after winning acclaim for performances in "Good Night", "Lover" and "Kudumbasthan".

"Makkal Kaavalan" is a unique action drama rooted in cultural and ethnic disputes. The originality and honesty in the script gave me all the compelling reasons to take it up. The film is gripping, intense, and very timely for today's world.

"I was hooked from the very first time Santhosh narrated the story. This is a dream project

for us, and we're thrilled that it has come out exactly the way we envisioned," the actor said.

Sunil Chainani, co-producer at Birla Studios, said the production house was excited to continue its partnership with Neelam Studios after "Bison Kaalamadaan".

"We remain deeply committed to championing filmmakers with bold, original voices and stories that connect deeply with audiences, and Santhosh Kumar brings exactly that vision to this film in his feature directorial debut."

"K Manikandan has established himself as one of Tamil cinema's most compelling actors, and we're thrilled to have him lead this project. 'Makkal Kaavalan' is a powerful and entertaining story with a deeply emotional core, and we look forward to bringing it to audiences in theatres," he added.

Pa Ranjith and Aditi Anand of Neelam Studios said the film introduces an exciting new directorial voice.

"We are delighted to bring one of the brightest young writer-directors in Tamil cinema, Santhosh Kumar, to audiences with 'Makkal Kaavalan'. It's one of the most exciting films we have had the opportunity to be part



of, anchored by a truly outstanding performance from Manikandan. We are equally thrilled to continue our part-

nership with Birla Studios, who share our belief in backing ambitious, filmmaker-led cinema with the scale to

reach audiences everywhere," they said.

Calling the project deeply personal, Santhosh Kumar said the story draws from his own experiences.

"Makkal Kaavalan" is my first feature film. It is inspired by the people I have met, the experiences I have lived through, and the realities I have witnessed. At its core, the film explores the hierarchies within systems of power and the inequalities they create. It also tells the story of an honest man and the challenges he faces while trying to uphold his integrity within that system."

"Having Manikandan lead this film brings exactly the honesty and intensity the character demands," he said.

The cast also includes Vaagai Chandrasekar, A Venkatesh, R K Vijaymurgan, Shanmugam Muthusamy, Sabumon, Unni Maya, Divya Sripada, Jenson Divakar, Lallu, Gemini Mani and Raghu.

The film features music by Nivas K Prasanna, cinematography by Pratheepan Selvaratnam and editing by Arul Moses. (PTI)

Gianni Infantino gets internal support at crisis meeting to remain as FIFA president

NEW YORK, Aug 6: FIFA said it had apologized for errors made over Gianni Infantino's now abandoned plans in the World Cup and that senior staff in attendance at a crisis meeting in Morocco "reaffirmed their full support" for his presidency.

World soccer's governing body attempted to present a unified front amid the turbulence caused by Infantino's controversial plans, with calls for him to step down.

In a statement, FIFA said Secretary General Mattias Grafström and members of the management board in attendance in Rabat had given their support to the embattled president.

Referring to the plans to sell profits in the World Cup through a commercial subsidiary called FIFA Forward Enterprise (FFE), the statement said "mistakes made were acknowledged" and that the "process should have been handled differently."

FIFA said a letter had been sent to FIFA Council and member associations apologizing for errors and committed to "ensure they do not happen again."

Grafström's stated support was notable after he distanced himself from Infantino's now abandoned plans in an email to all FIFA staff calling the last week a "sad and reproachable series of events."

FIFA said Infantino had also reaffirmed his support for his secretary general.

World soccer's governing said the FFE proposal was "now off the table."

"There are always lessons to be learned, and FIFA will continue to improve its processes in light of this experience," it said.

It remains to be seen if the meeting will ease the pressure on Infantino.

Serious questions' Earlier Wednesday, the association of European soccer leagues — including the Premier League, La Liga and Serie A — called for governance reform of FIFA. It described the FFE proposal as "dangerous" and said it pointed to deeper concerns about how the governing body operates.

It said it raised "serious questions about FIFA's governance, internal culture and decision-making."



"Now more than ever, FIFA requires governance reform that ensures that all relevant stakeholders have a formal role in decisions that shape the future of our game."

In the statement, European Leagues hit out at the possibility of further expanding the World Cup to 64 teams and said "FIFA must not be allowed to continue taking unilaterally disruptive decisions."

It said that until there was reform it would reject the "expansion or creation" of FIFA competitions.

Portugal and Real Madrid great Luis Figo also called for Infantino to step down, saying he had "debased the office."

