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Panel chief pins oppn's discussion demand

Heated exchanges at Parl panel meet on use of force against students on July 20

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: A meeting of a Parliament committee on Tuesday witnessed heated exchanges over the use of force against protesting students on July 20 as opposition members demanded a discussion on the issue, sources said.

The matter was raised by Congress member Ajay Maken during the meeting of the department-related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs, where views of officials of various ministries were to be presented on the subject of "crimes against children".

Maken said the issue of use of force against protesters should be taken up for discussion but committee chairman Radha Mohan Das Agarwal did not allow it, noting that the matter is sub-judice, the sources said.

The verbal sparring continued for about an hour as several opposition members, including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Jai Prakash of Congress, Shiv Sena-UBT's Sanjay



Raut, RJD's Sanjay Yadav and IUML's Haris Beeran, too demanded that the matter be discussed at the meeting.

Maken and others raised the issue of alleged use of pellet guns, nail-fitted batons and lathis on protesters, including children, who were marching to Parliament on July 20 over the issue of paper leaks.

Rejecting the demand, the chairman said that the already listed agenda of the meeting would be taken up, where several ministry officials would present their views on the issue of crimes against children.

The Chairman, in his ruling, said that the committee would take up a discussion at a later date on Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on use

of force on protesters. After the ruling, the opposition members relented and tempers cooled down.

Earlier, the other opposition members backed Maken's demand for a discussion on the issue, contending that it came in the category of "crimes against children".

The panel chairman, however, did not accede to their demand and ruled that matters which are sub judice cannot be discussed at the Parliamentary Committee meetings, the sources said.

The chairman noted that the issues raised by opposition members were being looked into by the Supreme Court, which has already set up a committee in this regard, they said.

The sources said that Maken had presented a letter to the Chairman during the August 5 meeting of the panel that this issue be taken up as it concerns children and the use of pellet guns, batons, lathis constitute crimes against them. They said BJP member (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Agencies working day and night to ensure safety for Indian seafarers: Sonowal

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Days after two commercial vessels carrying a total of 22 Indian nationals were hijacked by armed pirates off Yemen and Somalia, Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal on Tuesday said that all concerned agencies are working day and night, and they are committed to the safety, security, and welfare of Indian seafarers wherever they are working.

Sonowal said the government has asked the Directorate General of Maritime Administration (DGMA) to set up a dashboard for providing real-time information about Indian seafarers on each vessel operating in the region, irrespective of the ship's flag.

"In this sector, like you know, all concerned agencies, they are working day and night and particularly we are committed to the safety, security, and welfare of our seafarers wherever they are working," he said.

Sonowal was asked how the government is dealing with the security threat faced by Indian seafarers operating in the Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and wider Indian Ocean region, where vessels have to contend with



attacks linked to geopolitical tensions in the region.

The minister said he has categorically directed that every Indian seafarer in the affected region must be individually accounted for, irrespective of the vessel's flag.

The Indian crew members aboard both hijacked vessels are safe, according to the latest information available, a senior shipping ministry official said on August 21.

The Eritrea-flagged oil products

tanker M.T. Siblu 1, carrying 20 crew members, including 16 Indians, was hijacked in the Gulf of Aden on August 20, about 30 nautical miles off the Yemeni coast. The crew also includes one Syrian, one Sudanese and one Iraqi national, while the nationality of another seafarer is yet to be confirmed.

A second vessel, the Cameroon-flagged M/V LUTUF, was hijacked on August 17 off Somalia's Puntland coast. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

3 cattle smugglers held, 20 cows rescued in Goalpara

GUWAHATI, Aug 25: Three suspected cattle smugglers have been arrested and 20 cows rescued in Assam's Goalpara district, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Tuesday.

The cattle were being allegedly smuggled in a country boat, he said. "No matter where the routes of cattle smuggling lead, no one can escape the grip of the law," Sarma said in a social media post.

He said Goalpara Police rescued the cows while being illegal transported in a country boat, and arrested three accused.

He, however, did not specify when the operation was carried out. "Cattle protection is our priority, and operations against smuggling networks will continue," the chief minister assured. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Doval, Wang hold India-China Special Representatives talks on border issue, improvement of ties



BEIJING, Aug 25: National Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Tuesday said that normalcy in relationship between India and China has been a direct result of both sides maintaining peace and

tranquillity in the border areas as he held the crucial Special Representatives talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

Holding an extensive round of talks, both Doval and Wang emphasised delivering on the "clear and positive" direction given by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping to improve bilateral relations.

"I am very happy we are here for the 25th round of talks which are very important, particularly in the wake of the BRICS summit to happen shortly," Doval said in his opening remarks.

President Xi is widely expected to attend the BRICS summit scheduled to be held in New Delhi on Sept 12-13. Though China has not yet confirmed his participation in the summit, officials on both sides are optimistic about Xi's visit to India. His visit would provide an opportunity for a meeting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Rijiju, Khera spar over swimming; Himanta makes a splash

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: What began with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju posting a video of himself swimming in an Arunachal Pradesh river and defending his technique after comparisons with Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has now run into political cross-currents.

Congress Rajya Sabha MP Pawan Khera on Tuesday took a swipe at Rijiju for bringing Gandhi into his posts while responding to those questioning his swimming technique, saying the Union minister could not even go for a "half-naked swim" without invoking the Leader of the Oppo-

sition. Rijiju responded, seemingly half in jest, that he would report Khera's conduct to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma.

"Dear Pawan Khera, I'll report to CM Himanta Biswa Sarma ji about your indisciplined conduct if you talk about half-naked swimming. Do you swim with a full suit & coat?" Rijiju wrote on X.

Khera and Sarma have had several run-ins, most recently during the Assam assembly polls when allegations levelled by the Congress leader against Sarma's wife Riniki Bhuyan Sarma led to an FIR and a

legal battle that reached the Supreme Court.

In 2023, Khera was also deplaned from a flight at Delhi airport and arrested by Assam Police over remarks about Prime Minister Narendra Modi before the Supreme Court granted him interim protection. Khera had joined the swimming debate earlier on Tuesday, saying, "Imagine how badly Rahul Ji has gotten under the BJP's skin. On one hand, @KirenRijiju can't even go for a half-naked swim without invoking @RahulGandhi". Rijiju objected to the remark. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Economy shows resilience to global headwinds with buoyant domestic demand: RBI bulletin

MUMBAI, Aug 25: Indian economy demonstrated notable resilience on buoyant domestic demand as well as increased industrial activities, and recovery in monsoon mitigated agriculture sector risks, RBI's latest bulletin said on Tuesday.

Presenting an optimistic picture amid multiple global headwinds, the bulletin also highlighted that the country is likely to be less affected by the additional 10 per cent US tariffs compared to neighbouring China and some other Asian economies.

The global economy is confronting a fragile geopolitical environment and continuing trade-related uncertainties. Nevertheless, the domestic economy has demonstrated notable resilience to the ongoing global headwinds, characterised by buoyant domestic demand and rising manufacturing and services activity, an article in the August bulletin said.

The southwest monsoon picked up in July after recording a deficit in June. While headline CPI inflation rose fractionally, reflecting food inflation; core inflation remained stable. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

Youth arrested for stealing jewellery from parents in Jorhat

HT Correspondent

JORHAT, Aug 25: A youth identified as Yash Dhanuka of the Truck Stand area on AT Road here was arrested by police on Tuesday for allegedly stealing gold jewellery worth several lakhs of rupees from his parents' locker at their residence.

According to a source, Dhanuka was arrested in connection with Jorhat Police Station Case No 285/2026 under Sections 61(2), 306(A), 317(2), 317(5), 3(5) and 56 of the BNS, following an FIR lodged by his father a few days ago.

The source said Dhanuka allegedly stole the ornaments last month when his parents were out of station.

He reportedly broke the locks of the safe after hiring a lock seller and duplicate-key maker.

Dhanuka allegedly sold the gold jewellery through two youths, one of whom was reportedly a portal journalist.

In a confession posted on social media on Tuesday, Dhanuka admitted to the crime and alleged that the two other persons had misled him. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

'The market had seen virtually no Chinese rakhis for the past two to three years' Rakhi trade expands with new themes-Viksit Bharat, Nari Vandan; could cross ₹30,000 cr: CAIT

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Rakhis this year are carrying considerably more than the traditional message of sibling affection, with threads invoking swadeshi pride and government initiatives -- Viksit Bharat, BrahMos and women's empowerment -- even as traders estimate that the country's rakhi trade is expected to touch nearly ₹25,000 crore.

The wider festive trade, including sweets, dry fruits, gifts, apparel, electronics and other items, could cross ₹30,000 crore in the country, according to estimates by the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT). Delhi is expected to account for around ₹4,000 crore of the business.

The figures come as markets across Delhi, including Chandni Chowk, Sadar Bazaar, Karol Bagh, Lajpat Nagar, Kamla Nagar, Rajouri Garden, Gandhi Nagar, Khari Baoli and Laxmi Nagar, see a rush of shoppers



ahead of Raksha Bandhan on August 28. At a demonstration at Chandni Chowk MP and CAIT national secretary general Praveen Khandelwal's residence in Delhi on Tuesday, a group of women entrepreneurs sat around tables strewn with coloured threads, beads and ornaments, turning them into rakhi in a matter of minutes.

Rakhi designs showed the

changing vocabulary of the market: Viksit Bharat, Modi's Guarantee, Nari Vandan, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Lakhpati Didi, Amrit Kaal, BrahMos and Rashtra Raksha Sutra.

The political themes, however, were only one part of a market increasingly being populated by handmade and locally produced rakhis. The women said their products were being

supplied to Delhi's markets, and if orders came in, to buyers in neighbouring states.

For the women making them, the appeal is less ideological than economic. "We want to move ahead and support our family's income. Whenever the festival comes, we take up this seasonal business," said Sarita Kumar, a resident of Delhi's Haiderpur who has been making rakhis for three years.

Kumar works with a group of around 25 women who divide production among themselves. One cuts the threads, another separates them, another inserts the beads and another pastes the decorative pieces. A rakhi takes about two to four minutes to assemble, she said. Kumar further said that the group buys its raw material from Sadar Bazaar. "A rakhi costs them about ₹3 to ₹4 to make and is sold to markets for around ₹6 to ₹7, with retailers selling (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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Goyal promises BIS certification relief for high-tech sector firms

TOKYO, Aug 25: Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday said the government is working on a framework to exempt high-tech sector companies, including from Japan, from mandatory Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) certification for equipment and components needed to set up manufacturing facilities in India.

Goyal said he had taken note of concerns raised by Japanese companies over BIS certification requirements and that the government had already instructed the BIS and the Commerce and Industry Ministry to work on a framework to address the issue.

The minister was addressing representatives of Japanese firms from semiconductors and AI sectors here.

He said the framework could provide exemptions at the company, industry, product or project level, depending on the requirements.

The objective is to ensure timely availability of equipment, goods and services for high-tech companies setting up manufacturing operations in India and support the government's 'Make in India' initiative, Goyal said.

"I have noted some of the concerns that were flagged today. The concerns about BIS certification. I'm happy to share with you that we have taken action yesterday itself."

"We have already instructed BIS and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to work on a framework to support high-tech industry, not necessarily only Japanese companies, but high-tech industries coming in to promote the Make in India program, to create a framework of exemption from BIS certification required for all the equipment and components that they need to bring to India to promote their manufacturing in India," he said.

The issue was raised by an official from the Tokyo Electron, a major Japanese semiconductor equipment manufacturer.

"We'll be creating a framework which



will either give company level or industry level exemptions. We will work on the framework as I get back to India and find a solution for bulk exemption, or product or project based exemption, or company based exemption, so that we can have timely supply of products, goods, and services, and support your work in India," Goyal said.

The move would be relevant for semiconductor companies, which require specialised equipment and components to establish manufacturing facilities.

Certain firms have raised issues that mandatory BIS requirements and complex certification procedures for imported parts and equipment delay operations.

Goyal cited companies such as Tokyo Electron, saying high-tech firms entering India to manufacture semiconductor products would maintain high quality standards even if their equipment and components were available at lower prices.

"Sky is the limit in terms of potential. It is for industry from both the Indian side and the Japanese side to grab the opportunity," he said adding "We will be happy to support you in your search for partner investors in India, and we would like to make India a major global electronics manufacturing base".

India is a large and growing electronics market and "We expect our semiconductor demand to now grow up to USD 150 billion by 2032," he said.

The Union Cabinet has approved Semicon 2.0 for the development of India's semiconductor design and manufacturing ecosystem, with a total budget outlay of ₹ 1,27,500 crore.

"Apart from that, states give incentives, and in the aggregate, we believe that Semicon 2 should be in a position to seed about USD 50 billion of investments," Goyal said.

Semicon 2.0 will have six pillars including design of chips, he said adding in the second pillar of machines and materials, companies involved in manufacturing, R&D, chemicals and gases are welcome.

"We hope that this will be the foundation for sustainable growth in India and will help develop the precision manufacturing," the minister said.

He added that in the third pillar, India is looking at setting up more fab units and the first fab is scheduled to be commissioned in 2028.

"The world is showing greater confidence in India. We will make efforts to attract more manufacturers to come to India to set up fabs and manufacture chips, including silicon fabs, compound semiconductor fabs, discrete component fabs, display fabs, etc," he said.

On an issue raised by a representative from Fuji Electric on development of social infrastructure, the minister said the government had created such infrastructure in the 11 Japanese industrial townships.

"We are working on those lines, so that between Dholera and Sanad, we can create social infrastructure like schooling, lodging, hospitals, restaurants, and hotels," he said.

On issues related to special economic zones (SEZs), the minister assured timely action to enable Japanese companies avail themselves of incentives under the SEZ, or Export Oriented Unit (EoU) or Manufacturing and Other Operations in Warehouse (MOOWR) frameworks, depending on their requirements and location. (PTI)

Food firms Mondelez India, Amway withdraw misleading claims on products after FSSAI notices

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Food regulator FSSAI on Tuesday said that many food companies, including Mondelez India and Amway India, have withdrawn misleading claims on labels of their products after its notices.

In a social media post, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) said that "major food business operators (FBOs) have taken prompt corrective action" following notices issued by the regulator. The corrective measures include withdrawal of misleading label claims and revising product packaging. In the case of Mondelez India Foods Pvt Ltd, the FSSAI said it had found misleading health claims and nutrient comparative claims.

After its notice, Mondelez has "withdrawn the claims and advertisement from e-commerce platforms and ensured compliance."

Sapiens Labs too has withdrawn all misleading claims and advertisements. Juza Foods of Kerala has also removed misleading claims.

In case of Vichi Agro Products Pvt Ltd, FSSAI had issued a notice for a misleading trade name.

"Response from Flipkart was received, wherein the FBO mentioned that he has delisted the product from his platform," the regulator said. The FSSAI said that Amway India Enterprises was found violating the law and using the misleading term 100% in the name as "100% Pure Coconut Oil". "Amway India submitted a compliance response confirming that it has voluntarily removed the term '100%' from its product packaging and promotional materials in accordance with the FSSAI advisory and confirmed that old stock has been discontinued from sales channels," the regulator informed.

Amway India Enterprises has also discontinued the term "Energy Drink" on its XS product range. The updated packaging will take effect starting with the next production cycle in August 2026.