FIFA denied a British media report suggesting Infantino, in seeking support for his presidency, had offered Morocco the hosting of the final at the 2030 World Cup. Spain, Portugal and Morocco are the main co-hosts for the 2030 edition. Morocco hopes to host the final at the planned 115,000-seat King Hassan II Stadium near Casablanca; Spain has at least two contenders — the home stadiums of Real Madrid and Barcelona.

A FIFA spokesperson said it's "false and misleading to claim the FIFA president has made any promise in relation to hosting the FIFA World Cup 2030 final. A decision will be made by FIFA in due course."

Canada's Carney raises concerns Also Wednesday, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said he no longer has confidence in Infantino. He said the FIFA president committed a "fatal" governance failure by not consulting senior advisers.

"Certainly I don't have confidence in Mr. Infantino," said Carney, who had appeared alongside Infantino at several events during the 2026 World Cup co-hosted by Canada, Mexico and the

United States.

A tumultuous week have raised questions about Infantino's presidency of FIFA ahead of elections in March.

European soccer's governing body UEFA has applied the most intense pressure by voting to boycott the World Cup if Infantino pressed ahead with (FFE).

Even after Infantino's climbdown UEFA said it had lost confidence in FIFA's leadership — possibly paving the way for a challenge to his presidency. The governing body for North and Central American and Caribbean soccer (CONCACAF) also said FIFA leadership had "stopped putting football first."

There have also been signs of division within the organization with chief of global football development Arsène Wenger distancing himself from the FFE plans. Infantino's senior adviser Carlos Cordeiro resigned last week and chief operating officer Kevin Lamour said staff were "deceived" by the president's lack of openness.

Infantino is aiming for to win a fourth and final term in office at the March elections. (AP)

Pakistan beat West Indies to end 8-match overseas losing streak in cricket Tests



PORT OF SPAIN (TRINIDAD), Aug 6: Pakistan ended its eight-match losing streak away from home in cricket Tests with a resounding eight-wicket victory over the West Indies on Wednesday to level the series.

First innings century-maker Abdullah Shafique and Babar Azam, in his first series since being reappointed as captain, reappointed as captain, led Pakistan to 77-2 with unbeaten knocks of 24 runs each as the visitors achieved victory shortly after lunch on Day 4 of the second test.

Babar knocked off the target by hitting back-to-back sixes against left-arm spinner Jomel Warrican, whose six-wicket haul in the first

innings had limited Pakistan's lead to 43 runs.

West Indies won the first test by 90 runs at Tarouba. In the second test, spinners Sajid Khan and Ali Usman utilized favorable conditions on a wearing wicket of Queen's Park Oval to ensure Pakistan remained unbeaten in a test series against the West Indies since 2000.

Pakistan lost the wickets of Imam-ul-Haq, brilliantly snapped up by Justin Greaves in the slips cordon for 9 in Jayden Seales' first over Wednesday, and Azan Awaiz was bowled by Shamar Joseph for 18 before Shafique and Babar sealed the win inside four days.

Earlier, West Indies had set up a

modest target of 75 runs after it got bowled out for 117 with off-break bowler Sajid (4-32) and left-arm spinner Usman (4-39) sharing eight wickets between them.

Opening batter Brandon King couldn't bat in West Indies' second innings due to a back injury sustained on Day 3 when he ran out Babar with a spectacular direct throw from short cover.

Resuming on 106-3 — only 60 runs ahead — the resistance of West Indies' tailenders ended quickly with Usman picking up the wickets of Kumar Roach and Joseph. Greaves, the last recognized batter, played on to seamer Mohammad Ali's delivery back onto his stumps after adding just two runs to his total as he attempted a cross batted shot, but got a big inside edge.

Pakistan's last test win away from home came against Sri Lanka in 2023 during Babar's first tenure as captain, before Shan Masood led the side for nearly three years during which Pakistan lost 3-0 in Australia; 2-0 in South Africa; and 2-0 in Bangladesh.

Masood was eventually relieved of the captaincy after Pakistan's dismal run in red-ball cricket, but the return of Babar as skipper saw Pakistan losing the first test at Tarouba last week for Pakistan's eighth loss away from home in three years. (AP)

Inter Miami beats San Luis 4-2

Lionel Messi scores his first 2 goals since the World Cup



MIAMI, Aug 6: Lionel Messi scored his first two goals since the World Cup and took the career scoring lead in the Leagues Cup as Inter Miami overcame an early deficit to beat Atlético San Luis 4-2 on a rainy night.

The match at Nu Stadium was delayed 30 minutes in the second half because of lightning in the area.