FSSAI informed that Amway has requested a permit for the sale and distribution of existing market stock bearing the current artwork (which includes the word "Energy Drink") until that inventory is fully exhausted. (PTI)

Ather gives first glimpse of Konarc's Metal Body



GUWAHATI, Aug 25: Scooter Energy has offered the first glimpse of its upcoming electric scooter, Konarc, ahead of its unveiling on August 29.

Built on the company's new EL platform, the scooter features a metal body that is expected to be one of its distinctive design elements.

A video shared on X by Ather CEO and co-founder Tarun Mehta provides a close-up view of the scooter's metal construction.

The teaser, accompanied by the caption "Knock knock, Kon?", uses the sound of a knock to highlight the metal body.

Konarc will be the first production scooter based on Ather's EL platform, which was unveiled at Ather Community Day 2025.

The platform has been developed as the foundation for a new family of scooters, enabling Ather to expand into a broader and more accessible segment of the electric two-wheeler market.

With Konarc, Ather is expanding its portfolio beyond its 450 and Rizta scooter families.

The new model forms part of the company's next phase of product development, aimed at bringing its approach to design, engineering, software and everyday usability to a wider customer base.

Konarc will be unveiled on August 29, 2026, in Bengaluru, during Ather Community Day. The event will mark the company's first production launch on the EL platform.

AFFIDAVIT

I, G. NARASHIMMAN, Rank-RFN No. G/5011517A, S/o Govindan, a resident of No.137, Aneri Village, Rachamangalam Post, Tirupattur Taluk, Tirupattur Sub District, Vellore district, Tamil Nadu, Pin Code 635653, and presently residing at Assam Rifles Training Center & School (ARTC&S), P.O. & P.S. Sukhovi, Nagaland State, solemnly declare that (I) my wife's actual name is "AMUL P" based on her Aadhar card no. 7506 1006 5168, (II) my daughter's actual name is "SHARMITHA N" based on her Aadhar card no. 7639 1353 5040, (III) my son's actual name is "PRADEEP N" based on his Aadhar card no. 7863 7103 6719. In My Field Services Documents and E-Sheet Roll my wife's name has been wrongly recorded as "PAMUL" instead of "AMUL P" in my daughter's name has been recorded as "NSHARMITHA" instead of "SHARMITHA N" and my son's name has also been recorded as "PRADEEP" instead of "PRADEEP N" and my district name is also wrongly recorded as "KRISHNAGIRI" instead of the correct spelling "VELLORE". Therefore the names "PAMUL" and "AMUL P" are the name of the single person i.e. my wife and "NSHARMITHA" and "SHARMITHA N" are the name of a single person i.e. my daughter name "PRADEEP" and "PRADEEP N" are the name of a single person i.e. my son. I swear this affidavit before the Notary Public, Tirupattur Court, Tirupattur on 2th August, 2026.

AFFIDAVIT

I, Smt. Rinku Das, Daughter of Late Ramani Mohan Roy, resident of Vill-Jasman Rai Basti, P.O. Lahorijan, P.S-Khatkhathi, district-Karbi Anglong, Assam, solemnly affirm and declare that before my marriage my name has been recorded as Rinku Roy, but after I married to Biman Das, Son of Late Pranesh Ranjan Das, resident of Jasman Rai Basti, P.O. Lahorijan, P.S-Khatkhathi, district-Karbi Anglong, Assam- Pin Code 782480 and as per Hindu Law & Custom I changed my name to "Rinku Das." However in my Assam Gamin Bank passbook bearing A/c No.7457010096102, Lahorijan Branch my name has been recorded as Mrs. Rinku Roy instead of my actual name is Rinku Das. Both Rinku Das and Rinku Roy are my names and I am the same person. I swear this affidavit on 28th, July 2026 at Bokajan ADM Court Bokajan.

Contd. from Page 1...

Panel chief pins oppn's

Tarun Chugh and Congress' Jai Prakash were also involved in a spat, as Chugh raised the issue of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots and the Congress member countered him by alleging atrocities in Haryana under the BJP regime.

The panel meeting was called to hear the views of the Ministry of Labour and Employment; Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Education; Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment; and Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on the subject of crimes against children. (PTI)

Agencies working day and

The vessel has 10 crew members, including six Indians. The shipping ministry official quoted above had said, "As reported by Recruitment and Placement Service Licence (RPSL) agency - S K S Krishi Marine Services (Opc) Private Limited, six armed pirates are presently onboard the vessel (M.T. Sibhu-1) and have taken control of the vessel."

The RPSL agency has been advised to submit an incident report and subsequent periodic updates through the e-Navik online marine casualty reporting system, the official had said.

Maritime tracking information indicates the tanker was approached by an unauthorised vessel before the control of the ship was lost. The incident occurred as piracy activity off Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden has increased this year.

The hijacking of two ships came at a time when Indian seafarers face heightened security concerns elsewhere in the region, including the Strait of Hormuz, where tensions involving Iran, Israel and the United States have disrupted one of the world's most important shipping corridors. The developments are particularly significant for India, which has become the world's second-largest supplier of seafarers after the Philippines.

The 2026 BIMCO-ICS Seafarer Workforce Report estimates that India supplies 311,936 seafarers, underscoring the country's large exposure to risks affecting merchant crews worldwide. (PTI)

3 cattle smugglers held

The latest operation comes a day after 36 suspected cattle smugglers were arrested and 106 livestock rescued in Biswanath district on Sunday. (PTI)

Doval, Wang hold India-China

with Prime Minister Modi on the sidelines of the summit to discuss initiatives to take forward bilateral ties. "We meet in keeping with the guidance of our leaders, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping, who have given clear and positive direction to our relationship both at Kazan and Tianjin," Doval said, referring to the leaders' summits on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Russia in 2024 and the SCO summit in China last year.

Referring to the progress made by the two countries in normalising the ties and the four-year standoff at eastern Ladakh, Doval said he was happy that over the past year the bilateral relationship has been steadily returning to normalcy.

"The normalcy we have witnessed in our relationship has been a direct result of both sides maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas," he said.

"We have extensively talked about it today just to see how to effectively reinforce and further consolidate our efforts to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas," he said in an apparent reference to differences over the border and Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims as South Tibet.

Doval also talked about advances made by the two countries in improving people-to-people ties.

"The successful conduct of Kailash Manasarovar Yatra via Nathu La and resumption of our traditional border trade via all the three passes brought tangible benefits for our people, particularly people living in the border areas," he said.

In his remarks, Wang said the China-India relationship has gone beyond the bilateral scope and taken on global and strategic significance.

"It is important for us to step up communication, to enhance mutual trust, to remove disturbances and overcome obstacles. We need to be good friends that enjoy good neighbourliness and be good partners that contribute to each other's success," he said.

Wang also talked about adding new impetus to the ties during the talks with Doval.

"I look forward to continuing to have in-depth exchange of views with you on issues of shared interest to better understand each other and to properly handle the boundary question, to not only maintain peace and tranquillity in the border area but also inject new impetus for the bilateral relationship," he said.

Wang also said the two sides have stayed in regular communication through diplomatic and military channels on boundary affairs, implementing the guidance of PM Modi and President Xi.

Termining his talks with Doval as "very in-depth and candid," the Chinese minister expressed hope to reach "new consensus". Both Doval and Wang are the designated SRs for the boundary talks mechanism, which was established in 2003 to comprehensively address the dispute of the India-China border spanning 3,488 km.

While success eluded it in resolving the boundary dispute, officials on both sides regard the structured mechanism as a useful tool in addressing the recurring tensions between the two countries on various fronts.

The ties between New Delhi and Beijing came under severe strain after the 2020 Galwan Valley clash and the prolonged military stand-off in eastern Ladakh. But both sides have since taken steps to stabilise relations.

Ahead of the talks, Doval, who arrived here on a two-day visit on Monday, called on Chinese Vice President Han Zhang.

The two leaders discussed ways to strengthen peace and tranquillity in the border areas and further improve bilateral ties across economic, political and multilateral fora, in accordance with the consensus reached between the leaders of the two countries, the Indian Embassy said in a post on X.

During his meeting with Doval, Han said China and India should view and handle bilateral relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, and work together to implement the important consensus reached by their leaders.

"The two sides should enhance strategic mutual trust, tap the potential for cooperation, maintain close multilateral coordination, properly manage differences, and promote the sustained and stable development of China-India relations," Han was quoted as saying by the state-run Xinhua news agency.

In August last year, China and India successfully held the 24th round of talks, during which the two sides had candid and in-depth exchanges of views on the boundary question and reached a number of common understandings. (PTI)

Rijiju, Khera spar over swimming

pointing out that while Khera was a first-term Rajya Sabha MP, he had fought eight elections.

"You are a 1st-term MP, nominated by your party in Rajya Sabha & I've fought 8 elections so far. That doesn't give you the right to make indecent comments. I swim with my villagers to inspire my people & followers. Rahul ji doesn't exist in my mind when I'm with my people," Rijiju wrote.

"But Congressist started commenting that I can't swim like Rahul Ji. So, I responded since I don't take training for activities. I'm a natural khiladi in our mighty rivers. Don't be abusive needlessly all the time," he added.

It all started on Sunday when Rijiju posted a video of himself swimming in a river in Arunachal Pradesh. After comparisons with Gandhi, who has often spoken about swimming as part of his fitness routine, Rijiju said the Congress leader might need training to negotiate Arunachal's rivers while it was "child's play" for him. "Mein yahan ka khiladi hun," he said, a phrase he went on to repeat in several responses on X to those mocking his swimming technique.

Rijiju repeatedly underlined that swimming in Arunachal's raging rivers was different from doing so in a pool, saying it required the head to be kept up and the body more upright. Rijiju and Gandhi have previously had good-humoured exchanges over fitness, including over working out together and jiu-jitsu. (PTI)

Economy shows resilience to

Further, liquidity conditions eased, supporting credit growth and ongoing investment activity. Foreign capital inflows rebounded, reinforcing the external sector, it said. Monsoon activity picked up in July after a deficit in June.

"The recovery in southwest monsoon in July helped in kharif sowing reaching closer to normal acreage, partly mitigating some of the risks to the agriculture sector," said the article on 'State of the Economy'.

With increased rainfall in July, the all-India reservoir storage stood close to its decadal average and higher than the preceding level.

On the US Section 301 tariffs that imposed an additional 10 per cent tariff on India, the article said India's major export commodities to the US, such as smartphones, petroleum products and pharmaceuticals, remain outside its purview.

"India is likely to be less affected than some of the Asian economies in the US market, such as China, Vietnam and Thailand," it said.

It also said foreign direct investment (FDI) flows improved in June 2026 from the previous month, supported by higher gross inflows.

Singapore, the Netherlands, the US, and Canada accounted for around 74 per cent of the total equity inflows. Manufacturing received the highest share of equity inflows, followed by electricity generation, computer, and communication services.

Further, outward FDI continued to register a downward trend for the last two months. About 65 per cent of the outward FDI flows were directed to Singapore, the UAE, and the US. The major sectors witnessing outward FDI were financial, insurance and business services, manufacturing, wholesale/retail trade, restaurants, and hotels - together accounting for 74 per cent of the outward flows.

The central bank said the views expressed in the bulletin article are those of the authors and do not represent the views of the Reserve Bank of India. (PTI)

Youth arrested for stealing

He also reportedly admitted to spending money on a woman, including gifting her an iPhone and giving her large amounts of cash. He further stated that he had travelled with the woman to several places outside the State and stayed with her. Investigation into the case is underway.

Rakhi trade expands with new

the pieces for around ₹ 10 or more depending on the design," another woman explained. "It is not only about making rakhis. We make diyas and lights during Diwali too. In our free time, we stitch and teach each other the work," she added.

The shift towards locally made rakhis has also altered the sourcing of a product that was once commonly associated with Chinese imports. The artisans said the market had seen virtually no Chinese rakhis for the past two to three years, including last year and this season.

"Earlier, rakhis used to mostly come from China. After 2020, there was a feeling that we should make our own local and swadeshi products," Khandelwal said, linking the change in consumer sentiment to the aftermath of the 2020 Galwan Valley clash. Khandelwal added that the demand for theme-based rakhis was particularly visible among younger consumers, while Nari Vandan and Lakhpati Didi rakhis were attracting women buyers.

But the market is not confined to overtly political designs. Artisans are also drawing on regional traditions -- Khadi rakhis from Nagpur, Sanganeri art rakhis from Jaipur, seed rakhis from Pune, tea-leaf rakhis from Assam, jute rakhis from Kolkata, bamboo rakhis and Madhubani art rakhis from Bihar are among the varieties being sold.

Khandelwal said the preference for indigenous products was giving women entrepreneurs, self-help groups and artisans a larger role in the seasonal economy. "Today, a swadeshi rakhi is not merely a sacred thread of protection. It has become a powerful symbol of Viksit Bharat, Atmanirbhar Bharat, women's empowerment and national pride," he said. (PTI)

ASSAM POLLUTION CONTROL BOARD BAMUNIMAIDAM, GUWAHATI - 781021	
PUBLIC HEARING NOTICE	
As per the provision of the EIA Notification dtd. 14-09-2006, the Public Hearing for the "Proposed New Umrangso Limestone Block (Area: 200 ha) with Limestone Production Capacity: 0.681 Million TPA, Topsoil: 0.020 Million TPA, Waste/OB: 0.303 Million TPA and Mineral Reject: 0.120 Million TPA (Total Excavation: 1.124 Million TPA) located at Village: Umrangso 18 Kilo, Tehsil: Umrangso, District: Dima Hasao, Assam by M/s. JK Lakshmi Cement Limited" to be held as per following schedule:	
Date & Time	Venue
29-09-2026 at 11:00 A.M.	At Football Playground near the proposed site, Village Umrangso 19 Kilo, P.O. & P.S.: Umrangso, Dist.: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788931
Interested persons of the locality including bonafide residents, NGOs, etc., are hereby requested to attend the aforesaid Public Hearing for getting their statements recorded, if any. Stakeholders may also send their views before the date of Public Hearing to the Member Secretary, APCB.	
To know details of the proposed Project, interested person may collect the Executive Summary of Draft Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) Report for the project, available at the following offices:	
i) The District Commissioner, Dima Hasao District, Haflong, Assam - 788819, e-mail: dc-nchills@nic.in .	
ii) M/s. JK Lakshmi Cement Limited, Umrangso, Vill: 18 Kilo, P.O.: Umrangso, Dist.: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788931.	
iii) The Principal Secretary, N C Hills Autonomous Council, P.O.: Haflong, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788819.	
iv) The Chairman, Umrangso Municipal Board, P.O.: Umrangso, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788931.	
v) The Addl. Director, District Industries & Commerce Centre, P.O.: Haflong, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788819.	
vi) The Chairman, State Environment Impact Assessment Authority (SEIAA), O/o PCBA, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati, Kamrup (M), Assam - 781021.	
vii) The Gaon Burah, Umrangso, Village 18 Kilo, P.O.: Umrangso, Dist: Dima Hasao, Assam, PIN: 788931.	
viii) Head Office, APCB, Bamunimaidam, Guwahati - 781021.	
ix) Regional Laboratory cum Office, Silchar, APCB.	
x) APCB's website at http://www.pcbassam.org .	
Date: 25-08-2026	Sd/- Member Secretary

QUOTE OF THE DAY

If people sat outside and looked at the stars each night, I'll bet they'd live a lot differently.- Bill Watterson

Health condition of Imran Khan

Much apprehension has been expressed about the health of imprisoned former Pakistan Imran Khan. The Pakistan Supreme Court has ordered moving him from prison to a hospital. The order raised a larger question about Pakistan's institutions upholding basic constitutional obligations. It is all the more so as the prisoner ordered to be moved to a hospital happens to be the country's most influential political symbols. Since 2023 the former prime minister has been behind the bars. He contends that he has been convicted in cases designed to remove him from politics. The loss of liberty has led to his parting from his supporters though he continues to be their rallying point. Meanwhile his supporters have repeatedly alleged that his treatment in prison has been punitive. The Pakistan government holds that the former prime minister is being treated according to law. But Pak Supreme Court's latest order is a pointer that it does not seek to leave his medical treatment entirely to the prison authorities. The court order does not establish that Khan has been deliberately deprived of medical treatment. But it does indicate that the safeguard surrounding his health calls for judicial intervention. The dispute involves his eyesight. It is ironic as the former prime minister was one of the finest cricketers whose keen eyesight led to his much-admired skills with the bat and the ball. His lawyers have alleged severe deterioration of his right eye. Inadequate access to specialist medication is also among the charges levelled at the government.

This has been denied by the government. Medical assessment includes reports of improvement. The conflicting claims call for a politically neutral specialist medical assessment. This makes the Supreme Court's intervention the decider in this matter. An individual may lose his political freedom. But he does not lose his right to humane treatment post imprisonment. A prisoner cannot arrange his own medical care. Custody raises the state's responsibility and the principle applies to Khan. The Supreme Court order also includes weekly family meetings and telephonic conversation with his sons. This is a reminder that imprisonment is a restriction of liberty and not a license for unnecessary isolation. Restrictions have to be proportionate and transparent. They are also subject to scrutiny.

The issue will become larger if it tries to dilute the court's intervention. Now it needs to be seen if Pakistan's judiciary can impose meaningful limits on the executive's powers. This is a case involving Pakistan's most prominent political prisoner. The test the powers that be in the neighbouring country have to pass is by showing law operates above politics.

Albania's 'Flamingo Revolution' against Trump family land grab

By: C J Atkins

Sazan Island sat off-limits to ordinary Albanians for most of the 20th century. Enver Hoxha's government turned it into a naval fortress, part of the Cold War policy that kept the country isolated from both the capitalist and socialist worlds. When that era ended in the early 1990s and the base was decommissioned, the island was left to the comorants, the Mediterranean monk seals, and the flamingos that waded through the shallows of the Karaburun-Sazan Marine Park. For over three decades, it was one of the few pieces of the Albanian coast that belonged to no one in particular—which is to say, it belonged to everyone. Now, the island is up for sale. And the buyer, as it turns out, is the family of the president of the United States.

In 2021, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump, as the story goes, spotted Sazan from the deck of a yacht while cruising the Adriatic. Kushner's investment vehicle, Affinity Partners, has since teamed up with Qatari billionaire Moutaz Khayat to turn the island and the wetlands nearby into a \$1.4 billion resort complex, with another \$4.7 billion earmarked for further tourism development along the Narta Lagoon in Zvërnec—the flamingos' actual nesting ground.

The lease papers for Sazan are reportedly still unsigned and the terms under review, but the bulldozers have already been moving.

Prime Minister Edi Rama approved the project shortly after Donald Trump's return to the White House. His party still carries the Socialist name it inherited from Hoxha's old Party of Labour, but three decades of privatization deals and courtship of foreign capital by both it and the country's other major party, the Democrats, have left little else of that inheritance behind. Apart from the bad optics of selling off a piece of public land—which locals have now taken to calling Ishulli i Trumpëve, or Trump Island—Albanians are raising questions about how the government even managed to legitimize letting Sazan go on the market. When you follow the money, the story gets very strange. Land records connected to the deal trace back to a forged Ottoman-era title. Artur Shehu, the man listed as Sazan's owner, has been on the radar of Albanian and Italian police for years over suspected drug and migrant smuggling by boat to Italy. In 1999, he vanished from Albania after a shootout with a rival gang at a bar. His lawyer claimed "communist thugs" were after him, and on that basis U.S. immigration authorities granted him political asylum in 2001.

He eventually became a U.S. citizen and bought a home on, fittingly, Flamingo Drive in Miami Beach. Italian prosecutors tried and failed to have him extradited in 2012 over an ice cream business he ran with a mob boss. None of that stopped a Kushner-linked company from paying him roughly \$125 million in April 2026 for the Zvërnec land his lawyer had conjured out of a doctored deed—money Albanian prosecutors have since frozen. Two months later, they charged Shehu and 19 others with running a cocaine-trafficking ring that moved product from South America hidden in shipments of charcoal and fruit, accusing him of laundering the proceeds through exactly this kind of Albanian real estate.

Villagers in Zvërnec, for their part, say the land was never Shehu's to sell. They were the first to hit the streets against the lease deal and ended up sparking what has become the largest civic uprising Albania has seen since the pyramid-scheme collapse of 1997, when the country's headlong rush into unregulated capitalism wiped out the savings of two-thirds of families and nearly pushed the country into civil war.

It started in May, when residents of Zvërnec pushed back against security crews fencing off a public beach. Riot guards pepper-sprayed demonstrators and a reporter covering the confrontation, and the anger spread to the capital city, Tirana, within days. By June 20, more than a quarter million people—in a country of roughly 2.5 million—were on the march in what has become known as the "Flamingo Revolution."

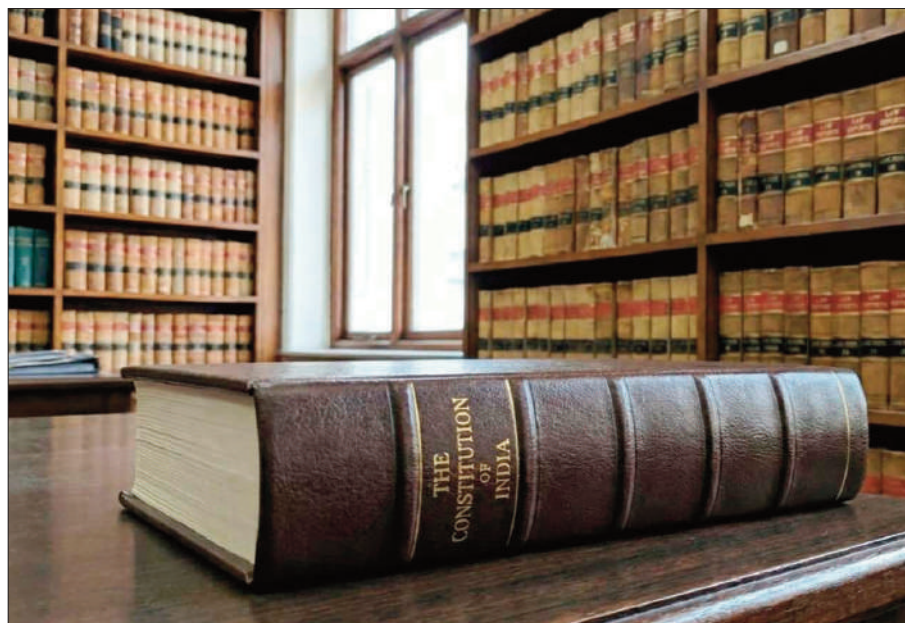
They're still going strong over two months later. Protesters have carried inflatable pink flamingos and waved a version of the Albanian flag with the black eagle replaced by the wetland bird. Water cannon and tear gas have been the government's response on multiple occasions, along with criminal charges against protest organizers.

The pressure hasn't come only from the street, though. Trump Island's developers have been leaning on Rama's government to remove any regulations that might slow down construction, demanding changes to Albania's Law on Protected Areas as well as designation of the resort as a "Strategic Investment" project. Those moves have prompted the European Union to intervene. In June, the European Commission warned that the project could jeopardize Albania's bid to join the EU because Kushner's construction work may violate European environmental standards. (IPA Service)

Constitutional safeguards for indigenous people

The question of constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people has, in the present social and political context of Assam, become a life-and-death struggle for the survival of the nation and the only legal shield for the future generations to continue their existence. If we analyze the current trend of demographic change and the process of political power transfer with complete objectivity and realism, it becomes evident that the indigenous people of Assam are steadily moving towards a frightening state of uncertainty within their own homeland. The Foreigners' Expulsion Movement carried out over several decades, the demand for implementation of the Assam Accord, and the recent CAA movement—all of these were fundamentally struggles to protect the identity and rights of the indigenous people. Yet, what have we actually gained from these movements, and how far have we advanced in securing legal protections? That remains a serious question. A nation cannot be protected merely through slogans on the streets or emotional speeches; it requires a strong constitutional wall that cannot be broken by political conspiracies or the force of numbers. There are examples in other Northeastern states showing that it is possible to secure one's existence while remaining within the framework of the Indian Constitution. However, due to the absence of political will and the lack of foresight among indigenous leadership, Assam remains trapped in committee reports and assurances. Protection of indigenous people does not merely mean preserving language and culture; it means safeguarding land rights, securing access to government employment, and, above all, retaining the authority to make political decisions in their own hands.

Whenever the issue of constitutional safeguards is discussed, the first challenge that emerges is the complex puzzle of defining who qualifies as an "indigenous person" or an "Assamese." Until this issue is resolved, no form of protection can be effectively implemented in reality. The primary reason why the report submitted by the Biplob Sharma Committee remains confined to government files is the legal conflict between the years 1951 and 1971. Under the Assam Accord, individuals who entered Assam up to 24 March 1971 were granted citizenship. However, constitutional safeguards require a standard that is higher than citizenship alone, and such safeguards are generally expected to be determined on the basis of the 1951 NRC or electoral rolls. Here lies a serious legal and social dilemma—those who arrived in Assam between 1951 and 1971 and obtained citizenship would be recognized as citizens, but they could be excluded from the special benefits reserved for indigenous people. Such an arrangement carries a strong possibility of being challenged in court. Nevertheless, we must accept the reality that citizenship and indigenous rights are two different matters. Even in countries such as the United States and Australia, indigenous populations enjoy certain special rights that are not available to citizens who arrived later. Assam similarly requires a legal framework where all citizens are equal in terms of citizenship, but indigenous people, as the sons and daughters of the soil, receive priority in matters such as land ownership, business opportunities, and access to government benefits. Until the government demonstrates the courage to clearly define the cut-off year or foundational benchmark, discussions regarding Clause 6 or safeguards for indigenous people will remain little more than a strategy for delaying action. In the present context, it appears that the process of defining indigenous status is being unnecessarily prolonged so that demographic changes



continue and, eventually, the very issue of indigenous safeguards loses its relevance.

The greatest threat to the existence of Assam's indigenous people lies in the loss of land rights, and in this regard the necessity of constitutional safeguards cannot be overstated. If we examine the pattern of land transactions in Assam over the past ten to fifteen years, it becomes clear that significant urban centres, including Guwahati, along with vast stretches of fertile agricultural land, are gradually passing out of indigenous hands and into the control of outside investors or individuals whose citizenship status often remains questionable. The provisions concerning Tribal Belts and Blocks under Chapter X of the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886, have, for all practical purposes, become ineffective. Through legal loopholes and administrative corruption, land transfers continue freely even in protected areas. Through constitutional safeguards, Assam must adopt stringent land laws similar to those in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, or Meghalaya, clearly stipulating that agricultural land and, particularly, rural land can be bought and sold only among the indigenous people of Assam. Although the government speaks of distributing land patta through schemes such as Mission Basundhara, there is no effective mechanism to monitor who acquires the land that indigenous families are compelled to sell because of economic hardship. A nation loses its roots when it loses its land. When an indigenous farmer loses a piece of land, he does not merely lose property; he contributes to the erosion of the demographic balance of that region. Therefore, the central demand of constitutional safeguards must be a legal framework that guarantees complete protection of indigenous land rights. Just as it is necessary to free char and riverine lands from encroachment, it is equally important to ensure that land in urban and commercial centres does not pass into non-indigenous hands. Without secure land rights, political reservations and language rights will ultimately become meaningless.

When discussing political protection for indigenous people, the focus generally falls upon constituency delimitation. However, the recent delimitation exercise demonstrated that merely redrawing constituency boundaries cannot protect a people from demographic domination. Such a process may facilitate the election of indigenous candidates for a few electoral cycles, but in the long term it is bound to fail if the composition of the electorate continues to change. The true meaning of constitutional safeguards would be the reservation of at least

100 to 110 of the 126 seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly exclusively for indigenous people, much like the reservations provided for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Yet, within the existing constitutional framework of India, there is no direct provision for reserving constituencies on the basis of language or community within the general category. Therefore, such an arrangement would require constitutional amendment or a special constitutional provision. It is already evident that in several districts of the Barak Valley and Lower Assam, indigenous people have become political minorities, and they have lost the ability to elect representatives of their own choice. Under such circumstances, instead of relying solely on the arithmetic of electoral numbers, the demand should be that the Assam Legislative Assembly be granted a special status whereby decisions concerning the future of Assam's indigenous people remain in the hands of indigenous representatives alone. Another possible alternative would be the formation of a Legislative Council comprising representatives from various indigenous communities. Without political power, who will enact laws to protect our language, culture, and land? If external forces gain political control, they will inevitably alter laws according to their own interests, and that will mark the beginning of disaster for the indigenous people. Political reservation, therefore, is not merely an emotional demand; it is a strategic necessity for maintaining control over the mechanisms of governance.

Any discussion of constitutional safeguards for indigenous people remains incomplete without addressing economic security and employment, because no community can focus on protecting its identity while struggling for basic livelihood. Government jobs in Assam are steadily declining, while the private sector is becoming increasingly dominant. Yet the participation of local or indigenous youth in this private sector remains minimal. Companies arriving from outside the state generally prefer to recruit employees from elsewhere, often arguing that local youth lack the necessary skills or willingness to work hard. In reality, such arguments frequently serve as excuses. If states such as Andhra Pradesh and Haryana can enact laws providing seventy-five percent reservation for local residents in the private sector, why should Assam not be able to do the same? A package of constitutional safeguards should clearly require that any company operating or establishing industries in Assam must reserve one hundred percent of Class III and Class IV jobs and at least eighty percent of higher-level positions for local indigenous people. Furthermore, legal provisions should ensure priority for indigenous youth in government contracts, market leases, and commercial licenses. Whether one looks

at Fancy Bazar in Guwahati or weekly rural markets, everyone knows who controls the economic lifeline. No nation can stand upright without economic self-reliance. Rather than reducing indigenous people to beneficiaries dependent on welfare schemes, constitutional safeguards should provide special economic opportunities that integrate them into the productive economy and ensure that the benefits derived from Assam's resources remain largely in the hands of its own people.