Messi scored in the 11th and the 44th minutes. He has 14 goals in 12 Leagues Cup matches — one ahead of Los Angeles FC's Denis Bouanga for most in the tournament's four-year history.

Telasco Segovia and defender Micael also scored, and Noah Allen had three assists as Inter Miami extended its unbeaten

streak to eight matches.

Messi returned to Miami's starting lineup in his second match since the World Cup, where he led Argentina to its second straight final appearance before La Albiceleste lost 1-0 to Spain. The 39-year-old played 37 minutes as a substitute in a 2-2 draw with the Columbus Crew on Saturday.

After being held off the score-sheet against Columbus, it didn't take Messi long to make an impact on Wednesday. He fired a long cross from Allen past Andrés Sánchez to equalize after David Rodríguez put San Luis ahead with a header four minutes into the match. Messi finished from close range later in the first half and assisted on Micael's header in stop-

Mandaviya highlights 2036 Olympic aspirations in report card

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: Union Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, who also holds the portfolio of Labour and Employment, presented a report card of his two ministries at a recent meeting of the NDA MPs, highlighting the efforts to bring the 2036 Olympics to India and the growth in employment over the last 12 years.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah in attendance, Mandaviya started with sports and then listed the progress made in the Labour and Employment ministry, drawing applause at the mention of major milestones.

"He mentioned that earlier the idea was to land a job through sports. The long-term vision was missing. He also spoke about how important it is to prioritise sports science to move ahead in the medal tally in international events," a well-placed source said referring to the minister's stated position on the issue of sports as a stepping stone for employment.

"We have to host the 2036 Olympics. We have to be in the top 10 of medal winners. We have to be in top five sporting nations by 2047," he added.

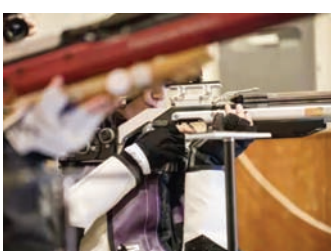
Mandaviya said India's medal tally in the Olympic Games, which was a total of 21 across the Games held between 1948 and 2012, was 15 in just the last three editions.

"He also highlighted India's outstanding Commonwealth Games performance, where despite the reduced number of medal events, India finished fourth with a tally of 39 medals including historic performances in boxing, athletics and judo."

In a more elaborate briefing on Labour and Employment, Mandaviya stated that "17.1 crore additional jobs were created between 2014 and 2024, alongside a 66 per cent rise in youth employability."

"The social security coverage also grew from 25 crore in 2015 to over 101 crore beneficiaries in 2026." (PTI)

American rifle shooter trains in India, returns home to win national title



NEW DELHI, Aug 6: After spending nearly two years honing his skills in India, American shooter Jeff Browning returned to the United States with a sharper edge, and a national title has underlined the progress.

The seasoned marksman capped off his journey by winning the prestigious 10m air rifle event at the US National Championship in Camp Perry, Ohio, turning his overseas training into championship success.

A competitive shooter since 2012, Browning trained extensively at the Topgun Shooting Academy in New Delhi during his stay in India. The experience proved invaluable, helping him refine his technique and elevate his performance.

Within a month of returning to the United States, Browning clinched the national title while representing the Virginia State team. He credited the academy for playing a key role in helping him maintain his competitive edge and further develop his shooting skills.

"I had been a competitive shooter in the United States since 2012 and wanted to continue pursuing the sport while living in India. When I arrived in Delhi in the summer of 2023, (academy founder and former international) Shimon Sharif and the coaches at Topgun Shooting Academy gave me the opportunity to train in the 10m air rifle."

"I returned to the United States last month, and within a month of my return, I won the U.S. National Championship. I am truly grateful to the academy for the training, guidance, and support I received

during my time in India. The experience played an important role in helping me continue competing at the highest level," Browning added.

For his championship-winning performance, Browning was awarded the prestigious Leatherneck Trophy, one of the coveted honours presented during the National Matches at Camp Perry.

The academy's association with the US shooting community, however, extends well beyond Browning's success.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when international travel and competitions came to a halt, the academy emerged as an unlikely global hub for elite shooters by organising virtual competitions that kept athletes match-ready despite lockdowns.

The online events attracted participants from around the world, including several members of the US Olympic shooting team as they prepared for the postponed Tokyo Olympics.

Among those who competed was American ace William Shaner, who went on to capture the Olympic gold medal in the men's 10m air rifle event at the Tokyo Games in 2021.

Fellow American Lucas Kozelniesky, who later won the silver medal in the 10m air rifle mixed team event in Tokyo, also took part in the academy's virtual competitions during the pandemic.

"It's a matter of immense pride for us to have contributed to the development of rifle shooters from several countries, including the United States."

"Jeff Browning's national title is another feather in our cap and reinforces our belief that quality coaching and a competitive training environment can help athletes perform at the highest level, regardless of where they come from," said Sharif, founder of the academy. (PTI)

India receive direct entry into MOBA Legends: 5v5

RIYADH, Aug 6: India have received a direct invitation to the MOBA Legends: 5v5 tournament at the Esports Nations Cup (ENC) after accumulating 2,600 points in the ENC Rankings.

India's roster for the tournament has Gaithanlung Gommei (Kyle), Susanta Biswas (Kimmy), Abhijeet Katkar (Asuna), Rithik Sohal (Romcom), Evancius A. Sangma (Vann), along with reserve players Mohammad Saad (Apex) and Jay Mehta.

Steve Vitug (Dale) will be India's coach,

announced the Esports Foundation through a release on Thursday.

The Legends competition will feature 32 teams competing for a prize pool of more than Rs 14.2 crore from November 23 to 29 in Riyadh.

The Esports Foundation has allocated 16 direct invitations through the ENC Rankings, and 14 places will be decided through regional online qualifiers, scheduled for August 15 to 16.

The final two slots will be filled through

wildcard invitations comprising one Host Region slot and one Solidarity slot.

"One of the biggest strengths of this roster is the variety of experience each player brings. Every player has something unique to offer, whether it's leadership, mechanics, or decision-making."

"Our focus over the coming months is to combine those strengths into a cohesive team with a clear identity and style of play. I am confident we'll be ready to take on the challenge in Riyadh," said coach Vitug. (PTI)

NWSL to start its season earlier in 2027 because of the Women's World Cup

NEW YORK, Aug 6: The National Women's Soccer League will kick off its season earlier than ever before next year to work around the Women's World Cup in Brazil.

NWSL Commissioner Jessica Berman gave a wide-ranging mid-season State of the League address Wednesday during which she discussed next season's schedule, the impact of the men's World Cup and other topics impacting the league.

The league's 15th season will open on Feb. 11, more than a month earlier than this season. The annual Challenge Cup match will be played on Feb. 6. The NWSL will pause from June 24 to July 25 during the Women's World Cup as many of the league's players will be on national teams that qualify for the tournament. The playoffs will start on Nov. 5 and the league championship will be played on Nov. 20.

"We know that major tournaments inspire millions of people to follow the sport, and our schedule allows us to be part of the lead-in and the lead-out of that big moment," Berman said.

The league is intentionally launching the season during Super Bowl weekend and will be "working closely with ESPN to make sure that the NWSL is woven into the weekend stories, and we're very excited about that," Berman said. ABC/ESPN is a broadcast partner of the NWSL, and ABC is broadcasting the 2027 Super Bowl.

There has been speculation the NWSL may at some point shift to a season that would align with its international counterparts, although the players' union has objected to such a move and the league will remain on a spring to fall schedule through at least 2030.

The men's domestic league, Major League Soccer, will shift its season to a summer to spring calendar next year. Berman said the MLS move presents both benefits and challenges because many teams share stadiums.

"Right now, being on a spring to fall footprint with MLS, we both have our playoffs at the same time, and what that means is that there are holds across lots of dates with uncertainty," she said. "With us being on different calendars, that's no longer going to be the case."



We're going to have visibility into weeks that might otherwise have been reserved but not confirmed, and that will be helpful."

World Cup bump Berman said the league appears to be benefiting from the so-called World Cup bump, with increased viewership and engagement following the men's tournament this summer. The league's "Summer of Soccer" event tour and marketing campaign aimed to capitalize on the men's tournament to boost the

NWSL's profile.

Berman touted the campaign for growth on social media platforms Instagram and YouTube. The league had nearly 40 million impressions on social media with the Summer of Soccer tour hashtag, #NWSLOnTour.

Average attendance to date is 11,174 per game, the second-highest behind 2024, which had an average of 11,249.

"We're close to beating that, and we hope we'll have a strong

second half of the season, where we can celebrate this being our highest-attended year on an average basis," Berman said.

FIFA fallout FIFA President Gianni Infantino's failed plan to sell stakes in future World Cups to private investors has brought increasing scrutiny of his leadership.

CONCACAF and its 41 member associations, including the United States, previously rejected Infantino's proposal. Whether U.S. Soccer would take a position on Infantino's future won't be discussed until a September board meeting. CEO JT Batson told reporters on Tuesday, Berman sits on the board.