The crisis of language and culture may appear ordinary on the surface, but its depth is alarming, and it is gradually consuming the very soul of society. Among contemporary Assamese society, particularly among the younger generation, the declining attachment to the Assamese language and the growing attraction towards Hindi and English are not merely signs of modernity; they are symptoms of cultural domination. Whenever demographics change, the character of language inevitably changes as well. Through constitutional safeguards, the Assamese language should not only function as the official language within government offices but should also be made mandatory in markets, commercial establishments, signboards, and private institutions. Article 350A of the Constitution provides for primary education in the mother tongue, yet Assamese-medium schools are steadily declining under the pressure of English-medium private institutions. This situation demands strong policies that make education in local languages and cultures compulsory. At the same time, caution is necessary. Indigenous people in Assam are not limited to Assamese-speaking communities alone. The state is home to Bodos, Mishings, Karbis, Dimasas, Rabhas and numerous other indigenous groups with their own distinct languages and cultural traditions. Therefore, the formula for constitutional safeguards must ensure that while Assamese is recognized as the link language and official language of the state, the development and protection of indigenous tribal languages are not hindered in any way. Instead, all indigenous languages and cultures should be brought under a common protective framework, creating a collective cultural defence mechanism. When a nation loses its language, it loses its ability to think independently. A people deprived of that intellectual strength inevitably become subordinate to others.

In conclusion, the struggle for constitutional safeguards for the indigenous people of Assam is a long and complex process in which emotion alone has no place. It must be understood that, for the Central Government and national political parties, the existential concerns of Assam's indigenous people are often not as significant as electoral calculations. The failure of the NRC and the forceful implementation of the CAA have taught us one lesson: the responsibility for safeguarding our future ultimately rests upon ourselves. This requires iron-like unity among all indigenous communities and a common strategy. We cannot remain dependent solely on Clause 6; rather, we must assert our rights through amendments to Article 371 or through the creation of new constitutional arrangements. Indigenous tribal and non-tribal communities must remain vigilant so that divisions among them are not exploited by external forces seeking to weaken their collective strength. The present moment is critical. If we make mistakes now or remain silent, then within the next two or three decades the indigenous people of Assam may survive only as a chapter in history. Therefore, the demand for constitutional safeguards must evolve not only into a mass movement but also into a powerful legal struggle. The only weapons available to us are reason, unity, and the demand for the proper implementation of constitutional principles. Only through the convergence of these three forces can we hope to overcome this existential crisis.

Census and teachers

Every morning across the towns and villages of Assam, thousands of young boys and girls put on their school uniforms, sling their bags across their shoulders, and set off toward their local government schools. They walk into classrooms expecting to hear the familiar voice of their teacher explaining a complex math problem, reading aloud a piece of classic literature, or guiding them through scientific concepts. For months at a time, many of these classrooms sit strangely quiet, or they are crammed to capacity as one remaining staff member tries desperately to supervise several grades simultaneously. The missing teachers are not sick, nor are they taking unauthorized leave.

They are out in the field, clipboard or tablet in hand, going door to door to count households, record family details, and register socioeconomic data.

This scene plays out with painful regularity whenever a national census or major administrative counting drive begins. The government relies heavily on public school teachers as the backbone of its administrative machinery. They are educated, organized, embedded within local communities, and already on the state payroll, which makes them the default choice for massive field operations. This practice comes at a crushing cost to the very children who rely on the public education system for their future.

The disruption is felt most acutely in government schools, which serve families from lower-income backgrounds. Wealthier families send their children to private schools, where staff members are never pulled away for state census work. Private institutions run uninterrupted, completing syllabi on time and preparing students thoroughly for competitive examinations. Public school students are left behind,

watching their academic calendar slip away while their teachers serve as data collectors.

The math of the classroom reveals a stark reality. In many rural parts of Assam, primary and middle schools operate with a minimal staff, sometimes just three to five teachers for an entire school. When two or three of those educators are drafted into full-time census operations for weeks or months, the remaining staff simply cannot cope. A single teacher might be tasked with managing five different grades all morning. That is not teaching.

Children lose more than just daily instructional hours. They lose the vital momentum of learning. Education depends on continuity, daily engagement, practice, and regular feedback.

When a teacher disappears for a month, returning briefly before being called away for another phase of field verification, the thread of instruction breaks. Students forget previous lessons, foundational literacy and numeracy slip, and the motivation to attend school wanes. When examinations arrive, the missing syllabus is often rushed through in a matter of days, leaving children confused, stressed, and ill-prepared.

The teachers themselves are caught in an unfair tug of war. Most educators enter the profession because they care about teaching and want to shape young minds. Pushing them into arduous field work creates immense professional frustration and physical exhaustion. They are forced to trek

long distances, deal with reluctant householders, handle tedious paperwork, and face public annoyance, all while knowing their students are missing out on vital instruction. When census duties end, teachers face the overwhelming pressure of catching up on lost academic time. The emotional toll on educators is severe, leading to burnout and diminishing the joy of teaching.

This situation is frustrating because an obvious, mutually beneficial solution exists right outside the school gates. Assam, like many states, has thousands of educated, energetic, and capable young people who are actively seeking employment. College graduates, diploma holders, and young professionals are constantly looking for opportunities to earn a living, gain work experience, and contribute to society.

Instead of pulling teachers away from classrooms, the government could recruit and train unemployed youth for census operations. This single policy shift would solve two major problems at once. It would protect the sanctity of the classroom, ensuring that public school students receive uninterrupted education. Simultaneously, it would offer short-term employment, valuable field experience, and a stipend to thousands of young people who desperately need work.

Deploying unemployed youth for data collection makes sense on every level. Young people are digital natives, comfortable with smartphones, data collection apps, and GPS tagging, which speeds up modern census operations. They have the energy for ex-



tensive door-to-door surveying and are motivated to perform well to build their resumes and earn money. A structured training program lasting a week could easily prepare them to handle demographic surveys with precision. Financially, the state already allocates a budget for census operations, including allowances and logistics. Redirecting those funds toward paying a fair temporary wage to unemployed youth would inject money directly into local communities, stimulating the rural and semi-urban economy. It would give young job seekers a sense of dignity, civic purpose, and institutional connection.

Continuing the habit of treating teachers as cheap, multi-purpose administrative labor reflects a flawed set of priorities. It signals that gathering data is more important than educating the next generation. While counting every citizen is necessary for policy planning and resource allocation, doing so at the expense of public education is self-defeating. A country cannot plan for its future by undermining the education of its children today.

The long-term consequences of this policy are damaging. When public schools fail to deliver quality education due to constant teacher absences, trust in the state educational system collapses. Parents who can barely afford it take out loans to send their chil-

dren to private institutions. Those who cannot afford private schooling are trapped in an underfunded, frequently disrupted public system. This deepens the social and economic divide, punishing poorer children for structural administrative inefficiency.

Protecting classroom instruction must become a non-negotiable priority. Schools should be treated as sanctuaries of learning, not as labor pools for every government survey that comes along. The law guarantees children the right to education, but that right becomes hollow when teachers are routinely taken away from their desks.

The path forward requires political will and administrative imagination. Authorities must establish dedicated field-survey cadres or partner with local youth groups, university students, and job seekers for large-scale enumeration projects. Teachers should be left to do what they were trained to do: teach, mentor, and inspire. By shifting census responsibilities to the unemployed youth of Assam, the state can protect its children's academic futures while empowering its young workforce. It is a simple, sensible solution that honors the dignity of teachers, satisfies the needs of job-seeking youth, and ensures that no child in a government school is left staring at an empty blackboard ever again.

DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Himangshu Ranjan Bhuyan



DEGREE OF THOUGHT

By: Satyabrat Borah





By: Suman Rana

I t is barely seven in the morning, and my day has already started without asking me. Before I have properly opened my eyes, I am running through a list I did not choose to write — my mother's medicine, my brother's school fee, the electricity bill that was due yesterday, whether my father slept through the night without pain. Somewhere in the middle of this list is a version of me that wanted to sleep a little longer and dream about a beach I have never actually seen. She waits. She almost always has to.

Nobody hired me for this job. There was no interview, no offer letter, no salary that

arrives on the first of the month. I simply became "the responsible one" somewhere along the way, and once you become that, nobody thinks to ask if you would like to un-become it.

As the elder daughter, I run my house the way someone runs an office, except there are no fixed hours and definitely nobody clocking my overtime. I manage the money. I keep track of who needs to see a doctor and when. I know my siblings' school timetables better than they do. I became fluent in a language nobody sat me down and taught me the language of quietly holding everything together so that nobody else even has to notice it is being held.

I think this is what people mean when

they talk about the invisible labour of being a "good daughter." It is invisible because it does not look like work. It looks like love. It looks like duty. It looks like something a daughter is simply supposed to do, so nobody counts it, measures it, or thanks her for it in any way that matches its weight. There is no performance review for keeping a family from falling apart. At best, you get a quick "thank you, beta" thrown over someone's shoulder on the way out the door. At worst, you get silence, because it was expected of you anyway, and nobody thanks the floor for holding up the house.

There is a phrase for this now, floating around the internet, and I have noticed

how quickly women my age recognise it the moment they hear it: "eldest daughter syndrome." I do not think it is an official diagnosis anywhere, and it does not really need to be, because so many of us feel seen by it anyway. It describes exactly this: growing up faster than you were supposed to, becoming a second parent to your own siblings, learning to read the mood of a house before you learn algebra, being trusted with money and medicine and decisions no teenager should really have to make alone, long before you are trusted with something as small as a later curfew. Somewhere along the way, being reliable stopped being a compliment and quietly turned into a job

The invisible labour of being a 'Good Daughter'

description nobody ever asked me if I wanted.

Here is the part that is harder to say out loud. I love my family. If I had to choose again, I would probably do most of this all over again. But I am tired in a way that sleep does not fix, and lonely in a way that is strange to explain, because I am almost never physically alone. I am surrounded, all day, by the people I am responsible for. And still, there are nights I have no one to actually talk to, not because they do not care about me, but because I have spent so long being the one who listens, who fixes, who holds, that it stops occurring to anyone that I might need to be held too, once in a while.

The strange part is that I cannot even blame anyone for this. I do not think my family shut me out on purpose. I think, somewhere along the way, I became the person everyone else brings their problems to, and it never occurred to me — or to them — that I might have problems too, sitting quietly underneath all of theirs. So when I am overwhelmed, I genuinely do not know who to call, because everyone I would normally call is already on my list of people to take care of.

And this is where the guilt shows up, uninvited, every single time. I catch myself wanting things to travel somewhere with no fixed return date, to make a decision that only affects me, to be reachable only when I choose to be — and almost immediately, a voice in my head asks, "what kind of daughter wants that?" As if wanting a life of my own erases the years I have already spent building a home for everyone else. As if love and longing are not allowed to sit in the same chest at the same time.

I do not think wanting more makes me a bad daughter. I think it makes me a person, which is something I was allowed to be before I was ever anyone's daughter. At some point, we started confusing self-sacrifice

with love, as if the only way to prove you care about your family is to slowly disappear from your own life. But resentment does not grow out of caring for people you love. It grows out of never once being asked whether you had a choice in the matter.

I think families need to start seeing this labour the way they would see any other job real work, and exhausting work, that deserves to be shared properly. Responsibility should not simply default to whoever is most likely to say yes without complaining. It should be noticed, talked about, and divided. Sons can learn to sit through a hospital billing counter too. Younger siblings can learn to worry about the electricity bill, instead of only borrowing money from the one person who never says no. A family is supposed to hold all of its members up. It is not supposed to quietly stand on one of them and call it love.

I have not figured all of this out yet. Most mornings, I still wake up and go straight into manager-mode, because there is genuinely no one else standing where I am standing, at least not today. But I have stopped calling my exhaustion selfish. I let myself want the trip I have not taken yet. I let myself say, quietly, even if only to myself, that I deserve a life of my own, even while I am still building one for everyone else too.

Maybe being a good daughter was never supposed to mean disappearing. Maybe it can mean staying, and caring, and showing up for the people I love, while still keeping one small, stubborn corner of myself that dreams of a beach I have never seen. I am learning, slowly and imperfectly, that I do not have to choose between the two. I am allowed to love my family loudly, and somewhere quieter, where no one else needs to see, love myself too. (Courtesy: Youth Ki Awaaz)

Vitamin C can't cure colds – how a Nobel Prize winner's claims were disproved

By: Evangeline Mantzioris

From the first hint of cold winter mornings, supermarkets and pharmacies begin heavy marketing to coax us to stock up on vitamin C to get through the cold and flu season.

But where did that idea come from?

As we'll see, it's a story including a Nobel Prize winner, a book and some claims that don't quite stack up.

Nobel Prize winner writes a book

Linus Pauling was a chemist from the United States who won two Nobel Prizes. One was in 1954 for chemistry, for his research into chemical bonds. The other was in 1962 for peace, for his activism against nuclear weapons testing.

He was not a dietitian or an infectious disease physician. But that didn't stop him publishing a book on vitamin C and colds in 1970. This book is widely credited with the skyrocketing sales of vitamin C at the time, a trend that continues today.

In this book, Pauling said we should consume high doses of vitamin C, around 1,000-2,000 milligrams a day for good health, and even more to prevent a cold.

His recommendations were said to be initially from one placebo-controlled trial in children on a ski camp in the Swiss Alps. He then analysed a further four studies conducted after his claims.

But his interpretation of these studies has been widely criticised. There were incorrect mathematical analyses, reliance on four poor-quality trials and the overemphasis of the study in children.

So, do mega-doses of vitamin C work?

The short answer is not really. Multiple studies conducted since the ones Pauling analysed show that if there is an effect on vitamin C and colds, it's minimal. Even then, any marginal benefits are only under certain circumstances, such as if you're an athlete or in the army.

One study, published in 2023, was a meta-



analysis that combined the results of ten placebo-controlled trials. These looked at the effect of vitamin C on the severity and duration of colds. In total, these trials involved 2,736 healthy people (adults, children and athletes) who regularly took at least 1,000mg of vitamin C a day, not just when they had a cold.

Overall, the researchers found people who took vitamin C had a 15% reduction in severe cold symptoms compared to those who didn't take it. This was expressed as the number of days "confined indoors", which the authors acknowledged as a limitation. Vitamin C did not affect how long mild symptoms lasted.

A meta-analysis in 2013 found taking lower doses (at around 200mg a day) did not decrease the number of colds in the general population. However, there were fewer colds for athletes and army personnel.

Similar to the other study, regular vitamin C supplements showed a reduction in severity of symptoms in children and adults by 8%-14%. However, taking vitamin C at the start of the cold had no benefit.

So, from these two meta-analyses, Pauling's original advice is over-stated. There is no evidence vitamin C will reduce your risk of catching a cold.

There is some evidence it will reduce how long severe symptoms last, but on average only by about 10%. So if severe symptoms from a cold last

for five days, it will reduce severe symptoms by about 12 hours. If the severe symptoms last for 24 hours, they will reduce by about two-and-a-half hours. Taking vitamin C when symptoms start will have no effect. You need to be taking it regularly, even before you get sick.

So how much vitamin C is too much?

Pauling's recommendation for good health, at around 1,000-2,000mg a day, is around the upper limit of what's now considered safe to consume.

Australia has not set an upper limit for vitamin C, due to inconclusive evidence. But guidelines refer to other expert recommendations for adults to not consume more than 1,000mg a day. In the United States, the upper limit for adults is 2,000mg a day.

Pauling's recommendation is also much higher than the recommended daily intake in Australia and other countries. For adults over 19 in Australia, this is 45mg.

This is what you would find in half an orange, three to four florets of cooked broccoli or one-third of a glass of orange juice.

So what should I do?

Taking high doses of vitamin C (over 1,000mg a day) continually can increase your risk of adverse events such as:

- Gastrointestinal effects, such as diarrhoea, nausea, stomach cramps and bloating
- More oxalate excretion, which may lead to kidney stones
- An increase in iron absorption, which may lead to tissue damage in people with undiagnosed haemochromatosis (an inherited disorder where you absorb too much iron from your food)
- Interactions with radiation therapy, chemotherapy and the cholesterol-lowering drugs statins.

If you feel you would benefit from vitamin C supplements, discuss this with your GP. You should limit the dose to below 1,000mg a day and be mindful of the side effects. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

I lived through the first Taliban girls' school ban — watching it happen again is heartbreaking

By: Ghazal Habibyar

In August 2021, the Taliban recaptured Kabul and, within weeks, barred girls from attending school beyond Grade 6. The ban has not lifted.

Afghanistan remains the only country in the world that formally bars girls and women from secondary and higher education. In the years since, Afghan women have also been banned from working across most sectors that once employed them, from the civil service to national and international aid organizations.

About 2.2 million adolescent girls have been barred from secondary school for nearly 1,800 days. A 2026 UNICEF analysis projects Afghanistan will lose up to 20,000 women teachers and 5,400 health-care workers by 2030, with the restrictions already costing the country an estimated \$84 million US a year.

Since September 2025, Taliban forces have also barred Afghan women, including United Nations staff, from entering UN offices. In January 2026, women civil servants lost even the reduced pay they had received since 2021 for staying home.

I watched a version of this happen once before, as a young girl in 1996, the last time the Taliban took Kabul.

What strikes me most about this second ban isn't that it happened again. It's that the world's failure this time isn't due to a lack of awareness. Everyone knows what's happening to Afghan girls. The failure is that knowing has not carried any real cost for the Taliban.

What Afghan women have built Within days of the takeover, Afghan women were in the streets of Kabul chanting "Bread, Work, Freedom," a demand they have kept making since, at real personal risk. The defining rallying cry calls for basic human rights — education and employment in the face of systemic erasure from public life.

Groups of Afghan women have organized protests throughout that time, even as participants have described arrests, torture and killings in response — reactions so severe they've forced much of their resistance work underground.

As recently as February 2026, girls were back on the streets of Kabul, still demanding education. But where protest has become too dangerous, Afghan women have built something quieter instead: informal networks of underground schools, run out of homes, that teach girls who would otherwise have no access to a classroom at all.

None of this resistance is happening because it's easy or safe. It's happening because no one else has done it for them, and it has to be done.

Alongside protest and underground schooling, Afghan women's organizations have also taken on documentation. As of June 2026, researchers at Georgetown University's Institute for Women, Peace and Security counted 264 Taliban decrees affecting human rights since



2021, 166 of which specifically target women and girls.

International response falls short The main channel for international engagement with the Taliban is the UN-led Doha process. There have been multiple rounds of talks with Taliban representatives since 2023 in pursuit of Afghanistan's eventual reintegration into the international community — normalized diplomatic relations, formal recognition of the Taliban government and the country's return to standard participation in international institutions and trade.

At the Taliban's insistence, women and Afghan civil society groups have been excluded from the main talks, meeting separately and on the sidelines instead. Sima Samar, former chairperson of the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, has argued that by accepting the Taliban's terms for participation, the UN risks indirectly legitimizing the very policies it says it opposes.

That risk is disputed within the UN itself. Georgette Gagnon, the UN's Deputy Special Representative and Officer-in-Charge of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, argued the opposite case at that same session: that continued, principled but pragmatic engagement remains necessary even when progress is incremental.

That disagreement, playing out at the UN's own podium, captures the trap Afghan women have been describing for years — statements of concern are issued regularly and they cost the Taliban nothing.

Global efforts

In September 2024, Australia, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands formally invoked Afghanistan's obligations under CEDAW, the UN convention against discrimination against women that Afghanistan ratified in 2003. It is a genuinely significant initiative because it's the first time any states have attempted to hold another accountable at the world's highest court for gender discrimination.

But two years on, the case has still not reached the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Civil society's own statement marking the initiative's first anniversary has described it as an effort that may eventually culminate in an ICJ case, not one that has achieved it.

When the Netherlands and Canada pursued a similar case

against Syria over torture, they moved through each stage without delay. Once negotiations stalled in 2022, they promptly requested arbitration. When Syria failed to engage within the required six-month window, they filed at the ICJ in 2023 and secured a binding order.

After invoking the same mechanism against Afghanistan, no equivalent milestone has been reached. Negotiations, if they have failed, have not visibly given way to a request for arbitration, and the case remains where it started.

Afghan women, and the states that made this commitment on their behalf, deserve the same procedural urgency that carried the Syria case through to a resolution.

The scale of what this inaction has allowed is well-documented.

Personal reflections I recognize all of this because I lived a version of it once already.

In 1996, I was a young girl a few weeks from final exams when the Taliban took over Kabul. That night, with no electricity, we gathered around a radio and heard we were promoted to the next grade, but that schools were closing for girls until further notice. At first, I didn't understand what that meant. As a young student, I was excited about the cancellation of final exams, so I ran to tell my grandmother. Partway down a dark corridor, what it actually meant caught up with me: there would be no school next year. I sat down and cried.

But I was fortunate. My parents moved my sister and me to Pakistan so we could keep studying, a decision many Afghan families could not afford. We could not either. It was my aunts and uncles living overseas who supported our studies.

Friends of mine were not able to finish school and, as far as I know, were married off instead. I went on to become the first woman to serve as a director, then deputy minister, then acting minister of mines and petroleum in the Afghan cabinet.

Those conditions changed for my generation. Nothing guarantees they will for this one — awareness alone will not accomplish that. Afghan women have spent the last five years proving they have not accepted this ban as permanent. It is worth asking why the rest of the world has settled for so much less than that. (Courtesy: The Conversation)

When welfare schemes punish women for their family size

By: Swapna Majumdar

On paper, the Delhi Lakshmi Yojana, launched with great fanfare recently, is expected to benefit 1.7 million marginalised women from low-income families in the national capital region. Women between 21 to 60 will receive Rs 2,500 a month provided they meet certain edibility criteria, including the number of children. If the woman has more than two children, she automatically becomes ineligible. The reason for imposing this exclusionary clause according to Rekha Gupta, the chief minister of the BJP-led Delhi government, was because "women are not baby-producing machines".

But is it the woman's fault that she has more than two children? Why is it that women are always held responsible for controlling their family size when most women lack the agency, choice and bodily autonomy to decide how many children they want to have.

Yet, several government programmes to empower women include the number of children as one of main eligibility criteria. Whether the aim is economic empowerment through cash transfer schemes or political empowerment by way of reservations of seats, these policies benefitting only women with not

more than two children end up violating their reproductive, human and political rights. One of the biggest examples of this disempowerment is the two-child norm set as eligibility condition to contest local panchayat elections and followed by many states even today as a way to 'control' population. Women face negative consequences of implementation of the norm directly (as candidates) as well as indirectly (as spouse of those disqualified) in the form of desertion, forced abortions, neglect and death of female infant or female child being given up for adoption.

One of the reasons for focussing on women for population stabilisation, whether directly or indirectly, is because they are soft targets. Despite India being a signatory to the programme of action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), and committed to providing a basket of contraceptive choices, national data shows that female sterilisation continues to overwhelmingly dominate family planning procedures in the country.

So, it is unsurprising that the national capital has shown a similar trend. In Delhi, over 97 per cent of the 14,543 sterilisation procedures carried out during 2024-25 were performed on women. Only 301 vasectomies took place in the same period,

underlining the massive gender gap in sterilisation and unwillingness of men to take responsibility to limit their family size.

But when women want to plan their families, they have no access to contraception or are not able to use it for spacing or limiting birth, thus increasing their risk of becoming pregnant. This unmet need for family planning increased to 7.3 per cent in 2023-24 from 6.1 per cent in 2019-21 (NFHS-6). While unmet need for spacing increased to 2.7 per cent in 2023-24 from 2.0 per cent in 2019-21, unmet need for limiting or for not wanting any more children increased to 4.6 per cent from 4.1 per cent for the same period (NFHS-6).

Then, why should women, who find themselves burdened with an unwanted pregnancy, be punished? A more serious and worrying fall-out of this conditional benefit will be the increased desire for the male child. If families stand to benefit from having only two children, the prevailing gender inequalities coupled with deeply entrenched patriarchy and preference for sons is likely to sound the death knell for girls. More so if the first child is a daughter. How cash transfer schemes help to change perception and attitudes of parents towards girls is still not clear, according to a study on 15 such schemes by UNFPA.

Alarm bells have been ringing for some time now with the continuing trend of declining sex ratio at birth in Delhi. Statistics for 2024 showed a fourth straight year decline in 2024, with 920 females born per 1,000 males, down from 922 in 2023 and 929 in 2022, according to the annual report on births and deaths released by Delhi's Directorate of Economics and Statistics and the office of the Chief Registrar (Births & Deaths). Concerns have been raised by health experts linking the trend to illegal prenatal sex determination in Delhi-NCR. This fear has been compounded by the unavailability of updated data for sex ratio at birth for Delhi in NFHS-6. This is among the several key indicators removed from NFHS-6 by the Union Health Ministry along with mortality rates and anaemia prevalence.

Incidentally, Delhi has reported the country's lowest total fertility rate (TFR) at 1.2, children per woman, lower than even the national TFR of 1.9 (Sample Registration System Statistical Report 2024). Delhi has also recorded the steepest decline in general fertility rate (GFR), which measures births per 1,000 women aged 15-49.

So, the vital question remains: why link women empowerment programmes with the size of their family? (Courtesy: The Pioneer)

Rahul Gandhi should learn from them'

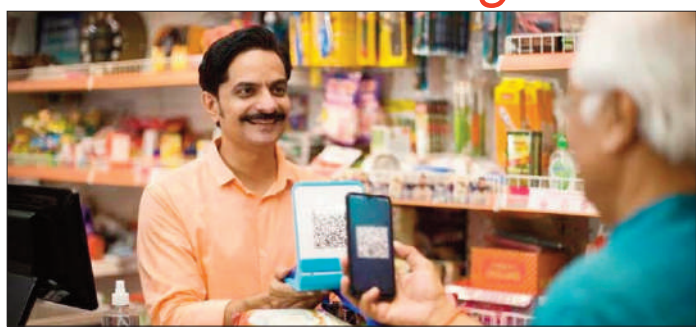
Golgappa and vegetable sellers far more intelligent than Rahul: BJP attacks Cong for 'mocking' UPI

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Highlighting the "success story" of the Unified Payments Interface, the BJP on Tuesday attacked the Congress, saying its leader P Chidambaram had mocked the launch of UPI which has become the world's largest real-time payment system in a decade.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) on Tuesday completed a decade of its rollout in 2016.

Addressing a press conference at the party headquarters, BJP national spokesperson Sambit Patra said Chidambaram called UPI a "big blunder" and had claimed that it would impact the country's economy.

The BJP MP was referring to the former finance minister's remarks on the digital payment system during a discussion in Parliament, where he claimed that the poor, like street vendors, and people in rural areas would



be unable to use it.

"Mr Chidambaram, in your part of the country, in my part of the country, and in every part of the country, the amma selling vegetables is smarter than Rahul Gandhi," the BJP leader said.

"Chidambaram had mocked golgappa sellers. Today, Paytm (digital transaction system) is available even at golgappa shops. A golgappa seller is smarter than Rahul Gandhi. Rahul Gandhi should

learn from them," Patra said in a swipe at Congress leaders.

"Don't underestimate the intelligence of a vegetable vendor. Don't underestimate the intelligence of a small-time worker. People are far more intelligent than the Gandhi family and its dynasty," Patra added.

Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw also posted Chidambaram's speech on X and said, "10 years of proving them wrong".

Hitting back, the Congress claimed that former prime minister Manmohan Singh laid the foundation on which India's digital payments infrastructure stands today.

"And, more importantly, let us ignore the petty, credit-hungry people who do too little and talk far too much - albeit with the help of a teleprompter," party MP Pawan Khara said.

On the UPI's "success story", Patra said its initial transaction volume was 1.78 crore with a transaction value of ₹ 0.07 lakh crore.

In 2025-26, the UPI's transaction volume increased to 24,162 crore from 1.78 crore transactions in 2016-17, showing a whopping 13,000-fold surge in transactions, he said.

Patra said UPI's transaction value also rose to ₹ 314 lakh crore in 2025-26, showing a 4,000-fold increase from ₹ 0.07 lakh crore in 2016-17. (PTI)

Bihar: Stone-pelting, lathi-charge, water cannons mark students' protest over BPSC exams

PATNA, Aug 25: Thousands of students fought a pitched battle with the Bihar Police here on Tuesday, hurling stones and braving water cannons and lathi-charge, upon being prevented from marching to the chief minister's residence.

The protesters, most of them aspirants for Teachers' Recruitment Exams to be conducted by Bihar Public Service Commission (BPSC) next month, had announced a 'Mukhyamantri Awas gherao' to press the demand for holding the written exams in a single stage, instead of prelims followed by mains.

A section of the protesters also demanded the cancellation of Combined Competitive Exams held by the commission earlier this year, alleging that the tests were marred by "irregularities".

They were joined by a number of Left-wing activists, owing allegiance to organisations like SFI and DYFI, in the procession that began at the historic Gandhi Maidan, which has witnessed many upheavals in the near and recent past.



Tight security arrangements were in place along the nearly 5-km stretch from Gandhi Maidan to the chief minister's residence, and police used water cannons at J P Golambar, the starting point of the procession, only to behold the protesters break into a "rain dance", in a stark reminder of the scenes witnessed last month when a 'Raj Bhavan march' was staged last month in support of the 'Gen Z protests' held at Jantar Mantar in Delhi.

"We repeatedly urged the crowd to maintain peace. We told them that we will help them send a delegation to authorities concerned to

register their demands. Water cannons were used when the situation became tense," Patna Senior Superintendent of Police Kartikeya Sharma said.

The protesters broke past the barricades to reach Dak Bungalow crossing, the city's busiest thoroughfare that leads to the Patna Junction as well as vital installations like Patna High Court and the Income Tax Office.

Videos have gone viral on social media of the lathi-charge that took place at Dak Bungalow crossing, where many of the agitators also hurled stones at the police personnel. (PTI)

Scrap questionnaire, prepare new one after consulting parties, experts: Cong to PM on caste census



NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Leaders of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi have written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi over the caste census issue, demanding that the government scrap the existing questionnaire for it and formulate a new one after consulting political parties, experts, and the general public.

Kharge and Gandhi said they do not accept the caste census being conducted in the current manner and urged the government to take cue from the surveys done in Telangana and Bihar.

Briefing reporters on the joint

letter written in Hindi by Leader of the Opposition in Rajya Sabha Kharge and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Gandhi, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the way the caste census was being conducted in the country was a "betrayal of the people", "self-sabotage" and a "whitewash" by the government.

He asserted that the caste count in its present form was unacceptable.

In their letter dated August 20, Kharge and Gandhi said social justice policies in India cannot be effectively implemented without

accurate data and a precise assessment of the numerical strength and socio-economic status of various castes is possible only if the caste enumeration is conducted correctly.

"Your government has opted for an open-ended question format to record caste details in the census, which is misleading. Under this method, whatever name an individual provides for their caste will be recorded as it is," the leaders wrote.