"I'll start by saying we wholeheartedly support the position that U.S. Soccer and CONCACAF took as it relates to not being supportive of that proposal, and are pleased that it was withdrawn," Berman said. "As it relates to future state conversations about the future of FIFA and leadership, I'm eager to have discussions with our fellow board members to listen and learn and better understand the optionality that might exist and the process." (AP)

Indian batters aim to ace spin test in warm-up before Test series against SL



COLOMBO, Aug 6: Indian batters will be keen to fine-tune their skills against spin during a three-day warm-up match against a local Sri Lanka XI at the Nondescripts Cricket Club here on Friday as they gear up for a two-match Test series against the Islanders next week.

Quality spin proved to be India's Achilles Heel against New Zealand and South Africa at home recently, and the challenge will not be any different against Sri Lanka.

The Islanders have a capable unit of tweakers, particularly in home conditions, and thus this warm-up match assumes massive importance for Indian batters ahead of the first Test at Galle on August 15.

It's cool and humbling: Starc as he nears Kapil's tally of all-time Test wickets

MELBOURNE, Aug 6: Australian pacer Mitchell Starc is just one wicket shy of equalling Indian great Kapil Dev in the list of all-time highest wicket-takers in Test cricket and says it would be humbling to be placed in that star-studded top-10.

Starc has 433 wickets in 105 Tests, one less than Kapil. The two-Test series against Bangladesh beginning August 13 will give him an opportunity to surpass Kapil and South African pace great Dale Steyn, who has 439 Test wickets.

"It means I've played a bit," Starc told the Australian Associated Press when asked about the milestone.

"It is cool and very humbling to be spoken about it with those guys. But that stuff doesn't mean a whole lot while you're still playing. You don't get too far ahead," he added.

Starc leads the global wicket-taking list in the ongoing World Test Championship cycle with 46 scalps from eight games. In the all-time list, the only Australians ahead of him are Shane Warne (708), Glenn McGrath (563) and Nathan Lyon (567).

The lanky bowler said he has worked hard to keep his body in good shape for the rigours of international cricket. The left-arm pacer played briefly in this year's IPL but hasn't been seen in action after that.

"When you're 36 and you've been around for 16 years, you'd like to think you've improved or got better at something," Starc said.

Australia vs Bangladesh Series schedule:

First Test: August 13-17, Darwin
Second Test: August 22-26, Mackay. (PTI)

Some frontline batters like skipper Shubman Gill, KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal had started preparations against spin individually at their home facilities before boarding the flight to Colombo, but that cannot really supplant an outing on a Sri Lankan pitch.

The three-day match will give them valuable first-hand idea about local conditions, and it is important because many of them are playing the red-ball format for the first time on these shores.

India's last Test series in Sri Lanka was in 2017, and the team composition has undergone vast changes in the last decade.

In fact, only Rahul, Kuldeep Yadav and Ravindra Jadeja in this squad have appeared in Test

matches in Sri Lanka.

In the absence of an injured Jasprit Bumrah, pacer Mohammed Siraj will be India's bowling lead with support coming from Prasidh Krishna, Gurnoor Brar, Manav Suthar and Saransh Jain.

This largely inexperienced bowling lineup, except Siraj and Kuldeep, will be eager to bowl on a Lankan pitch once again.

Both Brar and Jain had very good outings for India A against Sri Lanka A last month at Galle, and they will be raring to have another round of practice under their belt.

Head Coach Gautam Gambhir emphasised on this point.

"We know what is in front of us. We can do volume, we can push

our limits, we can tick all the boxes and come 15th morning whether we are batting first or bowling first we will be absolutely ready with every answer to every question thrown at us.

"So make sure to tick all the boxes from now on," Gambhir exhorted his wards in a video posted by BCCI.

However, intermittent rain is predicted to lash the city from Friday and that may jeopardise India's designs.

Meanwhile, Sri Lanka also announced a strong SLC XI that contained some front-runners to make it to the Test squad.

Led by Sonal Dinusha, who has played three Tests for SL, the squad features pacers Vishwa Fernando, Lahiru Kumara and spinners Isitha Wijesundara and Ramesh Mendis.

Teams (from)
India: Shubman Gill (Captain), KL Rahul (Vice-Captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant (WK), Sai Sudharsan*, Dhruv Jurel (WK), Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Manav Suthar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Gurnoor Brar, Devdutt Padikkal, Saransh Jain, Aaquib Nabi.
SLC XI: Nishan Madushka, Ravindu Rathantha, Pasindu Sooriyabandara, Pavan Rathnayake, Ahan Wickramasinghe, Sonal Dinusha (Captain), Anjala Bandara (wk), Nipun Dananjaya, Lahiru Kumara, Vishwa Fernando, Asanka Manoj, Isitha Wijesundara, Ramesh Mendis, Kesara Nuwantha, Dilum Sudeera.