In India, the same caste is known by different names, sub-castes, and linguistic variations across different regions, Kharge and Gandhi pointed out.

Consequently, if members of the same caste are recorded under different names during the census, a single caste could end up being fragmented into thousands of distinct names, they argued.

This would result in a list of hundreds of thousands of caste names, rendering the entire dataset obtained from the caste census useless, they further argued. (PTI)

Mayawati says BSP will contest Punjab Assembly polls alone

LUCKNOW, Aug 25: Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati on Tuesday said her party will contest the upcoming Punjab Assembly elections on its own, without entering into any alliance.

The former Uttar Pradesh chief minister made the announcement during a meeting held at the BSP's central office here to review the party's organisational work and efforts to expand its support base in Punjab.

Mayawati, according to a party statement, said the BSP would contest the Punjab polls "alone without any alliance or compromise with anyone", as it did in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand.

She said the decision was aimed at protecting the morale of party workers from a possible loss in seats and vote percentage that could result from electoral alliances.

The Punjab Assembly polls are scheduled to be held early next year.

Mayawati stressed that the party should field hardworking and honest candidates so that people "distressed by the anti-people attitude" of the Aam Aadmi Party, Congress and BJP could benefit from the Ambedkarite policies of "Sarva Jan Hitay and Sarva Jan Sukhay" (welfare and happiness of all).



She said such an electoral strategy would be a "true tribute" to Sant Guru Ravidas, Dr B R Ambedkar and BSP founder Kanshi Ram.

Mayawati directed the Punjab unit to strengthen the party organisation up to the polling booth level and expand its support base.

She asked party leaders to identify shortcomings on the basis of feedback received on earlier organisational directives and rectify them within a fixed timeframe.

The BSP chief also directed the Punjab unit to ensure that programmes marking the death anniversary of party founder Kanshi Ram on October 9 are organised successfully with full preparations. (PTI)

HC quashes sacking of 48 assistant managers of Uttar Pradesh Cooperative Bank

LUCKNOW, Aug 25: The Allahabad High Court on Tuesday quashed the June 2019 orders terminating the service of 48 assistant managers appointed in the Uttar Pradesh Cooperative Bank in 2016 and directed that they be permitted to resume duties on their respective posts.

Justice Rajeev Singh of the Lucknow bench passed the order while allowing separate petitions filed by Manish Kumar and 47 others, observing that an employee's services cannot be terminated merely on the recommendation or direction of another authority and the appointing authority must independently examine the matter and decide. The counsel for the petitioners had argued that the bank's management committee issued the termination orders on the basis of direction issued by the Principal Secretary, Cooperative Department, and did not attribute any individual illegal act or misconduct to the petitioners.

The recruitment process for assistant managers initiated in 2015 was plagued by controversies. Initially, candidates were required to possess graduation degrees in certain specified subjects. Subsequently, with the approval of the competent authority, the eligibility criterion was modified to graduation in any subject with a minimum of 50 per cent marks.

A revised advertisement was issued on July 22, 2015. The petitioners were selected thereafter on the basis of a written examination and interview. An unsuccessful candidate, however, challenged the selection process before the High Court. Following an interim order, the appointments of the selected candidates were made subject to the final outcome of the case. The petition was eventually dismissed on March 1, 2023. (PTI)

Saptadhara roadmap for stronger, self-reliant India: Sambit Patra

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, Aug 25: BJP national spokesperson and MP Sambit Patra on Tuesday described Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "Shakti Ki Saptadhara" as a roadmap for building a stronger, self-reliant and developed India by 2047.

Addressing a press conference in New Delhi, Patra said the seven streams of Saptadhara bring together India's economic strength, technological capabilities, infrastructure, national security, sustainability and civilisational soft power.

He identified manufacturing as the first stream, highlighting India's reported shift from import dependence towards becoming a global manufacturing hub.

Electronics production, he said, increased from around Rs 1.9 lakh crore in 2014-15 to Rs 12 lakh crore in 2024-25, while mobile-phone production rose from Rs 18,000 crore to Rs 5.45 lakh crore during the same period.

The second stream is agriculture and food processing, with greater emphasis on productivity, value addition, processing, branding and exports.

According to Patra, agricultural exports increased from USD 37.29 billion in 2013-14 to USD 51.1 billion in 2024-25, while processed food's share in agricultural exports rose from 13.7 per cent to 20.4 per cent.

The third stream, technology and innovation, focuses on areas such as artificial intelligence, space



technology, quantum technology, robotics and digital public infrastructure.

Patra highlighted the growth of UPI transactions and said the target of training one crore youth in AI skills would help prepare young Indians for a technology-driven future.

Gati Shakti, the fourth stream, aims to strengthen multimodal connectivity through highways, railways, airports, ports and waterways.

Patra said the national highway network has expanded from 91,287 km in 2014 to 1,46,560 km, while high-speed corridors and expressways have grown from 93 km to 3,052 km.

He also highlighted the expansion of railway elec-

trification and said improved connectivity would create new opportunities for the Northeast in trade, tourism and industry.

The fifth stream, Defence Shakti, represents the government's focus on defence self-reliance.

Patra said defence production increased from about Rs 46,429 crore in 2014-15 to Rs 1.78 lakh crore in 2025-26, while defence exports rose from Rs 686 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 38,424 crore in 2025-26.

The sixth stream, Green and Blue Economy, focuses on sustainable growth through renewable energy, green hydrogen, fisheries and the broader blue economy.

Patra cited the growth in renewable-energy capacity and fish production while highlighting the National Green Hydrogen Mission's target of producing five million tonnes annually by 2030.

The seventh stream is India's soft power, with culture, heritage and civilisational traditions contributing to the country's global influence.

Patra highlighted the international recognition of Yoga and India's cultural heritage, noting that the country now has 44 UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Patra said the seven streams together form the foundation of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat@2047.

He emphasised that India's next phase of growth would require scale, speed, self-reliance, innovation and global competitiveness, while harnessing the aspirations and energy of the country's youth.

Delhi: IYC marches towards BJP office, seeks Shah's resignation over student injuries

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: The Indian Youth Congress (IYC) on Tuesday marched towards the BJP headquarters here, demanding the resignation of Union Home Minister Amit Shah over alleged police brutality against students during the July 20 protest.

The protesters began marching from the Delhi Congress office on DDU Marg, with police barricades put up along the route and buses stationed in the area to ferry detained students as security arrangements were stepped up.

Delhi IYC president Akshay Lakra said the protest was aimed at seeking answers from the government over injuries suffered by students and protesters during last month's protest at Jantar Mantar.

"Our single-point agenda is demanding justice for those who are injured," Lakra told PTI.

"We waited for Parliament, and now we are waiting on the streets to get answers," he said, adding that the government's handling of the episode had exposed its lack of sensitivity towards students and protesters.

"The entire fiasco has exposed how the BJP government, or the home ministry, is tackling this issue and how much empathy and sensitivity they have towards students," Lakra alleged.

The protest came days after the Delhi Police



registered an FIR on August 21 over pellet injuries suffered by student Sahil Lochab during the July 20 protest. The FIR was registered on Lochab's complaint after Congress leader Rahul Gandhi staged a dharna that lasted over six hours at the Parliament Street police station, demanding action in the case.

Lochab, a resident of Najafgarh, had said that he was hit by several metal pellets during the protest and lost vision in his right eye. The FIR was registered against unidentified persons under Sections 118(1) and 125 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, according to police.

Lakra said the legal course of action would continue alongside the street protests.

"Action is still being followed in parallel. At this point, we are on the streets demanding answers because it is totally unjustified when your own state machinery is using such brutal force towards students," he said. (PTI)

UP to give 1 lakh govt appointment letters in next six months: Adityanath



LUCKNOW, Aug 25: Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said the state government will provide appointment letters to one lakh youths over the next six months.

Addressing an appointment letter distribution programme here, he said more than 9.3 lakh youths had been provided government jobs by his government through a transparent and non-discriminatory

process since 2017.

"It gives me pleasure to say that during this period, our government has succeeded in providing government jobs to more than 9,30,000 youths of Uttar Pradesh, and no one can raise a question over even a single appointment," he said.

The CM was speaking at an event where appointment letters were handed over to 3,446 techni-

cal assistants and 126 market secretaries. Agriculture Minister Surya Pratap Shahi and Minister of State for Agriculture Baldev Singh Aulakh were also present.

Adityanath said the government had ensured recruitment on merit while following reservation rules and without discrimination.

Without naming former chief minister and Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav and his uncle Shivpal Yadav, Adityanath targeted the previous government, alleging that before 2017, whenever a recruitment advertisement was issued, a "chacha-bhatija" duo and the "entire Mahabharata family" would go across the state for "vasooli".

"Young people kept wandering, results did not come and ultimately courts had to stay the cases. Their time and age were wasted (time spent for exams and then getting over aged for other exams)," he said. (PTI)

Kejriwal challenges BJP to compare Punjab, Gujarat schools

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Aam Aadmi Party national convener Arvind Kejriwal on Tuesday threw an "open challenge" to the BJP to compare 1,000 schools of Punjab and Gujarat.

Kejriwal also alleged that the BJP is using "doctored, AI videos" to defame Punjab government schools.

"I challenge the BJP: You have been in power in Gujarat for 30 years, and we have been in power in Punjab for four and a half years. I will give you a list of 1,000 schools in Punjab, and you give us a list of 1,000 schools in Gujarat. Let us inspect these schools together and see which ones are better," Kejriwal said in a video message. He also proposed the press cover the exercise.

The former Delhi chief minister alleged that the BJP governments, instead of improving their own schools, have been defaming the schools in Punjab. (PTI)

'Swift, secured interface': Amit Shah hails UPI on completion of 10 years

The NPCI had launched the UPI on August 25, 2016

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday hailed UPI as a swift and secured interface and said it is an example of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of paving India's journey of transformation through innovation.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) completed its 10 years of operation on Tuesday.

In a message on 'X', Shah said, "UPI is an example of Modi Ji's vision of paving India's journey of transformation through innovation. "In the #10YearsOfUPI, our nation has given the world's largest real-time payment system and proven what we can achieve through Digital India in empowering people with a swift, seamless and secured interface."

The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) had launched the UPI on August 25, 2016 as a mode of primarily mo-



bile-based cashless transactions under the regulatory oversight of the Reserve Bank of India. Clocking a 13,000-fold surge in transaction volume since its launch, the UPI was used in transactions worth ₹ 314 lakh crore in 2025-26.

"Annual transaction volume expanded from just 1.78 crore transactions in FY 2016-17 to over 24,162 crore transactions in FY

2025-26, representing an almost 13,000 fold surge in transaction volume.

"Parallely, transaction value rose sharply from ₹ 0.07 lakh crore in FY 2016-17 to approximately ₹ 314 lakh crore in FY 2025-26, translating into a more than 4,000-fold increase in transaction value," a government statement said. (PTI)

Nagaland Police to launch single-window complaint portal: DGP

KOHEMA, Aug 25: The Nagaland Police will launch a single-window portal within the next 10-12 days to enable residents to report grievances online, track the status of their complaints and access inquiry reports, DGP Rupin Sharma said on Tuesday.

Addressing a state-level convergence meeting on violence against women and children here, the director general of police said the proposed system would allow people to submit complaints to the police regardless of whether the matter is ultimately found to be civil or criminal.

Under the system, every complaint received will be assigned by the officer-in-charge of the police station concerned to an investigating officer for preliminary inquiry, he said, adding that the officer will determine whether the matter involves a cognisable offence, non-cognisable offence or a purely civil dispute.

If a cognisable offence is established, the police station will be required to register an FIR and in non-cognisable cases, com-

plainants may be advised to approach a magistrate, while purely civil matters will remain outside the police's jurisdiction, he said.

Sharma said complainants would be able to track the progress of their complaints electronically and, as provided under the new criminal laws, download a copy of the inquiry conducted by the police. Senior officers, from the police station level to the DGP, will also be able to monitor the status of complaints.

The system, he said, could be particularly useful in cases involving domestic violence, child abuse, stalking and harassment, as repeated complaints could help police identify patterns of behaviour and intervene before they escalate into more serious offences.

"Your complaints will not go unanswered," Sharma said, adding that complainants would be able to know whether an FIR had been registered and, if not, the reason for doing it.

Acknowledging gaps between existing government mechanisms and their implementation on the

ground, the DGP said there were several areas where agencies had mechanisms in place but lacked adequate capacity to respond effectively. Sharma urged victims of violence and the public to speak out, saying under-reporting makes it difficult for authorities to assess the magnitude of a problem and determine the resources required, including manpower, safe homes, vehicles and helplines.

He also clarified that police cannot intervene in purely civil disputes, but said the presence of a criminal element gives police grounds to intervene.

The DGP also warned NGOs, village councils, customary institutions and other civil society groups against taking the law into their own hands, particularly in cognisable offences such as rape and stalking.

Meanwhile, Director of Social Welfare Department, Tosheli Zhi-momi said one-stop centres across Nagaland handled 311 cases of gender-based violence in the last financial year, while the Women Helpline received 144 cases. (PTI)

Arunachal DyCM seeks Centre's support for strengthening Northeast power grid

'A stronger power network will be the foundation for the Northeast's next phase of growth, connectivity and development'

ITANAGAR, Aug 25: Arunachal Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Chowna Mein on Tuesday sought continued financial support from the Centre to strengthen and modernise the power infrastructure in the Northeast, while pressing for the early development of key transmission projects in the state to meet its growing hydropower potential.

Mein raised the issues during a meeting with Union Power Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, along with power ministers from other northeastern states and North Eastern Regional Power Committee (NERPC) chairman and Meghalaya Power Minister Metbah Lyngdoh in New Delhi, officials said.

Through the NERPC, the northeastern states sought the Ministry of Power's continued financial support for critical system-strengthening and modernisation



works, including the implementation of Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition/Energy Management Systems (SCADA/EMS) and Emergency Restoration Systems (ERS). The proposed interventions are crucial for improving grid reliability, security and resilience across the region, Mein said.

"A stronger power network will

be the foundation for the Northeast's next phase of growth, connectivity and development," he said.

The NERPC, a regional body under the Union Ministry of Power, brings together power-sector stakeholders from the northeastern states to coordinate regional grid operations and ad-

dress issues concerning the development and strengthening of the power system.

During the meeting, Mein also flagged Arunachal Pradesh's key power-sector priorities, including the proposed 132/33 kV substation at Kimin along with associated Loop In-Loop Out (LILO) transmission lines.

He said the project was critical for addressing voltage fluctuations and power outages in Kimin and adjoining areas, which are currently affected by the limitations of the existing long 33 kV feeder.

Mein, who also holds the power and hydropower portfolios, also drew attention to Arunachal Pradesh's growing hydropower potential and the state's pipeline of upcoming power projects, saying these developments necessitate timely upgradation and strengthening of the transmission network. (PTI)

3 militants arrested in Manipur for extortion bids

IMPHAL, Aug 25: Three militants belonging to different proscribed outfits were arrested in Manipur's Imphal East district for their alleged involvement in extortion activities, police said on Tuesday. An active cadre of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was apprehended during a search operation at Kiyamei Awang Leikai on Monday, they said.

The arrested militant was identified as N Sanju Meitei. An AK rifle, an SMG carbine, nine magazines and 737 rounds of ammunition were recovered from his possession, police said. In a separate operation, two active cadres of the proscribed SOREPA were apprehended from Khurai Thangjam Leikai based on "reliable intelligence corroborated by 28 Assam Rifles", the statement said. The two have been identified as L Rocky Singh, 37, and P Kumarjit Singh, 36.

They had allegedly come to the area to collect extortion money, police said, adding that a handwritten extortion slip bearing a mobile phone number and the name SOREPA was seized from them. (PTI)

Tripura CM hints at stitching alliance with TMP for village elections

AGARTALA, Aug 25: Tripura Chief Minister Manik Saha on Tuesday hinted at stitching an electoral understanding between the BJP and its ally - Tipra Motha Party (TMP) - for the elections to Village Committees.

The TMP is an alliance partner of the Manik Saha government, but the regional party contested the Tripura Tribal Areas Autonomous District Council (TTAADC) elections solo and registered a landslide victory.

"Since not many days are left for the VC elections, you will soon know the electoral understanding (with the TMP). Problems are always there even at home. They are our partner. They seek something which we don't want in their way," the chief minister told reporters.

The elections to 587 Village Committees are scheduled to take place in the first half of September.

On the implementation of the tripartite agreement for overall

development of indigenous people, Saha said, "It will be done... Sometimes they want something, but it may not be sorted out the way they demand. Ultimately, the time will come when a unanimous decision is reached."

Softening his stand on the alliance, TMP founder Pradyot Kishore Debbarma on Tuesday said he has a lot of respect for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and they will do everything to protect the rights of indigenous people.

"Today, they (Modi, Shah) are in power, and tomorrow they may not be. What will happen when they are not in power? That's why we are pressing for a constitutional guarantee to protect the land rights for indigenous people," he said.

Debbarma added, "If people of Bodoland, Karbi Anglong and Mizoram could get a guarantee over land rights, why Tripura people will be denied the same provision?" (PTI)

19 children rescued, three brokers held in crackdown on trafficking network



ITANAGAR, Aug 25: Nineteen children were rescued from various parts of Arunachal Pradesh and three suspected brokers arrested in a crackdown on a child trafficking network, police said on Tuesday.

A case was registered at the Namsai police station on August 17 after a complaint was lodged by the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of the district, they said.

The children were rescued from Mechuka in Shi-Yomi district, Aalo in West Siang,

Pasighat in East Siang, Naharlagun, Itanagar and Longding, they added.

Given the inter-district nature of the case, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) has been constituted, police said.

Preliminary investigation revealed that economically vulnerable families were allegedly approached with promises of better education and care for their children, following which the minors were procured and placed with individuals at distant locations, they said.

A majority of the rescued children are below eight, with the youngest being around three, Namsai SP Sange Thinley said.

"Police have also uncovered suspected monetary transactions ranging from ₹ 10,000 to ₹ 50,000 per child involving some intermediaries and parents," he said.

The children were allegedly engaged in domestic help and hotel-related work, he added.

The children's statements were recorded before a magistrate, the SP said.

"The SIT is currently analysing financial transactions, digital evidence and call records to trace and identify the wider network," he said, appealing to the people to share any information about children who may have been placed in similar circumstances. (PTI)

Collective efforts of all communities key to safeguard Manipur's integrity: CM

IMPHAL, Aug 25: Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Tuesday said the collective efforts of all communities are needed to safeguard Manipur's integrity, and dialogue among them was key to ensure peace in the state.

Speaking at the 45th Hawkers' Day celebrations here, Singh said the cooperation and understanding shown by Naga and Kuki communities were important steps towards restoring normalcy and ensuring smooth movement of people in the state.

He also thanked the Naga and Kuki communities for ensuring free movement of public transport vehicles along National Highway-2.

"Dialogue among communities is the solution for bringing peace and development in the state," the CM said.

On Monday's incident at Taphou village in Senapati district in which some houses were burnt by unknown miscreants, Singh said the MLAs and district authorities persuaded both the communities to refrain from any activities that disturb free movement of people and vehicles.

"It is not the sole responsibility of the government to safeguard the state, but a collective effort of all communities," the CM said.

Meanwhile, during the 79th Manipur Excise Raising Day at the Excise Headquarters here, Singh lauded the department for collecting a total revenue of ₹ 28.98 crore during the financial year 2025-26. (PTI)

District Planning Committee meeting held in Anini



HT Correspondent

ANINI, Aug 25: A meeting of the District Planning Committee (DPC) of Dibang Valley district was held here on Tuesday to discuss and approve the Gram Panchayat Development Plans (GPDs) and Zilla Parishad Development Plan (ZPDP) for the financial year 2026-27.

The meeting was chaired by Deputy Commissioner Yashwant Meena, IAS.

Addressing the meeting, ADC Jally Umpo highlighted the importance of coordinated, inclusive and need-based planning for grassroots development.

ZPC Sadhu Mihu briefed the committee on various develop-

mental schemes and programmes and urged stakeholders to work together to ensure that development benefits reach every village and household.

He also called upon ZPMs and Member Secretaries to guide and support GPMs and GPCs in preparing and implementing development plans.

The respective Member Secretaries presented their proposals before the committee.

Following detailed deliberations, the schemes and proposals were unanimously approved.

The Deputy Commissioner urged Panchayati Raj representatives to discharge their responsibilities with greater coordination, transparency and commitment.

He also directed technical departments to provide timely technical guidance and support to Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure proper planning and quality execution of developmental works.

The meeting was attended by Heads of Departments, ZPMs, officials, Panchayati Raj functionaries and concerned staff.

Mizoram assembly pays tributes to former minister F Malsawma

AIZAWL, Aug 25: The Mizoram assembly on Tuesday paid tributes to former minister F Malsawma, who died last month. Chief Minister Lalduhoma made obituary references to Malsawma and recalled the great service rendered by him as a politician and a church leader.

He said that while Malsawma had been actively involved in church and community activities, he entered active politics in April 1975 after resigning from his position as a lecturer in a reputed college in Aizawl and joining the People's Conference (PC) party.

After his first election to the state Assembly in 1978, Malsawma was inducted into the cabinet at just 30, making him the youngest minister not only in Mizoram but in the entire country at the time, Lalduhoma said. He said the veteran leader had also once vacated his cabinet seat to create an environment conducive to peace and reconciliation during the last



part of the insurgency movement in 1983. The CM also shared his personal experience with Malsawma, citing that he had a long political journey alongside him, leading the Congress as well as the Zoram Nationalist Party (ZNP).

"He had been a father figure and a source of solace to many people during some of the dark-

est and most difficult periods faced by India and Mizoram. We deeply feel his absence," Lalduhoma said.

Leader of Opposition Lalchhandama Ralte said Malsawma was instrumental in the establishment of several important institutions, including the state Lokayukta, and the implementation of support price for local agricultural products, among others. A minute of silence was observed by all the members to pay respect to the departed leader.

Born in 1947, Malsawma entered active politics by joining the PC party in 1975, leaving his job as a teacher at Pachhunga University College (PUC) behind. He switched to the Mizo National Front later and was elected to the assembly for the third time in the 1993 elections and retained the seat in 1998.

Malsawma chose to step away from politics in 2015. He was diagnosed with liver cancer in 2025 and died on July 4. (PTI)

Missing Sikkim woman rescued in Noida after CM Tamang's intervention

GANGTOK, Aug 25: A 38-year-old woman from Sikkim, who was missing after travelling to the Delhi-NCR region in search of employment, has been traced and safely brought to the state government guest house in the national capital following the intervention of Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang, an official statement said on Tuesday.

The woman, identified as Indra Kala Subba of Rumbuk in West Sikkim, had arrived in Delhi-NCR on July 15 in search of employment. Her family and well-wishers had lodged a missing person's report with the SHO of Sector 39 police station in Noida, Gautam Buddha Nagar, after she last contacted them on July 25.

"Upon the matter being brought to the attention of the Chief Minister of Sikkim, he took immediate cognizance of the case and directed the Resident Commissioner, Sikkim House, New Delhi, along with the entire Sikkim House team, to undertake all necessary steps for

her rescue and safe recovery without delay," the official statement issued by Chief Minister's Press Secretary, Yougan Tamang, said.

According to sources, the woman was said to have been living in a temple in Noida before she was located and subsequently sent back to Sikkim on Tuesday.

Following the chief minister's directions, officials at Sikkim House coordinated with the Uttar Pradesh Police and launched efforts to trace Subba. She was eventually located safely and brought to Sikkim House on Monday evening.

The statement said Tamang personally spoke to Subba after her recovery, sought to understand the circumstances surrounding her disappearance and assured her of all possible assistance from the state government.

Her family in Rumbuk in West Sikkim have been informed, and she is expected to be handed over to them later on Tuesday. (PTI)

UPI success story of India's digital ecosystem: Khandu

ITANAGAR, Aug 25: Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu on Tuesday said the phenomenal success of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), which now powers nearly half of the world's real-time digital transactions, was the result of an entire ecosystem coming together.

Khandu said financial inclusion through the Jan Dhan programme, digital identity through Aadhaar, and the widespread availability of affordable smartphones and cheap internet had together created the foundation for India's digital payments revolution.

"UPI's success is the story of an ecosystem coming together under the vision of PM Shri Narendra Modi Ji," the chief minister said in a social media post on the 10th anniversary of the payments platform. UPI, developed by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), was launched on a pilot basis on April 11, 2016, by then RBI Governor Raghuram G Rajan in Mumbai. (PTI)

SFC inspects rice stock in Arunachal districts

ITANAGAR, Aug 25: The Arunachal Pradesh State Food Commission (SFC) has launched a five-day inspection drive across four districts to assess foodgrain stocks, storage and distribution arrangements, with a focus on ensuring that beneficiaries receive adequate quantities of quality rice on time.

The inspection programme, being conducted from August 24 to 28, will provide the Commission with a ground-level assessment of stock availability, storage practices and delivery mechanisms, besides identifying shortcomings requiring immediate attention to ensure an uninterrupted supply of rations, an official statement said here.

As part of the exercise, SFC Chairman Tarh Tarak and members Ngasah Tajang and Maji Choker, along with officials of the Food Corporation of India (FCI) and the state food and civil supplies department, reviewed rice storage and distribution arrangements at

Pasighat in East Siang district.

The team subsequently inspected the FCI godown at Pasighat in the presence of divisional manager Pomsuk Nyamgel, district food and civil supplies officer Dana Yirang and other officials. The inspection covered the quantity and quality of rice available, as well as the physical condition of the storage facility.

A major focus of the exercise is to assess whether the existing foodgrain stock is sufficient to meet the requirements of beneficiaries for the next six months.

Officials were also asked to ensure proper storage conditions and remain vigilant against any possibility of deterioration or adulteration of foodgrains.

The inspection follows directions from the Governor to the SFC to visit FCI godowns across the state and ensure that quality foodgrains reach every household covered under the public distribution system without delay. (PTI)

Mizoram govt mulls further school provincialisation, sets area-wise enrolment criteria: Minister

AIZAWL, Aug 25: Mizoram School Education Minister Vanlalhlana on Tuesday said that the state government is considering taking over more schools after recently approving the provincialisation (full government takeover) of 51 private, ad hoc aided and other eligible schools.

Replying to queries during Question Hour in the Mizoram Assembly, Vanlalhlana said that out of about 180 schools recommended by the previous government, 51 schools have been provincialised under the present Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) administration headed by Chief Minister Lalduhoma.

Of these provincialised schools, 12 were higher secondary schools, 34 were high schools, and five were elementary schools, he said.

The minister informed the Assembly that the government is now examining additional schools for possible provincialisation, with the matter having already been discussed by the Cabinet.

For high schools, the government is considering five broad parameters, including enrolment, proximity to other government-run schools and the age of the institution, he said.



Importantly, enrolment will not be assessed using a uniform yardstick across the state, and instead area-wise assessment will be used, he said.

Schools will be evaluated according to their location, with separate consideration for the Aizawl Municipal Corporation (AMC) and Lunglei Municipal Council (LMC) areas.

The next category will cover district head-

quarters and places where Sub-Divisional Offices are located, while the remaining areas will fall under the "Others" category, the minister said.

Under the proposed area-wise assessment, schools will be evaluated against different enrolment thresholds, including 75 per cent and 50 per cent criteria, depending on the category.

The government will also take into account factors such as the number of houses in a village while assessing eligibility.

"The criteria for further provincialisation have already been reviewed by the cabinet", Vanlalhlana said.

The minister also said that the present government followed different criteria laid down in the official notification issued in January 2025 for provincialising the 51 schools.

For higher secondary schools, the key prerequisites include having functioned as a government grant-in-aid school for at least 10 years, maintaining a minimum enrolment of 80 students in urban areas and 40 in rural areas for four years, and recording an average pass percentage of at least 80 per cent over four years under the Mizoram Board of School Education (MBSE), he said. (PTI)

Save women's HIL, India's World Cup hockey stars appeal

AMSTELVEEN, Aug 25: India's women hockey players have made an emotional appeal to save the Women's Hockey India League, saying the tournament has played a crucial role in building the confidence of a young team that is on the verge of its best-ever World Cup finish since 1974.

With 11 World Cup debutants in the squad, India have lost just one match against Olympic champions the Netherlands while holding Olympic silver medalists China to a 2-2 draw in their opening game.

India were knocked out of semifinal contention after a goalless draw against Australia and will now play for fifth and sixth place, which would still be their best World Cup finish in 52 years.

The players believe the Women's HIL has been a major factor behind their progress and fear that its discontinuation could hurt the next generation of Indian talent.

"I think we have done our best to inspire girls in India to hold a hockey stick. People prefer their kids to play individual sports, but this should give them hope," veteran midfielder Neha, who led Odisha Warriors to the maiden HIL title

in 2024-25, told PTL.

"In the last two years, HIL for women has benefited us a lot. Junior and senior Nationals do not have this level of competition. Women's HIL has given us players like Baljeet, Sakshi and Rutuja, who are part of this World Cup team. For upcoming players also, we need this league. It should not be discontinued."

The appeal comes as the revived women's HIL faces serious financial challenges, including high operational costs, low broadcast and ticket revenues, delayed player payments and limited sponsorship interest.

India's captain Salima Tete also stressed the league's role in widening the national talent pool.

"We have many players from HIL in the Indian team. They get a chance to be selected for the national camp, which is an important opportunity for them," she said.

"This is just the beginning for us and there is much more to achieve. For that, HIL is a must so that our talent pool is broadened and the girls get good exposure to handling the pressure of international hockey."

Sakshi Rana, one of the players to have benefited from the league, said



playing alongside experienced stars helped her overcome pressure.

"HIL has given me confidence, which was very useful in this tournament. It is about handling pressure. We have played alongside many veteran players like World Cup top scorer Yibbi Janssen and learnt a lot," she said.

Navneet Kaur said sharing the dressing room with international stars had removed the fear and hesitation among

younger Indian players.

"We have been playing HIL for the last two years and gained confidence from that. We have played with some of the biggest names in international hockey and after sharing the dressing room with them, the fear and hesitation was gone," she said.

"That gave us self-belief. We often discuss that they are like us and we can beat them because we have played with

them."

Navneet also urged the teams and corporate houses to support the league at a time when its future is under a cloud.

"We have heard that a few teams are pulling out of the Women's HIL, but at a time when our performance graph is going up, we want to request them to support us. It will be a big setback for women's hockey and the future crop of players," she said.