Match starts at 10am. (PTI)

Please reconsider JFC's ISL withdrawal: AIFF chief Chaubey appeals to Tata group

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: All India Football Federation (AIFF) President Kalyan Chaubey has urged the Tata group to reconsider its "shocking" decision of withdrawing Jamshedpur FC from the embattled Indian Super League (ISL).

The Tata group has made it clear that JFC's exit from the ISL was a long-planned strategic decision to ensure that the company returns to its core ideal of grassroots football development. Tata Steel vice President (Corporate Services) D B Sundara Ramam has also insisted that the move has "nothing to do" with the uncertainty surrounding the ISL's commercial future and would not be reconsidered.

However, Chaubey said the AIFF would still hope for a rethink by the legacy corporate house.

"AIFF would be happy if Tata remains in football, especially in the senior top tier football. If an AIFF request or application can change their mind...the AIFF would like to appeal that for the interest of the players and football, Tata should remain in the senior football league," Chaubey told PTI in an interview.

"The AIFF welcomes any suggestion (from them) and is ready to incorporate the suggestions to ensure the best outcome," he said.

Tata Steel has assured that Jamshedpur FC will honour all existing player contracts and help footballers find new clubs.

The AIFF president said he has faith in Tata group and its decisions cannot be driven by commercial interests.

"It's all about, I think, some de-



cision in the boardroom. And I'm sure there are reasons, but it cannot be for Rs 1.1 crore participation fee or management fee. It is not that. When the board decided to withdraw the senior team from the top-tier league, I am sure they had a reason for taking this harsh decision.

"They are aware of the football fans' reaction, but I assume this cannot be only a financial decision because Tata has many enterprises and businesses," he observed.

The former India goalkeeper said he has immense respect for the group's contribution to the sport's growth through the Tata Football Academy that has been in operation since 1987. Chaubey too has trained in that facility during his playing days.

"We have seen many corporates become very prominent over the last few decades, but we have also seen many corporates go bankrupt thereafter. But Tata is different. It

has gained that respect, earned that respect among Indians," he noted.

"Tata will never consider sports merely as a medium for business, revenue generation, profit, or loss. They have done so much for Indian sport. They have invested in archery and several other areas, and in football, I think most of the youth development system has come through the Tata Football Academy," the former India player added.

Chaubey recalled how the academy survived a financial crisis in the '90s.

"...it was rumoured that TFA would be closed down, the Archery Academy would start, the Engineer Hostel would start, and the Cricket Academy would start. Many rumours were there.

"But since we won two tournaments in Germany and the Netherlands at the junior level, it became a headline in London. So officers from the London Tata office came and met us. They gave us incentives, PK Banerjee and Ranjan Choudhury were the coach and technical director. So that's how the Tata Football Academy continued, which was supposed to be closed down in 1992," he revealed.

Chaubey fondly recalled his association with the Tata Academy as a cadet player.

"I learned football through Tata Football Academy. Since 1987 till date, nearly 275 or more players have graduated from TFA. I am also one among them and perhaps Renedy Singh and myself served the longest period in the Tata Football Academy," he said. (PTI)

Sports Minister answers queries on vacant coaching positions, anti-doping measures, football



NEW DELHI, Aug 6: Over 500 vacant coaching positions in the Sports Authority of India (SAI), increased dope tests at the grassroots level and funds provided to football's beleaguered national body were among the diverse issues that Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya addressed in his responses to various Rajya Sabha queries here on Thursday.

Despite the launch of a mega recruitment drive by SAI in January to hire more than 350 assistant coaches, 464 positions remain vacant, a number which is over 100 more than last year.

In all, 554 positions are waiting to be filled, including 90 slots for head coaches at its facilities across the country.

"The qualifications and competencies of coaches are assessed in accordance with the prescribed recruitment and engagement norms," Mandaviya stated.

The minister also revealed that in the last five years, ₹ 8.5 crore has been allocated for training and upskilling programmes for coaches to "enhance their professional capabilities."

Mandaviya's statement was in written response to a query from the Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha and Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge.

Measures to counter doping

In response to a query from BJP MP Kesridevsinh Jhala on the anti-doping measures taken by the government, Mandaviya cited the NADA's dedicated intelligence and investigation mechanisms to collect, and assess information relating to potential Anti-Doping Rule Violations (ADRVs), including trafficking, administration, possession and distribution of prohibited substances and methods.