For the Indian players the women's league is not merely a commercial venture but an important pathway for developing the next generation. Ishika, Sakshi, Shilpi Dabas, Lalhanluangi are the players who are in the World Cup squad due to powerful performance in HIL.

With India producing its strongest World Cup campaign in decades, the players believe this is precisely the time to strengthen, rather than discontinue, the competition that has helped them take the next step.

"I request the Sports Ministry and Hockey India to save this league. I also request the corporate sector, which invests huge money in cricket, to support women's hockey."

"Our league does not require that much money. It is not about money, we need exposure. Women's Hockey League should survive. We will do even better in the future," said Navneet, who was player of the tournament last season with the Delhi team.

The inaugural season featured four teams -- Delhi SG Pipers, JSW Soorma Hockey Club, Shracchi Rarh Bengal Tigers and Odisha Warriors. Odisha Warriors were later terminated over non-payment of player dues and franchise fees, while Ranchi Royals replaced them in the second season.

The Ranchi franchise has also since been terminated, with Indian players still awaiting payments.

Last season's finalists Shracchi Rarh Bengal Tigers are also contemplating withdrawal, citing financial pressure.

Franchise sources said the league is currently not commercially viable. The cost of running both a men's and a women's HIL team is estimated at around ₹ 10-12 crore, including an administrative fee of around ₹ 1 crore. The franchise fee of ₹ 2.5 crore has, however, been removed for the third season for the women's team. (PTI)

India struggle against late-order batters

Dinusha, Sooriyabandara lead SL resistance

COLOMBO, Aug 25: Indian bowlers failed to break through the Sri Lankan resistance spearheaded by Sonal Dinusha and Pasindu Sooriyabandara in the company of late order batters as the home side finished day three of the second Test on 265 for eight here on Tuesday.

Dinusha (85 batting) and Lahiru Kumara (8 batting) were at the crease when stumps were drawn early because of rain and bad light. Sri Lanka still need 38 runs to avoid the follow-on after India amassed 503 for nine in their first innings. Once the hosts resumed from the tea score of 216 for seven, they were starting at an earlier end to the innings.

But Dinusha notched up his third 50-plus score in as many innings in this series to keep the Indians at bay across two sessions.

A diminutive left-hander, Dinusha displayed towering spirit and technical nous to counter the Indians.

Prasidh tested him with lifters and toe-crushers while spinners — Manav Suthar, Ravindra Jadeja and Saransh Jain — teased his awareness of lines.

The 25-year-old, however, came out of those tough interrogation spaces with flying colours, leaving the Indians a frustrated lot for 201 minutes.

However, Dinusha, who fetched his fifty in 84 balls, had two equally stone-minded companions — Keshara Nuwantha and Lahiru Kumara.

With Nuwantha, he added 57



runs for the eighth wicket and the former played out 74 balls, and then added 35 runs for the ongoing ninth wicket with Kumara, who consumed 50 balls in 65 minutes.

The Indians will be a massively disappointed lot to see an old failing against tail-end batters resurfacing at a very inopportune moment at the SSC ground.

But before they hit the roadblock, the Indians appeared to have primed to put an early end to Sri Lankan innings, reducing them to 216 for seven at tea.

In the pre-lunch session, Sri Lanka were competitive despite losing two wickets as they had added 122 runs.

But in the middle passage, the visiting bowlers took command of the proceedings, scalping four wickets and conceded just 86 runs.

India inflicted an early jolt on Sri Lanka as left-arm spinner Suthar found his correct length.

Suthar forced Dhananjaya de Silva to edge one to KL Rahul,

who held onto the catch in the second attempt at first slip.

From that point, there was no respite for the Lankan batters.

But the body blow was the dismissal of Sooriyabandara (80), who batted with a rare mix of patience and elegance.

Jadeja, who made only a cameo appearance in the opening session of the day, bowled one close to Sooriyabandara's body, and the batter's effort to guide the ball down point saw his stumps getting rearranged.

Two runs later, Mohammad Siraj accounted for Niroshan Dickwella with a rather innocuous down the leg delivery, which the Lankan batter edged to Dhruv Jurel.

Before their late evening fight back, Sri Lanka had their moments in the first session too, courtesy a good 87-run alliance for the third wicket between Sooriyabandara and Kamindu Mendis.

Starting from eight for two, the

home side showed better spirit in the opening passage of the day, which was also spiced up by verbal exchanges between Sarfaraz Khan, substituting for Rishabh Pant, Siraj and the Lankan batters.

Before the Lankans gained some foothold, India began the day brightly, dismissing overnight batter Kamil Mishara (19). Mishara failed to deal with a viciously rising delivery from Prasidh, fending it to stumper Jurel.

But Sooriyabandara and Mendis thwarted Indians' hopes of making further inroads into the Lankan top order for nearly two hours.

They tackled the bowlers with little nerves, and hardly allowed two spinners — Suthar and debutant Jain to settle down.

The off-spinner Jain procured some bounce and turn but the Lankan duo handled that rather comfortably.

Sooriyabandara, who was playing his second Test, was the lead act of that third wicket alliance.

The elegant right-hander reached his maiden Test fifty in 76 balls.

Mendis, on the other hand, smashed Suthar for a six over mid-wicket to announce his intentions. But Prasidh, who bowled two lively spells, broke the blooming alliance with another snorter aimed at the throat of Mendis, which he pulled straight into the hands of Jadeja at mid-wicket.

India also fetched the stalled momentum back with that wicket, and the hostile spell of Prasidh.

(PTI)

India not handling transition well, say former stars

AMSTELVEEN, Aug 25: The Indian men's hockey team was not expected to end its 51-year-old World Cup title drought but its failure to even reach the semi-finals has exposed some long-standing frailties, including lack of intent to carry out a tough transition.

The 3-5 defeat to Argentina, which ended India's semifinal hopes, exposed weaknesses that have repeatedly surfaced since the Paris Olympics.

Two-time Olympic bronze medalist goalkeeper PR Sreejesh is agast as to how none of the talented juniors coming through the system have been given exposure with less than two years left for the Los Angeles Olympics.

"Who is there to take the reins when seniors retire? Have we developed a second string? LA Olympics is just two years away and we will play around 30 quality international matches before that. Is that enough to prepare a player for the Olympics? No," a fuming Sreejesh said while talking to PTL.

"The 2026 World Cup team is still revolving around the same core group of players while promising juniors like Manmeet Singh, who was the top scorer at the Junior World Cup with six goals, Amir Ali, Roshan Kujur, Shardanand Tiwari, Talem Priyabarta, Rohit, and Arshdeep Singh were simply overlooked," he added.

The 1980 Moscow Olympics gold medal winning captain V Baskaran was scathing about India's attacking output and the failure to integrate youngsters.

"The transition from junior to senior has not taken place properly. Germany and the Netherlands have had a smooth transition. Look at the Netherlands team from the Paris Olympics and the World Cup - six gold medalists are missing."

"We are selecting the team on sympathies, past records and numbers. Six players could have been tried in the Pro League," Baskaran added.

He also questioned whether the expertise of the junior setup was being utilised.

"In other countries, junior coaches are very important. Why was Sreejesh not consulted when his team had won the bronze at the Junior World Cup?"

Another former India great, Jagbir Singh, felt some of the selection decisions could have been better.

"We had choices for picking the juniors at the right time and some of the selection decisions could have been better. It should always be Olympic to Olympic



year," Jagbir too echoed Sreejesh's sentiments.

"The coaching and team management were free to pick juniors after the World Cup. Nobody was stopping them. Most likely, they wanted to carry experience to put pressure on opponents, but it didn't work."

Just like they did ahead of Tokyo and Paris Olympics, Indian men's contingent had even travelled to the Swiss Alps ahead of the World Cup for mental conditioning but the team still struggled in pressure situations.

There was also an over-reliance on captain and drag-flick specialist Harmanpreet Singh, who was not fully fit, while experienced campaigners such as Manpreet Singh and Mandeep Singh failed to make the expected impact.

Head coach Craig Fulton has repeatedly stressed the importance of defensive solidity, yet India's defence remained one of its biggest weaknesses.

Jagbir also questioned India's inconsistency during matches.

"This was our best chance given the format. But where was the consistency? Our defensive structure was collapsing every 10 minutes. Such variation in 60 minutes is not acceptable. Was it a case of too many cooks spoiling the meal?"

Baskaran also highlighted technical issues that has been Indian forward line's undoing.

"I have not seen any Indian forward in the last four years performing exceptionally well. There was no contribution from anyone. Where were the back passes, how many times did you shoot at goal? When you go for a full press, there was a huge gap in mid-field," he said. (PTI)

Excluded 5 in tennis not part of AITA recommendations, don't meet criteria: SAI source



NEW DELHI, Aug 25: The five tennis players excluded from the country's Asian Games squad did not feature in the short list sent to the IOA by the All India Tennis Association (AITA), a Sports Authority of India (SAI) source said on Tuesday, justifying the omission on the basis of their lower-than-prescribed international rankings.

Manas Dhamne (men's singles), Vaishnavi Adkar (women's singles), Sahaja Yamalappalli (women's singles), Vaidehee Chaudhari (women's doubles) and Prarthana Thombare (women's doubles) were not included in the seven-member Indian squad as they did not meet the criteria of being inside the top-8 of continental standings.

"Their names were not received by Sports Ministry in the final list shared by the IOA (Indian Olympic Association). In fact their names were not there in the short list sent by the All India Tennis Association (AITA) to the IOA," the source told PTL.

Their exclusion, the source said, is justified as their recent performances too did not reflect medal probability or potential for effective

participation in the showpiece.

The Ministry's selection mandate required individual athletes to be among top six in Asia for singles events and be ranked within the top eight in Asia for doubles over a 12-month evaluation window. This criteria was unveiled by the Sports Ministry in September last year.

Their omission was heavily criticised by two-time Asian Games gold-medallist Rohan Bopanna, who said "a committee that never stood where they stood has decided their fate on paper, before a ball is struck."

Sahaja (world rank 344) is the current India number one in women's singles and Vaishnavi (world rank 388) is national number two. Prarthana is a former Asian Games bronze-medallist (2014). Vaidheehi is a two-time national champion and the 18-year-old Manas is a Challenger level finalist.

The Sports Ministry made it clear on Monday that the criteria will not be relaxed despite pressure being mounted by certain quarters. "...creating discretionary back-channel clearances for tennis players ranked 25th to 40th in Asia would destroy administrative integrity and trigger widespread litigation from other National Sports Federations (NSFs)," the source said.

Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan is the current Asian number one and is placed second in world rankings, while Japan's Naomi Osaka is current world number 13 and continental number two. The top six players in Asia are all ranked within the global top-100. (PTI)

We've developed winning culture, hungry for more: Harmanpreet ahead of Asia Cup, Asian Games

NEW DELHI, Aug 25: Indian women cricketers are "hungry for more" after a string of impressive victories, with captain Harmanpreet Kaur saying a winning culture is taking shape as they head into the Asia Cup in the UAE and Asian Games in Japan.

Fresh from winning the first-ever women's Test match at Lord's by defeating England last month, India will now turn their attention to the UAE Asia Cup T20, where they are record seven-time champions, before embarking on their title defence at the Asian Games in Japan.

"We of course expect to win. Our team has been playing very good cricket," the India skipper, who guided India to a historic Test win against England at the iconic Lord's recently, told Sony Sports.

"The last 4-5 years has been good and where we have played good cricket, dominating cricket, have defeated big teams and won series also. The Kaur-led side had sealed a huge 270-run win over England at Lord's, marking India's second-highest win by margin of runs in Women's Tests, the fourth biggest overall.

"Now, we are coming after the win at Lord's and have also won many games on the trot, so the team has already tasted success and will be hungry for more."

In the upcoming Asia Cup, beginning Friday, India share Group A with arch-rivals Pakistan in the eight-team tournament.

After losing the last edition to Sri Lanka, India will look to reclaim



the trophy, riding high on their recent Lord's triumph.

"The best thing is, everybody in the team talks about how to win a match, how to win tournaments. So when you have that kind of culture, you always feel motivated and you and you really look forward to go for any tournament.

"So this (Asia Cup) tournament is very important and I am sure we will play as a team and once again will make our country proud," said Harmanpreet.

"I think the biggest challenge is when you have the 'good team' tag, playing for those expectations is in itself a very big challenge because we know we dominate Asian cricket and it's very important to play every match with that domination," she opined.

On the hype surrounding India-Pakistan clashes, Harmanpreet said the pressure is on another level,

something players can genuinely feel despite being accustomed to high-intensity competitive cricket.

"No doubt it's a high-pressure game and as a player you need to deal with multiple things. We keep playing international cricket but the amount of pressure in a India vs Pakistan match, that kind of pressure you don't feel anywhere else."

"Somewhere we know every Indian is watching, not only cricket fans but every Indian is watching because that match is so important for all of us."

"As a captain and as a player I try to keep things very simple, very easy. Only focus on cricket, focus on our aims, focus on our routines."

Harmanpreet said winning a gold medal for the country is a special honour for any cricketer, with the Asian Games offering a different feeling from ICC events as every player receives an individual medal.

India made their Asian Games debut in Hangzhou, winning gold, and will now chase another top finish.

"As a cricketer I think this is a very big opportunity because before this we have mostly played ICC tournaments but have not fought for a medal because as a team we have always fought for any particular trophy."

"This is one such moment where you get your own medal and I think when it's about the medals, the motivation increases even more. Day and night we keep thinking how will we feel after winning the medal and how we will celebrate."

"It also gives the chance to witness other sports, meet other players, understand their routines so it's not just only about cricket but knowing your other sports fellows also on how they prepare," added the gold-winning Indian skipper at Hangzhou.

Harmanpreet acknowledged the weight of expectations at the Asian Games but said the team would remain focused on the task at hand, with preparations progressing in the right direction.

"Yes definitely, the last time we had played very dominating cricket and one-sided contests so there will be expectations from us to play that kind of cricket again."

"I'm sure the country is looking forward that one gold medal is coming from cricket, so I know pressure is going to be there but at the same time focusing on your job and how to achieve that job is more important." (PTI)

Pakistan sweats over Babar Azam's injury ahead of Lord's Test

KARACHI, Aug 25: Pakistan is sweating over the availability of skipper Babar Azam for the second Test against England at Lord's beginning on Thursday.

A source close to the team said on Tuesday that Babar was suffering from a finger injury, and the swelling made it difficult for him to grip the bat properly.

Babar first got hit on the fingers while batting in the second Test against the West Indies before the tour to England.

His injury worsened when he decided to bat a few overs in a three-day practice game against the Counties XI in Kent, where he retired after being hit again on the same finger.

He missed the opening Test at Leeds, which Pakistan lost by an innings and 103 runs inside three days because of the injury, and Salman Ali Agha led the side.

"The team management will see if Babar is comfortable batting in the nets tomorrow, but it is a sort of injury where the final decision must come from the player himself," the source said.

The Pakistan team management is considering playing both their spinners, Ali Usman and Sajid Khan, in the Lord's Test, as the feeling is the pitch will be sluggish and could assist the slow bowlers.

With Pakistan's three-pronged pace attack of Muhammad Abbas, Khurram Shehzad, and Muhammad Ali delivering a below-par performance in the first Test, the source said Babar and head coach Sarfaraz Ahmed are inclined to rely on the spinners to level the series. (PTI)