The minister said that the number

of sample collection sessions at grassroots-level events, including school, university, state, and zonal-level events has also gone up.

"A total of 20 sample collection sessions were conducted in 2025, and 55 sample collection sessions have been conducted in 2026 up to July 2026," he noted.

In addition, the Sample Collection Personnel (SCP) workforce has also been strengthened through "regular recruitment, training, and re-accreditation programmes."

"A total of 11 training programmes were conducted in 2025, and four training programmes have been conducted in 2026 up to July 2026, to ensure the availability of qualified sample collection personnel across different regions of the country," he said.

The government is also pushing for criminalisation of doping by proposing jail term and fines for entities indulging in trafficking and supply of prohibited substances in fresh amendments to the National Anti-Doping Act.

The football crisis

A couple of questions were posed on the state of Indian football as well. They focussed primarily on the central government's efforts to keep the sport afloat as it goes through a commercial crisis alongside lack of credible international performances.

Mandaviya stated that the government has provided financial assistance to the tune of ₹ 37.98 crore in the last five years. This year a total of ₹ 3.91 crore has been provided to the All India Football Federation (AIFF) from a total allocation of Rs 8 crore.

"At present 527 athletes of football discipline are being trained at various SAI centres across the country," read the minister's statement. (PTI)

Three Indians make finals of World Athletics U20 Championships

EUGENE (USA), Aug 6: Javelin throwers Ashish Yadav and T Dharanidharan along with discus thrower Amanat Kamboj qualified for the final rounds in a decent opening day performance by the Indians at the World Athletics U20 Championships here.

Yadav topped the men's javelin Group A qualification round with a throw of 69.87m and ended at second spot overall, behind South Africa's title favourite Jan-Hendrik Heymans who won Group B with a 76.02m throw. The 19-year-old Indian has a season's best of 74.49m, which is also his personal best.

Heymans was the lone competitor to breach the automatic qualification mark of 72.50m.

Dharanidharan made it to the final round, taking the 12th and the last spot overall after finishing fifth in Group B qualification round with a throw of 68.07m.

Those who breached the automatic qualifying mark of 72.50m or at least best 12 qualified for the final to be held on Friday.

Indian superstar Neeraj Chopra is the current world record holder in the event with his 86.48m throw in the 2016 edition of the championships in Bydgoszcz, Poland.

In women's discus throw, Amanat produced a season's best throw of 52.58m to finish sixth in Group A qualification round and take the 12th and last available spot to sneak into the finals.

China's Su Yixin took the top position across the two qualification groups with 58.06m, while compatriot Ma Chenyi was second with 57.72m.

Those who breached the automatic qualifying mark of 55m or the best 12 performers qualified for the final to be held later tonight.

Mogali Venkatram made it to the men's 800m semifinals while Uwin Anand bowed out in the same event after the Round 1 heat races.

Venkatram finished third in Heat 5, clocking 1 minute 52.81 seconds to secure his place in the semifinals. Anand ended seventh in Heat 1 and 30th overall, clocking 1:52.37sec.

Across the five heats, Uganda's Shafek Murungi recorded the fastest time, clocking a personal best of 1:46.64sec.

First five in each heat plus two fastest runners from the remaining athletes across the five heats qualify for the semifinal.

The Indian 4x400m mixed relay team exited the competition in the Round 1 itself after finishing fourth in its heat with a time of 3 minute 22.85 seconds. (PTI)

Come 15th, we'll be ready with all the answers: Gambhir

COLOMBO, Aug 6: Their home Test run in recent past may not have been particularly impressive but India head coach Gautam Gambhir has asserted that his team will be ready with all the answers when the two-Test series against Sri Lanka gets underway here from August 15.

In a short address to the team before a practice session here, Gambhir also welcomed the new entrants -- spin-bowling all-rounder Saransh Jain and pacer Aaquib Nabi.

"We know what's in front of us, we know what we are playing for. We can do the volume, we can push our limits, we can tick all the boxes," Gambhir said in the video shared by BCCI on social media.

"Come 15th morning (August 15), whether we are batting first, whether we are bowling first, we're absolutely ready with every answer, every question that's thrown at us, and every answer we are ready to give. So make sure we tick all the boxes from now on," he added.

The first match of the series will be played in Galle from August 15 while the second game will be held here from August 23. It would be India's first ICC World Test Championship assignment since the disastrous 0-2 home defeat to South Africa



in December last year.

Saransh has been picked in the squad on the basis of his consistently fine run for Madhya Pradesh in the domestic circuit. Nabi is in to replace an injured Jasprit Bumrah. He played a stellar role in J&K's maiden title-winning run in Ranji Trophy last season.

"We've got a couple of new guys in. To start with, Saransh, congratulations. You've worked extremely hard to be here," Gambhir said welcoming the 33-year-old late bloomer.

"Make sure that you make your family and your country proud, whenever you get that opportunity. (PTI)

Delhi ready to host best-ever World C'ships: BAI secy

NEW DELHI, Aug 6: After drawing criticism over the state of facilities during the India Open earlier this year, the Badminton Association of India (BAI) on Thursday said the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium has undergone a complete renovation and is ready to host the "best-ever" edition of the BWF World Championships.

The India Open came under scrutiny after players raised concerns over the condition of the venue, including its cleanliness, training facilities and air quality. The tournament also witnessed unusual disruptions, with matches briefly halted due to bird droppings and even a monkey entering the spectator stands.

The controversy erupted after Danish shuttler Mia Blichfeldt criticised the condition of the warm-up and practice areas at the K.D. Jadhav Indoor Hall and the Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium during the India Open, drawing attention to the poor state of the facilities.

"We've worked on every issue that came up then, and I'm happy to say those problems have been resolved completely. I'm confident this will be one of the best World Championships ever," BAI secre-



tary general Sanjay Mishra told PTI on the sidelines of the draw ceremony for the World Championships, which begin in New Delhi on August 17.

"I would especially like to thank the Sports Ministry and SAI because they've worked very hard. Under the guidance of

our president, Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma, all the preparations are progressing well," he added.

Mishra said the India Open had served as a "test event" ahead of the World Championships, helping the organisers identify shortcomings and address them

well in advance.

"The stadium is almost ready for the tournament. The India Open was essentially a test event for the World Championships. If we hadn't conducted that test event, we wouldn't have known what difficulties we were likely to face," he said.

According to Mishra, the venue has been fully refurbished, with the walls, toilets and flooring renovated, while a team of Malaysian lighting experts has been brought in to oversee the installation of the court lighting.

"The biggest change is the complete renovation of the stadium. The walls, toilets and floors have all been refurbished. We've even brought in Malaysian lighting experts to handle the lighting. There weren't any major complaints about the lighting last time, but even then, we've invited some of the world's best experts in this field," he said.

"They will set up the entire lighting system, after which the BWF will inspect and approve it before the final court-specific lighting is installed. I believe anyone who saw or played at the India Open will find this stadium completely transformed this time," Mishra said. (PTI)

England recall Lawrence, Carse, Pope, Cook for Pakistan tests with Bethell ruled out

LONDON, Aug 6: Dan Lawrence was recalled by England after two years on Thursday to play in the first test against Pakistan and Jacob Bethell was ruled out of the three-match series by a right knee injury. The post-Ben Stokes era starts in Leeds on Aug. 19 and Surrey batting all-rounders Lawrence will have the first crack at trying to fill the prodigious shoes of the former test captain.

He is set to bat at No. 6 with wicket-keeper Jamie Smith likely to slot in one place lower down, while Bethell being sidelined has opened the door for Jordan Cox at first drop in the batting order.

Cox's own injury misfortune meant he made his test debut only in June against New Zealand at The Oval, where he was down at No. 7. Fast bowler Brydon Carse missed the 2-1 loss against the Black Caps because of an injury to his right hand but he was named in England's 16-man squad for the first two tests under returning captain Joe Root, with Marcus Trescothick in interim coach in the absence of the newly appointed Stephen Fleming, who had a

say in selection. Former vice-captain Ollie Pope was back after being discarded during the Ashes series in Australia where he averaged 20.83 before making way for Bethell. Seamer Sam Cook was also in, after his lone test appearance against Zimbabwe in May 2025.

Off-spinner Shoaib Bashir was retained although it remained to be seen if he keeps his spot in the XI after confirmation that Lawrence, who bowls off-spin, will definitely be in the team. Lawrence has been in the international wilderness since the last of his 14 test appearances in September 2024, having struggled batting out of position as an opener against Sri Lanka.

He has, though, been in a rich vein of form in division one of the County Championship, averaging 65.66 with five centuries in eight outings this season.

Bowling allrounders Sam Curran and Rhan Ahmed were the other options to try to balance the side in the absence of Stokes, who ended his storied England career following the series defeat by the Kiwis after 7,273 runs and 252 wickets in tests. (AP)